

Europe's best classical music festivals

Sick of guitars and grotty fields? Head to the continent for some classier aural pleasure

While the UK's festival season is drawing to a close, the warmer climes of mainland Europe mean there's plenty of opportunities left to catch some alfresco tunes. Here's our pick of the shows to catch in the coming months.

The Puccini Festival Where and when: Lucca, Italy, July–late August

In my mind's eye, I'm in 'Fitzcarraldo', battling natives along the Pachitea river on a struggling steamship en route to building an opera house in Peru, the gorgeous arias drifting across the water doing their best to placate a raging Klaus Kinski. In reality, the arias are being played on a small boat chugging gently across the gorgeous Massaciuccoli lake en route to Torre del Lago to watch 'Madame Butterfly', just one of the productions featuring at this year's friendly, unstuffy Puccini festival. Dress up or down, a la Italiana, either way you'll enjoy top productions in a stunning setting for much less than you'd pay in most European cities. Lucca was home to the man behind it all – legendary composer Giacomo Puccini – and celebrates the fact with not just the annual festival, but also three museums in three very different parts of the region – they're a great excuse to sample this beautiful (and relatively quiet) part of Tuscany, in particular the deeply underrated walled city of Lucca. While you're here, it's worth taking in the Pietrasanta in Concerto festival too. Held in a breathtakingly pretty cloister in an elegant, arty town, it attracts prestigious names – this year for example saw the likes of Michael Guttman, Karin Lechner and Nigel Kennedy play – and if you wander in during the late afternoon and early evening, you can often catch a rehearsal for free. Best of all, once you've done the culture, the beaches around Viareggio and super-posh Forte dei Marmi are some of the loveliest on the Med.

€33-129, concessions available www.puccinifestival.it

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