

Mario Lanza belts out an aria in the 1950s.



ASK THE EXPERT

If You Hate Opera, Try These

STEVE SWAYNE | MUSIC PROFESSOR

“Operas tell our stories,” says Swayne. “They represent how we live in the world and how we deal with hatred, love, war and adversity.” As part of Dartmouth’s collaboration with the online learning platform edX, Swayne has taught introductory courses on Italian and German opera. He emphasizes that the art form is accessible to anyone, regardless of musical background: “Directors are keen on speaking to contemporary audiences with visual gestures that resonate with us today, while retaining the fantastic music.” Swayne recommends the following operas for their universal appeal.

—Jessica Fedin ’17

DIE FRAU OHNE SCHATTEN RICHARD STRAUSS

“One of my personal favorites, this opera is a heady mix of metaphysical conceptions as well as more down-to-earth interactions. Translated as *The Woman Without a Shadow*, this WW I-era opera uses the shadow as a weighty metaphor in a dramatic interplay between the supernatural and natural worlds. I drop anything I’m doing if it’s playing nearby. *Die Frau ohne Schatten* may not immediately grab you, but it will stay with you for a long time.”

CARMEN BIZET

“They may not know they know it, but most people know a lot of the music from *Carmen* already. It has appeared in so many commercials and television shows that you will be surprised when you recognize the music. It’s extremely fast-moving, very engaging, tragic and, ultimately, incredibly moving. The opera is set in Seville and the music has a Spanish tinge that is erotic, exotic and narcotic. The music is just incredibly seductive.”

THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO MOZART

“This comedic opera is brimming with so much beauty and funny moments. It’s about one couple wanting to be married, a guy trying to seduce the bride and the guy’s wife distressed by her husband’s philandering. At the end of the day this opera is all about forgiveness, as the wife finds it in her heart to forgive her husband. It’s an engaging story, a fantastic score and in many respects one of the foundations of this thing that I love called opera.”

LA BOHÈME PUCCINI

“*La Bohème* premiered in 1896. Exactly 100 years later another piece of theater comes out that tells the same story—*Rent*—which speaks to its durability and continued relevance. The story explores love at first sight, the challenges of staying in love and what it means to lose someone. It’s a beautiful and heart-breaking opera, but also comical in some parts. Puccini is a master. One is sure to come away quite engaged.”