

MUS 553, Topics in 19th Century Music – Race, Casting, and Operatic Dramaturgy
Instructor: Ryan Minor | Thursday, 3:30pm – 6:20pm

This course resides at the intersection of two discourses that have tended to occupy distinct registers: a largely journalistic consideration of race and casting in opera and theatrical representation more generally; and scholarly, often quite theoretical, explorations of operatic dramaturgy that have rarely addressed race. As the implications of both race-conscious casting and so-called Regietheater have increasingly come to dominate discussions of operatic staging, this seminar will examine both discourses at the site of their juncture.

The exact contours of the seminar will adjust to student interests, but several core questions will be foundational: in what ways do operatic voices get racialized? How do racial identity and representation affect the politics and promises of realism (still, arguably, the foundation of Anglo-American theatrical aesthetics)? How are we to understand the implications of casting singers of color in explicitly racialized roles that do not reflect their own identity (for instance, Black and Latino singers in Asian roles)? What is the ontological status of a staging when it is subsequently presented by singers with different racial identities? and how might casting dynamics in opera differ from those in musical theater or even Lieder performance?

Readings will be drawn from a wide archive, with particular attention given to the treatment of race in performance theory, singers' memoirs, recent work on operatic staging practices, and perspectives on casting in spoken theater and dance.

This course is primarily intended for MA and PhD students, and it fulfills the Elective Group 2 requirement for students in the MA or PhD Critical Studies track. With the permission of the instructor, interested MM or DMA students may enroll in the course, which fulfills the Elective Group 1 requirement.

3 credits