

# Berwick Educational Association



Image: *Xerxes at the Hellespont*, by Jean Adrien Guignet (1816-1854), oil on canvas

## ***Bridging the Hellespont***

**A lecture by Dr. Richard Moore,  
Tuesday 19th June 2018, 10-12 noon  
Henry Travers Studio, The Maltings, Eastern Lane, Berwick**

‘We live and die in the books we read’ : So wrote Edith Thompson, the millinery book-keeper who was addicted to Sheikhs, desert moons and Eastern romance and who would end up hanged for murder. Edith’s exotic tastes were in part an escape from humdrum realities. But one does not have to be a literary fantasist to be imaginatively stirred by *The Thousand and One Nights* or the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam. In this lecture we shall examine some of our Western responses. We shall also see how the East generally was musically treated in works as varied as Arne’s *Artaxerxes*, the song *In A Persian Garden*, Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Scheherazade*, and such comedy-operas as *The Rose of Persia*, *Utopia Limited* and *Il Seraglio*.

The fascination with the East is well seen in responses to the career of Xerxes, a Persian king who ruled from 486 B.C. until his assassination in 465. In Histories, Herodotus relates that at the Strymon river, his Magi sought good omens by sacrificing white horses. When they learned that Nine Ways was the name of the river-bridges, they buried alive nine boys and nine girls. Xerxes' wife Amestris also twice buried people. Each time it was seven sons of notable Persians.

Xerxes' story is best known to us now through Handel's eponymous opera. Here, surprisingly, the main part was taken by a soprano castrato and the story is much changed. At the end the great king not only avoids assassination; he apologises to everyone. Later Eastern-inspired works offered rather more death, sex and passion. They also produced the curious 1920's notion of the Sheik reflected in the famous Fahmi murder case. Come and learn what we in the West have made of 'East of Eden'. It will be an informative preparation for the delights of the Handel opera and a resurgence of associated cultural treatments.

**This lecture by Dr. Richard Moore costs £5, and is one of two events supporting Byre Opera's performance of [Handel's Xerxes at The Maltings](#) (June 30th and July 1st). Proof of purchase entitles ticket holders to £5 off the opera ticket, and a similar concession applies to [Xerxes: Behind the Scenes](#) (May 26th), so you can attend all 3 events for only £20.**

**All are welcome and no previous knowledge is assumed.**

If you supply us with your personal data (name, address or email), we will hold this in accordance with our [privacy policy](#).

To book the lecture online, please go to [The Maltings' website](#).

To book in person, please go to The Maltings box office (01289 330999).

To book by mail, please fill in the booking form below, and mail to BEA, 7 Ravensdowne, Berwick-upon-Tweed TD15 1HX along with a cheque in favour of Berwick Educational Association.

If you have any queries, please email [berwickea@gmail.com](mailto:berwickea@gmail.com) or phone Cian McHugh on 01289 303254

---

Name

Address

Tel No

Email

Cheque enclosed  £5 Bridging the Hellespont, or  
 £20 (£18 concessions) Bridging the Hellespont, Xerxes Behind the Scenes,  
and Handel's Xerxes (specify June 30th or July 1st)