

A History of Western Music, 10th Edition, Grout, et al.

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/ [CHAPTER 27. ROMANTIC OPERA AND MUSICAL THEATER TO MIDCENTURY](#) / [CH 27 OUTLINE](#)

I. The Roles of Opera

- A. First half of nineteenth century, golden age of opera
 1. new opera theaters erected all over western Europe
 - a. run for profit by an impresario
 - b. backed by government subsidies or private support
 - c. attended by upper and middle classes
 - d. newspapers started: advertising, substantive articles, reviews
 2. opera in elite and popular culture
 - a. excerpts and complete scores published, voice and piano
 - b. performed in salons, amateurs at home
 - c. selections transcribed for piano
 - d. overtures and arias on concert programs
 - e. abridged and parodied, popular theater
 - f. opera arias staples of café orchestras
 3. singers, orchestra, and composer
 - a. focus on beautiful singing
 - b. French and German opera, orchestra increasingly significant, Italian composers followed
 - c. star singers paid more than composers
 - d. composer's score starting point for a performance
 - i. composers gradually prominent figures
 - ii. new operas major events; successful ones restaged, performed numerous times
 - iii. by 1850, permanent repertory emerged
 4. subjects and settings
 - a. strong plots, interesting characters, wide audience appeal
 - b. subjects and settings varied widely
 - i. distant lands, long-ago times had special attraction
 - ii. many adapted from recent literary works or literary masterpieces
 - iii. librettists addressed concerns of the broader audience
- B. Nationalism
 1. French Revolution, Napoleonic Wars: spread concept of a nation
 - a. unified group of people, national identity through shared characteristics
 - b. intentionally created; social and political goals
 2. nation and state
 - a. Germany and Italy divided since Middle Ages
 - i. foundation for unification: common language, literature, music, other arts
 - ii. cultural nationalism became strong element in operas
 - b. presence of national elements in opera
 - i. reinforce group identity as a nation
 - ii. Italians: analogies to suggest nationalist ideas
 - iii. Germans: Weber's *Der Freischütz*, inspiration for nation-building
 3. use of exoticism, evocation of a foreign land or culture

II. Italy

- A. Opera invented and popularized in Italy
 1. more opera houses than any other region
 2. forty or more new operas produced every year
 3. dozens of composers wrote operas
- B. Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868)
 1. one of the most popular and influential composers of his generation
 - a. born in Pesaro, Italy
 - b. as a child, studied and performed as violist, singer, pianist
 - c. 1806 entered Bologna Conservatory
 - d. 1810, first opera commission
 - e. 1815, musical director of Teatro San Carlo in Naples
 - f. composed rapidly, wrote for particular singers
 - g. 1824, director of Théâtre Italien in Paris
 - h. retired at age forty, disappeared from operatic scene
 - i. major works: 39 operas, including *Tancredi*, *L'italiana in Algeri*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Otello*, *La Cenerentola*, *Mosè in Egitto*; *Stabat mater*, *Petite messe solennelle*, other sacred vocal works; smaller vocal and instrumental pieces
 2. best known today for his comic operas
 - a. reputation during his lifetime rested on serious operas
 - b. blended opera buffa and opera seria
 3. bel canto singing style
 - a. elegant, effortless technique, agility, flexibility, control
 - b. long lyrical lines, florid embellishment, much of it improvised
 - c. term used in retrospect
 4. general style
 - a. catchy melodies, snappy rhythms, clear phrases
 - b. coloratura melodies, vocal display, expressivity, depiction of character
 - c. spare orchestration supports singers

- i. individual instruments featured, winds for color
 - d. harmonic schemes not complex, juxtaposing third-related keys
 - e. "Rossini crescendo": repeating phrases louder each time, often at higher pitch
- 5. scene structure
 - a. story evenly distributed
 - b. new plot developments, changes of mood within an aria or ensemble
 - c. continuous succession of orchestrally accompanied recitatives, solo arias, duets, ensembles, choruses
 - d. orchestra and chorus, more significant roles
 - e. typical scene
 - i. instrumental introduction
 - ii. recitative section (*scena*), accompanied by orchestra
 - iii. aria in two sections: cantabile, cabaletta
 - iv. *tempo di mezzo*: middle section in most arias between the cantabile and cabaletta
 - v. duet or ensemble may follow similar pattern; opening section (*tempo d'attacco*)
 - vi. finale: action piece, most or all characters; culminates in fast stretta
 - f. basic format applied to almost any dramatic situation
- 6. *The Barber of Seville*
 - a. opera buffa with bel canto tradition
 - b. chaotic plot: secret messages, drunken brawls, mistaken identity
 - c. *Una voce poco fa* (NAWM 149), Rosina's entrance aria (cavatina)
 - i. conveys character through changes of style
 - ii. cantabile: appropriate to narration, comic patter, elaborate embellishments
 - iii. cabaletta: reveals Rosina's true nature; vocal leaps, rapid passage work
 - iv. masterful combination of bel canto melody, wit, comic description
- 7. serious operas
 - a. wider range in delineating characters, capturing situations, conveying emotions
 - b. *Guillaume Tell* (1829)
 - i. written for the Paris Opéra; over 500 performances during composer's lifetime
 - ii. timely theme of rebellion; subjected to censorship
 - iii. choruses, ensembles, dances, processions, atmospheric instrumental interludes; founding example of French grand opera
- 8. a new kind of tenor
 - a. Gilbert Duprez (1806–1896), high C in full voice (chest voice), *Guillaume Tell*, Paris, 1837
 - b. first time on operatic stage
 - c. new style enormously popular, not with Rossini
 - d. composers wrote for his type of voice
- 9. overtures
 - a. gems of the orchestral repertoire
 - b. most in two parts: long slow introduction, fast binary form without repeats
 - i. fast sections end with Rossini crescendo on each half
 - c. *Guillaume Tell* overture, four sections
 - i. slow pastoral introduction
 - ii. musical depiction of a storm
 - iii. slow section, *ranz des vaches* played by English horn
 - iv. galloping allegro
- C. Vincenzo Bellini (1801–1835)
 - 1. came to prominence after Rossini retired
 - 2. dramas of passion, fast, gripping action
 - 3. action built into arias; lyrical moments in recitatives
 - 4. ten serious operas include:
 - a. *La sonnambula* (The Sleepwalker, 1831)
 - b. *Norma* (1831)
 - c. *I puritani* (The Puritans, 1835)
 - 5. long, sweeping, highly embellished, intensely emotional melodies
 - 6. *Casta diva* (Chaste goddess) from *Norma* (NAWM 150), cavatina
 - a. subject reflected fascination with distant times, Italian yearnings for freedom
 - b. vocal line: constant motion, deeply expressive, unpredictable
 - c. follows Rossini's scene pattern
 - d. chorus plays important role, creates continuous action
- D. Gaetano Donizetti (1797–1848)
 - 1. oratorios, cantatas, chamber and church music, 100 songs, several symphonies, 70 operas
 - a. most enduring works:
 - i. serious operas: *Anna Bolena* (Milan, 1830), *Lucia di Lammermoor* (Naples, 1835)
 - ii. comic operas: *L'elisir d'amore* (Milan, 1832), *Don Pasquale* (Paris, 1843)
 - iii. opéra comique: *La fille du regiment* (Paris, 1840)
 - b. melodies capture character, situation, or feeling
 - c. constantly moves drama forward in serious operas, sustained dramatic tension
 - 2. *Lucia di Lammermoor*
 - a. based on novel by Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832)
 - b. set among Scottish highlands, culture fascinated Romantics
 - c. "mad scene" in last act, unbroken flow of events, numerous entrances and tempo changes
 - d. "reminiscence motive": hearkening back to an earlier theme
 - e. flexible adaptation of Rossini's scene structure; model for Giuseppe Verdi
- E. Classics of Italian opera
 - 1. Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti were performed throughout Italy and other nations
 - 2. most famous arias became popular tunes
 - 3. by midcentury, these operas were part of core repertory, staged repeatedly

III. France

- A. Opera remained most prestigious genre throughout nineteenth century
 - 1. French opera under Napoleon
 - a. since late seventeenth century, opera centered in Paris, shaped by politics
 - b. Napoleon restricted theaters, only three presented operas
 - i. the Opéra: focused on tragedy, most prestigious
 - ii. Opéra-Comique: operas with spoken dialogue, many with serious plots
 - iii. Théâtre Italien: operas in Italian

- c. other Paris theaters featured variety of stage works
- 2. defeat of Napoleon, monarchy restored
 - a. government sponsorship for the Opéra continued; 1821, new theater built
 - b. Théâtre Italien: operas by Rossini, became director in 1824
- 3. "July Revolution" of 1830, reduced power of French monarch
 - a. government continued to subsidize opera and concerts
 - b. royal family contributed informally
 - c. Opéra theater leased to a businessman, Louis Véron
- B. Grand opera
 - 1. designed to appeal to newly well-to-do middle class
 - a. spectacle as important as music
 - b. librettos on romantic love, context of historical conflicts
 - c. ballets, stage machinery, choruses, crowd scenes
 - d. early examples: Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*, *La muette de Portici* by Daniel-François-Esprit Auber
 - 2. Eugène Scribe (1791–1861), Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791–1864)
 - a. librettist and composer: leaders of grand opera
 - b. *Robert le diable* (Robert the Devil, 1831), *Les Huguenots* (1836)
 - c. defined new genre, set pattern for musical treatment
 - 3. *Les Huguenots*
 - a. five acts, enormous cast, ballet, dramatic scenery and lighting effects
 - b. St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572
 - i. new view of history, influenced by 1789 and 1830 revolutions
 - c. closing scene of Act II (NAWM 151)
 - i. deep personal feelings with crowd scenes, public ceremonies
 - ii. variety of styles and gestures
 - iii. structured like Italian opera finale
 - iv. entertaining spectacle, glorious singing, serious artistic statement
 - 4. impact of grand opera
 - a. Meyerbeer's approach admired and emulated
 - b. genre spread to Germany, London, and elsewhere
 - c. profound influence on Richard Wagner
 - 5. Berlioz, *Les Troyens* (1856–58)
 - a. five-act opera, libretto by Berlioz on Virgil's *Aeneid*
 - b. drew on grand opera and French opera tradition
 - c. "epic opera": story of a nation, passions of individual characters
- C. Opéra comique
 - 1. spoken dialogue instead of recitative
 - 2. less pretentious than grand opera, fewer singers and players
 - 3. straightforward comedy or serious drama
- D. Ballet
 - 1. Romantic ballet introduced by Marie Taglioni (1804–1884)
 - a. performed in Paris, London, St. Petersburg
 - b. helped establish ballet tradition in Russia
 - 2. music composed after choreography
 - 3. *Giselle*, premiered at Paris Opéra, 1841
 - a. music by Adolphe Adam (1803–1856)
 - b. use of recurring motives as in an opera

IV. Germany

- A. Interaction between music and literature developed fully
 - 1. Singspiel, root of German opera
 - 2. elements from French opera
 - 3. intensified genre's specific national features
- B. Carl Maria von Weber (1786–1826)
 - 1. *Der Freischütz* (The Free Shooter, first performed in Berlin, 1821)
 - a. established German Romantic opera
 - b. plots drawn from medieval history, legend, fairy tale
 - i. humble village life, country life
 - ii. supernatural incidents intertwined with human protagonists
 - iii. triumph of good is form of salvation, redemption
 - iv. importance to physical and spiritual background
 - c. musical styles and forms draw directly from other countries
 - i. folklike melodies, distinctly German element
 - ii. more equal role for the orchestra; use of chromatic harmony, orchestral colors
 - iii. rustic choruses, marches, dances, arias
 - iv. multisectional arias adapted from Rossini format, Italian style florid vocal characteristics
 - 2. Wolf's Glen Scene (finale of Act II, NAWM 152)
 - a. elements of melodrama, spoken dialogue with background music
 - b. casting of bullets
 - i. exploits resources of orchestra
 - ii. diminished, augmented intervals, daring chromaticism depict evil
 - iii. offstage chorus reinforces supernatural elements of plot
 - c. entire scene centers on diminished 7th chord
 - i. reminiscence motive from overture
 - ii. recurs often in other forms throughout the scene
 - iii. association of motives and keys with particular characters
 - 3. influence
 - a. model for Wagner: continuous, through-composed musical drama on German legend
 - b. associations, conventions established
 - i. mystery, danger, supernatural: tritone-related, 3rd-related harmonies, dim. 7th chords, string tremolos
 - 4. other dramatic works varied in subject
 - a. *Euryanthe* (1823), troubadour in medieval France
 - b. *Oberon* (1826), supernatural world and Islamic courts of Baghdad and Tunis

V. Russia

- A. Russian nationalism

1. through subject matter, set design, costumes, music
 2. tool of propaganda, absolutist government under the tsar
- B. Mikhail Glinka (1804–1857)
1. recognized equally by Russians and western Europeans
 2. *A Life for the Tsar* (1836), pro-government historical drama
 - a. first Russian opera to gain international audience
 - b. peasant sacrifices life to save tsar from Polish invaders
 - c. major Western operatic traditions
 - i. Italianate melody
 - ii. French drama and spectacle
 - iii. German counterpoint, idealization of peasant life and culture
 - d. distinctive Russian character
 - i. modal scales
 - ii. quotation or paraphrasing of folk songs, folklike idiom
 3. *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1842)
 - a. established Russian tradition
 - b. based on poem by Aleksander Pushkin (1799–1837)
 - c. chromaticism, dissonance, whole-tone scale portray supernatural

VI. The United States

- A. Opera important part of musical life
1. theater companies, touring troupes
 - a. traveled across continent
 - b. English versions of foreign-language operas
 - i. replaced recitative with spoken dialogue
 - ii. simplified ensembles and arias
 - iii. entertainment accessible to all
 2. European opera
 - a. New Orleans, Théâtre d'Orléans, 1819–66
 - i. French and Italian operas, original languages
 - ii. many American premieres
 - iii. toured East Coast several times
 - b. New York, European troupe
 - i. presented Italian operas, 1825–26
 - ii. several attempts to establish permanent Italian opera house
 - iii. Academy of Music, 1854–86
 - c. San Francisco 1850s, opera in Italian and English established
 3. opera widespread as popular entertainment
 - a. few Americans saw operas in their original form
 - b. overtures, arias, excerpts arranged and published as sheet music
 - c. Swedish soprano Jenny Lind, toured United States 1850–52
 - d. Elizabeth Greenfield (1824–1876), born into slavery
 - i. emancipated as infant, adopted by Philadelphia Quaker
 - ii. toured U. S. and England, 1850s
 - iii. first African American to perform for royalty, Queen Victoria, 1854
 - iv. founded opera troupe, 1860s
 - e. excerpts, arrangements, performed by orchestras, bands, choruses
 - f. operatic parodies had ready audience (*Mrs. Normer; Fried Shots*)
- B. American opera
1. no demand for American composers to produce opera
 2. ambitious attempts:
 - a. *Leonora* (Philadelphia, 1845), by William Henry Fry (1813–1864)
 - b. *Rip Van Winkle* (New York, 1855), by George Frederick Bristow (1825–1898)
- C. Minstrel shows
1. minstrelsy, white performers blackened their faces
 - a. 1830s through 1870s most popular form of musical theater
 - b. impersonated African Americans in jokes, skits, songs, dances
 - c. Christy's Minstrels, successful troupe
 - d. propagated offensive racial stereotypes
 - e. "creolization of American culture," Christopher J. Smith
 - i. white musicians borrowed from African American music
 - ii. development traced to music along rivers and coasts, common musical language developed that crossed racial lines
 - f. other scholars argue origins in European styles
 - i. elements of African American traditions borrowed: banjo, call-and-response
 2. stage entertainment
 - a. "Daddy" Rice (1801–1860) as Jim Crow
 - i. *Jump Jim Crow* (1829), first American piece to be a hit overseas
 - ii. "Ethiopian opera," performed between or after acts of a play
 - b. George Washington Dixon (1808–1861) as Zip Coon
 3. Virginia Minstrels in New York, 1843
 - a. first full independent minstrel shows
 - b. dialogue, songs, banjo and fiddle playing, dances loosely strung together
 - c. shows throughout East Coast and British Isles
 - d. first musical export from U. S. to Europe
 - i. "The Black and White Minstrel Show," British television 1958 to 1978
 4. social roles
 - a. minstrel shows explored issues of social and political power
 - i. improper behavior through inversion of social roles
 - b. license to behave outside accepted norms
 - c. commented candidly on social, political, economic conditions
 - d. subversive tendency lost, reinforced stereotypes, "Jim Crow" laws
 - e. African Americans part of minstrelsy tradition, James A. Bland (1854–1911)
 5. legacy, enduring songs
 - a. Virginia Minstrels' violinist, Dan Emmett (1815–1902), composer of *Dixie* (1860)
 - b. Stephen Foster's songs written for Christy's Minstrels

- i. *Oh! Susanna* (1848), comic
 - ii. *Camptown Races* (1850), comic
 - iii. *Old Folks at Home* (1851), sentimental plantation ballad
 - iv. *My Old Kentucky Home* (1853), inspired by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
 - v. black dialect, pentatonic melodies, syncopations
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[◀ CH 26 QUIZ](#)

[CH 27 NAWM8-149 Gioachino Rossini: Il barbiere di Siviglia, Act I, No. 7, Una voce poco fa ▶](#)

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