HKB
Hochschule der Künste Bern
Bern University of the Arts

Master Specialized Music Performance Opera

Swiss Opera Studio

Berner Fachhochschule
Bern University of Applied Sciences

Why study Opera?

Opera is a fascinating art, where different artistic expressions conflate, interact, work and come together to tell a story: music, singing, acting, language, movement and dance, costume, stage design, light. Opera combines these genres like no other art form does.

Despite the variety: opera productions could not possibly be realised without the singer's creativity, versatility and power of persuasion on stage. Vocal talent and singing skills are essential, yet only the starting point for an education at the Swiss Opera Studio. More knowledge needs to be acquired and various skills to be developed.

A completed Bachelor's or Master's degree in singing is a prerequisite for the Master of Arts in Specialized Music Performance Opera at the Bern University of the Arts HKB. The two-year opera programme at the HKB extensively and intensively prepares for professional employment by training students in musical, scenic and other stage relevant areas, as well as in opera-specific singing. This training is complemented by interrelated stage projects and opera productions. Both, excerpts from important operas as well as entire parts and musical

theater works are rehearsed, staged and complemented with instrumental ensembles or orchestra.

Mathias Behrends
Head of Studies Opera

MA Specialized Music Performance Opera Swiss Opera Studio

Core Competencies
In regular curricular subjects, we support our students in the establishment and development of their personal skills. Our goal is for students to gain confidence in their vocal, musical and acting abilities and deepen their theoretical background.

In addition to class attendance, students acquire practical competence in production and performance in a lively, inspiring university environment. In this way, the personal development is reflected in real-life artistic experiences and test situations. In own projects students can try out and realise personal artistic ideas.

This continuous intertwining of teaching and project work is a unique feature of the opera studies at the HKB. Further characteristics are:
- Good infrastructure
- Bilingualism at the campus Biel
- Intensive collaboration with lecturers and
- Network for auditions and artistic internships

Study Environment
The Opera Studio is not a stand-alone institution; together with the theater programme it forms the Opera/Theater department at the HKB. It considers itself as a trans-disciplinary education of the arts. It enables and supports collaboration between lecturers and students of different art genres.

The collaboration with other music academies in Switzerland enables students of partner universities to specialize in opera at the HKB, without having to change their vocal coaches and teachers. Foreign students can choose from an interesting pool of teachers from all music academies in Switzerland to study opera singing. There are also regular collaborations with the Theater Orchestra Biel Solothurn, which is next door to the Swiss Opera Studio, and also with other opera houses both in Switzerland and abroad.

Profession
The professional field of opera has radically changed: in the last decades, various large opera houses, highly skilled smaller stages, opera festivals, contemporary music theater projects and independent productions have done pioneer work. The genre of opera is a challenging art form, because it confronts us with conditions and relationships of social life and deals with its own alienation potential of both classical opera material and current issues.

Artistic impulses break out of the rigid forms of the opera house, overcome boundaries between classical opera repertoire and contemporary art and initiate new creative expressions that are increasingly becoming important for young singers. Still, opera creates space for visions, transgressions, dreams. It links thoughts and feelings in new and surprising ways time and again. Opera seduces one to explore ever newer sounds and visual worlds. This diversity is reflected in the content of the opera studies at the HKB. It is the engine of teaching and learning and shapes the eductional work of all lecturers. Just like the future professional environment, the Opera Studio is characterised by the international background of students and staff.

Degree Structure

The *Master of Arts in Specialized Music Performance Opera* at the HKB usually lasts four to five semesters and comprises 90 or 120 ECTS, depending on the previous education. It builds on a Bachelor's or Master's degree in singing and expands the range of training required for the musical stage. Profound musical performing skills are taught as a foundation. Simultaneously, the vocal skills are further developed. In all three core areas (performing skills and musical skills as well as vocal development) the personal artistic imagination, creativity and own initiative in design and interpretation are promoted. The Opera Studies programme enables the students to actively and independently deal with the broad range of artistic requirements, different directorial signatures, diverse musical styles and formal language in their future careers. We support our students to develop their own artistic personality.

At the core of the studies are the following subjects:
- Scenic work opera / musical theater,
- Solo repetition / role study,
- Ensemble coaching,
- Opera singing lessons and
- Stage productions and opera productions.

Added to these are other relevant opera elements such as:
- Training in acting,
- Stage oriented movement,
- Diction / language coaching,
- Intensive week performance/ presentation,
- Theory of musical theater,
- Production-related dramaturgy,
- Musical preparation of the opera projects and
- Production-related theme days.

The programme is topped off with audition training, auditions at agencies and opera houses, artistic internships in musical theater, encounters with guest lecturers in the practical module *Getting into Business* and the teaching experience with a lecturer in residence (visiting professors from the current musical theater world), for networking opportunities in the professional world.

Artistic Practice / Opera Productions
During the studies and in each semester artistic practices and public opera performances give real-life experiences on the theater stage.

1st Semester
Opera sketches: vocal, musical and performance realisations of excerpts from various opera productions and eras, staged based on a dramaturgically related topic and /or a title and accompanied by keyboard instruments.

2nd Semester
Opera workshop: comprehensive realisation of a creative musical theater project and of a specific vocal literature. The opera workshop is developed

and staged on the basis of the perspectives of a given theme and accompanied by an instrumental ensemble.

3rd Semester
Artistic practice (vocal parts/role play in musical theater productions) and the realisation of an own project (presentation of a personally chosen piece of work from a musical and scenic perspective).

4th Semester
Opera production: rehearsal of a complex piece of opera and realisation of the complete opera role in the context of musical interpretation and production with an orchestra. The opera production is the artistic part of the final Master's thesis. A written essay and the opera-relevant reflective paper will supplement it.

In recent years, the following works have been performed at the Swiss Opera Studio:

Ottone, Re di Germania (G.F. Händel)
La finta giardiniera (W.A. Mozart)
L'Incoronazione di Poppea (C. Monteverdi)
Falstaff (A. Salieri)
Il curioso indiscreto (P. Anfossi)
Così fan tutte (W.A. Mozart)
Giulio Cesare in Egitto (G.F. Händel)
The tender land (A. Copland)

Personal Experiences and Research
This optional module is based on the students' own initiative. It offers the possibility to scenically and musically realise a self-selected musical theater project. The module *Getting into Business* is supervised by outstanding individuals from the current musical theater world, and focusses on issues like development, opportunities and prospects in the professional world.

The programme at the HKB teaches a broad spectrum of stylistic and opera performance skills. Italian, French, German and English opera literature of all eras are analysed. Important practical performance knowledge (historically informed opera performance practice) are incorporated and contemporary musical theater develops into a firmly established realm of experience within the studies. This also includes the collaboration with the research department at the HKB.

























Research

The HKB's research combines scientific, artistic and technological aspects, is practical and engages in socially relevant debates.

"Singers as actors" is a research project in which both lecturers and students of the Swiss Opera Studio participate. "The requirements regarding the opera singers' acting quality are constantly increasing" – that's what today's opera composers often say. This isn't anything new though: in the first half of the 19th century the Paris Opera demanded acting ability from its singers. The project follows these developments and examines the relationship between singing and acting at that time. It is about showing the relationships between codified gestures, improvisation and stage directions as well as the similarities and differences in the development of drama and noted musical theater. In class, the findings are tested in practice, strengthening the network of the courses within the department of Opera/Theater.

Students receive insights into research projects during their studies. After having obtained the master's degree, they may commence post-graduate studies – at the Graduate School of the Arts in collaboration with the Bern University.

Head of Studies and Lecturers

Mathias Behrends is the head of studies of the opera programme and teaches scenic musical theater/opera. After studying opera direction in Berlin, he staged works in Stuttgart, Ingolstadt, Cottbus, Berlin, Graz, Leipzig, Singapore, Zagreb and La Chaise-Dieu (France). Behrends teaches at the University in Graz, Leipzig and Karlsruhe and gives master classes in the field of opera on a regular basis. He is also an artistic director at the International Summer Academy Biel/Bienne.

The lecturers of the Swiss Opera Studio form a solid and throughout the programme present team, supplemented by external lecturers. The core team is comprised of the following:

- *Franco Trinca,* conductor and assistant opera director at the Theater Orchestra Biel Solothurn, musical director at the Opéra de Chambre de Genève, editor of various italian operatic.
- *Anna Magdalena Fitzi,* actor, speaker, stage director and lecturer in diction and opera-relevant languages.
- *Franziska Meyer,* lecturer in the area of music and movement (rhythmics), dance and stage movement.
- *Maren Rieger,* dramaturg in acting and music theater, curator and juror in the field of performing arts, theory lecturer in the field of acting and opera at the HKB.
- *Monika Nagy,* pianist, song accompanist, chamber music partner and opera répétiteuse.
- *Riccardo Bovino,* pianist, chamber musician, conductor and accompanist for opera and vocals, as a HKB lecturer connects the areas musical theater with music and movement (rhythmics).
- *Francesco Addabbo,* pianist and accompanist, specialized particularly in the area of old music, fascinated by world languages, masters seven of them.
- *Pawel Mazurkiewicz,* concert pianist and accompanist, lecturer in classical music (piano) and opera.

– *Stefan Saborowski,* actor in theater and film, director, theater director and acting lecturer.
– *Hans Peter Blochwitz,* outstanding international lyrical tenor with a 20-year stage career in the area of opera, concert and song, lecturer for vocals at the HKB and particularly involved in the opera project work.
– *Guest lecturers* in the past study year were, for example, singing educationalist Marga Schiml, musical theater director Johannes Schaaf, Peter Schweiger and Wolfram Mehring, dramaturg Wolfgang Willaschek and dancer, choreograph and director Joachim Schloemer.

The following HKB lecturers teach opera singing:

– *Christian Hilz,* a baritone in demand as interpreter in concerts and opera, since 2009 teaching a singing class at the HKB.
– *Kai Wessel,* countertenor, a leading representative of his discipline, opera guest performances throughout Europe, at the HKB mainly teaching in the area of interpretation in contemporary singing and musical theater repertoire.
– *Rachel Harnisch,* internationally renowned soprano, at home both on the opera stage and in the concert hall, guest performances at outstanding opera houses, numerous recordings.
– *Malin Hartelius,* soprano, was permanently engaged at the Vienna State Opera and the Zurich Opera House, guest performances with a broad repertoire on all leading stages and opera festivals.

Moreover, students may choose from a pool of guest lecturers from the music academies in Switzerland for the additional vocal core subject. Consent of the respective academies is needed.

Infrastructure

Campus “Burg” (Castle) Biel
The Swiss Opera Studio is at home in the bilingual town of Biel. German and French are the teaching and everyday working languages. Due to the international nature of our students, the programme is also taught in English. Excellent teaching and practice rooms, rehearsal rooms and studios for performing lessons are available. Courses take place in the so-called Castle, in the heart of the old town along with those of the theater musical programme (contemporary music theater for composers and instrumentalists) as well as music and movement (rhythmics).

Campus Theater Studies
The Opera Studio makes up the department of Opera/Theater together with the BA and MA theater programmes. The theater programmes are located in Bern. Collaborations and projects with theater students offer the chance to increase the knowledge of scenic implementation practices.

Recording Studio and Music Library
Students are given the opportunity to use the modern infrastructure of the recording studio at the music department of the HKB for their own projects. The staff offers support for professional sound productions. The music library of the HKB is a scientific specialized library open to students, staff and the musically interested public.

Berlin Chamber Opera

Opera Agency ZAV in Cologne

Munich State Opera

Other music academies in Switzerland

Bayreuther Festspiele

Theater Orchestra Biel Solothurn

Bavarian Theater Academy Munich

International Summer Academy Biel

The Munich Biennale of New Music Theater

Opera Studies in Biel

Music Theater in Switzerland

Salzburg Festival and University Mozarteum

HKB in Bern

Zámecké divadlo Český Krumlov

Theater Orchestra Bern

Paris Opera Towns Lyon

Teatro alla Scala Milano

Venice Opera Town

Teatro Amazonas Manaus (Brasilien)

Ooppera Suomen Kansallisooppera

Information and Contact

Dates
The aptitude test takes place in April/May respectively.
Admission to the aptitude test is possible until the beginning of April.
Start of studies: mid-September

More detailed information on the admission procedure, aptitude test and study programme can be found at:

hkb.bfh.ch/schweizeropernstudio
facebook.com/schweizeropernstudio

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01 Mathilde Legrand in Giovanni Paisiello: *La Frascatana*
Opera production 2014, photo: Singi Chonge
02 Li-Chin Huang and Daniel Bentz in Pasquale Anfossi: *Il curioso indiscreto*
Opera production 2011, photo: Carine Steiner
03 Daniela Braun, Annina Haug, Matthieu Heim, Chasper-Curo Mani, Clara Meloni, Dong Hee Seo, Nadia Catania, Oriane Pons, Stephanie Ritz, Oleg Sopunov, Céline Steudler, Dzianis Yantsevich in Antonio Salieri: *Falstaff*
Opera production 2012, photo: Cornelia Lampart
04 Anna Gössi and Oleg Sopunov in Giovanni Paisiello: *La Frascatana*
Opera production 2014, photo: Carine Steiner
05 Oriane Pons in Wolfgang Amad. Mozart: *La finta giardiniera*
Opera production 2013, photo: Carine Steiner
06 Mathilde Legrand and Géraldine Cloux in Georg Friedrich Händel: *Ottone, Re di Germania*
Opera production 2015, photo: Carine Steiner
07 Denis Kovalenko in *Opera workshop Romantik*
2006, photo: Karl Forster