OPERA ACROSS MEDIA  
Signature Course  
M/W 4:10—5:30  
MUSI 25020/1, TAPS 26516/1, CMST 24617/1, SIGN 26058/1, ITAL 25020/1

Instructor  
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COURSE DESCRIPTION  
“Opera is a type of theater in which most or all of the characters sing most or all of the time.” So write Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker in their recent history of opera. Opera, they note, is also (usually) outlandishly expensive as well as widely beloved and often fetishized.

But there is something else opera is: an object of radical cultural translation, exported to and from different literary genres (novels, plays, fairy tales, myths, epics, other operas), to different languages and lands (France, Italy, China, Germany, Spain, Russia, Swn, Korea, Argentina, South Africa, etc.), and between different races, classes, and ethnicities. It is also a form that has been remade again and again in different operatic genres, from Singspiel to opera buffa, opera seria to intermezzo, opera to operetta or farce, Peking opera to kunqu, opéra comique to Broadway musical, all of which have had their own kinds of venues. Added
to such exports and translations, especially since the late 19th to early 20th centuries, have been new mass reproduced, broadcast, digitized, and otherwise remediated forms of opera, using new technological means.

What does the assemblage of cultural markers that have long characterized opera production and consumption have to do with the new affordances given opera in the era of film, digital HD live streaming, radio broadcasts, cinecasts, podcasts, Facebook streams, and so on, as well as experimental “mediatized” stagings? Where do these stand amid the extremes of extravagant performance supposedly inherent to opera and the “realism” supposedly intrinsic to recording and moving pictures (a dichotomy that will quickly break down under scrutiny)? This course will address those questions by looking at opera as something that exists “across media,” thereby experiencing its rich possibilities for remaking and transformation.

Remediated works from opera’s “mainstream” will include Verdi’s La traviata (1853) as directed for film by Franco Zeffirelli (1981), Offenbach’s Tales of Hoffmann (1881) as transformed into “ballet opera” by Powell and Pressburger (1951), and Mozart’s Magic Flute (1791) as directed for television by Ingmar Bergman (1975), remade and staged by Capetown, by the South African troupe Isango Ensemble (2007), and staged by Johannesburg artist William Kentridge (2005). All these are covered in the first half of the course.

Less canonical works in the second half of the course—not all of them operas per se—will include Fellini’s opera-infused film And the Ship Sails on (1983) about the ashes of a diva buried at sea, Huang Shuqin’s Woman Demon Human (1987), about a famous woman who cross-dresses as a male warrior in the Chinese Zhong kui opera tradition, Menotti’s NBC television opera Amahl and the Night Visitors (1951), Beineix’s diva-centered thriller Diva (1982) about an obsessive opera fan, Tom Volf’s film Maria by Callas (2017) about diva phenomenon Maria Callas, and the Lyric’s production-in-progress Factotum (2021) by baritone/composer Will Liverman and producer/deejay K-Rico, which transposes Rossini’s Barber of Seville (1816) to a present-day Black barbershop in Chicago.

No prior background in music performance, music theory, opera, or music notation is needed to succeed in this course. Students may write final papers based on their own skills and interests, as relevant to the conjuncture of opera and media. All materials will be made available in English translation. The course is open to all College students.

**STRONGLY RECOMMENDED FOR BACKGROUND**
*Please purchase your own copy.*
REQUIRED SCREENINGS

N.B. All screenings are required and will take place online at 7:30 pm on Mondays.
Following is the list of screenings. Please note that films on Canvas will be only be published after screenings take place.
Panopto is the film/video tool used by Canvas.

Week 1  Verdi, La traviata [Venice, 1853] (dir. Franco Zeffirelli, 1983), 1'45” [Panopto]
Week 2  Maria by Callas: In Her Own Words (dir. Tom Volf, 2017), 1'59” [Panopto]
Week 6  Woman Demon Human (dir. Huang Shuqin, 1987), 1'55” [Panopto]
Week 7  Menotti, Amahl and the Night Visitors, TV opera, 46” [Alexander Street Library]
Week 8  Diva (dir. Jean-Jacques Beineix, 1982), 1'57” [Panopto]
Week 9  E la nave va [And the Ship Sails on] (dir. Federico Fellini, 1983), 2'8” [Panopto]

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

1. Overall attendance and engagement in Zoom classes
2. Reading, listening, and watching excerpts
3. Attendance at screenings (9 in all)
4. Seven paragraph-length posts on particular questions as given on the syllabus. Note that there will be two groups, A and B, making posts on given days, 7 in all for each group; see course schedule below. ALL students should be prepared to discuss all readings. **ALL POSTS MUST BE POSTED BY 9AM CT ON THEIR DUE DATE.** Posts will be graded as 2 (very good to outstanding), 1 (adequate to well done), 0 (missing or inadequate).
5. A short midterm think piece (ca. 3-4 pp., roughly 800-1000 words)
6. A final project, for which you can choose from two options, a or b:
a) A final paper on a topic of your choice (roughly 8-10 pp., or 2000-2500 words)
b) A creative project inspired by and responding to the course, which will include a project narrative and bibliography, and if appropriate, a final class presentation on Wed., May 26. **Advance approval by instructor required.** Projects might include a performance, an original libretto scene, a dramaturgical or scenographic stage plotting of an act of an opera, etc.
GRADING
Grades will be based on:

- 50% preparation, attendance (including at screenings), engagement, and Canvas posts
- 15% midterm paper
- 35% final project

CLASS COMMUNITY GUIDELINES:

- Please mute yourself when you’re not speaking to improve the audio environment.
- Please use headphones or earbuds to reduce ambient noise and improve audio.
- When you wish to enter the conversation, please raise your hand electronically.
- Do not use devices during class except for class purposes, for example to consult readings under discussion or to take notes. Your adherence to this mandate is based on an honor system, to which you commit by taking this course.
- Please do not record class sessions.
- Please use Chat only when we open it for everyone or if you need to report a technical problem, an emergency departure, or something of the kind. Do not use the Chat function for side notes or side discussion, even if you think it is relevant, unless Chat is open for class use. If you have something related to the discussion to say, please raise your hand electronically. Comments pertaining to course content are welcome!
- Please make your video available unless your connection is unstable, in which case you can mute video. If you have another reason for wanting to mute video, please communicate with one of us privately.
- Please, as always, listen attentively to your peers and treat their comments with respect and sensitivity.

DISABILITY STATEMENT
Students with physical or cognitive disabilities should speak with me early on about their needs. If this applies to you, please understand that you are responsible for informing the instructor as early as possible about anything that may negatively affect your ability to perform in the course. Without timely prior notification, it may be difficult or impossible to adjust the due dates of assignments, to reschedule examinations, or to make other reasonable accommodations, as needed. Thank you in advance for working with the instructor or TA about this.

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WEEKLY PLAN

N.B. Class sessions are oriented around the operas, productions, and opera-inflected films, etc. that we will view and study. For bibliographic information on assigned readings and further readings, please see the Selective Bibliography at the end of this document. This will be an essential resource for final papers. Many are posted on Canvas and certain others we can supply on request.

REMEMBER, ALL POSTS MUST BE POSTED BY 9AM CT ON THEIR DUE DATE.

WEEK 1
Mon., Mar. 29
Introduction: Opera as aesthetic object, fetish object, cultural object, dramaturgical form, event, and institution
LISTENING/VIEWING: excerpts from early 20th-century operatic short silent films; audio examples of arias and ensemble pieces

MONDAY NIGHT SCREENING #1:
Giuseppe Verdi, La traviata [Venice, 1853], (dir. Franco Zeffirelli, 1983)

Wed., Mar. 31
Verdi’s La traviata
READING AND DISCUSSION: libretto by Francesco Maria Piave, for Verdi’s La Traviata (Venice, 1853)
RECOMMENDED READING: Abbate and Parker, The History of Opera, Introduction, 1-35 (highly recommended if you’re very new to opera)
IN-CLASS LISTENING: excerpts from Verdi, La traviata (1853), act 1
WEDNESDAY REPONSE PARAGRAPH: GROUP A

Francesco Maria Piave’s libretto (i.e. verbal text) for Giuseppe Verdi’s opera La traviata (Venice 1853) is a poetic text. Following long-standing tradition, the action and dialogue are generally in free unrhymed verse, while the “set numbers” (arias, duets, finales, songs, choruses, etc.) are generally in rhymed verse. The action and dialogue are often in recitative; the set numbers may either be action-packed or involve lyrical envelopes when everything but the music seems to stop. Think about these dichotomies as you read, glancing over at the Italian from time to time.

The opera has several points of maximal dramatic tension, especially in acts 2 and 3. Pick one such moment in act 2 or 3, and reflect on how the poet has fashioned the text to make it so. (You might, optionally, attend to formal features of the text, such as poetic line lengths, rhyme schemes, divisions into stanzas, etc. insofar as they affect how the climax you’re talking about is worked out.)
WEEK 2

Mon., Apr. 5

Verdi’s La traviata

READING: Abbate and Parker, A History of Opera, Chap. 15, “Verdi—Old Still,” 373-82; Heather Hadlock, “Violetta’s Passion, according to Zeffirelli”

RECOMMENDED READING: Giorgio Biancorosso, “The Big Screen and Verdi’s Stage”; Tambling, Opera, Ideology, and Film, pp. 176-193 (a Marxist take on Zeffirelli’s film)

IN-CLASS LISTENING: Verdi, La traviata, acts 2 and 3

MONDAY REPONSE PARAGRAPH: GROUP B

Consider “Italian opera’s first brush with urban modernity” (Abbate and Parker, 377) in La traviata against the filmic interpretation given it by Zeffirelli. Think about how Verdi grounds this urbanism in what Abbate and Parker call “local color” (couleur locale) and how Zeffirelli in turn “colors” his opera film to bring out Verdian color (timbral, orchestral, harmonic, etc.). What kind of work does this “coloring” of (i.e. painting of) urban modernity do in each case? Write your paragraph using your own listening and/or viewing skills.

OR

Heather Hadlock writes that during the Act II finale “an entire society draws together to protect its shared self-deception” (83). In your paragraph, comment on the ways that Zeffirelli evokes or suppresses themes of self-deception, construction of identity (perceived, projected, actual), and character transformation between the Act II finale and the end of the opera. Keep in mind the visual elements of the film, staging and directing, costume, and vocal timbre.

MONDAY NIGHT SCREENING #2:

Maria by Callas: In Her Own Words (dir. Tom Volf, 2017), 1’59”

Wed., Apr. 7

The diva phenomenon (Callas’s 1958 Paris concert and the Lisbon Traviata)

READING: Wayne Koestenbaum, The Queen’s Throat, “The Callas Cult”

RECOMMENDED READING: Will Crutchfield, “The Story of a Voice”

IN-CLASS LISTENING/VIEWING: Callas’s Paris concert, 1958: Bellini’s “Casta diva,” (Callas and Caballé compared); Puccini’s “Vissi d’arte”; Lisbon Traviata “Addio del passato”

WEDNESDAY REPONSE PARAGRAPH: GROUP A

Wayne Koestenbaum, an acclaimed cultural critic, poet, and essayist, explores the connection between gay “opera queens” and opera divas in his early book The
Queen’s Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire (1993). Between the two he sees a mysterious connection, a connection that arises between opera performers and (a subculture of) opera fans--constellations of admirers who train their adoration on the diva.

Pick one or two of Koestenbaum’s “dozen attempts to explain the gay cult of Callas,” and relate it to an aspect of Tom Volp’s Maria by Callas (2017). As you do so, think about why greatness in Callas thrives and feeds on reiteration, mistakes, lapses, self-reinvention, confusion between the real and the operatic, and so on.

WEEK 3
Mon., Apr. 12
Mozart’s Die Zauberflöte [The Magic Flute], 1
READING: Emanuel Schikaneder, libretto for Mozart’s Die Zauberflöte [The Magic Flute], Vienna, 1791
IN-CLASS LISTENING/VIEWING: excerpts from Ingmar Bergman’s Magic Flute, act 1
MONDAY REPONSE PARAGRAPH: GROUP B
The libretto by Emanuel Schikaneder—theater director, poet, and actor—for Mozart’s The Magic Flute is essentially written in the tradition of Singspiel, a genre designator for a German opera, especially eighteenth-century opera, with spoken dialogue. Its specific contours and leanings have invited much critical commentary over the years, as they seem to bring out the best and worst in enlightenment postures, both of which the libretto thematizes.

Focusing on Pamina or Monostatos so as to think about issues of gender or race, write a paragraph that crystallizes a problem we will have to confront in class.

MONDAY NIGHT SCREENING #3:

Wed., Apr. 14
Mozart’s Die Zauberflöte [The Magic Flute], 2
IN-CLASS LISTENING/VIEWING : Bergman’s Magic Flute, act 1 recap and act 2
WEDNESDAY REPONSE PARAGRAPH: GROUP A
How does Abbate’s reading of the Queen of the Night recalibrate your perception of the opera through Bergman’s filmic version of it? Focus on her two arias and the transformation that takes place from one to the other.

WEEK 4
Mon., Apr. 19
**South African Magic Flutes, 1: William Kentridge production**


IN-CLASS LISTENING/VIEWING: South African Magic Flutes, including South African artist William Kentridge’s production (available on Canvas)

**MONDAY REPONSE PARAGRAPH: GROUP B**

What does Calvin Tompkins’s biographical, and quasi-autobiographical, account of South African artist William Kentridge suggest you might expect of his *Magic Flute* production? What does it tell you about the snares and responsibilities that a white, strongly political South African artist of his generation might feel toward the opera?

**MONDAY NIGHT SCREENING #4: *Impempe Yomlingo***

**Wed., Apr. 21**

**South African Magic Flutes, 2: *Impempe Yomlingo***

READING: Sheila Boniface Davies and James Q. Davies, “‘So Take This Magic Flute and Blow. It Will Protect Us As We Go’: *Impempe Yomlingo* (2007–11) and South Africa’s Ongoing Transition”; https://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/09/arts/music/09flut.html

IN-CLASS LISTENING/VIEWING: *Impempe Yomlingo*

**WEDNESDAY REPONSE PARAGRAPH: GROUP A**

Davies and Davies use opera to explore a number of issues related to post-apartheid South African society. One of their primary themes is that of operatic “authenticity.” Their primary case studies, of *Impempe Yomlingo* and William Kentridge’s production of *The Magic Flute*, raise interesting questions about how personal values shape thinking about genres. Consider your own reaction to these two operatic projects on a conceptual level. Do you they fit under the rubric of Mozart’s original “work”? Given opera’s history of constant remediation and reinvention, what might your response reveal about your own genre assumptions, and how broadly or narrowly its boundaries are drawn.

OR

Elaborate on one aspect of *Impempe Yomlingo* that differs from Bergman’s version of Mozart’s *Magic Flute* not in the most obvious ways but in terms of media affordances. Consider how those media affordances coincide with the politics of race and class that are front and center in *Impempe Yomlingo*.

**WEEK 5**

**Mon., Apr. 26**

**The Tales of Hoffmann (Powell and Pressburger), 1: puppetry, automatons, and the uncanny**

READING: Marcia Citron, *When Opera Meets Film*, pp. 112-41
RECOMMENDED READING: Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, preface, vii-xvi

IN-CLASS LISTENING/VIEWING: *The Tales of Hoffmann* (Powell and Pressburger)

**MONDAY REPOSTRE PARAGRAPH: GROUP B**

Read Marcia Citron on Powell and Pressburger’s *Tales of Hoffmann* (1951) a filmed version of Offenbach’s opera of the same name (1881), transposed to the genre of ballet opera. Then imagine yourself in the position of having to create a “fully composed film” (p. 116) of an opera that in its original form combines music and spoken dialogue along with other elements typical of opera. Explain in one generous paragraph some of the challenges you might confront and some of the decisions that could result.

**MONDAY NIGHT SCREENING #5:**


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**Wed., Apr. 28**

*The Tales of Hoffmann (Powell and Pressburger), 2, life and death*

READING: Lesley Stern, “The Tales of Hoffmann: An Instance of Operality” (electronic resource)

RECOMMENDED READING: Babbington and Evans, “Matters of Life and Death in Powell and Pressburger’s *The Tales of Hoffmann*” (1994)

IN-CLASS LISTENING/VIEWING: *The Tales of Hoffmann* (Powell and Pressburger)

**WEDNESDAY REPOSTRE PARAGRAPH: GROUP A**

While we have been unpacking the nature of opera considered in relation to media and especially film, we have not specifically talked about histrionics, a central question related to performance in opera and in film scholar and critic Lesley Stern’s “*The Tales of Hoffmann: An Instance of Operality.*” Write a good paragraph taking up the following questions: What do histrionics have to do with gesture, so-called silent cinema, and what Stern calls “operality”? How specifically can histrionics work in tandem with cinema’s capacity for special techniques like dissolves and double exposures, or simply with its manipulation of focus, camera speed, the length of takes, and all else that is proper to cinema?

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Saturday, May 1, 5 pm CT: midterm think piece due

PLEASE SUBMIT YOUR PAPER ON TIME! Respondents will be assigned for Monday’s discussion as soon as think pieces arrive.

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**WEEK 6**

Mon., May 3

Discussion of midterm think pieces, with respondents
ASSIGNMENT: Read the think piece assigned to you and make notes for a response. (Note: you have no regular Monday response paragraph due today.)

MONDAY NIGHT SCREENING #6:
*Woman, Demon, Human* (dir. Huang Shuqin, 1987), 1'55"

Wed., May 5

*Woman, Demon, Human (1987)*


RECOMMENDED READING: Berry and Farquhar, “Operatic Modes: Opera Film, Martial Arts, and Cultural Nationalism”

LISTENING/VIEWING: excerpts from *Woman, Demon, Human* and excerpts from John Adams, *Nixon in China* (Houston, 1987) (Metropolitan Opera live recording)

WEDNESDAY REPOSE PARAGRAPH: GROUP B

Haiyan Lee writes that the film *Woman, Demon, Human* (Huang Shuqin, 1987) mobilizes a “cinema of attractions” that departs from the usual ways of treating opera in modern film. Explain how this is so, using two or three specific examples from the film. Why, relatedly, does Haiyan Lee’s charge of “gender essentialism” against some opera films not land on *Woman, Demon, Human*?

WEEK 7 [Anna’s classes]

Mon., May 10

*Menotti, Amahl and the Night Visitors, 1*


IN-CLASS LISTENING/VIEWING: excerpts from Mozart’s *Cosi fan tutte*, broadcast in English. OR excerpts from early radio broadcasts of the Met

MONDAY REPOSE PARAGRAPH: GROUP A

The television camera is bound to bring sincerity and realism to opera,” wrote NBC Opera Music Director Samuel Chotzinoff in 1949. Choose one scene from *Amahl and the Night Visitors* that exemplifies this sentiment. Describe what technical aspects—musical moments and television technique—create this sense of “sincerity and realism.”

MONDAY NIGHT SCREENING #7: *Menotti, Amahl and the Night Visitors*
Wed., May 12

**Menotti, Amahl and the Night Visitors, 2**

READING: Jennifer Barnes, *Television Opera: The Fall of Opera Commissioned for Television* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2003), Ch 1: “A Daring Experiment” (pp.15-41, excerpts)

RECOMMENDED READING/SKIMMING: Winthrop Sargeant, "Wizard of the Opera," *LIFE*, May 1, 1950, 81-90

IN-CLASS LISTENING/VIEWING: Menotti and NBC *Cosi fan tutte* excerpts; excerpts from Philip Glass’s *Einstein on the Beach*

**WEDNESDAY RESPONSE PARAGRAPH: GROUP B**

This week we are discussing the ways that opera was transmitted through the mass media of radio and television for the American audience of the early to mid-twentieth century. How would you take advantage of today’s mass media for the circulation of opera? Choose one medium and/or platform that you think would work particularly well for broadcasting opera. What sort of limitations would you expect from that specific medium?

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WEEK 8

Mon., May 17

**The Factotum Project**, by Will Liverman and K-Rico, with the Lyric Opera of Chicago

(special participating guest[s] attending class)

READING/WATCHING:

Creating the Factotum (17' video about their project in progress);

Lawrence Brownlee presents “The Sitdown with L.B.,” with guest baritone Will Liverman, esp. 4:00-29ff., 37:15 (and whatever else you do, don’t miss 14:50-18:30!);

Wikipedia article on “The Barber of Seville”;

Gordana Lazarevich, “Barbiere di Siviglia,” *Grove Music Online*

STRONGLY RECOMMENDED VIEWING: “Lift Every Voice: A Conversation Hosted by (Mezzo Soprano) J’nai Bridges,” produced by the Los Angeles Opera, a conversation on race and opera

IN-CLASS LISTENING/VIEWING:

Michael Spyres and Lawrence Brownlee sing “All’idea di quel metallo” from *The Barber of Seville*;

Giuseppe De Luca sings “Largo al factotum” ca. 1930?

**No response paragraph today.** Instead everyone should prepare at least one question for our Lyric Opera visitor(s) based on the Factotum clip and the Lawrence Brownlee interview with Will Liverman, and if possible the conversation hosted by J’nai Bridges. (We will know who specifically will visit closer to the time of this session.)
MONDAY NIGHT SCREENING #8:  
*Diva* (Jean-Jacques Beineix, 1982)

**Wed., May 19**

**The Diva, dead or alive**  
**READING:** Jonathan Sterne, “Afterword: Opera, Media, Technicity,” in Henson, *Technology and the Diva*  
**RECOMMENDED READING:** David Levin, “Is There a Text in this Libido? *Diva* and the Rhetoric of Contemporary Opera Criticism”  
**IN-CLASS LISTENING/VIEWING:** excerpts from Cecil B. DeMille, *Carmen* (1915) and *A Burlesque on Carmen* (Charlie Chaplin, 1915)

**WEDNESDAY REPONSE PARAGRAPH: GROUP A**  
Jonathan Sterne ends his chapter with the observation, “Technicity is of the diva, and all divas are made of it” (164). By ending in this way, he points to the constructedness of divas. How does Sterne’s point intersect with the performance dimensions and the medium affordances present in the film *Diva?*

**WEEK 9**  
**Mon., May 24**

**Fellini’s And the Ship Sails on/ *E la nave va***  
**READING:** Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera*, Chap. 6, “Fellini’s Ashes”  
**RECOMMENDED READING:** David Schroeder, *Cinema’s Allusions, Opera’s Allure*, Chap. 1, “Silent Opera, DeMille’s *Carmen*”; Chap. 11, “Bursting out into Opera: Fellini’s *E la nave va*, 127- 139; Melina Esse, “The Silent Diva: Farrar’s *Carmen***”  
**IN-CLASS LISTENING/VIEWING:** *E la nave va* [And the Ship Sails on] (dir. Federico Fellini, 1983)

No response paragraph today, but everyone should prepare an oral response to the reading of Grover-Friedlander’s chapter to share in class, or of one of the recommended readings.

**MONDAY NIGHT SCREENING #9:**  
Week 10  *E la nave va* [And the Ship Sails on] (dir. Federico Fellini, 1983)

**Wed., May 26**

**Discussion of *E la nave va; Wrap-up and special projects****

**WEDNESDAY REPONSE PARAGRAPH: GROUP B**

Taking Michal Grover-Friedlander’s chapter or another reading on Fellini’s ashes and related filmic motifs as a starting point, reflect on what memories, loss, mortality, and death have to do with technology in Fellini’s 1983 film *E la nave va* (And the Ship Sails...
On). Choose one or two moments from the film to explain how the cluster of death-memory-loss overlaps with problems of technological production and reproduction.

Final paper DUE DATE: Wed., June 2, 11 pm CT
N.B. Senior grades may be due earlier, on a date to be arranged
Selective Bibliography

Databases and Encyclopedias
RILM, online database of music periodical literature, including opera
Grove Music Online, enormous encyclopedia of music, including the Grove Dictionary of Opera

Periodicals
Cambridge Opera Journal
The Opera Quarterly
Avant-scène opera

Books and Articles


Citron, Marcia J. When Opera Meets Film. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.


Davies, James Q. and Sheila Boniface Davies. “‘So Take This Magic Flute and Blow. It Will Protect Us As We Go’: Impempe Yomlingo (2007–11) and South Africa’s Ongoing Transition.” The Opera Quarterly 28/1 (2012): 54-71.


