

March 7

### Semiramide

Composer: Gioachino Rossini



The tale, which inspired at least 65 composers besides Rossini, concerns the legendary Babylonian queen who helped a lover murder her husband and then unwittingly chose her own son as the replacement king. Hamlet and Gertrude, meet Oedipus and Jocasta. Although in some versions, Semiramide's life is spared -- the Assyrian legend has her disappear in the form of a dove.

Source: *The New York Times* 1990

### March 28 *Così fan Tutte*

Composer: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

The third and final collaboration between Mozart and librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte is a fascinating paradox: a frothy comedy of manners with an intensely dark take on human nature; an old story (it has antecedents in Boccaccio, Shakespeare, and Cervantes, among others) with a startlingly modern tone; and a beautiful score depicting questionable behavior. *Così fan tutte* was only moderately successful at its premiere and remained just outside the standard repertoire for more than a century. *Così* still poses unique challenges, and correspondingly unique rewards, for the public today. Every possible impression of love—from the loftiest to the basest—is explored in this extraordinary opera.

Source: *The Metropolitan Opera*



### April 11 *Luisa Miller*

Composer: Giuseppe Verdi

"The overture has been much praised, the finale to Act I is excellent, and earlier in the act there are three effective arias for Luisa, Miller and Walter. The duet



between Wurm and Walter and Rodolfo's aria are the best passages in Act II: the latter, 'Quando le sere al placid', is one of the most beautiful arias Verdi ever wrote, and its wistful loveliness is unsurpassed in his music. Francis Toye describes Act III as the best of the opera because of its uncommon dramatic fitness. Luisa' 'Piangi, piangi' in the scene with Rodolfo, and final trio are singled out for particular praise." Source: *The New Kobbe's Complete Opera Book*

### April 18 *Cendrillon*

Composer: Jules Massenet

In the opera, as in Perrault's fairytale, Cinderella has a stepmother and two step-sisters and the Fairy Godmother helps her to go the palace ball. However, after midnight, the opera takes a different turn from the fairytale: upset by the hateful suggestions of her stepmother and step-sisters, Cinderella runs away from home. Feverish, she arrives in the Fairy Godmother's magic forest and meets the Prince once more. He recognizes the beautiful, mysterious girl from the ball and offers her his heart.



Months later, when we catch up with Cinderella again, her father has convinced her that it was all a dream. But, when the Prince is travelling the length and breadth of the country to find the owner of the glass slipper, he recognizes Cinderella and she returns his love.

Source: *The Opera Platform*

Music historian Jeffrey Engel will present each opera talk, offering historical context for the composer and the opera stories. In Paris for 14 years, Mr. Engel studied cello, art history and earned diplomas in French. As a cellist he played with orchestras in France, including the Paris Opera, performed in chamber ensembles and taught in municipal conservatories. A graduate of Ithaca College, & a teacher at Northwestern Connecticut Community College, Mr. Engel brings a rich knowledge of music history to each lecture, with musical excerpts.



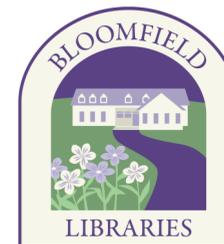
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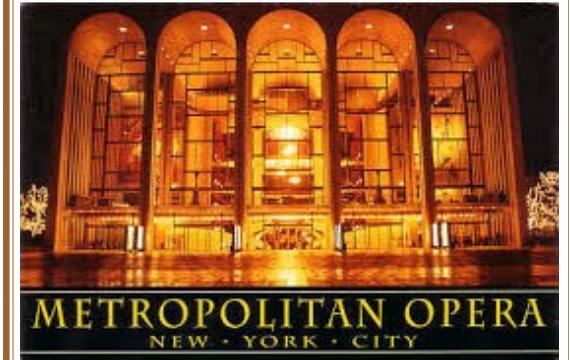
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# OPERA TALKS 2017 - 2018



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Jeffrey Engel  
Lecturer

Wednesdays  
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## METROPOLITAN OPERA

### October 4 *Norma*

Composer: Vincenzo Bellini

Oroveso seeks to rouse his countrymen to rebellion against the Romans. Pollione now confides in Flavio that he no longer loves Norma, in spite of the fact that, unknown to everyone, she has born him two sons. Norma tries to prevent rebellion, to protect Pollione, prophesying the fall of Rome through its own internal weaknesses. Pollione persuades Adalgisa to run away to Rome with him. Norma, at home, knows that Pollione plans to leave her, but does not know the name of her rival. Adalgisa admits her infidelity to her people to Norma, who eventually understands that Adalgisa is the new object of Pollione's affections. When Adalgisa realises the situation, she rejects Pollione. Norma considers killing her sons and then asking Adalgisa to go with Pollione and be a mother to her children in her place. Adalgisa refuses to be disloyal to Norma, but goes to Pollione to recall him to his duty. He will not hear her, and Norma now calls for open revolt. Meanwhile Pollione, attempting to abduct Adalgisa, has been taken prisoner, and will be put to death. Norma offers in his place one who has broken faith with her people, herself. A funeral pyre is erected, which she mounts, joined in her final moments by Pollione.

*Norma* occupies a very particular place in operatic repertoire, a dramatic work of lyrical beauty, not least in the most famous of Norma's arias, *Casta diva* (Chaste goddess), her first-act prayer to the moon. Oroveso calls the Druids to watch for the new moon in *Ite sul colle, o Druidi* (Go to the hills, O Druids) and in the second act he warns of Pollione's possible successor, inveighing against Roman tyranny in *Ah! del Tebro al giogo indegno* (Ah! To the disgraceful yoke of Rome). Norma has notable duets with Adalgisa and with Pollione, revealing different aspects of her tragic character.

Source: [naxos.com](http://naxos.com)

### October 11

### *Magic Flute*

Composer: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

A sublime fairy tale that moves freely between earthy comedy and noble mysticism, *The Magic Flute* (*Die Zauberflöte* in the original German) was written for a theater located just outside Vienna with the clear intention of appealing to audiences from all walks of life. The story is told in a Singspiel ("song-play") format characterized by separate musical numbers connected by dialogue and stage activity, an excellent structure for navigating the diverse moods, ranging from solemn to lighthearted, of the story and score.

Source: *The Metropolitan Opera*



## 2018

### January 24 *Tosca*

Composer: Giacomo Puccini

Puccini's melodrama about a volatile diva, a sadistic police chief, and an idealistic artist has offended and thrilled audiences for more than a century. Critics, for their part, have often had problems with *Tosca's* rather grungy subject matter, the directness and intensity of its score, and the crowd-pleasing dramatic opportunities it provides for its lead roles. But these same aspects have made *Tosca* one of a handful of iconic works that seem to represent opera in the public imagination. *Tosca's* popularity is further secured by a superb and exhilarating dramatic sweep, a driving score of abundant melody and theatrical shrewdness, and a career-defining title role. Source: *The Metropolitan Opera*



*Sonya Yoncheva is Tosca on January 27 in theaters.*

Pre-performance lectures at Prosser Public Library  
1 Tunxis Avenue Bloomfield, CT 06002 860-243-9732  
[www.prosserlibrary.info](http://www.prosserlibrary.info) Registration is appreciated.

### February 7 *Elixir of Love*

Composer: Gaetano Donizetti

*L'Elisir d'Amore* has been among the most consistently popular operatic comedies for almost two centuries. The story deftly combines comic archetypes with a degree of genuine character development rare in works of this type. Its ending is as much a foregone conclusion as it would be in a romantic comedy film today - the joy is in the journey, and Donizetti created one of his most instantly appealing scores for this ride.

Source: *The Metropolitan Opera*



### February 21 *La Boheme*

Composer: Giacomo Puccini

A four-act tragedy, the story delves into 1830s Paris where a group of struggling artists live in destitute slum conditions, yet are determined to celebrate love in all its simple glory. When Rodolfo helps his pretty neighbor Mimi to find her keys in the dark, their hands touch, and attraction flares within them.

The story then moves on over the course of a few months, where Mimi is found to be terminally ill from consumption; despite having broken up, Rodolfo cares for her deeply, and is heartbroken to hear that she is dying. He carries her upstairs to his couch and caresses her, as she slips away in his arms.

Source: *The Metropolitan Opera*

