

**“WHAT CAN BUSINESS SCHOOL STUDENTS LEARN FROM
THE OPERA?” -
MANAGING DIVERSITY AND IN/JUSTICE**

DAY: TUESDAY // TIME: 18.15-20.00 // ROOM: 23-102

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COURSE CONTENT

Opera is undoubtedly a difficult art genre. After its highlight in the 19th century when opera shined as one of the most popular and at the same time provocative and critical forms of art, opera has been and keeps being accused of being outdated, elitist therefore exclusive, unpopular and therefore uncompetitive and money-consuming. Notwithstanding, a series of current composers took up and rose to the challenge to provide us with operas that succeeded in rehabilitating the opera as a genre of art even in the eyes of its fiercest critics. One of those composers is the Belgian avant-garde jazz pianist and composer **Kris Defoort** (born in 1959) with his opera *The Time of Our Singing* that premiered in the La Monnaie Theatre in Brussels in September 2021. Based on the name of the same name by the American writer Richard Powers, the opera tells the story of a family involved in music and dealing heavily with issues of musical talent and genius, dysfunctional family structures, prejudices, historical traumas, racism, and political activism.

With this opera as centrepiece, an opera that will be staged also in St. Gallen in March and April 2023 under the musical direction of Kwame Ryan and the stage direction of Ted Huffman, we intend to step up the question regarding the actuality of the opera as an art form. The question upon which we will be focusing is “What Can Business School Students Learn from The Opera?” and the answers we expect from that question revolve around two very timely and important topics, namely diversity and in/justice.

More concretely, the first aspect we intend to discuss is how the opera as an art form thematizes diversity and is able (or not) to take account of the Different and/or the Other. In this light, we categorize, systematize, and provide a panoramic overview of the various and different forms that the Other is encountered within the canon of classic operatic compositions. The second task of our course lays in discussing notions of justice and - maybe, even more importantly - injustice that are abundant in the operatic world. Finally, we turn to the logistical costs that come alongside the attempt to overcome the aforementioned forms of injustice.

Overcoming racial or sexual discrimination, for example, does not just demand a higher than usual sensitivity and awareness from the opera directors. It is also connected with costly interventions that are very often met with distrust and cautiousness from the more traditional press and the rather conventional opera-goers. Seen this way, a part of the course will be devoted to discussing theories and models of production management that are capable of providing the suitable framework in regard to this objective.

Needless to say, that in order to achieve this undoubtedly very ambitious goal reading texts does not suffice. Going to the opera, getting engaged in productions that are currently under development and talking with world-renowned art producers is also a part of our course. Thanks to the generosity of the Opera House of St. Gallen the students of the course will have the unique chance to attend and get involved in the production not only of the opera *The Time of Our Singing* but also of the staging of **Giuseppe Verdi’s Requiem**, talk to the producers and become actively involved in an egalitarian music and artistic production.

COURSE STRUCTURE

(21.02.2023, Tuesday) 1st Session: Introduction

Introduction – Brainstorming – Examination Modalities

(28.02.2023, Tuesday) 2nd Session: Race, Sex/Gender, and Identity Politics in Contemporary Literature

Mithu Sanya: *Identitti* (Astra: London, 2022), pp. 3-64.

Richard Powers: *The Time of Our Singing* (Farrar Straus & Giroux: New York, 2003), pp. 3-30.

Presentations:

(07.03.2023, Tuesday) 3rd Session: Race in the Opera

A Discussion with the composer KRIS DEFOORT (*Singing of our Times*)

Presentations (prepared questions to the composer):

(11.03.2023, Saturday) 4th Session: Premiere of the Opera *The Time of Our Singing* at the Opera House St. Gallen (Tickets for 15 CHFs – Begin: 19:00)

(14.03.2023, Tuesday) 5th Session: Gender bias in the Opera

A Discussion with the librettist ARYEH LEV STOLLMAN (*Lili Elbe*)

Presentations (prepared questions to the librettist):

(18.03.2023, Saturday) 6th Session: RECORDING of the Opera *Lili Elbe* at the Opera House St. Gallen (Begin: 9:00)

(21.03.2023) 7th Session: Rethinking Race, Class, and Sex/Gender (Theory)

Alcoff, Linda: “Critical Philosophy of Race”, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2021. Link: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/critical-phil-race>

Butler, Judith: *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge), pp. 3-44.

Presentations:

(28.03.2023) 8th Session: CANCELLED!

// Break

(18.04.2023) 9th Session: Rethinking Difference and Otherness (Theory)

Hamer, Fannie Lou: “Nobody’s Free Until Everybody’s Free”: Speech delivered at the Founding of the National Women’s Political Caucus, Washington, D.C., July 10, 1971, in: *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell It Like It Is*, edited by Maegan Parker Brooks & Davis W. Houck (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), pp. 134-139.

King, Martin Luther Jr.: “I Have a Dream”: Speech delivered on 28 August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C. (<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihavedream.htm>)

The Combahee River Collective: “The Combahee River Collective Statement”, in: *Home Girls. A Black Feminist Anthology*, edited by Barbara Smith (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), pp. 264-273.

Presentations:

~~(25.04.2023)~~

(02.05.2023) 10th Session: Re-Actualizing the Opera

Discussion with the director KRYSTIAN LADA (Giuseppe Verdi: *Messa da Requiem*)

Presentations (prepared questions to the director):

~~(09.05.2023)~~

(16.05.2023, Tuesday) 11th Session: Final Discussion

Presentations (Reflexions on the theoretical texts and practical experience):

(17.05.2023, Wednesday) 12th Session: Concert: Giuseppe Verdi’s *Messa da Requiem* at the Opera House St. Gallen (Tickets for 15 CHFs – Begin with Introduction by CAROLINE DAMASCHKE: 18:45) – Drinks!!

~~(23.05.2023)~~

***The texts for every session are uploaded online and linked to the syllabus.**

EXAMINATION INFORMATION

The examination consists of two parts:

- i) The **first part** consists of a group (or individual) **presentation** (same grade for everyone) where the students get either to present the main ideas of the ascribed texts (max. 10 minutes) or to prepare well-founded, researched, and elaborate questions to our guests. This part accounts for **40% of the final grade**.
- ii) The **second part** consist of a **written essay** (12.000 -15.000 characters) **due ca. two weeks** after the end of the term. The students are asked to either come up with a theoretical topic elaborating on one of the theoretical topics tackled in the first half of the course or sketch a paper whether they freely and autonomously reflect upon the difficulties/challenges/possibilities that diversity and inclusion thinking pose upon management. This part accounts for 60% of the final grade.