

DIGITAL MEDIA REVIEWS

EDITED BY STEPHEN HENRY



Met Opera On Demand: Student Access. [New York, New York]: Metropolitan Opera. <http://www.metoperafamily.org/ondemand/studentaccess/sales/overview> (Accessed 12 January 2014). [Requires a Web browser, an audio-enabled device, and Adobe Flash Player. High-speed Internet connection of at least 2 mpbs recommended. Pricing: annual subscriptions prices vary and are based on institution FTE]

Introduction

After a 2006 launch that was only available to individual subscribers, the Metropolitan Opera has recently made institutional access to their Met on Demand services available through *Met Opera on Demand: Student Access*. This online product provides users with high- and standard-definition video of Metropolitan Opera productions as well as audio from historic Metropolitan Opera broadcasts. The student access platform also provides links to curated educational content on the operas, composers, productions, and singers featured in the catalog.

Coverage

All of the content presented in the database consists exclusively of Metropolitan Opera productions and curated educational content. Currently, the service includes sixty-seven high-definition streaming video productions originally presented through the Met's *Live in HD* theater broadcasts, which began in 2006 with Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Many of these productions include the originally-broadcast introductions and intermission interviews with artists. Additional video content consists of sixty-eight standard-definition streaming video productions. In addition to the streaming video content, there are 336 audio-only productions available dating back to the 1936 broadcast of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*.¹

Many important productions are represented. The high-definition catalog alone includes important American works like John Adams's *Nixon in China* and *Doctor Atomic* alongside company premieres like Tan Dun's *The First Emperor*, and the baroque pastiche *The Enchanted Island*. Many operas are represented by multiple productions. Notably, Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* appears eight times—the earliest performance featuring Kirsten Flagstad and Lauritz Melchior from the 1938 radio broadcast and the most recent featuring Deborah Voigt and Roger Dean Smith in a high-definition performance from 2008. Listening to the history of this work at the company provides an unparalleled research tool for scholars of opera and performance practice.

Educational content is linked to the streaming site, as well. In addition to a synopsis for every opera, many videos include links to regularly-published Metropolitan Opera content such as the *In Focus* series. This series contains information about the opera, music, composers, and Metropolitan Opera productions (including premieres). Some of the operas also link to contemporary program notes from the streaming production on view. The most exciting content is some of the additional multimedia available under Spotlights. For example, in addition to linking to the previously mentioned publications, the Spotlight currently published for Richard Strauss provides audio documentaries, additional video clips,

1. <http://www.metoperafamily.org/ondemand/studentaccess/sales/catalog> [accessed 12 January 2014].

and interviews with singers of historic importance like Lotte Lehmann, Leonie Rysanek, and Christa Ludwig.²

Content is added monthly. The current Recently Added section includes productions from 2013 as well as standard-definition video additions from the 1990s and audio broadcasts from the 1950s.³

Navigation

The *Student Access* portal is designed with easy browsing in mind. On launch, the site provides recent additions in categories labeled *Live in HD* Presentations, Classic Telecasts, and Radio Broadcasts. A mouse-over on production icons gives a quick preview that includes composer, librettist, conductor, principals, running time, and short description of the production. The icons for video are production stills and the audio broadcasts use a template and are conveniently color-coded by decade to aid in date browsing.

The launch page also provides options to view the catalog by format, date, or title. A simple keyword search is available as well. This general search does not seem to accept Boolean operators. This might not be problematic, but the advanced search available does not seem to be quite accurate. For example, a search on Domingo as conductor returns both productions where Plácido Domingo is featured as a singer and productions on which he conducts. Metadata for production designers and directors also seems inconsistent. A search for Zeffirelli fails to return any results, including his well-known *La Bohème* which was presented in HD in 2008, but a search for Lepage does bring up the 2012 *Ring Cycle* and the accompanying documentary. However, the easy browsing set-up and facets for sorting by format type, date, and title somewhat mitigate these search issues.

Video Interface

The video interface is easy to use and has most of the playback features one would ex-

pect to see. Both video and audio use the same player, with audio broadcasts showing a record cover template that is color-coded by decade for browsing access. One interesting choice for the player is the chaptering access to content. All content opens in a minimized mode where users can view all of the preview information about the opera and have access to a playlist that shows the list of chapters. This provides easy access to specific arias or ensembles in each production and its placement below the video as opposed to a sidebar allows for maximum screen devotion to the video itself. You can navigate to chapters either through the playlist or using the forward and back buttons in the player itself. The progress bar in the player indicates where in the chapter the video is and clicking within this bar facilitates forward and backwards access within the chapter.

Access to subtitles is impressive—high-definition content includes subtitles in seven languages, while standard-definition content may only include English (to date, subtitles are unavailable for audio broadcasts). Some functionality, however, is necessarily lost in full-screen view. In addition to not being able to see the chapter list, subtitles cannot be changed in full screen. Both modes offer play/pause, forward, backward, and mute buttons as well as a “tell a friend!” email button, but curiously there is no volume control within the player. This makes adjusting volume difficult in full screen mode because it must be adjusted through the playback device itself.

The high-definition content is streamed at 1280x720 resolution and depending on the user-end Internet speeds, can stream in excess of 2 mbps.⁴ This provides beautiful high-definition streaming in previews on a network that tested at greater than 40 mbps speeds. Aspect ratio is 16:9 for high-definition video and 4:3 for standard-definition video.⁵ A slower network was not available for testing at the time of this review.

2. <http://metoperafamily.org/watch-and-listen/met-opera-on-demand/MOoDIInstitutional-Access/Spotlight-on-Richard-Strauss/> [accessed 12 January 2014].

3. <http://metoperafamily.org/ondemand/index.aspx> [accessed 30 November 2013].

4. <http://www.metoperafamily.org/ondemand/studentaccess/sales/catalog> [accessed 12 January 2014].

5. http://www.metoperafamily.org/ondemand/information/index.aspx#Aspect_Ratio [accessed 12 January 2014].

Access, Licensing, and Assessment

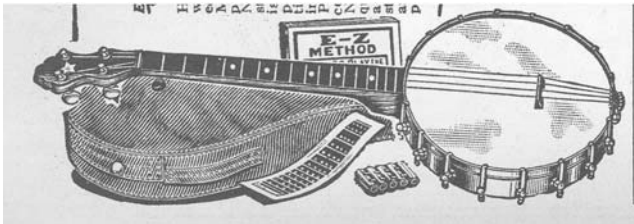
There are full MARC records available for purchase through OCLC for all video and audio broadcasts available from the service. This can be important for libraries that wish to make title-level access available through local catalogs. No user limits are placed on subscriptions—all subscriptions allow unlimited simultaneous users at subscribing institutions. However, *Student Access* subscribers do not currently have access to the Apple mobile app, which is available to individual subscribers. Authentication is set up through proxy and IP address(es) at subscribing institutions. Monthly usage statistics are also provided.⁶

There are no public performance rights granted with subscriptions, but the license is explicit about support of access for educational uses.⁷ This clarification is welcome in an era when libraries find more and more content providers using licenses to restrict access to content. Public performance licenses at rates of \$75–\$125 dollars per production are available.⁸

Conclusion

Met on Demand: Student Access provides a unique collection of Metropolitan Opera productions to researchers and students. No other subscription-based research tool for opera provides the ability to track performances throughout the history of the company from the early 20th century to today. Subscription access to this platform simply allows researchers to interact with content in a way that was impossible five years ago. No other resource provides the scope of content and historical context of these streaming productions. This combination of exclusive content delivered in high-quality video and audio makes *Met on Demand: Student Access* a valuable addition to the list of classical streaming products available.

KATHLEEN DELAURENTI
College of William and Mary



6. <http://www.metoperafamily.org/ondemand/studentaccess/sales/benefits> [accessed 12 January 2014].

7. <http://www.metoperafamily.org/ondemand/studentaccess/sales/license> [accessed 12 January 2014].

8. Metropolitan Opera, *Public Performance License*, http://www.metoperafamily.org/uploadedImages/MetOpera/9_watch_and_listen/3_met_opera_on_demand/MOoD%20Institutional/MET_Public%20Performance%20License.pdf [accessed 12 January 2014].

Copyright of Notes is the property of Music Library Association Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.