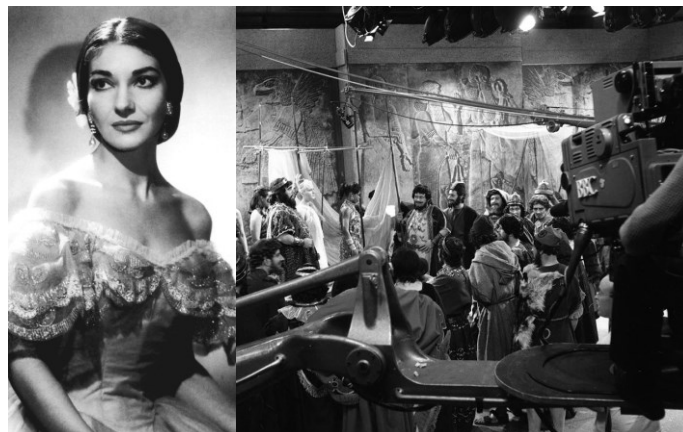


Broadcasting the Arts: Opera on TV

With onstage guests directors Brian Large and Jonathan Miller & former BBC Head of Music & Arts Humphrey Burton on Wednesday 30 April



BFI Southbank's annual *Broadcasting the Arts* strand will this year examine **Opera on TV**; featuring the talents of **Maria Callas** and **Lesley Garrett**, and titles such as *Don Carlo at Covent Garden* (BBC, 1985) and *The Mikado* (Thames/ENO, 1987), this season will show how television helped to democratise this art form, bringing Opera into homes across the UK and in the process increasing the public's understanding and appreciation.

In the past, television has covered opera in essentially four ways: the live and recorded outside broadcast of a pre-existing operatic production; the adaptation of well-known classical opera for remounting in the TV studio or on location; the very rare commission of operas specifically for television; and the immense contribution from a host of arts documentaries about the world of opera production and the operatic stars that are the motor of the industry. Examples of these different approaches which will be screened in the season range from the **David Hockney**-designed *The Magic Flute* (Southern TV/Glyndebourne, 1978) and **Luchino Visconti's** stage direction of *Don Carlo at Covent Garden* (BBC, 1985) to **Peter Brook's** critically acclaimed filmed version of *The Tragedy of Carmen* (Alby Films/CH4, 1983), **Jonathan Miller's** *The Mikado* (Thames/ENO, 1987), starring **Lesley Garret** and **Eric Idle**, and ENO's TV studio remounting of Handel's *Julius Caesar* with **Dame Janet Baker**.

Documentaries will round out the experience with a focus on the legendary **Maria Callas**, featuring rare archive material, and an episode of *Monitor* with John Schlesinger's look at an *Italian Opera Company* (BBC, 1958). There will be an opportunity to debate the future in the panel discussion *Where Next for Opera on TV?*, when we will welcome the undisputed king of TV opera coverage, director **Brian Large** former Head of Music & Arts, BBC TV **Humphrey Burton** and the director of many famous operatic productions, **Jonathan Miller** on **Wednesday 30 April**. At this exciting time when opera houses have never been more aware of the power of the digital media, who knows what the future for Opera on TV will bring.

Screenings taking place during the season:

Callas Sings Tosca

C4 1986/ATV 1964. Stage Dir Franco Zeffirelli. TV Dir Bill Ward. With Maria Callas, Tito Gobbi, Renato Chioni, Robert Bowman. 48min

In 1964 ATV's Golden Hour went to Covent Garden to relay a gala performance of Act II of Puccini's *Tosca*, in Zeffirelli's famous production. Introduced by Sir David Webster, he prophetically announced that 'those viewers seeing Callas' performance tonight will talk about it to their grandchildren, so great is her achievement in the role.' He was proved correct.

In association with Royal Opera House

+ The Southbank Show: Maria Callas

Isolde films/LWT 1987. Dir Tony Palmer. 85min

John Ardoin, Callas' biographer, asks why she reaches out from the grave to fascinate us still, in Tony Palmer's rich and moving film. Through interviews with those who knew her and worked with her (Visconti, Zeffirelli, Gobbi) and rare archive footage, the film builds a complex picture. It is perhaps the most revealing documentary to date on this most enigmatic of women and her exceptional talent.

Mon 31 Mar 18:00 NFT1

Don Carlo at Covent Garden

BBC 1985. Stage Dir Luchino Visconti. TV Dir Brian Large. With Ileana Cortrubas, Patricia Barker, Luis Lima, Robert Lloyd, Giorgio Zancanaro. 215min + interval

Verdi's dark, brooding masterpiece is wonderfully served by Visconti's atmospheric lighting, costumes and set. In a traditional period production, the emphasis is squarely placed on the dramatic action and the psychological cruelties of the Machiavellian intrigues at court. The conductor is Bernard Haitink, whilst the cast bring the required gravitas and depth to the singing replete with some truly thrilling moments. Brian Large's direction for TV is a textbook example of how to broadcast an opera from one of the world's greatest operatic stages.

In association with Royal Opera House

Sat 12 Apr 15:45 NFT1

The Magic Flute

Southern TV/Glyndebourne. Stage Dir John Cox. TV Dir Dave Heather. With Leo Goeke, Felicity Lott, Benjamin Luxon, May Sandoz. 165min + interval

Although Hockney's famous set designs for this production have since been seen all over the world, this recording, made in the intimate old Glyndebourne auditorium, is where it all began. Hockney's two-dimensional fantasy version of ancient Egypt creates a magical environment for the action, as well as nodding to the Masonic secrets said to be buried within Mozart's work. Dave Heather's direction for television ensures that Hockney's sets and costumes achieve maximum impact in this visually stunning production.

Mon 14 Apr 17:30 NFT1

In association with Glyndebourne Opera

The Mikado

Thames TV/ENO 1987. Stage Dir Jonathan Miller. TV Dir John Michael Phillips. With Richard Van Allan, Bonaventura Bottone, Lesley Garrett, Eric Idle. 130min followed by an interval

This famous production of the Gilbert and Sullivan classic brims over with wit and an energetic exuberance and boasts Eric Idle's famous interpretation of Ko-Ko. Miller's black and white concept creates a visually stunning impression whilst John Michael Phillip's sweeping camera crane movements work brilliantly with Miller's blocking and Anthony Van Laasts choreography to produce one of the finest ever transfers of a stage production to television.

In association with English National Opera

+ Source of Innocent Merriment

Thames TV 1987. Dir John Michael Phillips. 42min

Transmitted the night before the opera's opening night, this documentary goes behind the scenes with Jonathan Miller and the ENO company to see how this remarkable production was put together, and to elucidate Miller's vision.

Fri 18 Apr 14:45 NFT3

Julius Caesar

C4/RM Arts/ENO 1985. Stage Dir John Copley. TV Dir John Michael Phillips. With Dame Janet Baker, Sarah Walker, Della Jones. 185min + interval. Sung in English

This famous production boasts an impeccable cast and is conducted by Sir Charles Mackerras. It's also musically sublime, with one fantastic aria after another marking this out as Handel's operatic masterpiece. Filming it in the TV studio ensures that it's given a visual gloss and an intimacy that would be lost by trying to film it on stage at the ENO, whilst John Copley's direction mines the drama and psychological insight that so surprised modern audiences as being present in such a formal construct as an *Opera Seria*.

In association with English National Opera

Fri 25 Apr 19:00 NFT1

The Tragedy of Carmen

Alby Films/C4 1983. Dir Peter Brook. With H  l  ne Delavault, Howard Hensel, Jake Gardner. 85min

Critics raved about Brook's production when it appeared at the Parisian theatre Bouffes du Nord. Paring Bizet's *Carmen* down to the bare essentials, he liberated it from kitsch to become a story of doomed love, perfectly captured on film by his long-time cinematographer, Sven Nykvist. In Brook's own words: 'It rests upon the concentration, the truth and the intimacy of direct theatre.'

+ The Southbank Show: Peter Brook and the Tragedy of Carmen

LWT 1983. Dir Tony Cash. 52min

A behind the scenes look at how *Carmen* was reworked for just four singers, two actors and a 15-piece orchestra.

Mon 7 Apr 17:50 NFT1

Tobias & the Angel

BBC 1960. Dir Rudolph Cartier. With Trevor Anthony, Caroline Myer, Ronald Lewis, John Ford. 80min

These screenings showcase two operas specifically conceived and written for television. *Tobias & the Angel* dates from 1960 and is given a lavish and visually impressive production, especially given the technical limitations of TV at the time. 'An opera for television,' the music is by Sir Arthur Bliss and the libretto by Christopher Hassall with the London Symphony Orchestra. The year is 722 BC and the children of Israel are in captivity in Ninevah – great costumes and sets and some very committed performances help to tell this tale of biblical proportions.

+ Parade – All the King's Men

Granada 1973. Dir Peter Plummer. With Trinity Boys Choir and Orchestra. 35min

With music by Richard Rodney Bennett and libretto by Beverly Cross, this short opera uses a technique often favoured by Benjamin Britten of employing children's voices for adult roles – in this case, the Trinity Boys Choir and Orchestra, conducted by David Squibb. This provides an additional dimension to the very adult theme of the English Civil War, allowing us to view it from a new perspective. Director Peter Plummer used the conceit of a children's game of soldiers to bring the production vividly to life.

Wed 16 Apr 18:15 NFT3

The Lively Arts: Orpheus in the Underground

BBC 1975. Dir Kenneth Corden. With Julian Littman, Joanna Carlin. 30min

In this modern television version described as a 'music fantasy' by librettist John Wells and composer Carl Davis, the Orpheus legend is retold by constructing it around eight pop songs. Orpheus becomes a busker in a London underground subway and Eurydice his unhappy girlfriend. With music played by the Gabrieli String Quartet and guitar by George Fenton the opera builds to an emotional climax, and makes full use of the experimental techniques available in the television studio to find an effective visual style that is very much of the 1970s.

+ Monitor: Italian Opera Company

BBC 1958. Dir John Schlesinger. 17min

An Italian opera company visits Drury Lane Theatre in 1958. By simply observing the staff and performers before his camera, with no voiceover, Schlesinger builds an atmospheric snapshot which brilliantly debunks any pretensions surrounding opera.

+ Panel Discussion and Q&A: Where next for Opera on TV?

Director Jonathan Miller, television opera director Brian Large (work permitting) and Humphrey Burton, former head of music and arts at the BBC, debate the future of opera on TV.

Wed 30 Apr 18:15 NFT3

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

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