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## **The Best of Opera with Smithsonian Journeys' Three Extraordinary Metropolitan Opera Tours**

Smithsonian Journeys will offer three tours to New York's Metropolitan Opera in late 2008 and early 2009, each featuring different highlights from the Met's upcoming schedule. Travelers on each tour will enjoy prime orchestra seating at all operas, plus daily lectures on the performances by opera expert Arthur Kaplan. Backstage tours at the Met will provide participants with a special behind-the-scenes look at how the operas are produced.

New York City's festive holiday atmosphere provides the backdrop to the first tour, titled "Shining Stars at the Met," Dec. 16 through 20. Featured performances include a new production of Massenet's "Thaïs," starring Renée Fleming; Wagner's "Tristan und Isolde"; Puccini's "La Bohème"; and Mozart's "Don Giovanni," with Erwin Schrott, the current leading exponent of the title role.

Smithsonian Journeys celebrates the birthplace of opera at "Masterpieces of Italian Opera at the Met," March 31 through April 4, 2009. Kaplan will lead travelers on an exploration of the bel canto and verismo styles of opera during four consecutive evening performances, including the season premiere of Donizetti's "L'Elisir d'Amore," featuring a stellar cast, including Angela Gheorghiu, Rolando Villazón and Bryn Terfel. Travelers will also attend Verdi's "Rigoletto" with the noted coloratura Diana Damrau as Gilda, a double-billing of Mascagni's "Cavalleria Rusticana" and Leoncavallo's "Pagliacci" with Jose Cura singing the tenor leads in both works, and finally, a new production of Bellini's "La Sonnambula," starring the sensational bel canto duo Natalie Dessay and Juan Diego Flórez.

Wagner's four-part "Ring Cycle," an epic story of the strengths and frailties of gods and humans, will complete the season for Smithsonian travelers, April 27 through May 3, 2009. James Levine, one of the greatest Wagnerian conductors of our time, directs Plácido Domingo and René Pape in "Die Walküre." Also included in Otto Schenk's landmark traditional production are "Das Rheingold," "Siegfried" and "Götterdämmerung." Throughout the tour, Kaplan offers insight into

Schenk's interpretation of Wagner's original intentions for the four-part epic. During this special week of opera, travelers will also attend a new production of Verdi's "Il Trovatore."

### **About Smithsonian Journeys**

Smithsonian Journeys, the educational travel program of the Smithsonian Institution, is dedicated to the life-enriching experiences of educational travel. More than 250 international tours annually are led by eminent experts that add extraordinary depth and insider's access to people, sites and experiences that are rarely available to the casual traveler. More information is available by calling (877)-EDU-TOURS (338-8687) or visiting [www.smithsonianjourneys.org](http://www.smithsonianjourneys.org).

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