

FRIENDSHIPS: GOOD and BAD

A Lecture for Mercury Opera Rochester by Chuck Lundeen

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Playlist of excerpts used and an outline of the lecture

1. A Friendship Formed from Shared Circumstances:

NORMA 1831, La Scala, Milan; by Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835), with libretto by Felice Romani.

ARTHAUS MUSIK DVD #101 465: From the Gran Teatre Del Liceu, Barcelona, conducted by Giuliano Carella and directed by Francisco Negrin, 2007.

Norma (soprano), High Priestess of the Druids	Fiorenza Cedolins
Adalgisa (soprano) a virgin from the Druid temple	Sonia Ganassi

Norma, supposedly a virgin high priestess of the Druids, has secretly been carrying on a love affair. Oddly enough, it is with Pollione, the head of the Roman army in Gaul, which is trying to conquer the Druids. Their affair has been going on long enough for the couple to have two young sons whom Norma has successfully kept hidden from everyone!

Adalgisa, one of the young virgin priestesses, is feeling guilty and comes to confide in Norma that she is having a secret love affair. During the course of her confession Norma discovers that the affair is with none other than her own lover, Pollione.

In this scene Norma is in total desperation. She knows she and her children will be deserted, so she plans to murder them. Her motherly instincts prevail however, and she holds back. When Adalgisa enters they pledge total friendship to each other in life until death.

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2. An Ironic Friendship: Who'd have ever thought???

LA FORZA DEL DESTINO (The Force of Destiny) 1862, St. Petersburg; by Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) with libretto by Francesco Maria Piave.

Deutsche Grammophon DVD #B0004770-09: From the Metropolitan Opera, New York, conducted by James Levine and directed by John Dexter, 1984.

Don Alvaro, (tenor) lover of Leonora di Vargas
Don Carlo di Vargas (Baritone)
son of the Marquis of Calatrava
brother of Leonora

Giuseppe Giacomini
Leo Nucci

Don Alvaro and his lover, Leonora, are planning to elope. During the process they are discovered by her father who is obviously furious. To show his good intentions toward Leonora, Don Alvaro throws down his gun in surrender. Unfortunately it discharges, killing the father, and each of the lovers flees in a different direction.

Don Carlo, Leonora's, brother vows vengeance on both his sister and her lover, not only for the murder of their father but also for the dishonor she has brought to their family. Leonora eventually ends up in a monastery where she opts to live as a hermit in a cell, completely isolated from the world.

In the meantime both Don Alvaro and Don Carlo have joined the Spanish army to fight against Italy. When this scene opens Don Alvaro is alone on stage. When he hears a cry for help from off stage, he rushes off to help and returns with none other than the man who has sworn vengeance on his life, Don Carlo. Neither recognizes the other, and both introduce themselves using false names. In a short, but very memorable, duet they swear eternal friendship to one another.

3. A Friend One Can Turn to in Time of Need.

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DON CARLOS, (French) 1867, Opera, Paris; (Italian) 1884, La Scala, Milan; by Giuseppe Verdi with text by Mery & du Locle after a play by Schiller.

KULTUR DVD #D2031: original French version from Theatre du Chatelet, Paris, conducted by Antonio Pappano and directed by Luc Bondy, 1996.

Don Carlos (tenor) Heir to the Spanish throne	Roberto Alagna
Rodrigue (baritone), Marquess of Posa, his best friend	Thomas Hampson

As part of a peace treaty between Spain and France, Don Carlo, the eldest son of King Phillip II of Spain, has been promised in marriage to the French Princess, Elizabeth de Valois. Upon meeting each other the couple fall immediately in love. Sadly, only a few minutes after singing a rapturous love duet, King Phillip arrives on the scene and announces that he has decided to marry Elizabeth himself. When asked if she will accept Elizabeth knows that her duty as a Princess takes precedence over her personal desires, so she agrees.

In this scene Don Carlo meets with his best friend, Rodrigue, the Marquess of Posa, to confess and seek consolation for his love for the woman who has now become his step-mother.

4. One Friend Betrays Another

EUGENE ONEGIN, 1891, Moscow; by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, (1840-1893) based on a poem by Pushkin.

Decca Met Opera DVD B0010525-09: From the Metropolitan Opera, New York
Conducted by Valery Gergiev and Directed by Peter McClintock, 2007.

Eugene Onegin (Baritone), a cold, self-centered, man-of-the-world	Dmitri Hvorostovsky
Lenski (tenor), Onegin's friend and Olga's fiancée	Ramon Vargas

Olga, her sister, Tatiana, and partygoers.

When Tatiana and Onegin first meet Tatiana falls in love with him immediately. In one of opera's most famous scenes, she writes an emotional letter to Onegin in which she pours out her heart. At their next meeting, Onegin very insensitively lectures Tatiana and tells her that love and marriage are not for him. Tatiana is humiliated.

In the scene we are about to see Onegin once again behaves very badly. He has been invited to a large party by his friend Lenski. During the party he monopolizes the time of, and outwardly flirts with, Olga, Lenski's fiancée. This infuriates Lenski, who at first

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becomes publicly very angry with Olga. Onegin continues to push at Lenski and taunts him to the point where in front of all the guests, Lenski disavows his long friendship with Onegin and demands satisfaction in the form of a duel. Too cold and proud to understand his friend's anger, Onegin refuses to offer any kind of apology even though he knows he has gone too far. The duel is set for the next morning.

5. A FALSE FRIEND

OTELLO, 1887, La Scala; by Giuseppe Verdi, with libretto by Arrigo Boito based on Shakespeare.

Deutsch Grammophon DVD B0004285-09: a 1973 movie version conducted and directed by Herbert Von Karajan with the Berlin Philharmonic.

Otello (tenor), a Moor, commander-in-chief of the Venetian fleet	Jon Vickers
Iago (baritone), an ensign and confidant of Otello	Peter Glossop

Early in the story Otello has appointed Cassio to be the new captain of the navy. This infuriates Iago, a well-trusted colleague of Otello's, because he desperately hoped to have that appointment for himself. Iago decides to seek revenge against Otello by plotting his destruction, all the time posing as Otello's friend and maintaining his deepest trust and confidence. He begins his scheming by getting his young rival, Cassio, drunk. Cassio then gets involved in a fight and, as a result, Otello removes him from service. Iago is delighted by his first step in the undoing of Otello.

In the scene we are going to watch Iago launches his second step: To make Otello jealous of his own wife, Desdemona. At Iago's urging, the young and naive Cassio has approached Desdemona to ask if she will intercede with Otello on his behalf in an attempt to be reinstated to his captain's position. Everything transpires just as Iago hopes for: Cassio and Desdemona begin their conversation just beyond earshot. Otello approaches. Pointing out Desdemona and Cassio in conversation, Iago slyly plants the first seed of suspicion with a line not fully understood by Otello, "Ha! I like not that."

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5. THE FRIEND CAUGHT in the MIDDLE.

LA BOHEME, 1896, Teatro Regio, Turin; by Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924), with libretto by Giacosa & Illica.

Image Entertainment DVD: ID5784RADVD. From the Sydney Opera House, featuring Julian Smith conducting the Australian Orchestra, Chorus and Children's Chorus with direction by Baz Luhrmann, 1993.

Mimi, a seamstress	Cheryl Barker
Rodolfo, a poet and lover of Mimi	David Hobson
Marcello, a painter and the friend in the middle	Roger Lemke

We all love the unforgettable first act music from the original meeting of Mimi and Rodolfo, and none of us can forget the heart-wrenching final death scene, but in between the beginning and the end is my favorite music in the entire opera, and today I'm happy to share this with you.

We are going to the early part of Act III for this excerpt where poor Marcello, finds himself caught in the middle between his two friends, the lovers, Mimi and Rodolfo. Their life together has not been nearly as idyllic as we are led to believe in Acts I and II. Some time has passed. Marcello and his lover, Musetta, have opened a tavern and have managed to make ends meet with him doing some sign painting and her giving music lessons. Mimi is very ill and seems to be naively unaware of the seriousness of her situation. The relationship has been on-again, off-again, fraught with problems. Mimi arrives at the tavern to speak with Marcello. She learns that Rodolfo is upstairs sleeping, having sought shelter with his friends after yet another fight with Mimi. She is emphatic with Marcello that she does not want Rodolfo to know she has come. First she pours out her heart to Marcelo and then hides while Marcello is forced to listen to the same thing from Rodolfo.

7. LAYING DOWN ONE'S LIFE FOR A FRIEND

TURANDOT, 1926, La Scala; by Giacomo Puccini, with libretto by Adami & Simoni based on a fable.

Deutsch Grammophon DVD B0000852-09. From the Metropolitan Opera, conducted by James Levine and directed by Franco Zeffirelli, 1989.

The opera's title character, China's Princess Turandot, could easily be called a man-hater. She has established a rule that anyone interested in becoming her husband must first answer three riddles correctly. If he can't do it, it's off with his head. Up to this point

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in the year she has already had thirteen suitors decapitated. The opera opens up with an extended crowd scene. In the crowd is a very old man, Timur, and his servant friend, Liu. Timur is knocked down, and Liu calls for someone to help with him. A young man offers to assist, and he turns out to be Timur's son, Calaf. For political reasons, both Calaf and his father, Timur, are in disguise, hoping no one will learn who they are.

When Princess Turandot comes out to address the crowd, Calaf is bewitched and falls in love with her immediately. To her great surprise, Calaf answers all three of her riddles correctly. Turandot is dismayed and tries to wiggle out of her obligation, but her father insists the marriage will take place. Showing his own confidence, Calaf offers Turandot a counter-proposal: If she can learn his name before morning she will be free to add him to her list of decapitated suitors.

The Princess immediately issues a decree that no one should sleep until she learns his name. From this comes the famous tenor aria, "Nessun Dorma." When the moment of truth arrives in the morning, both Timur and Liu are tortured in front of Calaf, Turandot, and the crowd. Liu steps forward declaring that she knows the Prince's name and no amount of torturing will make her disclose it. When Turandot asks why, Liu tells her that it is her undeclared love for Calaf that gives her strength. She has loved him silently since long ago when he smiled at her, a simple slave girl, one day in the Palace where they had all been living together. In this extended scene Liu hopes that, with her sacrifice, Turandot, too, will be able to experience the same kind of love she feels for Calaf.