

Notes on History and Theory of Opera (Dramatic Art Music)

I. Introduction:

- Opera is drama that combines soliloquy, dialogue, scenery, action and continuous music; the whole greater than the sum of the artistic parts. Opera started in Italy which continued to dominate its development for its 400+ year history. Italian style opera became popular throughout Europe. Only after Italian style opera gained a foot-hold in other European countries did the others begin to develop their own style, suited to the local language and culture. In most cases, local styles became popular at the same time that Italian style opera retained its popularity.
- In the 16th century polyphony of sacred masses and *motets* of the Medieval Church spilled into the secular field to produce the *madrigal*. At the same time, *intermedi* (brief entertainments separating act of pastorals and classic plays of Renaissance Theater) developed into an entertainment of its own and merged with *madrigals*. Music evolved to be a continuous part of the *intermedi* and became a means of expressing the drama itself, in musical terms. This alone made the idea of opera possible.
- Opera started in 1597, during the late Renaissance. “Renaissance” literally means “rebirth” (in French); when applied to Western cultural development, it means “rebirth of Greek culture.” In the late 1500’s, a group of scholars, philosophers, and amateur musicians formed a *camerata* (society) dedicated to discussion and reform of drama to a form similar to that of the Ancient Greeks. They wanted this Renaissance drama to move and influence its audience in a manner similar to the Ancient Greek theory of *ethos*.
- In 1597, **Jacopo Peri** and **Giulio Caccini** (of the *camerata*) produced a musical play called 'Dafne' which dramatized an ancient Greek myth. Since only some parts of 'Dafne' exist today, the oldest full opera existing in the current world is Euridice (1600) composed by **Peri** with **Ottavio Rinocini's** libretto. This model was refined and lifted to be considered high art with the composition of **Claudio Monteverde's** "Orfeo" in 1607. Since that time, opera has developed in directions far removed from these early models, due to both technical and cultural evolution. Opera is a mirror of contemporary people and their cultural environment.
- From its beginning, opera brought together all of the arts. It involved painting, poetry, drama, dance and music, making it the most complex of art forms. It was also always of social and political importance. In the first respect it edified and entertained and, in the second, it served as an expression of the power and splendor of the monarch in the age of kings.
- Throughout history, the vast majority of composed operas have been for commercial profit and have followed a model similar to current day television. To be successful, many were banal and titillating. However, a few of the operas composed over the past 400+ years have arising to represent some of the highest artistic achievements in the history of Western Civilization (e.g., Mozart). This paper addresses these high artistic forms of opera.
- This paper is a result of my own research to learn about opera.

- My research is sourced from a vast number of publications including several books, several academic research papers, a number of newspaper reviews and Wikipedia.
- The flow is generally chronological. It is broken into 19 sections that are categories based on: time-period, musical era and/or operatic style. The paper begins with some brief technical definitions and then begins the history from the time of the Ancient Greeks up to and including the most recent opera compositions of the 21st century.
- It serves two purposes: 1) to survey the key developments in the 400+ years of opera history, and 2) to profile many of the most important composers and their operas. Since the paper arose from my own curiosity, it places greater emphasis on topics in which I am least knowledgeable and less on those with which I am more familiar (e.g., Mozart, Wagner and Verdi). While I have included some very brief comments on music theory, most of the paper is intended for those with little music theory background.
- While I have tried to categorize events and styles for simplification, many of these place too much emphasis on the categories themselves. Many styles of opera never really ended as the categorization may suggest but were blended into other styles and/or revived in later periods (e.g., *opera seria* never totally disappeared, it was subsumed and periodically revived).
- Finally, I have included many names of historical composers and opera – which I did to provide myself a guide for my further research. I also included many dates of composers and operas as a means of placing them into their chronological order and to emphasize which composers and operas had influence on later developments.

Sections:

- 1) **Introduction:**
- 2) **Voice:**
- 3) **Greece:**
- 4) **Middle Ages (600-1400):**
- 5) **Renaissance (1450-1600):**
- 6) **Invention of Italian Opera in the 17th Century (1600's):**
- 7) **Baroque Opera (1600-1750):**
- 8) **Opera in Italy from 1700-1750:**
- 9) **Revolution of Gluck and the Introduction of Classical Era Opera:**
- 10) **Development of English Opera:**
- 11) **French Style Opera:**
- 12) **Italian Classical Style and Composers of Opera 18th (1700's) and 19th Centuries (1800's):**
- 13) **Classical Opera of the 18th (1700's) and 19th Centurys (1800's):**
- 14) **The Romantic Period and German Style Opera:**
- 15) **Russian Style Opera:**
- 16) **Verismo Opera (Realism):**
- 17) **Turning Point from late-Romantic to 20th Century Modernist Music:**
- 18) **Modern:**

19) **Alone in the Forest (decline of new opera production with only repeats of the old):**

- 20th Century and Nationalism
- The Operatic Ghosts of Versailles
- The 20th Century End of Opera
- Opera and Jazz
- Summary of Operas in America
- Opera and Minimalism
- 20th Century Opera in Russia
- Post-Modern Opera
- Avant-Garde Opera:

II. **Voice:**

Register:

- 1) **Whistle** – higher than falsetto - sopranos use this frequently when singing a coloratura aria. Some men can also produce sounds in this register.
- 2) **Falsetto** – male tenors often use this when singing as countertenor. Women are also capable of singing in this register.
- 3) **Modal** – the normal and comfortable, natural pitches for a singer. This register is used when determining a singer's normal range.
- 4) **Fry** – can be produced by male and female voices. Used in singing occasionally for bass gospel or for a “growl” or “scream” in heavy metal music.

Type (C4 is middle C, below):

- 1) **Soprano** (female) - the highest female voice (C4-C6).
 - Coloratura refers to virtuosic singing (not vocal range) - most coloratura singers are sopranos, although this term can be used for certain singers of other ranges. They are distinguished by their wide range, clarity and agility.
 - Lyric soprano – a fairly light, warm and flexible voice.
 - Spinto Soprano – a voice lying between a lyric and a dramatic soprano.
 - Dramatic soprano – a heavier, darker and larger voice than a lyric.
- 2) **Mezzo-soprano** (female) – heavier, darker and lower than a true soprano. Approaching the alto voice (A3-A5).
- 3) **Alto** (female) (also called contralto) – a female voice of exceptionally low focus (F3-F5).
- 4) **Countertenor** (male) – male voice whose range is equivalent to the female alto. Men utilize falsetto register to achieve this range.
- 5) **Tenor** (male) - the highest male voice (C3-C5).
- 6) Lyric tenor – a light, clear, flexible voice.
- 7) Dramatic tenor – a more forceful, powerful voice capable of greater volume and endurance.
- 8) **Baritone** (male) - a voice slightly lower in range, heavier and fuller in sound than a tenor (F2-F4).
- 9) **Bass** - the lowest male voice; a rich, dark, heavy and powerful voice but not particularly agile (E2-E4).

Types of Vocal Numbers (Used in Baroque opera):

1) Recitative

- for solo voice with only continuo accompaniment
- free, speech rhythms without a strong sense of meter
- speechlike melody with many repeated notes, usually not very tuneful
- ornamentation, melismas and repetition of words and phrases are rare
- seco ("dry") recitative is accompanied only by a "basso continuo." Meaning "continuous bass." Sometimes just called "continuo", was played by a keyboard instrument and another bass instrument such as cello, violone (an old form of double bass) or bassoon. The keyboard instrument was normally a harpsichord or, if it was being played in a church, an organ.

2) Accompanied Recitative

- for solo voice with *orchestral* accompaniment
- otherwise very similar to simple recitative
- emerges in the mid- and late Baroque

3) Aria

- for one solo voice with orchestral accompaniment (most often), frequent use of orchestral *ritornelli* between sections
- usually a clear sense of meter (sometimes freer)
- greater variety of melodic motion than recitative, often very tuneful
- frequent use of ornamentation, melismas and repetition of words and phrases
- strophic, ground bass and other simple forms common in early Baroque; *da capo* arias dominate in the late Baroque

4) Arioso

- an aria-like passage heard (most often) within a recitative, but too short to be a full-fledged aria
- for solo voice with continuo or orchestral accompaniment, sometimes with orchestral *ritornello*
- a stronger sense of meter than the surrounding recitative
- melody is more tuneful than the surrounding recitative
- frequent use of ornamentation, melismas and repetition of words and phrases

5) Ensemble

- for two or more solo voices with orchestral accompaniment (most often)
- often referred to as duets, trios, quartets, etc.
- otherwise very similar to an aria (but for more than one solo voice)

6) Chorus

- for four to eight parts, usually with more than one singer on each part, with continuo or orchestral accompaniment, often uses orchestral *ritornelli* between stanzas
- usually a strong sense of meter (sometimes freer)
- more tuneful melody, not much ornamentation, texture can be chordal and/or imitative

III. Greece:

- Music in Ancient Greece and was incorporated into every aspect of society and daily life from religious rituals to private ceremonies and public events. Music was an integrated art form that

permeated society and embodied cultural values. Music was often associated with drama. Only about 40 fragments of pre-Christian, ancient music have survived.

- The Ancient Greek doctrine of *ethos* attributed ethical powers to music and claimed that music could affect human character. They viewed music as something magical, capable of changing the face of nature, the hearts and souls of people. Although Western music and culture have changed, the doctrine of *ethos* still holds significance in Western musical heritage.
- This doctrine of *ethos* was personified in the Greek legend of Orpheus. Orpheus was a musician, poet and prophet in Greek religion and myth. As an archetype of the inspired singer, Orpheus is one of the most significant figures in Western culture, portrayed or alluded to in countless forms of art and popular culture including poetry, opera, and painting. The earliest literary reference to Orpheus is a two-word fragment of the 6th century BC lyric poet **Ibycus**. Orpheus was not mentioned by **Homer** or **Hesiod**. Greeks of the Classical age venerated Orpheus as the greatest of all poets and musicians - it was said that Hermes invented the lyre but Orpheus perfected it. According to mythology, Apollo (god of music) gave his son Orpheus a golden lyre and taught him to play. His mother (a human) taught him to make verses for singing.
- The most famous Orpheus story involves him and his wife Eurydice. This story is centered on his ability to charm all living things and even stones with his music. He attempted to retrieve Eurydice from the underworld and his death was at the hands of those who could not hear his divine music. The story in this form belongs to the time of **Virgil**; however, other ancient writers such as **Plato** and **Ovid** speak of him in more negative light. This romantic story of Orpheus and Eurydice formed the subject of many operas (especially as it first developed in the early 1600's) as composers of the Renaissance were trying to recapture the nature of Ancient Greek theater and music.
- **Pythagoras** believed music could be used to calm or heal people, as well as affect their mood. His work in ratios of vibrations helped lead the development of harmony. **Pythagoras** believed that music and math were inseparable. He developed what would become the founding principles of modern-day acoustics: that pitches are made of sound waves, and the frequencies of those waves correlate to the frequencies of other waves in a series of ratios.
- Three well known Greek poets have had works used as basis for modern operas: **Euripides** (480-406 BCE; Greek) - wrote Orestes 408 BC and Alcestis; 438 BCE. **Seigilos** (1st century CE; Greek) - wrote Spitaph in the 1st century CE. **Ovid** (43 BCE-17CE) wrote Fasti in 8 CE.
- There is a lack of historical documentation on the origins of sung drama in Ancient Greece but, in sum:
 - The Greeks were humanists who developed and enhanced staged drama for the benefit of its citizens.
 - Lacking modern audio projection technology, combined with outdoor theaters for dramatic plays – The Greeks needed a means to project the emotion of the play and its characters to the audience.
 - In order to both project their vocal dialog (so that audiences in the back could hear and understand) and to further communicate emotion, actors themselves began to use some form of singing to deliver their lines (early recitative). Later, the singing was supported by

instrumental accompaniment (instrumentation was expanded beyond *intermezzos*) also setting the emotional backdrop of the play and the actors.

- The Greeks began to incorporate choruses with some instrumental accompaniment to perform between acts of the plays. These musical *intermezzos* were used to communicate the emotional setting and feelings of the actors. This is consistent with the Greek theory of *ethos* where music could change the hearts and souls of people.

IV. Middle Ages (600-1400):

- Music was dominated by the Church; mostly mass and plainchant, and later *motets*.
- Musical harmony was invented in the late ninth century (800's). Singers in monasteries like St. Gall in Switzerland improved the basic chant by adding a second voice with the original melody. This was the beginning of musical harmony and is known as *organum*.
- Textural Definitions:
 - **Monophony** is the simplest of textures, consisting of melody without accompanying harmony. This may be realized as just one note at a time or with the same note duplicated at the octave (such as often when men and women sing together). If an entire melody is played by two or more instruments or sung by a choir with a fixed interval between the voices or in unison, it is also said to be in monophony.
 - **Polyphony** is a texture consisting of two or more simultaneous lines of independent melody, as opposed to music with just one voice (monophony) or music with one dominant melodic voice accompanied by chords (homophony). Within the context of the Western musical tradition, the term is usually used to refer to music of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. Baroque forms such as the fugue, which might be called *polyphonic*, are usually described instead as contrapuntal.
 - **Homophony** is a texture in which two or more parts move together in harmony, the relationship between them creating chords. This is distinct from *polyphony*, in which parts move with rhythmic independence, and *monophony*, in which all parts (if there are multiple parts) move in parallel rhythm and pitch. A *homophonic* texture is also *homorhythmic* (or uses a "very similar rhythm"). However, in melody-dominated *homophony*, one voice, often the highest, plays a distinct melody and the accompanying voices work together to articulate an underlying *harmony*.
 - **Harmony** (technically not a texture at all but an element, along with meter, melody, tempo, rhythm and mood) is an element component of *homophony*. It is the use of simultaneous pitches (tones, notes), or chords. The study of *harmony* involves chords and their construction and progressions and the principles of connection that govern them. *Harmony* is often said to refer to the "vertical" aspect of music, as distinguished from melodic line, or the "horizontal" aspect. *Counterpoint*, which refers to the interweaving of melodic lines, and *polyphony*, which refers to the relationship of separate independent voices, is thus distinguished from *harmony*.
 - **Heterophony** is a type of texture characterized by the simultaneous variation of a single melodic line. Such a texture can be regarded as a kind of complex *monophony* in which there is only one basic melody, but realized at the same time in multiple voices, each of

which plays the melody differently, either in a different rhythm or tempo, or with various embellishments and elaborations. The term was initially introduced into systematic musicology to denote a subcategory of *polyphonic* music, though is now regarded as a textural category in its own right. *Heterophony* is often a characteristic feature of non-Western traditional music—for example Arabic classical music, Japanese Gagaku, the gamelan music of Indonesia, kulintang ensembles of the Philippines and the traditional music of Thailand.

- **Organum** is a plainchant melody with at least one added voice to enhance the harmony. Depending on the form of the chant: a supporting bass line may be sung on the same text; the melody may be followed in parallel motion (*parallel organum*); or a combination of both of these techniques may be employed. As no real independent second voice exists, this is a form of **heterophony**. In its earliest stages, *organum* involved two musical voices: a Gregorian chant melody and the same melody transposed by a consonant interval. In these cases the composition often began and ended on a unison, the added voice keeping to the initial tone until the first part has reached a fifth or fourth, from where both voices proceeded in parallel harmony, with the reverse process at the end. Over time, composers began to write added parts that were not just simple transpositions, thus creating true *polyphony*.
- **Monody** has two meanings: 1) it is sometimes used as a synonym for *monophony*, a single solo line, in opposition to *homophony* and *polyphony*; and 2) in music history, it is a solo vocal style distinguished by having a single melodic line and instrumental accompaniment. Although such music is found in various cultures throughout history, the term is specifically applied to Italian song of the early 17th century, particularly the period from about 1600 to 1640. Compositions in *monadic* form might be called *madrigals*, *motets*, or even concertos (in the early sense of "concertato", meaning "with instruments"). In *monody* (which developed out of an attempt by the Florentine Camerata in the 1580s to restore ancient Greek ideas of melody and declamation), one solo voice sings a melodic part, usually with considerable ornamentation, over a rhythmically independent bass line. The development of *monody* was one of the defining characteristics of early Baroque practice, as opposed to late Renaissance style, in which groups of voices sang independently and with a greater balance between parts.
- **High Middle Ages** (1000-1400) saw the further development of *Organum*. In 1100, an improvement known as "*florid organum*" developed, as inspired by a monastery in south-central France known as St. Martial. In *florid organum*, there are at least two voices: the first, lower voice, sings the original word in long (extended) mono-note form; and the second, higher, voice sings many notes for each original long word, emphasizing the perfect consonances. This form of *organum* is based on a plainchant melody that is sung by two simultaneous voices but both the singing the same word:
 - The lower voice sings the word at one pitch but for an elongated period. The lower chant voice thus transforms into a succession of long held notes, according to the original melody. This lower voice is called the "tenor" from the Latin *tenere*, meaning "to hold."

- The second voice sings the same extended word but alters his voice up and down over several pitches while singing the original word.
- This is also called a *melisma*. One word sung simultaneously by two voices, one voice at a single low pitch (tenor) and the other voice by numerous and varying higher pitches.
- European polyphony rose out of *melismatic organum*. Twelfth-century (1100's) composers, such as **Léonin** and **Pérotin**, further advanced *organum* and also added a third and fourth voice to the now *homophonic* chant.
- The High Middle Ages also saw the rise of the *troubadour*. These were secular composers that sprang from the Occitania region (southern France, northern Spain and western Italy – the present day Catalonians speak the Occitan language) whose texts deal mainly with themes of chivalry and courtly love.
- **Duke William IX of Aquitaine** (1071-1126) was the earliest *troubadour* whose work survives. **William** and many of the early *troubadours* came from high nobility. They lived and traveled constantly, usually sojourning to one court or another for lengthy periods of time under the patronage of a wealthy nobleman. *Troubadour* songs were usually *monophonic* - fewer than 300 melodies out of an estimated 2500 survive. Most were metaphysical, intellectual and formulaic with many humorous or vulgar satires.
- **Bernard de Ventadorn** (1135-1195) epitomized the Classical period of the *troubadour* (1170-1213) and saw the height of its popularity when the love song became a distinguishable genre.
- The 14th century (1300's) saw the end of absolute rule by the Church.
- **Guillaume de Machaut** (1300-1377) – was from France and fused together contemporary styles and techniques to create a series of masterworks that some say stands at the summit of 14th century music. He composed a wide range of styles and forms and is part of the musical movement known as the *ars nova* (secular music that acquired a *polyphonic* sophistication formerly only found in sacred music). **Machaut** helped develop the *motet* and secular song forms. Secular compositions make up the larger part of his music and love is often the subject of his texts. As a composer of the 14th century, Machaut's secular song output includes *monophonic lais* and *virelais* (in updated forms from the tradition of the troubadours). He also worked in the *polyphonic* forms of the *ballade* and *rondeau*.
- **Motets** - The word *motet* comes from the French word "mot" which means "word." It is a choral piece "with words." The earliest *motets* arose in the 13th century (1200's) from the *organum* tradition of **Leonin** and **Perotin**.
- **Motets and Madrigals** are very similar choral pieces (secular *madrigals* were not created until a later time – 1520's) – choral having become a favored form of music in the Renaissance. Although they both used imitation and *homophonic* techniques to create *polyphonic* textures, there were still clear differences making them suitable for their own respective settings. A theorist in the 1200's said: the motet was not intended for the vulgar that do not understand its finer points and derive no pleasure from hearing it – it is meant for educated people and those who look for refinement in art.
 - Similarities between the *motet and madrigal*:
 - 1) Homophonic textures: two or more parts with a single melodic line moving together in harmony.

- 2) *Polyphonic* textures: two or more simultaneous but independent melodic lines (parts or voices).
- 3) Imitation techniques: process of repeated melody at another part or point to cause overlap.
 - Differences:
 - 1) Motet –
 - a) Sacred choral works performed in worship service. Examples are Ave Maria and Gratia Plena.
 - b) Much more strict style with fewer accents on words and more on music.
 - c) Harmonies are smooth and predictable with smooth transitions from layer to layer and texture to texture.
 - 2) Madrigal –
 - a) About secular topics of love, humor and scenery presented at home or in social gatherings. May also depict hate, grief, fear or shock.
 - b) May include dissonance (form of homophony) instead of consonance if the piece demands negative emotions.
 - c) Use word paintings – musical techniques that illustrate and interpret the meaning of a word to make it clearer and more obvious in meaning.

V. **Renaissance (1450-1600):**

- Saw the rediscovery of ancient Greek and Roman culture as Europe turned to pre-Christian models for inspiration and guidance. Composers wanted their music to have the same impact on their listeners as that which the Humanistic Greeks attributed to their music, *ethos*.
- By the mid-Renaissance an entirely new view of vocal articulation and system of harmony came into place to accommodate the new, more humanistic, expressive aims of composers.
- **Josquin Desprez** (c.1440-1521) is widely regarded as one of the finest and most influential composers in the history of Western music. He was the most famous European composer between **Guillaume Dufay** (1397-1474) and **Palestrina**, and is usually considered to be the central figure of the Franco-Flemish School. **Josquin** is widely considered by music scholars to be the first master of the high Renaissance style of *polyphonic* vocal music that was emerging during his lifetime. The clear textures and text declamation which **Josquin** employed set the stage not only for the next developments of technical harmony but also for the clarity and conciseness demanded by the Counter-Reformation of **Palestrina** as well. **Josquin** was born in the area controlled by the Dukes of Burgundy, and was possibly born either in Hainaut (modern-day Belgium), or immediately across the border in modern-day France, since several times in his life he was classified legally as a Frenchman.
- **Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina** (1525-1594) was an Italian composer of primarily sacred music and the best-known 16th-century representative of the Roman School of musical composition. He has had a lasting influence on the development of church music and his work has often been seen as the culmination of Renaissance *polyphony*. **Palestrina** left hundreds of compositions, including 105 masses, 68 offertories, at least 140 madrigals and more than 300 motets.

- **Carlo Gesualdo** (1560-1613) was a composer of the *madrigal* and the poetry of **Petrarch**, in particular, shows up in a wide variety of his *madrigal* genres. He was a nobleman from Naples and is remembered for writing intensely expressive *madrigals* and sacred music that use a chromatic language not heard again until the late 19th century.
- *Madrigals* originated in Italy from secular poetry during the 1520s. It was the most important genre of secular music in the late Italian Renaissance. In the *madrigal*, the composer attempted to express the emotion contained in each line, and sometimes individual words, of a celebrated poem. Its emotional “Expression” was based on *word-painting* and included several voices.
 - The *madrigal* originated from:
 - 1) The *frottola*,
 - 2) The resurgence in interest in vernacular Italian poetry, and
 - 3) The influence of the French *chanson* and *polyphonic* style of the *motet* as written by the Franco-Flemish composers who had naturalized in Italy during the period.
 - The *madrigal* reached its formal and historical zenith by the second half of the 16th century. English and German composers, too, took up the *madrigal* in its heyday. After the 1630s, the madrigal began to merge with the cantata and the dialogue. With the rise of opera in the early 17th century (early 1600’s), the aria gradually displaced the *madrigal*.
- **The Intermezzo/Intermedio** developed alongside the madrigal and was an important forerunner of opera. It was a class of 16th century (1500’s) musical compositions presented between the acts of *pastorals* and other classic spoken plays of Renaissance Theater. Many became more interesting than the plays themselves. **Madrigals were frequently performed as intermezzi and synthesized into stand-alone opera from where this new genre of music developed for the next 400 years.**
- As *intermezzos* developed separately from plays as stand-alone pieces (operas), a new form of *intermezzo* developed (between the acts of opera), in the form of ballet. Ballets later separated from opera (similar to the operatic separation from plays) and thus the separate opera and ballet arts.
- **The Pastoral** was a style of dramatic poetry that dominated Italian theater in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. *Pastorals* feature sylvan settings and mild love adventures, usually ending happily. *Pastoral* is a mode of poetry (not a genre) in which the author employs various techniques to place the complex life into a simple one. Composers became drawn to *pastoral* modes after the use by *troubadours*. *Pastoral* mode had significant influence over opera, especially for earliest such as **Peri’s Daphne** and **Monteverde’s L’Orfeo**.

VI. **Invention of Italian Opera in the 17th Century (1600’s):**

- **The Florentine Camerata** was a private academy called “Ridotto.” Of special interest of this group of men was the nature of musical and dramatic expression especially as achieved by the Ancient Greeks. Its members (including **Vincenzo Galelei**, father of **Galileo**) felt that the *madrigal* form offered artificiality of expression largely due to the use of by 3 separate voices which prevented expression of individual emotion. The Camerata believed that true musical expression could only be achieved by a single singer employing the dramatic and oratorical skills of an actor. They developed a new “theory” of music based on the Greek expressive idea:

- The text being sung must be clearly understood.
- The words must be sung with correct and natural declamation.
- The music must depict the feelings and emotions of the character singing.
- The first operatic works were created by members of this group:
 - Daphne: **Ottavio Rinuccini** and **Peri** (1598) music lost.
 - Euridice: **Rinuccini** and **Peri** (1600).
 - Euridice: **Rinuccini** and **Giulio Caccini** (1600).
- **Jacopo Peri** (1561-1633) was a member of the Camerata and is generally thought to have composed the first surviving "opera." Euridice was first performed in 1600 at the wedding of **Henry IV of France** and **Marie de Medici** at the Pitti Palace in Florence (the Duke of Mantua was in attendance). It was a fully sung stage production with alternating Choruses; Rhyming (pop-type) songs; and early recitative (thus recitative preceded the development of arias). **Peri** is considered the inventor of recitative. The character of Orfeo, with his ability to change souls and the very face of nature with music, personifies both opera and the Greek view of music. Both Dafne and Euridice included choruses commenting on the action at the end of each act in the manner of Greek tragedy.
- **Recitative**: is a style of vocal delivery (much used in operas, oratorios, and cantatas) in which a singer adopts the rhythms of ordinary speech. At one end of the spectrum is the mostly syllabic **recitative secco** ("dry" - accompanied only by continuo), through **recitative accompagnato** (accompanied by orchestra), the more melismatic *arioso*, and finally the full-blown aria or ensemble, where the pulse is entirely governed by the music, at the other end of the spectrum. Recitative does not repeat lines like formally composed songs and it is used to progress the plot through time. It resembles sung ordinary speech more than a formal musical composition.
- **Claudio Monteverdi** (1567-1643) was the first great composer of opera. Of his 19 stage works, only 6 have survived, including his first, Orfeo. Orfeo (libretto by the Duke of Mantua's secretary, **Alsandro Striggio**) represents the first completely successful attempt to apply the full resources of music and drama in the new genre of opera. Orfeo premiered in 1607 for the court of Mantua. The inspiration came from the Duke who had seen **Peri's Euridice** and from **Monteverde** who had been employed at Mantua for 17 years. Although **Peri** invented recitative, **Monteverdi** made it into an art form.
 - These earliest operas were synthesis of:
 - 1) Stage scenery and machinery
 - 2) Dance/ballet episodes
 - 3) Popular song/ballads
 - 4) *Madrigal*-style choruses
 - 5) Recitative
 - In 1612, **Monteverdi** took the position of Maestro de Capella for St. Marks Basilica in Venice. One of his best-known opera works, premiered in Venice: The Coronation of Poppea. Libretto by **Giovanni Busenello** based on a book by **Tacticus** about the Roman court of **Nero**. This opera represented a huge leap in creativity, it was the first opera not based on classical mythology and that down-played the pastoral mode. It was based on an embellished history of the Emperor, **Nero**. **Monteverdi** reflected moods and dramatic

vividness of the libretto in his music, becoming a model for later operatic composers. Under **Monteverdi's** followers, the distinction between recitative and aria became more marked and conventionalized.

VII. **Baroque Opera (1600-1750):**

- The development of the Italian Opera in the 17th century (1600's) can be differentiated by urban centers – Venice, Rome and Naples. This classification is based on the changing center of opera in Italy. While Opera began in Florence (Commarata) and then moved to Mantua (**Monteverde's Orfeo**) its first center was Venice in the early 1600's. Rome grew into a center after 1632 with the performance of a series musical drama that could be called “opera” by **Stefano Landis'** (1590-1655). His major opera was called Il Sant' Alessio (1632). Roman opera developed as a less creative genre than Venetian and Neapolitan due to the conservative influence of the Church and its phases of disapproval of public theater. Naples became a center in 1697 as the Roman church turned from favor of public theater and **Alessandro Scarlatti** was forced to relocate from Rome to Naples, Italy's largest city. Opera became popular in other Italian cities such and Torino, Bologna, and Parma.
- **Venetian Opera** - Baroque period opera started and grew after **Claudio Monteverde** moved to Venice. Opera which previously played a role as the entertainment for the aristocracy (under aristocratic patronage), became available to popular audiences. The first public opera house, the Teatro de San Cassiano, was opened in 1637 by **Benedetto Ferrari** and **Francesco Manelli** in Venice which became the center of the development of opera. By 1650, 50 opera houses were open in Venice and by 1625 there were 150. Almost all of the operas (and opera houses) that sprang up after 1637 were performed in the carnival season when many tourists flocked to Venice.
- Venice, in relation to the rest of Italy, had always been unique: as a republic with an elected ruler and a well-regulated patrician constitution. It lacked the incentive to celebrate dynastic prestige, which claimed so much energy of the ducal courts of the Renaissance. There was no court theater and theatrical activity took place mainly in the carnival season when uninhibited celebrations and masquerades had become famous all over Europe.
- Therefore, commercial aspects of opera could be exploited for profit. Commercial opera in Venice created a large demand for new compositions and the many composers in Venice created the first explosion of opera production. The new opera houses employed very small orchestras and phased out choruses completely to fit the commercial structure. A large part budgets was spent on attracting star singers of the day; this was the beginning of the castrato and the prima dona (leading lady). Recitative diminished in interest in favor of the aria and choruses gave way to virtuoso soloists. Comedy and parody also became popular. This focus on popular opera tended to debase its artistic value.
- The true theatrical tradition in Venice was essentially a popular one, depending upon visiting troupes of actors whose improvised performances had their roots in the still-flourishing traditions of the *commedia dell'arte*. The composer **Francesco Manelli** (1594-1667) from Rome was invited to Venice to give a performance in the Teatro S. Cassino. In 1937, the Teatro S. Cassiano was reopened as a musical theater, devoted to entertainment

of the esteemed public. **Manelli** was joined by the poet and librettist **Benedetto Ferrari** who together produced the opera: L'Andromeda. The boxes were hired mainly by the patrician classes and the pit was for all. For the first time in history, on March 6, 1637, opera as entertainment for the esteemed public had arrived.

- Commercial opera in Venice was characterized by:
 - 1) More emphasis on formal arias;
 - 2) The beginning of *bel canto* style and more attention on vocal elegance than to dramatic expression;
 - 3) Less use of choral and orchestral music (a professional chorus of 20-30 was expensive to maintain; commercial patrons were more drawn to arias; people who wanted to hear a chorus could still go to church performances where the chorus was a metaphor for the "body of humanity");
 - 4) Complex and elaborate plots often taken from classical or pastoral sources;
 - 5) Elaborate stage machinery;
 - 6) Short fanfare-like instrumental introduction, the prototypes of the later overture.
- With the next generation of Venetian composers, including: **Cavalli**, **Marcantonio Cesti** (1623-1669), **Giovanni Legrenzi** (1626-1690), **Antonio Sartorio** (1630-1680) and **Pietro Francesco** (1770-1837), an international style developed which spread throughout Europe. While the bulk of the versification was recitative, at moments of great dramatic tension, *arioso* passages (known as *aria cavate*) started to appear.
- In Venice, where musical academies were competing with Naples's academy, castrati did not have as big a role. Because of the location of Venice, a trade center with northern cities, it was not as restricted a form. **Gasparini**, **Antonio Rotti**, **Albinoni**, and **Vivaldi** were the most famous musician in Venice.
- **Roman Opera** – Within a few decades of opera in Venice, Rome found an advocate in the prelate, poet and librettist **Giulio Rospigliosi** (later Pope Clement IX) whose patrons were the **Barberini** (a family of Italian nobility in the 17th century). The work that established Roman opera, Sant' Alessio, by **Stefano Landi** (1587-1639) and libretto by **Giulio Rospigliosi**, appeared in 1632. **Landi** modified the strict declamatory style of Venice and his recitatives and arias became more clearly differentiated. He also made more prominent use of choruses and orchestras. His librettos included comic scenes which had not been part of earlier operas. With only a minor influence from Venice, the operas of Rome were full of unique Roman creativity. Composers in Rome also tried composing operatic music that would suit different dialects. Roman models moved away from characters based on Greek myth, history, and Italian *commedia dell'arte* and toward real figures in that period. This new Roman style deemphasized aria and enlarged the role of recitative. For example, **Landi's** the death of Orfeo consists of only three arias and **Vitali's** Aretusa only one. Recitative grew to become more melodious *arioso*. Other early Roman operas include: Erminia sul Giofano (1633) by **Michel Angelo Rossi**, Chi soffre, spera or L'Egisto (1637) by **Virgilio Massocchi** and **Marco Marazzoli** and Il Palazzo Incanto (1642) by **Luigi Rossi** (1598-1653).
- **Neapolitan Opera** – Italian composers of Italy shifted toward Naples for several reasons:

- 1) A developing church inclination to restrict opera in Rome (many roman composers moved to nearby Naples);
 - 2) Naples became the center of new opera creativity, attracting students of music.
 - 3) Napolitano population was more than the sum of Venice and Milano's populations, combined. Naples also had a cultural tradition of language and plays.
- Naples was flourishing as the only city that had an academy of music, under the rule of Spain. Although opera was popularized by **Francesco Provenzale (1624-1704)**, there was no previously established style of Neapolitan opera. **Provenzale** was the first Neapolitan composer to focus on opera and his Teseo premiered in 1654. Naples opera featured new dialects, descended from Spanish plays as plots, and used characters from *comedia dell'arte* tradition and religious based operas.
 - From Naples, opera spread throughout Italy and had common ethic and aesthetic principles. Unlike in Venice, castrati played a key role in the operas of Naples. Neapolitan opera closely followed **Metastasio's** form. **Domenico Sarro (1679-1744)** of Naples played a significant role in the opera history of Naples. He rejected Baroque form, and emphasized emotion of the opera.
- When Italy's first public opera houses opened, audiences had few formal expectations. However, by 1650, opera had become an established genre with a set of characteristics (forms) or conventions that would last for centuries. The most important of these is the gradual emergence of a more obvious distinction between recitative and aria. The generation following **Monteverde** opened further dramatic possibilities in which extended solo singing became acceptable as soliloquy.
 - This period was also marked by the rise of professional virtuoso singers who were trained to amaze the audiences with a high level of difficulty. Singers with careers exclusively in opera began in the later 1600's and, for the first time in history, working women were paid as much or more than men.
 - **Francesco Cavalli (1602-1676)** was an Italian composer of early Baroque period. He was born in Crema, Lombardy but moved to Venice during his youth where he met and interacted with **Monteverdi** (becoming his most talented student). He followed **Monteverdi's** footsteps as the maestro de cappella for St. Mark's in 1668. He was the most influential composer in the rising genre of public opera in mid-17th century (middle 1600's) Venice. **Cavalli's** operas provide the only example of a continuous opera development of a single composer from the early to the late 17th century – only a few operas of others (e.g., **Monteverdi** and **Antonio Desti**) even survive. Opera was a new medium when **Cavalli** began working and it matured into a popular public spectacle by the end of his career. He wrote 41 operas, 27 of which are extant.
 - Unlike **Monteverdi's** early operas, scored for the extravagant court orchestra of Mantua, **Cavalli's** commercial operas make use of a small orchestra to meet the limitations of public opera houses. He also introduced melodious arias into his music. **Cavalli** contributed to the growth of public opera in two ways:
 - 1) He frequently served as investor, organizer (impresario) and composer of his operas.
 - 2) Many of his operas enjoyed enduring popularity in the 17th century Italy and helped to influence development of opera throughout Italy and Europe.

- His works (mostly Egisto, Giasone, Xerse and Erismena) became a repertory mainstay as opera gained a firm footing, even in many smaller Italian towns, during the 1650's and 1660's.
- He was commissioned from the French **Cardinal Mazarin** (Italian by birth) to compose an opera to celebrate the wedding in France of **Louis XIV** and **Maria Teresa** (of Spain) which was named Ercole Amante (Hercules in Love). The grand preparation for the production resulted in delays (construction of a grand theater in Tuileries which ultimately proved to have bad acoustics) and the opera was presented two years after the 1660 wedding, in 1662. The rehearsals in **Mazarin's** palace came off well to the satisfaction of the king and court but failed as an introduction of opera in France. The spectacle lasted six hours and included ballets by **Lully**, in which the king, queen and other members of the court danced (the ballets which received the most attention).
- This effort played a big role in the export of Italian opera to France.
- During his two years in Paris, **Cavalli** also composed Xerse which was performed in a temporary theater in the Louvre.
- **Alessandro Scarlatti** (1660-1725) was born in Palermo and was sent to Rome when he was 12 but spent most of his composing career in Naples and became the founder of the Neapolitan school of opera. This school became a major influence on all European opera because of the many composers who studied at the school.
 - While political disturbances had hindered the spread of opera in southern Italy, particularly at the end of the 17th century (late 1600's), Naples assumed the position formerly occupied by Florence and Venice in the early 18th century (early 1700's). In 1697, Roman public performance of opera was forbidden by the ecclesiastical authorities and the seat of development was transferred to Naples. The Venetian school creations of form and melody were adopted as established practice in the Neapolitan school.
 - **Scarlatti's** early schooling made him a master of counterpoint and he is sometimes called the "Italian Bach." Like **Bach**, he was one of the most prolific composers of all time. He left 115 operas, 66 of which are extant, more than 200 masses and many miscellaneous works for church and concert, both vocal and instrumental.
 - To the simple recitative (recitative secco), invented by **Peri**, he added (along with **Henry Purcell** in his Dido and Eneas) the important recitation *stommentato* (accompanied recitative).
 - While **Scarlatti** did not invent the aria (other composers had used it before him), he was the first to formulate it into a persistent style that continued for nearly a century. The **Scarlatti** aria consisted of three parts: two contrasting sections, concluding with a *Da Capo* or repetition of the first, expressed by the formula A B A. The first section presented a theme, the second a complementary one, and the third a repeat of the first with ornamentation and elaboration. However, this led to degeneration from art as singers found in the aria a means of displaying their technical skill and it became the canvas on which they embroidered the most astonishing tours de force.
 - **Scarlatti** also did not invent the *opera seria* style but he was a major contributor to the establishment of its form and to its adoption by other composers.

- **Scarlatti's** overtures show great advance over the simple preludes of early Italian operas. He perfected what is known as Italian Overture; in contrast from the earlier **Lully** form called French Overture. It featured three movements, the first and last quick, and the middle, slow. This arrangement was the direct precursor of the modern symphony. At the time, an overture played before an opera was called a *sinfonia* and when played independently as a concert number was called an *overture*.
- By fixing the principles of form and melody at a time when both were vague and undetermined, **Scarlatti** laid the foundation of the great classical period, beginning with **Hayden** and **Mozart**.
- **Aria** was originally developed in the 17th century (1600's), as any expressive melody performed by a singer. Arias evolved from simple melodies into structured forms. In such works, the sung, melodic, and structured aria became differentiated from the more speech-like (*parlando*) recitative – broadly, the latter tended to carry the story-line, the former carried more emotional expression and became an opportunity for singers to display their vocal talent.
 - Vocal virtuosity and greater formal complexity of aria were a response to several pressures on commercial opera including a means to rise above noise created by the unruly Italian opera-going crowd.
 - Most new operas in the decades after 1637 were performed during the carnival season which attracted a more demanding audience (in the spirit of carnival) for excess, pageantry and bad behavior. It soon became clear that a staged version of this excess would be vocal virtuosity. These virtuosic singers were trained to perform at a level of difficulty unprecedented in musical history and operas began to feature more elaborate arias.
 - Aria evolved typically in one of two forms. Binary form was in two sections (A-B); while ternary form was in three (A-B-A). **Scarlatti** moved the standard from the binary to the ternary and thus developed what was known as *da capo arias* (literally 'from the head', i.e. with the opening section repeated, often in a highly decorated manner). In the *da capo* aria the 'B' episode would typically be in a different key. Other later variants of these forms were found in the French operas of the late 17th century such as those of **Jean-Baptiste Lully** (1632-1687) which dominated French Baroque. Vocal solos in **Lully's** operas (the French term, *airs*) are frequently in extended binary form (A-B) or sometimes in *rondeau* form (ABACA), (a shape which is analogous to the instrumental rondo).
 - In Italian opera of the late 17th (1600's) and early 18th century, the *da capo* form of aria came gradually to be associated with the Baroque *ritornello* (literally, 'little return'). Ritornello is a recurring instrumental episode which eventually provided, in early operas, the opportunity for dancing. This version of aria form with *ritornelli* spread throughout European opera in the 18th century. It is thought by some writers to be the origin of the instrumental forms of concerto and sonata form. The *ritornelli* became essential to the structure of the aria – "while the words determine the character of a melody, the ritornello instruments often decided in what terms it shall be presented."
- **Opera seria** - By the end of the 17th century some critics believed that a new, more elevated form of opera was necessary. Their ideas would give birth to the genre: *opera seria* (literally "serious opera"), which would become dominant in Italy and much of the rest of Europe until

the late 18th century. The influence of this new attitude can be seen in the works of the composer **Carlo Francesco Pollarolo** (1653-1723). It is an Italian musical form referring to the noble and “serious” style that predominated from the ~1710 to ~1770. Opera seria acquired definitive form early during the 1720s. While **Apostolo Zeno** (1669-1750) and **Alessandro Scarlatti** (1660-1725) (often called of the Neapolitan School) had paved the way, the genre became internationally standardized by **Pietro Metastasio** (1698-1782).

- A typical *opera seria* would start with an instrumental overture of three movements (fast-slow-fast) and then a series of recitatives containing dialogue interspersed with arias expressing the emotions of the character, this pattern was only broken by the occasional duet for the leading amatory couple. The recitative was typically *secco*: that is, accompanied only by continuo (harpsichord or cello). At moments of especially violent passion *secco* was replaced by *stromentato* recitative, where the singer was accompanied by the entire body of strings. The leading singers each expected their fair share of arias of varied mood, be they sad, angry, heroic or meditative.
- During the 18th century, artistic and cultural life in Italy was heavily influenced by the aesthetic and poetic ideals of the members of the Accademia dell'Arcadia. The Arcadian poets introduced many changes to serious music drama in Italian. This group had a significant influence on **Metastasio**, who was a member.
- The librettos featured classical characters from antiquity bestowed with princely values and morality, struggling with conflicts between love, honor and duty, in elegant and ornate language that could be performed equally well as both opera and non-musical drama. After peaking during the 1750s, the popularity of the **Metastasian** model began to wane due to a struggle with the “Revolution of Gluck.”
- The primary musical emphasis of opera seria was on the solo voice and on *bel canto*, the florid vocal style of the period. Chorus and orchestra played a circumscribed role. High voices were cultivated, both in women and in the castrati, or eunuch sopranos. Music and text were divided into recitative (simply accompanied dialogue sung with speech rhythms), which advanced the dramatic action, and arias, solos that reflected a character’s feelings and also served as vehicles for vocal virtuosity.
- **Pietro Metastasio** (librettist) (1698-1782), **Johann Adolf Hasse** (composer) (1699-1783) and **Apostolo Zeno** (librettist) (1669-1750) were the leading masters of the *opera seria* libretto style (which presented characters from classical mythology or history and avoided diversionary comic episodes). Among the examples of *opera seria* are Rinaldo (1711), by **George Frideric Handel**, Demofonte (1764), by **Niccolò Jommelli**, Didone abbandonata (1725; Dido Abandoned), by **Nicola Porpora**, and Artaserse (1730), by.
 - **Metastasio** was by far the most successful librettist of the era and he maintained his prestige well into the 19th century (1800’s). He belonged to the Arcadian Academy and was firmly in line with its theories. **Metastasio’s** twenty-six librettos were often set by twenty or thirty different composers and audiences came to know the words of his dramas by heart. **Metastasio’s** influence of standardizing the form of *opera seria* was manifested by this frequent setting of his libretti. **Metastasio** would come to be remembered as the father and defender of the *opera seria style*. However, his formulaic style would later lead to a

repeat of the debasement through singing spectacle. Audiences found his formulaic style to be boring and demanded the star performances of the sopranos and the castrati.

➤ The popularity of *opera seria* style began to fade in the early 1700's, and *da capo* style arias were replaced by the *rondo* style. Orchestras grew in size, arias lengthened, ensembles became more prominent, and obbligato recitative became both common and more elaborate. Tragic endings, on-stage death and regicide became the norm rather than the exception. With a few exceptions, *opera seria* was the opera of the court, of the monarchy and the nobility. However, with the French Revolution came serious political upheavals across Italy, and as new, more egalitarian republics were established and old autocracies fell away, the Arcadian ideals of *opera seria* seemed increasingly irrelevant. Such significant socio-political change meant that *opera seria* was finished. By the final decade of the 18th century, *opera seria* was essentially dead, and the political upheavals that the French Revolution inspired swept it away once and for all. The catalyst for this change largely came from the “**Revolution of Gluck.**”

- **Castrati** - The age of *opera seria* corresponded with the rise to prominence of the castrati. The castrati were gifted male singers who had undergone castration before puberty to retain a high, powerful soprano or alto voice backed by decades of rigorous musical training. The rise of these star singers with formidable technical skills spurred composers to write increasingly complex vocal music, and many operas of the time were written as vehicles for specific singers. Of these the most famous is perhaps **Carlo Broschi (Farinelli)** (1705-1782). Only a relatively few castrati earned a living in opera, the principal occupation of most was as singers in the Catholic Church (where female voices were banned). Although castrati predates opera, there is evidence castrati had parts in the earliest opera (**Monteverdi's Orfeo** in 1607 featured castrati in subordinate roles). The height of the craze for these voices occurred in the 1720's and 1730's, however, castrati were always thought exotic with many embellished rumors of their supposed sexual exploits. By the late 1700's, changes in operatic taste and social attitudes led to the end of the castrati. The last operatic castrato role ever written was for a character called Amando in **Il Crociati in Egitto** by **Meyerbeer** (Venice 1824). After the unification of Italy in 1861, castration for musical purposes was made illegal.
- **Antonio Lucio Vivaldi** (1678-1741) was an Italian Baroque composer, virtuoso violinist, teacher and cleric. Born in Venice, he was recognized as one of the greatest Baroque composers and his influence during his lifetime was widespread across Europe. He is known mainly for composing many instrumental concertos, for the violin, as well as sacred choral works and over forty operas.
 - In early 18th-century (1700's) Venice, opera was the most popular musical entertainment. This commercial form of opera proved most profitable for **Vivaldi** as there were several theaters competing for the public's attention. Vivaldi started his career as an opera composer as a sideline: his first opera, **Ottone in villa** was not performed in Venice, but at the Garzerie Theater in Vicenza in 1713. The following year, **Vivaldi** became the impresario of the Teatro San Angelo in Venice, where his opera **Orlando finto pazzo** was performed. The work was not to the public's taste, and it closed after a couple of weeks.

- In the late season, **Vivaldi** planned to put on an opera composed entirely by him, Arsilda, regina di Ponto, but the state censor blocked the performance. The main character, Arsilda, falls in love with another woman, Lisea, disguised as a man. **Vivaldi** got the censor to accept the opera the following year and it was a resounding success.
- **Vivaldi's** progressive operatic style caused him some trouble with more conservative musicians, like **Benedetto Marcello** (1686-1739), a magistrate and amateur musician who wrote a pamphlet denouncing him and his operas.
- Only around 50 operas by **Vivaldi** have been discovered, and no other documentation of the remaining operas exists. Although **Vivaldi** may have exaggerated, in his dual role of composer and *impresario*, it is plausible that he may either have written or been responsible for the production of as many as 94 operas during his career.
- While **Vivaldi** certainly composed many operas in his time, he never reached the prominence of other great composers like **Alessandro Scarlatti**, **Johann Adolph Hasse** (1699-1783), **Leonardo Leo** (1694-1744), and **Baldassare Galuppi** (1706-1785), as evidenced by his inability to keep a production running for any extended period. His most successful operas were La costanza trionfante and Farnace.

VIII. Opera in Italy from 1700-1750:

- In the beginning of 18th century Italian opera won popularity in Naples and London, Bologna and Venice and from Vienna to St. Petersburg. This Italian style of opera spread throughout Europe. At later dates, France, Germany, Russia, Czech Republic and (to a lesser extent, England) would develop their own specialized forms of opera, usually with emphasis on the nature of the local language as well as the local cultural norms. Only France really resisted Italian style opera but generally the Italian tradition was the international one and its leading exponents (e.g., **Handel**, **Gluck** and **Mozart**) were often not natives of Italy. Composers, who wanted to develop their own national forms of opera, generally had to fight against the popularity of Italian opera. Thus in the early 19th century (1800's), both **Carl Maria von Weber** in Germany and **Hector Berlioz** in France felt they had to challenge the enormous influence of the Italian style popularized by **Rossini**.
- **Birth of Opera Buffa and Intermezzo** - Although opera buffa and intermezzo have very different origins, they have similarity in that they use farcical factors denied by *opera seria*, the prevailing form (see the background on Intermezzo in the early section of the Renaissance).
 - In the 17th century comic operas were produced only occasionally and no stable tradition was established. Only in the early years of the 18th century was the comic genre of *opera buffa* born in Naples and it began to spread throughout Italy after 1730.
 - *Opera buffa's* triumph over *opera seria* is very significant in opera history. The new form of opera was more compatible with citizens rather than heroes. The greater flexibility and variety of the new form won over the older form of *opera seria*. The aristocracy also converted its interest.
 - Comic *opera buffa* had its roots in popular entertainment. Traveling musicians had staged comic musical entertainment since the Middle Ages and in the 16th century (1500's), these developed into a tradition of *commedia del l' arte*. During the second half of the 17th century

(1600's) comic interludes (featuring situations and characters (arche types) of *commedia del l'arte*), were inserted between the acts of serious operas. By the end of the 18th century (1700's) the once low-brow comic intermezzi had developed into the dominant operatic genre: opera buffa.

- In the second half of the 18th century comic opera owed its success to the collaboration between the playwright **Carlo Goldoni** (1707-1793) and the composer **Baldassare Galuppi** (1706-1785). Thanks to **Galuppi**, comic opera acquired more dignity. *Opera buffas* were divided into two or three acts, creating libretti for works of a substantially greater length. They differed from *opera seria* in the more straight-forward plots and the psychology of characters. *Opera buffas* included serious figures instead of the exaggerated caricatures of *opera seria*. The plots focused on the conflict between the social classes and included self-referential ideas. **Goldoni** and **Galuppi's** most famous work together is probably Il filosofo di campagna (1754).
- *Opera buffa* was distinguished from *opera seria* by numerous characteristics:
 - 1) Importance given to stage action and the consequent need for the music to follow the changes of the drama, emphasizing the expressiveness of the words.
 - 2) Singers were also excellent actors, able to perform the drama convincingly.
 - 3) Reduction in the use of scenery and stage machinery and in the number of orchestral players.
 - 4) Use of a small cast of characters (at least in the short form of comic opera known as the intermezzo) and simple plots, a good example being **Pergolesi's** La serva padrona.
 - 5) Libretti inspired by *commedia dell'arte*, with realistic subjects, colloquial language and slang expressions.
 - 6) Rejection of vocal virtuosity; a tendency to incorrect pronunciation of words; frequent presence of rhythmic and melodic tics; and use of onomatopoeia and interjections.
 - 7) The finale of *opera buffa* form is a major distinguishing element from *opera seria*. It is itself conceived as a miniature comedy with its own plot.
- This comic opera developed as a result of the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on popular, non-elitist content and spirit of dramatic and musical "naturalism." The melodic content also reflected the more natural, melodic spirit of the Enlightenment (i.e. Classical-era music).
- By the mid-18th century (1700's), baroque *opera seria* come to represent the old, elite, aristocratic order. **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** (1712-1778) took the lead in this rejection of baroque *opera seria*. He and his followers embraced **Pergolesi's** new ideal for opera.
- **Giovanni Pergolesi** (1710-1736) composed La Serva Padrona (1733) which began its life as an *intermezzo* and later evolved into its own opera. Typical of early *opera buffa*, La Serva Padrona features lively, catchy music in which no particular formulas are followed. The plot involves a simple ruse by which a servant tricks an old bachelor into marriage.
- As it evolved, *opera buffa* continued to use *commedia del l'arte* character archetypes. The most significant character division is between the savvy, street-smart servants (and other members of the lower class) vs. blundering, pompous aristocrats, merchants, doctors and

lawyers. Almost by their nature, *opera buffa* plots were politicalized in an era when class distinctions underwent profound reexamination.

IX. Revolution of Gluck and the Introduction of Classical Era Opera:

- The Baroque period between **Monteverdi** (1556-1643) and **Gluck** (1714-1787) is known both as the “golden age of opera” and the “dark age of opera.” Golden age in the sense that: a lot of basic structural forms were established; opera grew as an art form; and it grew, expanded and became a deep part of the Italian culture. Dark Age in the sense that: the incentive to earn a profit in commercial opera led to a debasement of the artistic aspects and domination by popular spectacle.
 - (1640-1700):
 - 1) The first opera houses were opened and opera quickly became big public entertainment.
 - 2) Singing style developed rapidly, introducing aria, and exhibiting the exuberant, expressive spirit of Baroque.
 - 3) The huge demand for new opera reduced the quality of libretti creating a spectacle with stupid and strange content but also focusing on virtuosic singing.
 - (1700-1760): **Pietro Metastasio** (1698-1782) led a reform movement of *opera seria* and ultimately came to be remembered as the patron of its style. His objective was to establish a standardization of form and an artistic focus:
 - 1) He was the great librettist of the early 1700’s. He standardized his libretti into a formulaic dramatic procedure.
 - 2) He further formulated **Scarlatti’s** aria into a structure called: “Da Capo” meaning an A-B-A format (he formalized a style that had already been broadly practiced).
 - 3) As a result of the predictability of the formula, singers and vocal virtuosity later increasingly became the focal points of reformed opera (returned the emphasis back to virtuosic aria and spectacles of the Baroque period).
 - 4) The greatest abuses were promulgated the castrati.
- **Christoph Willibald von Gluck** (1714-1787) a German opera composer (born in Bavaria and brought up in Bohemia) of the early classical period. After many years at the Habsburg court at Vienna, **Gluck** brought about the practical reform of opera's dramaturgical practices that many intellectuals had been campaigning for over the years. With a series of radical new works in the 1760s, among them Orfeo ed Euridice and Alceste, he started to break the dominance that Metastasian *opera seria* had enjoyed for much of the century. The libretti were by **Ranieri de’ Calzabigi**, of Italian decent born in the same year as **Gluck** who had drifted from Livorno to Naples and Paris and finally to Vienna where he met **Gluck**. Orfeo ed Euridice has usually been regarded as the starting point of the Calzabigi-Gluck reform: for the first time in an Italian opera, secco recitative (accompanied only by the harpsichord and a continuo bass line) was abolished and the singers were accompanied by the orchestra throughout.
 - Metastasian *Opera seria* had weaknesses (similar to the Baroque era) and critics: a taste for embellishment on behalf of the superbly trained singers and the use of spectacle as a replacement for dramatic purity and unity.

- **Francesco Algarotti's** *Essay on the Opera* (1755) proved to be an inspiration for **Gluck's** reforms. He advocated that *opera seria* had to return to basics and that all the various elements—music (both instrumental and vocal), ballet, and staging—must be subservient to the overriding drama. **Gluck** tried to achieve a "beautiful simplicity" and return opera to its status of high art.
- **Gluck** thought that both of the Italian styles of opera: *opera seria* and *opera buffa* had strayed too far from what opera should really be, and seemed unnatural. He wanted to return opera to its origins, focusing on human drama and passions and making words and music of equal importance. **Gluck** said: "I decided to restrict the music to its proper function, that of expressing the true meaning of the poetry and underlying situation of the play, without interrupting or weakening the action with useless and superfluous ornamentation."
 - 1) The arias now become far more expressive of the individual emotions of the characters and more firmly anchored in the storyline.
 - 2) **Gluck** organized libretti so that arias had a more organic part in the drama rather than merely interrupting its flow.
 - 3) Words and music on equal footing.
 - 4) "Real-time" stops to express a depth of feelings far beyond that of words alone (similar to a soliloquy in theater).
 - 5) Marked the starting point for the modern opera house repertoire.
- **Gluck** also drastically cut back on the possibilities for vocal virtuosity afforded to singers, abolished *secco* recitative (thereby heavily reducing the delineation between aria and recitative) and took great care to unify drama, dance, music and theatrical practice in the synthesis of Italian and French traditions. He believed that opera aspires more to satisfying the mind than flattering the ear.
- **Gluck** continued his reform with *Alceste* and *Paride ed Elena*. He paid great attention to orchestration and considerably increased the role of the chorus: he also cut back heavily on exit arias. The labyrinthine subplots that had riddled earlier baroque opera were also eliminated.
- Conflict between forms grew as Metastasio resisted Gluck's changes. **Metastasio** and **Hasse** led arguments for the traditional *opera seria* form while **Calsabigi** and **Gluck** led arguments for the reformed style. While **Metastasio's** birth pre-dated Gluck's (he was 16 years older), they were contemporaries. **Metastasio** was 1698-1782, while **Gluck** was 1714-1798.
- **Gluck's** reforms made most of the composers of *opera seria* of the previous decades obsolete. The careers of **Hasse**, **Jommelli**, **Galuppi**, and **Traetta** were effectively finished. Replacing them came a new wave of classical era composers such as **Wolfgang Mozart**, **Joseph Haydn**, **Antonio Salieri** (a disciple of Gluck), **Antonio Sacchini**, **Giuseppe Sarti**, and **Domenico Cimarosa**, following Gluck's reforms.
- **Gluck's** reforms continued to have had resonance throughout operatic history. **Weber**, **Mozart** and **Wagner**, in particular, were influenced by his ideals.
- By the time **Gluck** died in 1787, **Beaumarchais's** subversive comedy *Le Mariage de Figaro* had already been transmuted into an altogether new form of musical drama in Vienna and,

as the nineteenth century approached, the way forward in the German-speaking countries lay through Mozartian *opera buffa* and the romantic opera that grew out of **Beethoven** and **Weber**. **Gluck's** primary influence on Viennese opera was on the development of Classical style opera and especially his direct influence on **Mozart** of making drama so supremely important. **Gluck** also had a direct and broad Viennese/Classical influence through the composer **Antonio Salieri**.

- Gluck later influenced Romantic style opera, with its emphasis on drama, through such composers as **Berlioz**, **Weber** and **Wagner**.
- Italy, the country at which the reform of *opera seria* had originally been directed, bypassed **Gluck** entirely and, reluctant to shake off old habits, adapted and re-adopted for another half-century the convention of an earlier age. In the Italian operas of the early 19th century (1800's), (**Gioachino Rossini** and **Gaetano Donizetti**), bravura arias (*bel canto*) remained focal attractions and they continued to play a major role in both grand and Italian opera through the 19th century (1800's).
- The post **Rameau** vacuum in France, led **Gluck** to move to Paris in 1773. It was here that **Gluck** had his most appreciable influence as his Parisian operas paved the way to the nineteenth-century French *Grand Opera* and eventually provided the direct inspiration for the greatest of them all, **Berlioz's** classical Les Troyens.

X. Development of English Opera:

- The *masque* was the true antecedent of English opera. It was a form of dramatic entertainment, popular among the nobility in 16th and 17th century England which consisted of dancing and acting performed by masked players.
- The first English opera was The Siege of Rhodes by **Matthew Locke**, **Henry Lawes** and **Henry Cooke** with a text by poet laureate **Sir William D'Avenant** (1656).
- The English composer **John Blow** produced his opera Venus and Adonis (1683), which was partly based on **Ovid's Metamorphoses**, with a text by **Aphra Behn**. It was first performed at the court of Charles II and **Purcell** was almost certainly sitting in the audience taking it all in.
- The one great English opera of the 17th century was Dido and Aeneas (1689) by **Henry Purcell**, after whose death England succumbed completely to Italian opera.
- The supreme reigning composer of "English" opera was a German who had completely absorbed the Neapolitan Italian style, **Georg Fridrich Händel**. Although best known as the composer of the oratorio *Messiah*, **Händel** spent most of his musical energy between 1705 and 1738 in composing operas. His first opera in England was Rinaldo (1711), an instant success, and among the many other operas he composed are Giulio Cesare (1724), Rodelinda (1725), and Alcina (1735). **Handel's** operas featured castrati who dominated this period and type of opera, sometimes forcing composers to write around them (adding music that had little or nothing to do with the plot). Coincident with **Händel's** efforts at establishing Italian opera in England were the attempts of native talent to produce an English musical theatrical form.

- **Henry Purcell** (1659-1695) was an English composer. Although incorporating Italian and French stylistic elements into his compositions, **Purcell's** legacy was a uniquely English form of Baroque music. He is generally considered to be one of the greatest English composers; no other native-born English composer approached his fame until **Edward Elgar**. The composition of his chamber opera Dido and Aeneas (1689) formed a very important landmark in the history of English dramatic music. It was written to a libretto furnished by **Nahum Tate**. It was based on **Virgil's** epic poem, The Aeneid, and was **Purcell's** first and only all-sung work. It is occasionally considered the first genuine English opera, though that title is usually given to **Blow's Venus and Adonis**.
 - In the ten years that followed, **Purcell** wrote a five other semi-operas, including Dioclesian in 1690, King Arthur in 1691, The Fairy-Queen in 1692, Timon of Athens 1694, and The Indian Queen 1695.
 - The composition of Dido and Aeneas gave **Purcell** his only opportunity to compose a work in which the music carried the entire drama. While understanding the concept of all-sung opera, seventeenth-century English impresarios and their audiences also understood opera to mean spoken plays with a large amount of added music. The works have been given a variety of descriptive titles including 'semi-operas', 'ambigues', 'multi-media spectaculars', and, most appropriately, 'dramatick operas'.
- **George Frideric Handel** (1685-1759) was a German-born Baroque composer famous for his operas, oratorios, anthems and organ concertos. He is regarded as one of the greatest composers of the Baroque and he composed more than forty operas in over thirty years.
 - **Handel** received critical training in Halle, Hamburg and Italy before settling in London (1712) and became a naturalized British subject in 1727. He was strongly influenced both by the great composers of the Italian Baroque and the middle-German polyphonic choral tradition.
 - **Handel** met **Gian Gastone de' Medici** 1703–1704 in Hamburg. **Ferdinando Medici** tried to make Florence Italy's opera capital, attracting the leading talents of his day. **Handel** left for Rome (since opera was temporarily banned in the Papal States) and initially composed sacred music for the Roman clergy. Rodrigo, his first all-Italian opera, was produced in the Cocomero theatre in Florence in 1707 and his Agrippina was first produced in 1709 at Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo.
 - In 1710, **Handel** became *Kapellmeister* to German **Prince George**, the Elector of Hanover, who in 1714 would become **King George I** of Great Britain and Ireland.
 - In 1712, **Handel** decided to settle permanently in England. He received a yearly income of £200 from **Queen Anne**. Handel also became an impresario and managed and ran several theaters for commercial opera in England. Handel and his opera houses failed to compete with the Opera of the Nobility, who engaged musicians such as **Johann Adolph Hasse**, **Nicolo Porpora** and the famous castrato **Farinelli**.
 - Within fifteen years, Handel had started three commercial opera companies to supply the English nobility with Italian opera. After his success with Messiah (1742) he never performed an Italian opera again. Almost blind, and having lived in England for nearly fifty

years, he died in 1759, a respected and rich man. His funeral was given full state honors, and he was buried in Westminster Abbey.

- In 1728 **John Gay's** The Beggar's Opera premiered and had the longest run in theatre history up to that time. The Beggar's Opera inaugurated the form of *ballad opera* that satirized Italian opera and contemporary politics. This started to diminish the popularity of Italian style opera in England.
- **Michael Tippett** (1905-1998) was an English composer who rose to prominence during and immediately after the Second World War. In his lifetime he was considered to rank with his contemporary **Benjamin Britten** as one of the leading British composers of the 20th century. Among his best-known works are the oratorio *A Child of Our Time*, the orchestral *Fantasia Concertante on a Theme of Corelli*, and the opera The Midsummer Marriage. His five operas were heralded with increasingly muted fanfares, only his first effort, A Midsummer Marriage (1955) has flourished.
- **Benjamin Britten** (1913-1976) was an exception to the inability of 20th century composers to produce a number of successes. He is by a huge margin the most regularly performed opera composer born in the twentieth century. **Britten's** Peter Grimes (1945) was a huge success. A loner in a small British seaside town seeks success and marriage but three of his apprentices die and the town blames him. Suicide is his way out. Between 1945 and 1954, **Britten** produced seven operas, two of which, Billy Budd (1951) and the Turn of the Screw (1954), almost rivaled Grimes in popularity.
- **Thomas Ades** (1971-?) Is a British composer. His The Tempest (2004) conjures things that once were opera, the European past, duets, and quintets. He belongs to a new generation of composers born after World War 2 who have thrived with opera.

XI. French Style Opera:

Introduction:

- French style opera derived from a combination of: Italian opera, the *pastoral*, French classical tragedy and the *ballet de cour*. French opera formally began in 1669 with the establishment of the Academie royale de Musique and in 1674 when Lully's first opera was performed. Born in the France aristocracy and supported by the king, French Opera had a primary purpose to praise the greatness of Louis XIV. **Jean Baptiste Lully** assured the success of French opera by molding it from its antecedents to the French taste for dramatic poetry and combined it with music. **Lully** introduced his audience to grand-scale entertainment: lavish stage settings and scenery in addition to ballets, choruses and long disquisitions on love and glory. **Jean Philippe Rameau** followed the tradition of **Lully**, but was not as well received as the signs of the French Revolution were to profoundly change the direction of opera.
- After **Rameau's** death, the German **Gluck** was persuaded to produce six operas for the Parisian stage in the 1770s. They show the influence of **Rameau** by simplifying and placement of greater focus on drama. At the same time, by the middle of the 18th century (1700s), another genre was gaining popularity in France: *opéra comique*. In *opéra comique*, arias alternated with spoken dialogue. By the 1820s, Gluckian influence in France had given way to a taste for the

operas of **Rossini**. **Rossini's** Guillaume Tell helped found the new genre of *Grand opera*, a form whose most famous exponent was **Giacomo Meyerbeer**. The lighter *opéra comique* also enjoyed tremendous success in the hands of **Boïeldieu**, **Auber** and others. In this climate, the operas of the French-born composer **Hector Berlioz** struggled to gain a hearing. **Berlioz's** epic masterpiece Les Troyens, the culmination of the Gluckian tradition, was not given a full performance for almost a hundred years after it was written.

- In the second half of the 19th century (1800s), **Jacques Offenbach** dominated the new genre of *operetta* with witty and cynical works such as Orphée aux enfers. At the same time, **Charles Gounod** scored a massive success with Faust; and **Bizet** composed Carmen, probably the most famous French opera of all. At the same time, the influence of **Richard Wagner** was felt as a challenge to the French tradition. Perhaps the most interesting response to Wagnerian influence was **Claude Debussy's** unique operatic masterpiece Pelléas et Mélisande (1902). Other notable 20th century names include **Ravel**, **Poulenc** and **Messiaen**.
- **French opera** is one of Europe's most important operatic traditions, containing works by composers of the stature of **Lully**, **Rameau**, **Berlioz**, **Bizet**, **Debussy**, **Poulenc** and **Messiaen**. Many foreign-born composers have played a part in the French tradition as well, including **Gluck**, **Salieri**, **Cherubini**, **Rossini**, **Meyerbeer**, **Offenbach** and **Verdi**.
- The French regarded theatrical music as an accompaniment to their favorite stage “spectacle,” ballet. The history of ballet began in the Italian Renaissance courts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It quickly spread to the French court by of **Catherine de' Medici** (1519-1589) (and by **Catherine**) where it was further developed. **Medici** was originally from Florence and became Queen of France in 1547. The creation of classical ballet occurred under **Louis XIV** (1638-1715) who, in his youth, was an avid dancer and performed in ballets by **Pierre Beauchamp** and **Jean-Baptiste Lully**. In 1661 Louis founded the Académie Royale de Danse (Royal Dance Academy) which was charged with establishing standards for the art of dance and the certification of dance instructors. In 1672, following his retirement from the stage, Louis XIV made **Lully** the director of the Académie Royale de Musique (Paris Opera) in which the first professional ballet company, the Paris Opera Ballet, arose.
- French-language opera came into being in 1669/1674 which was a late start compared to that of Italian opera. The comparative late start has much to do with the nature of the French language and the French “spirit.”
 - The French language is not as well suited to a melismatic operatic singing style as the Italian language.
 - The French preferred the drama “pure,” in the theater, unsullied by music.
- One of the important differences between French and Italian opera – apart from the integral ballets – was in matters of verisimilitude (French polemics about this topic were much more common than Italian, and often turned on the distinction between spoken and sung drama). The French believed that the singing throughout an opera was unnatural and downplayed it. They also believed that Italian opera contained too much emotional exuberance. The Lullian *tragedie lyrique* tended to avoid long, elaborate arias with instrumental accompaniments generally showing a less rigid distinction between recitative and aria, and distrusted anything approaching Italian singing virtuosity. It also favored natural voices rather than those of

castrati. French opera moved the plot forward by means of lengthy recitatives that also preserved the rhythms of spoken language. Each act of French brand of opera was then enlivened by a *divertissement* (literally a “diversion”) in which plot was abandoned in favor of an elaborate ballet on a mythological subject, the dancing accompanied by scenic splendors that often rivaled the old *intermedi*. The King himself danced in these ballets on many occasion. Another fixed feature of this court entertainment was a lengthy prologue in which, although the subject matter was ostensibly mythological, explicit homage was paid to the King. As this brief description implies, many of the developments of Venetian opera were reversed in Lully’s *tragedie lyrique*, which did not have to cater to mass audience tastes and could concentrate on maintaining the classical decorum suitable to glorification of the royal dynasty. **Lully’s** works continued to be performed even after his death in 1687; they were not seriously challenged for another forty years and remained in the repertory until as late as the 1770s.

History:

- The first operas to be staged in France were imported from Italy, beginning with **Francesco Sacrati’s** *La finta pazza* in 1645. French audiences gave them a lukewarm reception. This was partly for political reasons, since these operas were promoted by the Italian-born **Cardinal Mazarin**, who was then first minister during the regency of the young **King Louis XIV** and a deeply unpopular figure with large sections of French society. Musical considerations also played a role, since the French court already had a firmly established genre of stage music, *ballet de cour*, which included sung elements as well as dance and lavish spectacle. When two Italian operas, **Francesco Cavalli’s** *Xerse* and *Ercole amante*, proved failures in Paris in 1660 and 1662, the prospects of opera flourishing in France looked remote. Yet Italian opera would stimulate the French to make their own experiments at the genre and, paradoxically, it would be an Italian composer, **Jean-Baptiste Lully**, who would found a lasting French operatic tradition.
- The French had a curiously productive love-hate relationship with Italian opera for centuries. In Paris the court of Louis XIV at first welcomed the exotic Italian. In each case they were modified to suit French taste, not least with the addition of ballet and in some cases by replacing the castrati with baritones. Six Italian operas were performed in Paris between 1645 and 1662 under the aegis of **Cardinal Mazarin**. **Lully** contributed dance music to two of these: **Cavalli’s** *Xerse* (1660) and *Ercole amante* (1662), which was composed for the wedding of Louis XIV to the **Spanish Infanta Maria Theresa**. Despite the Cardinal’s support, these operas had little appeal to the French courtiers, who objected to the use of the Italian language and the length of the performances. The only elements to receive general praise were concessions to French taste: spectacular stage machinery, extravagant settings and ballets. However, with the death of **Mazarin** in 1661 the fortunes of Italian opera waned. The scene was soon dominated by **Jean-Baptist Lully** (1632-1687), an Italian expatriate who progressed to opera through instrumental music and then ballet, in the later via collaboration with **Moliere (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin**, known by his stage name **Molière** (1622 – 1673), was a French playwright and actor who is considered to be one of the greatest masters of comedy in Western literature). **Lully** and **Moliere** produced a series of *comedies-ballets*: pieces that inserted singing and dancing

into comic plays and were one precursor to the type of comic opera in France (and then Germany) that mixed musical numbers and spoken drama. In 1672 Louis granted **Lully** the exclusive right to an "Academie Royale de Musique," in effect allowing him personally to invent and patent the genre of French-language serious opera. This highly distinctive brand was called *tragédie en musique* or *tragédie lyrique* and (as those names suggest) was strongly influenced by France's powerful and prescriptive tradition of spoken drama.

- French opera began **with Lully's** first *tragédie en musique*, *Cadmus et Hermione* (1673). *Tragédie en musique* was a form in which dance music and choral writing were particularly prominent. After **Ovid's** *Metamorphoses*, it was first performed in 1673, by the Paris Opera. The prologue, in praise of King Louis XIV, represents him as Apollo slaying the Python of Delphi. The opera itself concerns the love story of Cadmus, legendary founder and king of Thebes, Greece, and Hermione (Harmonia), daughter of Venus and Mars.
- **Pierre Perrin** (c.1620 – 1675) was a French poet and librettist and was born in Lyon. He founded the Académie Royale de Musique, of which he had obtained the privilege from King Louis XIV. He obtained royal monopoly to form an *Académie d'Opéra* to produce operas in Paris in 1669. Unlike any other country, the opera in France became an institution of the state itself (which lasted until the Revolution in 1789). This led to a unique and politically involved opera development in France including official heads of the opera, political battles to change it, a very slow process of change (with much political meddling). It also led French opera to be only an aristocratic entertainment with no involvement of the general public. As an institution/vehicle of the state, Louis XIV used the opera for spreading/signaling propaganda about the strength and wealth of his court throughout Europe. **Perron** worked with **Robert Cambert**, creating with him *La Pastorale d'Issy* in 1659, and with **Jean-Baptiste Boësset**, creating *La Mort d'Adonis*, in 1662. With **Cambert**, he also created *Pomone*, which inaugurated the opening of the first "salle de l'Opéra" in 1671. A poor administrator and the victim of dishonest collaborators, **Perrin** was imprisoned for debts and had to transfer his monopoly privilege, granted by the King, to **Lully**. He died in poverty in Paris, aged about 55. His verses are now considered mediocre but his name remains associated with the birth of opera as an art form in France.
- **Lully** had not guaranteed his supremacy as the leading French opera composer through his musical talents alone. In fact, he had used his friendship with King Louis to secure his monopoly on the public performance of stage music. It was only after **Lully's** death that other opera composers emerged from his shadow. The most noteworthy was probably **Marc-Antoine Charpentier**, whose sole *tragédie en musique*, *Médée*, appeared in Paris in 1693 to a decidedly mixed reception. **Lully's** supporters were dismayed at **Charpentier's** inclusion of Italian elements in his opera particularly the rich and dissonant harmony the composer had learned from his teacher **Carissimi** in Rome. Nevertheless, *Médée* has been acclaimed as "arguably the finest French opera of the 17th century".
- The close relationship between **Lully** and Louis XIV had a large part in the development of French opera. The King was the primary patron of opera, and all Lully's operas included preludes praising the monarchy. Louis suggested a number of the plots for the operas to Lully, notably those whose subject matter centers around the conflict between glory and duty on the

one hand, and love on the other. In his published scores, Lully always included a preface dedicating the work to his primary patron.

- **Jean-Baptiste Lully** (1632-1687) is considered the chief master of the French baroque style and the inventor of French style opera. He is also credited with the invention in the 1650s of the French overture, a form used extensively in the Baroque and Classical eras, especially by **Bach** and **Handel**.
 - He was born in Florence but, at the age of 14, moved to France to become a “chamber boy” for the daughter of a Duke of Guise so that she would have someone to converse with in Italian. In February 1653, Lully attracted the attention of the young Louis XIV, dancing with him at the Ballet royal de la nuit. When Louis XIV took over the reins of government in 1661, he named **Lully** superintendent of royal music and music master of the royal family. In December 1661 the Florentine was granted naturalization in France. **Lully’s** collaboration with the playwright **Moliere** began with Les Facheux in 1661 and broke off in 1672. **Lully** acquired **Piere Perrin’s** opera privilege and became director of the Academie Royale de Musique (the royal opera which performed in the Palais-Royal) giving him a monopoly over French opera. After Queen Marie-Theresa’s death in 1683 and the King’s secret marriage to Mme de Maintenon, Louis XIV’s enthusiasm for opera dissipated. He was also revolted by **Lully’s** dissolute life and homosexual encounters. **Lully** died from gangrene, having struck his foot with the conducting staff during a performance of his Te Deum to celebrate Louis XIV’s recovery from surgery. He died in Paris and was buried in the church of Notre-Dame-des -Victories.
 - **Lully** and his librettist, **Phillipe Quinault**, a respected playwright, employed the same poetics that dramatists used for verse tragedies. These were used for **Lully’s** recitative creating a very “natural’ effect. He also forsook the Italian method of dividing musical numbers into separate recitatives and arias, choosing instead to combine and intermingle the two, for dramatic effect. He and **Quinault** also opted for quicker story development which was more to the taste of the French public. **Lully** imitated the speech melodies and dramatic emphasis used by the best actors in the spoken theater. His attentiveness to transferring theatrical recitation to sung music shaped French opera for a century. Unlike Italian opera of the day, which rapidly moving toward *opera seria* with its alternating recitative and da capo arias, **Lully’s** operas focused on drama, expressed by a variety of vocal forms.
 - **Lully** created a French national style opera that included magnificence, tragic drama and dance (and laid the groundwork for the later French style *Grand Opera*). His greatest operatic contribution was his design of a recitative style suited to the long vowels and soft consonants of the French language.
 - 1) **Lully** claimed that his model for his style of dramatic declamation were the tragedies of the *Comadia Frances* – that is, spoken drama.
 - 2) His recitatives are almost entirely Slavic in style: one syllable per pitch and one pitch per syllable. (Slavic languages have many more syllables than European languages as well as many more articles and prepositions, therefore, Slavic style recitative usually feature one pitch per syllable and no melisma).

- 3) The flexibility and fluidity of the French language is mirrored notationally with continuous change of time signatures. It creates a serpentine and continuous and rhythmic sensibility. This is in contrast to Italian recitative which has no change in time signatures providing a clearer sense of forward rhythmic drive.
 - 4) Falls into melodic patterns (almost sing-song like) in contrast to Italian recitative which is “through composed” with each melody developing as it goes.
- **Lully’s** aria, unlike Italian:
 - 1) Tended to be short and limited (narrower) in vocal range.
 - 2) Do not stand alone as musical numbers but rather merge with or are embedded into larger sequences of recitatives, duets, ensembles and choruses. Since **Lully** created the model for French opera for the next 150 years, arias became of much lower importance.
 - 3) Contain no coloratura thus requiring less virtuosity by the singers.
 - 4) Emphasized clear enunciation and textural clarity over vocal acrobatics because there was less virtuosity. The singers tend to also have more focus on acting.
 - In sum:
 - 1) The dignified, formal splendor of **Lully’s** operas embodied the glorious age of Louis XIV. One of **Lully’s** most popular operas was *Atys* (*Attis*) (1676), a tragedy to a libretto by **Philippe Quinault** and based on **Ovid’s** *Fasti*. It became known as “the king’s opera” because it became the favorite of Louis XIV.
 - 2) **Lully** established recitative that is more substantial than in Italian opera. It is more dramatic, flexible and melodic. **Lully’s** operas, which de-emphasized aria, were similar to those of **Monteverdi** who had no arias at all.
 - 3) The French opera became an institution of the French state of Louis XIV, to display his dignity, splendor and royalty.
 - 4) However, after Louis XIV, these same factors made French opera seem empty and pompous. On the other hand, they led to the continued development of French style opera and to the tradition of significant state financial support which permitted the development of *French Grand Opera*.
 - **Tragédie en musique** (Musical tragedy), also known as **tragédie lyrique** (lyric tragedy), is a genre of French opera introduced by **Lully** and used by his followers until the second half of the eighteenth century (late 1700’s) (the word: “opera” was Italian so the French made their own word “*Tragédie en musique*” to distinguish its style from the Italian form). Operas in this genre are usually based on stories from Classical mythology or the Italian romantic epics of Tasso and Ariosto. The stories may not have a tragic ending - in fact, they generally don’t - but the atmosphere must be noble and elevated. The standard *tragédie en musique* had five acts; earlier works in the genre were preceded by an allegorical prologue which, during the lifetime of Louis XIV, generally celebrated the king’s noble qualities and his prowess in war.
 - Though influenced by Italian models, *tragédie en musique* increasingly diverged from the form then dominating Italy, *opera seria*. French audiences disliked the castrato singers who were extremely popular in the rest of Europe, preferring their male heroes to be sung by the *haute-contre*, a particularly high tenor voice. Dramatic recitative was at the heart of Lullian opera, whereas in Italy recitative had dwindled to a perfunctory form known as *secco*,

where the voice was accompanied only by the continuo. Likewise, the choruses and dances that were such a feature of French works played little or no part in *opera seria*. Arguments over the respective merits of French and Italian music dominated criticism throughout the following century, until **Gluck** arrived in Paris and effectively fused the two traditions in a new synthesis.

- **Opéra-ballet** Other composers tried their hand at *tragédie en musique* in the years following Lully's death, including **Marin Marais** (*Alcyone*, 1703), **Destouches** (*Télémaque*, 1714) and **André Campra** (*Tancredi*, 1702; *Idoménée*, 1712). **Campra** also invented a new, lighter genre: the *opéra-ballet*. As the name suggests, *opéra-ballet* contained even more dance music than the *tragédie en musique*. The subject matter was generally far less elevated too; the plots were not necessarily derived from Classical mythology and even allowed for the comic elements which **Lully** had excluded from the *tragédie en musique* after *Thésée* (1675). The *opéra-ballet* consisted of a prologue followed by a number of self-contained acts (also known as *entrées*), often loosely grouped round a single theme. The individual acts could also be performed independently, in which case they were known as *actes de ballet*. **Campra's** first work in the form, *L'Europe galante* ("Europe in Love") of 1697, is a good example of the genre. Each of its four acts is set in a different European country (France, Spain, Italy and Turkey) and features ordinary middle-class characters. *Opéra-ballet* continued to be a tremendously popular form for the rest of the Baroque period.
- **Pastorale héroïque** was another popular genre of the era, the first example of which was **Lully's** last completed opera *Acis et Galatée* (1686). The *pastorale héroïque* usually drew on Classical subject matter associated with pastoral poetry and was in three acts, rather than the five of the *tragédie en musique*. Pastoral was more a mode of poetry (not a genre) in which the author employs various techniques to place the complex life into a simple one. Around this time, some composers also experimented at writing the first French comic operas, a good example being **Mouret's** *Les amours de Ragonde* (1714).
- **Jean-Philippe Rameau** (1683-1764) – was a contemporary of **J.S. Bach** in the High Baroque.
 - He was the most important opera composer to appear in France after **Lully**. He was also a highly controversial figure and his operas were subject to attacks by both the defenders of the French, Lullian tradition and the champions of Italian music. The operatic traditionalists or "Lullists," found **Rameau's** operas too Italian and, as such, musically subversive. The operatic progressives felt that **Rameau** was the savior of an operatic tradition that had grown tired and stale with age.
 - **Rameau** was almost fifty when he composed his first opera, *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733). Until that point, his reputation had mainly rested on his works on music theory. *Hippolyte* caused an immediate stir. Some members of the audience, like **Campra**, were struck by its incredible richness of invention. Others, led by the supporters of **Lully**, found **Rameau's** use of unusual harmonies and dissonance perplexing and reacted with horror. The war of words between the "Lullistes" and the "Ramistes" continued to rage for the rest of the decade.
 - **Rameau** made little attempt to create new genres; instead he took existing forms and innovated from within, using a musical language of great originality. He was a prolific

composer, writing five *tragédies en musique*, six *opéra-ballets*, numerous *pastorales héroïques* and *actes de ballets* as well as two comic operas. **Rameau** was a loner and was very difficult to deal with. He viewed himself as the inheritor (from **Lully**) of a grand and majestic tradition. He also referred to his work as: “tragédie lyrique.” His Hippolyte et Acicie (1733) was typical of **Lully** and other French composers, however, unlike **Lully**, his music uses the full technical resources of the High Baroque period.

- By 1745, **Rameau** had won acceptance as the official court composer, but a new controversy broke out in the 1750s, only about 20 years after the first controversy. This was the so-called *Querelle des Bouffons*, in which supporters of Italian opera, such as the philosopher and musician **Jean-Jacques Rousseau**, accused **Rameau** of being an old-fashioned, establishment figure. The “anti-nationalists” (as they were sometimes known) rejected **Rameau’s** style, which they felt was too distanced from emotional expression, in favor of what they saw as the simplicity and “naturalness” of the Italian *opera buffa*, best represented by **Pergolesi’s** La serva padrona. Their arguments would exert a great deal of influence over French opera in the second half of the eighteenth century, particularly over the emerging form known as *opéra comique*.
- I viewed Rameau’s opera called: “Castor et Pollux.” The version I saw was the 1755 revised version, which was Rameau’s last. The music has formal integrity and stately French elegance like that of Lully. However, Rameau was a much better composer than Lully. He added a lot of the Italian lyricism (leading to push back from the “Lully’s” that he was too Italian) and his characters were much more real than the stiff characters of Lully. The theme of the opera was similar to opera seria – involving gods, humans and classics (Mercury, Jupiter and the Greek Spartans). The theme was the importance of brotherly love as the two main characters were very self-sacrificing for the benefit of the other brother. Although there was expression of affection between the brothers, I thought it was appropriate and involved the brothers embracing. The opera featured singing throughout and there was no distinction between aria and recitative. It was like a Verdi music drama. Typical of French opera, there were dance scenes incorporated, however, the dance style was more modern than classical French ballet (think I prefer ballet). I liked the opera, a lot and would like to see more of Rameau’s music and opera.
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)
 - Within 20 years of the first controversy over Rameau’s music perceptions had shifted 180m degrees.
 - 1) **Rousseau** and his followers rejected traditional French opera and embraced the new Italian comic genre (*opera buffa*) as an example of opera appropriate for the Enlightenment.
 - 2) **Rameau’s** operas became the “tradition” against which the new Enlightenment progressives rebelled.
 - 3) **Rousseau**, among other talents, was a composer (of sorts) and in 1752 wrote the opera Le Devin du Village. Le Devin du Village was influenced by Italian *opera buffa* and was very close to the popular French tradition of *opéra comique*.

- **The Querelle des Bouffons** ("Quarrel of the Comic Actors") was the name given to a battle of rival musical philosophies which took place in Paris between 1752 and 1754. The controversy concerned the relative merits of French and Italian opera.
 - In the eighteenth century, Italian opera evolved greatly, considerably faster than *tragédie lyrique* or *tragédie en musique*, until it split into two genres: *opera seria* and *opera buffa* (from *buffo* = deriving from "to laugh", "grotesque", "farce").
 - The quarrel broke out on August 1, 1752, when **Eustacchio Bambini's** Italian touring company (an itinerant Italian troupe of comic actors, known as *buffoni* - *bouffons* in French, hence the name of the quarrel) arrived at the Royal Academy of Music (the future Paris Opera) to give performances of *intermezzi* and *opera buffa*. They opened with a performance of **Pergolesi's** *La serva padrona* (*The Servant Turned Mistress*). The same work had already been given in Paris in 1746, without attracting any attention. The scandal was created by the fact that it was performed at the *Royal Academy*, which had always been rather limited to *tragedie lyrique*.
 - The controversy provoked a war of words between the defenders of the French operatic tradition and the champions of Italian music. In the controversy that followed, critics such as **Rousseau** and **Friedrich Melchior Grimm** (in the queen's corner) praised Italian *opera buffa* and attacked the styles French *lyric tragedy*, a style originated by **Lully** and perpetuated by **Rameau** (for example by featuring mythological and classical characters – gods and Spartans) (in the king's corner).
 - Italian opera showed an aesthetic form which was no longer only Italian but European, or international, since numerous composers of the genre were not Italians. The Germans like **Melchior Grimm** and **Baron d'Holbach** were among the most fervent adherents of Italian opera. Many French rejected the Italian style due to French nationalism. They felt that with their eighteenth century royal court, only France could claim to be the dominant nation in Europe.
 - However, the stakes for cultural domination in France played out through comparison of the two aesthetics. The Italian opera favored singing and the more consonantal, articulated French language genre was more preoccupied with words. Furthermore, for the "French" side, the laughter provoked by comic opera was considered noxious because one lost self-control and was irrational while the Italian side called for passion and emotion.
- **Opera comique**
 - Opera had been a court entertainment, a linear descendent of **Lully's** Académie Royale de Musique - a succession of theaters in which Louis XV and (less commonly) Louis XVI would attend. Here the *tragédie lyrique* reigned supreme. Meanwhile a lighter, more authentically popular form of entertainment also emerged in Paris during the 18th century (1700's) that became to be known as *opera comique*.
 - The *Querelle des Bouffons* (1752–54), mentioned above, was a major turning-point for *opéra comique*. In 1752 **Rousseau's** *Le Devin du village* was an attempt to introduce his ideals of musical simplicity and naturalness to France. Though **Rousseau's** piece had no spoken dialogue, its *opera buffa* style provided an ideal model for composers of *opéra comique* to

follow. These included **Egidio Duni**, whose Le peintre amoureux de son modèle appeared in 1757; **Philidor** (Tom Jones, 1765) and **Monsigny** (Le déserteur, 1769). All these pieces dealt with ordinary bourgeois characters rather than Classical heroes. But the most important and popular composer of *opéra comique* in the late eighteenth century was **André Ernest Modeste Grétry**.

- *Opéra comique* began life not in the prestigious opera houses or aristocratic salons, but in the theatres of the annual Paris fairs. Here plays began to include musical numbers called *vaudevilles*, which were existing popular tunes refitted with new words. In 1715 the various fair theatres were brought under the aegis of an institution called the *Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique*. In spite of fierce opposition from rival theatres, the venture flourished and composers were gradually brought in to write original music for the plays. These became the French equivalent of the German *Singspiel* because they contained a mixture of arias and spoken dialogue.
- **Grétry** (1741-1813) successfully blended Italian tunefulness with a careful setting of the French language. He was a versatile composer who expanded the range of *opéra comique* to cover a wide variety of subjects from the Oriental fairy tale Zémire et Azor (1772) to the musical satire of Le jugement de Midas (1778) and the domestic farce of L'amant jaloux (also 1778). His most famous work was the historical "rescue opera", Richard Coeur-de-lion (1784), which achieved international popularity, reaching London in 1786 and Boston in 1797.
 - These were light, opera style works with lively set pieces, some sentimental moments and lots of spoken dialogue. It was the main progenitor of French, German and English traditions of *operetta* and hence of what would become the twentieth-century *musical*.
 - While *opéra comique* flourished in the 1760s, serious French opera was in the doldrums. **Rameau** had died in 1764, leaving his last great *tragédie en musique*, Les Boréades unperformed. No French composer seemed capable of assuming his mantle. The answer was to import a leading figure from abroad. **Gluck** was already famous for his reforms of Italian opera, which had replaced the old *opera seria* with a much more dramatic and direct style of music theatre, beginning with Orfeo ed Euridice in 1762. Gluck admired French opera and had absorbed the lessons of both **Rameau** and **Rousseau**. Gluck's arrival in Paris Rameau's opera was considered too old and was largely forgotten. Under the patronage of his former music pupil, **Marie Antoinette**, who had married the future French king Louis XIV in 1770, **Gluck** signed a contract for six stage works with the management of the *Paris Opéra*. He began with Iphigénie en Aulide (19 April 1774). The premiere sparked a huge controversy, almost a war, such as had not been seen in the city since the *Querelle des Bouffons*. **Gluck's** opponents brought the leading Italian composer, **Niccolò Piccinni**, to Paris to demonstrate the superiority of Neapolitan opera and the "whole town" engaged in an argument between "Gluckists" and "Piccinnists".
- **Christoph Willibald von Gluck** (1714-1787) **Gluck** moved to Paris in November 1773, at the invitation of Marie Antoinette.
 - On 2 August 1774 **Gluck's** French translation of Orfeo ed Euridice was performed, with the title role transposed from the castrato to the haute-contre, according to the French preference for high tenor voices. **Gluck's French** Orfeo ed Euridice was better received by

the Parisian public than it had been in Vienna. **Gluck** went on to write a revised French version of his Alceste, as well as the new works Armide (1777), Iphigénie en Tauride (1779) and Echo et Narcisse for Paris. Fusing the traditions of Italian opera and the French national genre into a new synthesis, **Gluck** wrote eight operas for the Parisian stages. One of the last of these, Iphigénie en Tauride, was a great success and is generally acknowledged to be his finest work. Though he was extremely popular and widely credited with bringing about a revolution in French opera, **Gluck's** mastery of the Parisian operatic scene was never absolute, and after the poor reception of his Echo et Narcisse, he left Paris in disgust and returned to Vienna to live out the remainder of his life.

- I viewed a streamed performance of Orfeo ed Euridice. I enjoyed the straight-forward beauty and drama of the music to be wonderful. The theatrical element was an improvement over Monteverdi (although the music was not an improvement). My greatest disappointment with this production was the change in the story line. In this version, Orfeo makes the deal to retrieve Euridice with Jupiter before he enters the underworld. Worse yet was at the end, Jupiter relents and permits Euridice to remain in world with Ofreo. I thought the suspension of the deal reduced that drama of the story line.
- **Gluck** left behind an immense influence on French music and several other foreign composers followed his example and came to Paris to write Gluckian operas, including **Salieri** (Les Danaïdes, 1784) and **Sacchini** (Oedipe à Colone, 1786).
- **From the Revolution to Rossini**
 - Paris became the operatic capital of Europe during the late 1700's to early 1800's. However, the French Revolution of 1789 was a cultural watershed. What was left of the old tradition of **Lully** and **Rameau** was finally swept away, to be rediscovered only in the twentieth century. The Gluckian school and *opéra comique* survived, but they immediately began to reflect the turbulent events around them. Established composers such as **Grétry** and **Dalayrac** were drafted in to write patriotic propaganda pieces for the new regime. A typical example is **Gossec's** Le triomphe de la République (1793) which celebrated the crucial Battle of Valmy the previous year. A new generation of composers appeared, led by **Étienne Méhul** and the Italian-born **Luigi Cherubini**. They applied Gluck's principles to *opéra comique*, giving the genre a new dramatic seriousness and musical sophistication.
 - The stormy passions of **Méhul's** operas of the 1790s, such as Stratonice and Ariodant, earned their composer the title of the first musical Romantic. **Cherubini's** works too held a mirror to the times. Lodoiska was a "rescue opera" set in Poland, in which the imprisoned heroine is freed and her oppressor overthrown. **Cherubini's** masterpiece, Médée (1797), reflected the bloodshed of the Revolution only too successfully: it was always more popular abroad than in France. The lighter Les deux journées (1800) was part of a new mood of reconciliation in the country.
 - Theatres had proliferated during the 1790s, but when Napoleon took power, he simplified matters by effectively reducing the number of Parisian opera houses to three. These were *the Opéra* (for serious operas with recitative not dialogue); the *Opéra-Comique* (for works with spoken dialogue in French); and the *Théâtre-Italien* (for imported Italian operas). All three would play a leading role over the next half-century or so. At the Opéra, **Gaspere**

Spontini upheld the serious Gluckian tradition with La Vestale (1807) and Fernand Cortez (1809).

- In Paris, a law began in 1807 that restricted theaters to perform certain types of opera so *Opera Comique* became the specialty of the *Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique* – the law was relaxed in the 1860's.
- Nevertheless, the lighter new *opéra-comiques* of **Boieldieu** and **Isouard** were a bigger hit with French audiences, who also flocked to the *Théâtre-Italien* to see traditional *opera buffa* and works in the newly fashionable *bel canto* style, especially those by **Rossini**, whose fame was sweeping across Europe. **Rossini's** influence began to pervade French *opéra comique*. Its presence is felt in **Boieldieu's** greatest success, La dame blanche (1825) as well as later works by **Auber** (Fra Diavolo, 1830; Le domino noir, 1837), **Hérold** (Zampa, 1831) and **Adolphe Adam** (Le postillon de Longjumeau, 1836). In 1823, the *Théâtre-Italien* scored an immense coup when it persuaded **Rossini** himself to come to Paris and take up the post of manager of the opera house. **Rossini** arrived to welcome worthy of a modern media celebrity. Not only did he revive the flagging fortunes of the *Théâtre-Italien*, but he also turned his attention to *the Opéra*, giving it French versions of his Italian operas and a new piece, Guillaume Tell (1829), *Grand Opera*. This proved to be **Rossini's** final work for the stage. Ground down by the excessive workload of running a theatre and disillusioned by the failure of Tell, **Rossini** retired as an opera composer.
- **Grand Opera** Certain works written for the Paris Opera between the late 1820's and the late 1860's. The French word "grand" also means big, so that grand opera is both magnificent opera and quite simply, opera that seldom is over before midnight. By the 1820's, as royal patronage dwindled, opera increasingly became a middle-class entertainment. Spectacular and dramatic *grand operas* were designed to appeal to the new and growing middle class audience. Its development was permitted by large state subsidies. To merit this name, the opera had to concoct something large scale, serious, French and almost always in five acts. It also had to deploy a large choral force in several acts. The libretto must have been set in remote historical periods, ideally Middle Ages. Guillaume Tell might initially have been a failure but, together with a work from the previous year, **Auber's** La muette de Portici, it ushered in *grand opera* which dominated the French stage for the rest of the century. *Grand opera* had already been prefigured by works such as **Spontini's** La vestale and **Cherubini's** Les Abencérages (1813), but the composer history has above all come to associate with the genre is **Giacomo Meyerbeer**. It would also have to be written for the *Paris Opera*, an institution that survived the French Revolution. The most famous example of French grand opera likely to be encountered in opera houses today is by **Giuseppe Verdi**, who wrote Don Carlos for the *Paris Opéra* in 1867.
- **Giaocomo Meyerbeer** (1791-1864) almost singlehandedly established French *grand opera* with his two operas: Robert the Devil (1831) and The Huguenots (1836).
 - Like **Gluck**, **Meyerbeer** was a German who had learned his trade composing Italian opera before arriving in Paris. His first work for the Opéra, Robert le diable (1831), was a sensation; audiences particularly thrilled to the ballet sequence in Act Three in which the ghosts of corrupted nuns rise from their graves. Robert, together with **Meyerbeer's** three

subsequent grand operas, Les Huguenots (1836), Le prophète (1849) and L'Africaine (1865), became part of the repertoire throughout Europe for the rest of the nineteenth century (1800's) and exerted an immense influence on other composers.

- His operas have fallen into almost total obscurity today – they were intended as popular entertainment and lacked the musical and dramatic substance necessary to remain in the repertoire (similar to modern day **Andrew Lloyd Webber**). However, he is particularly famous for his ability to manage large numbers of singers, dancers and choristers on stage.
- Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)
 - While **Meyerbeer's** popularity faded, the fortunes of another French composer of the era have risen steeply over the past few decades. Yet the operas of **Hector Berlioz** were failures in their day. **Berlioz** was a unique mixture of an innovative modernist and a backward-looking conservative. His taste in opera had been formed in the 1820s, when the works of **Gluck** and his followers were being pushed aside in favor of **Rossinian bel canto**. Though **Berlioz** grudgingly admired some works by **Rossini**, he despised what he saw as the showy effects of the Italian style and longed to return opera to the dramatic truth of **Gluck**. He was also a fully-fledged Romantic, keen to find new ways of musical expression.
 - His first and only work for the *Paris Opéra*, Benvenuto Cellini (1838), was a notorious failure. Audiences could not understand the opera's originality and musicians found its unconventional rhythms impossible to play.
 - Twenty years later, **Berlioz** began writing his operatic masterpiece Les Troyens with himself rather than audiences of the day in mind. Les Troyens was to be the culmination of the French Classical tradition of **Gluck** and **Spontini**. Predictably, it failed to make the stage, at least in its complete, four-hour form. Under the title Les Troyens à Carthage, the last three acts were premièreed with many cuts, the *Théâtre Lyrique*, in Paris in 1863, with 21 repeat performances. The full 5 act opera did not premier until the second half of the twentieth century in 1890, twenty one years after the composer's death and not in France but in Karlsruhe, Germany. Fulfilling the composer's prophecy, "If only I could live till I am a hundred and forty, my life would become decidedly interesting". Les Troyens (1863) is a French *grand opera* in five acts. The libretto was written by **Berlioz** himself from **Virgil's** epic poem the Aeneid and the score was composed between 1856 and 1858. Les Troyens is **Berlioz's** most ambitious work, the summation of his entire artistic career, but he did not live to see it performed in its entirety. **Berlioz's** third and final opera, the Shakespearean comedy Béatrice et Bénédict (1862), was written for a theatre in Germany where audiences were far more appreciative of his musical innovation.
 - Les Troyens (1853) - **Berlioz** used as a model for structure and style, the great classical dramas of **Gluck**, a composer he had always worshipped, though he added elements of spectacle - crowd scenes, ballet and an important role for the chorus – that suggest a debt to the Parisian *grand opera* of his own day. And there is the inevitable influence of **Shakespeare**, not only in moments of poetic ecstasy, but in the human contrasts and variety of the action. For this is a very human interpretation of **Virgil**. Apart from the recurrent insistence on Aeneas's destiny in Italy, there is no overt presence of the gods whose intrigues and favors control the development of the Latin epic; this is a story of

classical antiquity seen through the eyes of a man for whom its participants are real, live beings – often more real and more live than their counterparts in the world around him.

- **The late 19th Century France and *Opéra lyrique*** literally, 'lyric opera' for the late 18th/19th century.
 - *Opéra lyrique* represents a halfway point between *grand opera* and *opéra comique* (with *opéra comique* having branched off into a separate development). Similar to *grand opera*, it features a large scale in terms of number of performers and size of staging, however, less grandiose overall. Similar to *opéra comique* it, features spoken dialog and direct and appealing melody. Included in this classification are: **Charles Gounot's** (1818-1875) Faust and Romeo et Juliette, **Camille Saint-Saëns'** Samson and Delilah and **Georges Bizet's** Carmen (which is also an example of an *opéra comique* with a tragic plot).
 - **Berlioz** was not the only one discontented with operatic life in Paris. In the 1850s, two new theatres attempted to break the monopoly of the *Opéra* and the *Opéra-Comique* on the performance of musical drama in the capital. The *Théâtre Lyrique* ran from 1851 to 1870. It was here in 1863 that **Berlioz** saw the only part of Les Troyens to be performed in his lifetime. But the *Lyrique* also staged the premieres of works of this new generation of French opera composers, led by **Charles Gounod** and **Georges Bizet**.
 - Though not as innovative as **Berlioz**, these composers were receptive to new musical influences. They also liked writing operas on literary themes. **Gounod's** Faust (1859), based on the drama by **Goethe**, became an enormous worldwide success. **Gounod** followed it with Mireille (1864), based on the Provençal epic by **Frédéric Mistral**, and the **Shakespeare**-inspired Roméo et Juliette (1867). **Bizet** offered the *Théâtre Lyrique* Les pêcheurs de perles (1863) and La jolie fille de Perth (1867), but his biggest triumph was written for the *Opéra-Comique*. Carmen (1875) is now perhaps the most famous of all French operas. Early critics and audiences, however, were shocked by its unconventional blend of romantic passion and realism.
- **Georges Bizet** (1838-1875) and Carmen (1875). Carmen remains one of the most beloved and frequently performed and adapted opera in the repertoire. **Bizet** led a short and unhappy life, dying nearly penniless shortly after the premier of Carmen. Carmen is the embodiment of temptation and primal, destructive sexuality. The original composition contained many of the spoken dialog sections, characteristic of *opéra comique*. These were later changed to recitative to make it more consistent in style to opera.
- **The late 19th Century France and Operetta** - Operetta grew out of the French *opéra comique* around the middle of the 19th century (1800s) to satisfy a need for short, light works in contrast to the full-length entertainment of the increasingly serious *opéra comique*. *Operetta* is a genre of light opera, light in terms both of music and subject matter. It is also closely related, in English-language works, to forms of *musical theatre*.
- **Jacques Offenbach** (1819-1880) was a German-born French composer and impresario of the romantic period. Born in Cologne, the son of a synagogue cantor, **Offenbach** showed early musical talent. At the age of 14, he was accepted as a student at the Paris Conservatoire but found academic study unfulfilling and left after a year.

- **Offenbach** found that contemporary French *opéra-comiques* no longer offered room for comedy. His little theatre, the Bouffes-Parisiens, established in 1855, put on short one-act pieces full of farce and satire. In 1858, **Offenbach** tried something more ambitious. Orphée aux enfers ("Orpheus in the Underworld") was the first work in a new genre: *operetta*. Orphée was both a parody of high flown Classical tragedy and a satire on contemporary society. It's incredible popularity prompted **Offenbach** to follow up with more operettas such as La belle Hélène (1864) and La vie parisienne (1866) as well as the more serious Les contes d'Hoffmann (1881).
- **Offenbach** is remembered for his nearly 100 *operettas* of the 1850s-1870s and his uncompleted opera The Tales of Hoffmann. He was a powerful influence on later composers of the *operetta* genre, particularly **Johann Strauss, Jr.** (1825-1899) and **Arthur Sullivan** (1842-1900). His best-known works were continually revived during the 20th century, and many of his *operettas* continue to be staged in the 21st. The Tales of Hoffman remains part of the standard opera repertory. **Offenbach's** tradition was then carried on by **Robert Planquette** (1848-1903), **André Messager** (1853-1929), and others.
- **Franz Lehar** (1870-1948) is one of the most significant composers of *operetta* in the history of classical music. His lighthearted, comic works like The Merry Widow (1905) continue to delight audiences today, as do his stand-alone orchestral pieces such as the ever-popular Gold and Silver Waltz.
- **Offenbach** was a critical figure in this transition from comic opera to *operetta*. By this time, the "*comique*" meant something closer to "humanistic," meaning to portray "real life" in a more realistic way, representing tragedy and comedy next to each other, as **Shakespeare** had done. The "comique" part of the genre name had become misleading: *Carmen* (1875) is an example of an *opéra comique* with a tragic plot. With this new connotation, *opéra comique* dominated the French operatic stage since the decline of *tragédie lyrique*.
- **The late 19th Century France and Jules Massenet**
- Opera flourished in late nineteenth-century (late 1800's) Paris and many works of the period went on to gain international renown. These include Mignon (1866) and Hamlet (1868) by **Ambroise Thomas**; Samson et Dalila (1877, in the *Opéra* 's new home, the Palais Garnier) by **Camille Saint-Saëns**; Lakmé (1883) by **Léo Delibes**; and Le roi d'Ys (1888) by **Édouard Lalo**. The most consistently successful composer of the era was **Jules Massenet**, who produced over thirty operas in his characteristically suave and elegant style.
- **Jules Massenet** (1842-1912) was a French composer best known for operas. The two most frequently staged are the tragic romances Manon (1884) and Werther (1892) which have weathered changes in musical fashion and are still widely performed today.
 - Between 1867 and, his death forty-five years later, he wrote more than forty stage works in a wide variety of styles, from *opéra-comique* to *grand opera*; depictions of classical myths, romantic comedies, lyric dramas, as well as oratorios, cantatas and ballets. Massenet had a good sense of the theatre and of what would succeed with the Parisian public. **Massenet's** main influences were **Gounod** and **Thomas**, with **Meyerbeer** and **Berlioz** important influences of his style. From beyond France he absorbed some traits from **Verdi**, and possibly **Mascagni**, and as well as **Wagner**. Unlike other French composers of the period,

Massenet never fell fully under **Wagner's** spell, but he took from the earlier composer a richness of orchestration and a fluency in treatment of musical themes.

- Although, when he chose, **Massenet** could write noisy and dissonant scenes, much of his music is soft and delicate. **Massenet's** Parisian audiences were greatly attracted by the exotic in music and **Massenet** willingly obliged, with musical evocations of far-flung places or times long past.
- Having honed his personal style as a young man, and sticking broadly with it for the rest of his career, **Massenet** does not, as many other composers do, lend himself to classification into clearly defined early, middle and late periods. Moreover, his versatility means that there is no plot or locale that can be regarded as typical **Massenet**. Another respect in which he differed from many opera composers in that he did not work regularly with the same librettists. **Massenet's** output covered most of the different sub-genres of opera, from *opérette* (L'adorable Bel'-Boul and L'écureuil du déshonneur – both early, lost pieces) and *opéra-comique* such as Manon, to *grand opera*. Le roi de Lahore is considered the last *grand opera* to have a great and widespread success.
- Manon (1884) is a totally French opera with a bohemian style quick pick up and rooming together. The story concerns an inexperienced young woman who travels to the city; meets a man (love at first sight); they decide to cohabit (in a tiny “love shack” loft); she leaves him for a wealthy man; she becomes enamored with wealth and related social life; she returns to her original boy-friend; she gets accused of cheating at gambling and finally is imprisoned where she dies. The music and story start off slow but both become much more compelling and dramatic as the opera moves forward. The music is quite tuneful and lyric. The singing is compelling, especially by the character Anna.
- **French Wagnerism and Debussy**
 - The conservative French music critics who had rejected **Berlioz** detected a new threat in the form of **Richard Wagner**, the German composer whose revolutionary music dramas were causing controversy throughout Europe. When **Wagner** presented a revised version of his opera Tannhäuser in Paris in 1861, it provoked so much hostility that the run was cancelled after only three performances. Deteriorating relations between France and Germany only made matters worse and after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, creating political and nationalistic reasons to reject **Wagner's** influence. Traditionalist critics used the word “Wagnerian” as a term of abuse for anything that was modern in music. Yet composers such as **Gounod** and **Bizet** had already begun to introduce Wagnerian harmonic innovations into their scores and many forward-thinking artists such as the poet **Baudelaire** praised **Wagner's** “music of the future”. Some French composers began to adopt the Wagnerian aesthetic wholesale. These included **Emmanuel Chabrier** (Gwendoline, 1886) and **Ernest Chausson** (Le roi Arthus, 1903). Few of these works have survived; they were too derivative and their composers too overwhelmed by **Wagner** to preserve much individuality.
 - **Claude Debussy** had a much more ambivalent — and ultimately more fruitful — attitude to Wagnerian influence. Initially overwhelmed by his experience of **Wagner's** operas, especially Parsifal, **Debussy** later tried to break free. **Debussy's** unique opera Pelléas et

Mélisande (1902) shows the influence of the German composer in the central role given to the orchestra and the complete abolition of the traditional difference between aria and recitative. Indeed, **Debussy** had complained that there was "too much singing" in conventional opera and replaced it with fluid, vocal declamation molded to the rhythms of the French language. The love story of Pelléas et Mélisande avoided the grand passions of **Wagner's** Tristan und Isolde in favor of an elusive Symbolist drama in which the characters express their feelings only indirectly. The mysterious atmosphere of the opera is enhanced by orchestration of remarkable subtlety and suggestive power.

- **The Twentieth Century France**

The early years of the twentieth century saw two more French operas which, though not on the level of Debussy's achievement, managed to absorb Wagnerian influences while retaining a sense of individuality. These were **Gabriel Fauré's** austere Classical Pénélope (1913) and **Paul Dukas's** colorful Symbolist drama, Ariane et Barbe-Bleue (1907). The more frivolous genres of *opéra comique* and *opéra bouffe* still thrived in the hands of composers like **André Messager** and **Reynaldo Hahn**. Indeed, for many people, light and elegant works like this represented the true French tradition as opposed to the "Teutonic heaviness" of **Wagner**.

- This was the opinion of **Maurice Ravel**, who wrote only two short but ingenious operas: L'heure espagnole (1911), a farce set in Spain; and L'enfant et les sortilèges (1925), a fantasy set in the world of childhood in which various animals and pieces of furniture come to life and sing. A younger group of composers, who formed a group known as "Les Six" shared a similar aesthetic to **Ravel**.
- The most important members of Les Six were **Darius Milhaud**, **Arthur Honegger** and **Francis Poulenc**. **Milhaud** was a prolific and versatile composer who wrote in a variety of forms and styles (none of which is more than ten minutes long), from the Opéras-minutes (1927–28), to the epic Christophe Colomb (1928). The Swiss-born **Honegger** experimented mixing opera with oratorio in works such as Le Roi David (1921) and Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher (1938). But the most successful opera composer of the group was **Francis Poulenc** (1899-1963), though he came late to the genre with the surrealist comedy Les mamelles de Tirésias in 1947. In complete contrast, **Poulenc's** greatest opera, Dialogues des Carmélites (1957) is an anguished spiritual drama about the fate of a convent during the French Revolution. **Poulenc** wrote some of the very few operas since the Second World War to win a wide international audience.
- Another post-war composer to attract attention outside France was **Olivier Messiaen** (1908-1992), like **Poulenc**, a devout Catholic. **Messiaen's** religious drama Saint François d'Assise (1983) requires huge orchestral and choral forces and lasts four hours. St. François in turn was one of the inspirations for **Kaija Saariaho's** L'amour de loin (2000). **Denisov's** L'écume des jours (1981) is an adaptation of the novel by **Boris Vian**. **Philippe Boesmans's** Julie (2005, after Strindberg's *Miss Julie*) was commissioned by the Théâtre de la Monnaie of Brussels, an important center for French opera even in **Lully's** day.

XII. Italian Classical Style and Composers of Opera 18th (1700's) and 19th Centuries (1800's):

- Italian opera became a major commercial enterprise throughout Italy as it gained popular appeal not only in the cities but everywhere. Due to the highly profitable commercial investment, Italian opera began to become more conservative and was less subject to the development of the Romantic era influences as both Germany and France had been.
- The melodic style of these predominantly comic operas of the early 1800's was: direct, tuneful, and, in every sense, popular. To meet the commercial demands composers and librettist traveled from city to city creating operas in as little as two weeks before moving on. In order to meet the deadlines, composers would often reuse earlier music in newly commissioned operas.
- During this period, commercial profit, the impresario and the lead soprano singers ruled. The impresario controlled the economics, chose the libretto and set the schedule; the singers (the commercial stars) could dictate modifications; and the composer was little more than a paid contractor. The production was totally focused on profits.
- Italian opera developed a style called "*bel canto*" (Italian for beautiful singing) that was best known by the three composers: **Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini**. *Bel canto* opera was similar to opera which preceded the reforms of **Metastasio**, marked by a notable lack of dramatic integration of words and music. *Bel canto* was characterized by compositional formulas which allowed for the rapid composition with the traditional "numbers" technique of divisions of recitative, aria and ensemble. *Bel canto* style opera thus replaced and absorbed *opera buffa*.
- The commercial demand and success of Italian style opera became a global phenomena, strongly influencing opera development in other countries and attracting many non-Italians to compose in the style: **Mozart** (The marriage of Figaro, Don Giovanni, Cossi fan Tutti); **Beethoven** (Fidelio).
- **Giovanni Paisiello** (1740-1816) was an Italian composer of the Classical era. **Paisiello** was primarily an opera composer. He had mastered all the techniques which made for good opera and this made his works widely popular and admired throughout Europe. By 1763, his reputation being now firmly established, he settled for some years at Naples. He produced a series of highly successful operas, one of which, L'Idolo cinese, made a deep impression upon the Neapolitan public. In 1776 **Paisiello** was invited by the empress Catherine the Great to St. Petersburg, where he remained for eight years, producing, among other charming works, his masterpiece, Il Barbiere di Siviglia, which soon attained a European reputation. The fate of this delightful opera marks an epoch in the history of Italian art; for with it the gentle suavity cultivated by the masters of the 18th century died out to make room for the dazzling brilliancy of a later period. When **Rossini** set the same libretto to music in 1816, under the title of Almaviva, it was hissed from the stage. Nevertheless under its changed title, Il Barbiere, it is now acknowledged as **Rossini's** greatest work, while **Paisiello's** opera is consigned to oblivion -- a strange instance of poetical vengeance, since **Paisiello** himself had many years previously endeavored to eclipse the fame of **Pergolesi** by resetting the libretto of his famous intermezzo, La Serva padrona.
- **Domenico Cimarosa** (1749-1792) was an Italian opera composer of the Neapolitan school. He wrote more than eighty operas during his lifetime, including his masterpiece, Il matrimonio segreto (The Secret Marriage) (1792). It is an opera in two acts, on a libretto by **Giovanni Bertati**, based on the play The Clandestine Marriage by **George Colman the Elder** and **David**

Garrick. “Il Matrimonio Segreto” had its premiere in Vienna in February 1792 (two months after Mozart’s death) at the Imperial Hofburg Theatre in Vienna in the presence of Emperor Leopold II. The public reception was ecstatic. Mozart never had this kind of success in the city. However, the best-known **Cimarosa** opera, “Il Matrimonio Segreto” does not turn up often in modern production. While we have had a long while to grapple with the complexities of **Mozart’s** operas, while “Il Matrimonio Segreto” offered audiences immediate and artful pleasures. With a stock comic libretto by **Giovanni Bertati**, the story is amusing and humane, refreshingly free of absurd disguises and mistaken identities. Musically, especially in comparison with **Mozart**, **Cimarosa’s** score lacks harmonic richness and bold strokes of invention. There is nothing as musically complex and psychologically brutal as the game of partner-swapping that goes on in “Così Fan Tutte.” Still, the directness and spontaneity of **Cimarosa’s** music, especially the vibrant ensembles, are nothing to take for granted.

- **Gioacchino Antonio Rossini** (1792-1868) Very few composers equaled **Rossini** for sheer tunefulness, however, many criticized **Rossini** for his harmonic simplicity. Born in Pesaro and brought up in Bologna, his early success had largely been confined to Venice and Milan. However in 1815 he arrived in Naples. Since Naples had been for a century and a half the most influential of Italian center of operatic activity, **Rossini’s** arrival raised eager anticipation. By the 1840’s, *opera buffa* fell out of favor in Italy to be replaced by serious *grand opera*, in the French style and merged with *bel canto* style. Rossini’s last opera, William Tell, was written in the *grand opera* style.
 - Barber of Seville libretto was written by **Cesare Sterbini** and was based on a play by the French poet, **Pierre-Augustin Beaumarchais**. It was the first of three related plays by **Beaumarchais**: Barber of Seville, The Marriage of Figaro (the most socially incendiary of the three) and The Guilty Mother.
 - The high popularity of Rossini’s’ tunefulness and *bel canto* style arias made his productions in great demand internationally. His production also became highly influential throughout Europe but especially in France to where he permanently relocated in 1823.
 - Troupes of Italian *comedia del l’arte* arrived with success in Paris in the early 1500’s introducing their character archetypes. By 1660, under Louis XIV, *comedia del arte* was so popular in France, that a theater was built dedicated to its production. As its success waned in the mid 1700’s, the theater was combined in 1762 to also include performances of French *opera comique*. **Beaumarchais** was heavily influenced by these *comedia del l’arte* stock character archetypes and incorporated them into his plays. Further, Italian style opera continued to be popular in France with a separate dedicated theater.
 - The Barber of Seville, along with the 3 **Mozart/Deponte** operas and **Verdi’s Falstaff** are considered the greatest *opera buffa* every produced. Further, the Barber of Seville is also considered *bel canto* at its best.
- **Gaetano Donizetti** (1797-1848) was an Italian composer from Bergamo in Lombardy. Over the course of his career, **Donizetti** wrote almost 70 operas. His style was considered early Italian romantic. He, together with **Rossini** and **Bellini**, were the masters of *bel canto* opera.
 - **Donizetti** was an astoundingly prolific composer. In a little over twenty-five years he produced more than seventy operas. The speed with which he worked was legendary:

L'Elisir d'Amore, for example, was composed in the incredibly short period of eight days. Because of his extreme haste, **Donizetti's** work occasionally suffers from inconsistency, feeble orchestration and superficiality. His melodic genius and bouncy good spirits, however, are always in evidence.

- Before 1830, success came primarily with his comic operas, the serious ones failing to attract significant audiences. However, his first real success came with an *opera seria*, Zoraida di Granata, which was presented in 1822 in Rome. In 1830, when Anna Bolena was premiered, **Donizetti** made a major impact on the Italian and international opera scene and this shifted the balance of success away from exclusively comedic operas. Even after that date, however, his best-known works also included comedies such as L'elisir d'amore (1832) and Don Pasquale (1843). Significant historical dramas also became successful, including Lucia di Lammermoor (the first to have a libretto written by **Salvadore Cammarano**) given in Naples in 1835.
- **Donizetti** perfected a fast-paced dramatic style in which tenors and sopranos exude passionate love and suffer fate's consequences. **Donizetti** jettisoned other traditions of the Italian opera, such as the conventional formulaic libretto, in order to advance the dramatic emphasis. **Donizetti** synthesized some of the older conventions, such as the showpiece arias that we associate with *bel canto*, with emotional projection as developed by Romantic drama. He adapted the conventional techniques of vocal display (*coloratura*) to create theatrical effects. The famous "mad scene" from Lucia di Lammermoor provides a dramatic context to the trills, runs and arpeggios that the soprano uses to display her vocal agility, while conveying the pathos of Lucia's mental deterioration.
- As **Donizetti's** fame grew during the early 1830s, **Verdi** took note of the new directions that **Donizetti** was taking Italian opera, with Romanticism, by embracing action-driven and emotionally textured stories. This set the stage for **Verdi's** masterpieces to come. Musicologists have noted many striking examples of a **Donizetti** musical passage that appears to be the direct inspiration for one of **Verdi's**.
- The Romantic influence of **Vincenzo Bellini** is evident in **Donizetti's** next operas, the most famous of which is Elisabetta al Castello di Kenilworth (1829). In 1830, Donizetti reached his artistic maturity with Anna Bolena, and his international reputation was established. Anna, like a good many of the composer's works, is a romanticized version of English history. Cherished by the world's leading dramatic coloratura sopranos, the opera provides an opportunity for the ultimate display of vocal and histrionic skills.
- Anna Bolenna is a tragedia lirica opera in two acts by Gaetano Donizetti. Libretto by Felice Romani, an Italian poet and scholar of literature and mythology. He was considered the finest Italian librettist between Metastasio and Boito. Anna Bolena premiered on 26 December 1830 at the Teatro Carcano in Milan, to "overwhelming success." The opera recounts the life of Anne Boleyn, the second wife of England's King Henry VIII. It is one of four operas by Donizetti dealing with the Tudor period in English history—in composition order, Il castello di Kenilworth (1829), Anna Bolena (1830), Maria Stuarda (named for Mary, Queen of Scots, it appeared in different forms in 1834 and 1835), and Roberto Devereux (1837, named for a putative lover of Queen Elizabeth I of England). The leading

female characters of the latter three operas are often referred to as "the Three Donizetti Queens."

- The duet "Sul suo capo aggravi un Dio" between Anna (soprano) and Jane Seymour (mezzo soprano), who later became Henry VIII's third wife, is considered one of the finest in the entire operatic repertoire.
- It is a *bel canto* style with no recitative. The music is a blending of aria, ensemble and chorus. It is a very dramatic tragedy, especially in the last dungeon scene where Anna switches between insanity and sanity (dreams of happier times and then recalls her tragic current condition) as she awaits her execution.
- Two years after Anna Bolena, L'Elisir d'Amore (The Elixir of Love) scored a success in Milan. This sentimental pastoral comedy contains many beautiful melodies, and is one of the composer's most frequently performed works. In quick succession, **Donizetti** produced a series of notable operas: Il Furioso all'Isola di San Domingo (1833), Lucrezia Borgia (1833), and Maria Stuarda (1834) are the best known of these. Perhaps the composer's most popular work, Lucia di Lammermoor (1835) is a mixture of Romantic melodrama and Rossinian floridness. Coloratura sopranos delight in the pyrotechnics of the "Mad Scene."
- Another of **Donizetti's** operas that is still performed today is Roberto Devereux, composed in 1837 – the role of Queen Elizabeth is one of the greatest dramatic challenges for a coloratura soprano in all of opera. For Vienna, the composer then wrote Linda di Chamounix (1842) and Maria di Rohan (1843). Linda, the better known of the two, is an *opera semiseria*, combining comedy, romance and pathos. By the time he completed his last well-known opera, Don Pasquale (1843), his mastery of the drama was complete; this bubbly, brittle comedy ranks as one of the greatest examples of *opera buffa* ever written.
- **Donizetti** found himself increasingly chafing against the censorial limitations which existed in Italy (and especially in Naples). From about 1836, he became interested in working in Paris, where he saw much greater freedom to choose subject matter, in addition to receiving larger fees and greater prestige. From 1838 onward, with an offer from the Paris Opéra for two new works, La Fille du Régiment (The Daughter of the Regiment) and La Favorite (completed in 1840) which were well received; the former, though sung in French, is a thoroughly Italian comedy, while the latter is a typical example of French *grand opera*. He spent a considerable period of the following ten years in that city and set several operas to French texts as well as overseeing stages of his Italian works. The first opera was a French version of the then-unperformed Poliuto which, in April 1840, was revised to become Les martyrs.
- As the 1840s progressed, **Donizetti** moved regularly between Naples, Rome, Paris, and Vienna continuing to compose and stage his own operas as well as those of other composers. But from around 1843, severe illness began to take hold and to limit his activities. Eventually, by early 1846 he was obliged to be confined to an institution for the mentally ill and, by late 1847, friends had him moved back to Bergamo, where he died in April 1848.
- **Donizetti** played an invaluable role in the development of Italian opera, planting the seeds that enabled opera to flourish in the latter half of the nineteenth century (late 1800's).

Donizetti, to a much greater extent than **Rossini** and **Bellini**, was to exert a tremendous influence on the operas of **Giuseppe Verdi**.

- **Vincenzo Bellini** (1801-1835) was an Italian opera composer, who was known for his long-flowing melodic lines for which he was named "the Swan of Catania."
 - **Vincenzo Bellini** was one of the most important composers of Italian opera in the earlier years of the 19th century. He died in Paris in 1835 at the height of his success.
 - **Bellini's** first great success was in 1827 when Il pirata was staged at La Scala, Milan. The six further operas that he wrote include a version of **Shakespeare's** Romeo and Juliet called I Capuleti e i Montecchi, the famous and complicated La sonnambula produced in Milan in 1831, the demanding opera Norma set in Roman Gaul and staged at La Scala at the end of the same year, and the final work I puritani which was mounted in Paris in 1835.
 - From the age 24 for the next ten years **Bellini** composed eleven operas more than half being quite remarkable. His unique gift for melody influenced the greatest of composers, not only of opera, **Chopin** amongst them. **Donizetti** had been influenced by **Rossini** and **Rossini** also gave **Bellini** some of his inspiration. However, **Bellini** did not have the natural fluidity of composing that caused these two to dash off operas in weeks or even days to meet deadlines for he worked much slower, an opera a year was his pace. In the Bel Canto vein, his is of the purest and most sustained melodic invention of this tradition.
 - After his initial success in Naples, most of the rest of his short life was spent outside of Naples, with his living and composing in Milan and Northern Italy. His final masterpiece in Paris, I puritani preceded his death by only nine months; **Bellini** died in Puteaux, France at the age of 33.
 - In considering which of his operas can be seen to be his greatest successes over the almost two hundred years since his death, Il pirata laid much of the groundwork in 1827, achieving very early recognition in comparison to **Donizetti's** having written thirty operas before his major 1830 triumph with Anna Bolena. Both I Capuleti ed i Montecchi at La Fenice in 1830 and La sonnambula in Milan in 1831 reached new triumphal heights, although initially Norma, given at La Scala in 1831 did not fare as well until later performances elsewhere. The genuine triumph of I puritani in January 1835 in Paris capped a significant career.
 - **Bellini** revised and revised for perfection and those work methods were that of a romanticism that had not yet penetrated Italy as it had Germany. The natural heir to this working style was **Beethoven**.
 - I viewed a streamed production of Norma and found it to be wonderful! I enjoyed the music totally and liked it more than **Donizetti's** Anna Bolena (which I also liked a lot). The story was dramatic and was a keep depiction of human nature with both public and private views on people, their nature and their resulting actions. The final scene, in which the two principle love based characters, was very similar to **Wagner's** Siegfried and Brunhilde's death on a funeral pyre. **Wagner** used **Bellini's** character Norma as a model for his Isolde. It was a great opera and I want to see more of **Bellini's** work.
- **Giuseppe Verdi** (1813-1900) - His career practically constitutes the history of Italian opera from 1850-1900. He composed a total of 26 operas. He was not an innovator or reformer,

rather, his operatic craft slowly evolved across the span of his long compositional career. His evolving style can be summarized as:

- He inherited the *bel canto* style
- The nineteenth century was a literary age and **Verdi**, as a dramatist, sought ever-greater dramatic continuity in his operas.
- Parlante: a new technique by which recitative-like vocal parts are under laid by a memorable and tuneful accompaniment.
- Lyricism: the key to **Verdi's** dramatic art.
- Thematic repetition/coherence: **Verdi** typically used a musical idea cyclically to connect large areas of operatic drama – a so-called hinge-theme.
- The characteristics of his mature operas:
 - Reliance on human emotions and psychological insight for the essential story lines.
 - Increasing de-emphasis on the *bel canto* division of recitative and aria in favor of musical continuity.
 - The orchestra plays a key dramatic role.
 - Good libretti based on good literature.
- **Giuseppe Verdi's** first great successful opera, Nabucco (1842), caught the public fancy because of the driving vigor of its music and its great choruses. *Va, pensiero*, one of the chorus renditions, was interpreted and gave advantageous meaning to the struggle for Italian independence and to unify Italy. The ensembles impressed me as similar to the work of Mozart (although not as good as Mozart's *Così fan tutti*). The story reminded me of Shakespeare's *King Lear* with the older monarch starting as arrogant, turning mad and then finally reconciling his position (and in this case accepting the Hebrew God as sovereign). The base of the story is the Hebrew exile to Babylon and subsequent release. It also outlines an initial hatred of and then conversion in faith of the Hebrew God. Obviously this theme also refers to the release of Italy from foreign bondage and national independence.
- After Nabucco, **Verdi** based his operas on patriotic themes and many of the standard romantic sources: **Victor Hugo** (Ernani, 1844); **Byron** (Il Duca Foscari, 1844); and **Shakespeare** (Macbeth, 1847). **Verdi** was experimenting with musical and dramatic forms, attempting to discover things which only opera could do. In 1877, he created Otello which is described by critics as the finest of Italian romantic operas. For two of **Verdi's** masterpieces: Othello (1887) and Falstaff (1893), the libretti were written by **Arrigo Boito** and the two were generally considered close to the **Mozart/DePonte** team in quality of production.

XIII. Classical Opera of the 18th (1700's) and 19th Centurys (1800's):

- Thanks to **Gluck**, opera as we know it today could be radically different. **Gluck** was the composer who provides the missing link between baroque opera and the more dramatic and musically sophisticated classical operas of **Mozart**. It was **Gluck** who decided that baroque opera was, at least from a dramatic standpoint, needed updating. Baroque operas, particularly those of **Handel**, remain with us today mainly because of their exquisite scores and marvelous

opportunities for skilled singers to put on a dazzling demonstration of vocal pyrotechnics. But as drama, such opera leave much to be desired.

- As outlined earlier in the “dark ages,” Baroque opera was based on familiar characters, often from Greek mythology and seemed more like secular oratorios in costume. Elemental plots were cast as a series of party pieces for the soloists, stitched together by a prosaic prose narrative or recitative, accompanied by continuo (usually harpsichord) that serves to move the story on to the next aria. Characters are wooden and two-dimensional. But it was setting rather than dramatic action that provided the context. Audiences were there, after all, for the singers, so the rest scarcely seemed to matter.
- Audiences love the old and familiar, but younger audience members tend to crave novelty and the Baroque model of opera eventually began to wear thin. **Gluck** gradually “sold” his concept to sophisticated opera audiences and his innovations were eagerly studied, imitated, and exceeded by his successors—particularly and perhaps surprisingly by revolutionary figures such as **Berlioz** and **Wagner** who held **Gluck’s** operas in very high esteem.
- **Gluck** pushed the notion that the instrumental music playing underneath the vocal line could portray the psychological workings of a character, which often were at odds with his external actions. That concept is particularly noticeable in **Gluck’s** Iphigénie during Oreste’s vocal monologue in which he convinces himself he’s at peace. But the turbulent instrumental figure that accompanies him indicates he’s kidding himself, as he’s actually knotted up with internal conflict and turmoil. **Wagner**, in particular, was impressed with the use of the orchestra as a part of character, a technique he later perfected in his own masterpiece, Tristan and Isolde.
- An additional **Gluck** innovation readily apparent in Iphigénie is the lack of an overture. After just a few bars, we’re thrust right into the action as a powerful storm lashes Iphigénie’s lonely isle. It’s a new way of realizing another ancient Greek literary concept, the notion of beginning a story *in medias res*—literally, “in the middle of things”—rather than adopting a less-exciting linear narrative form.
- Yet another modernization is Gluck’s avoidance of old-style recitatives. Yes, there are short, narrative bridges in his operas, but they’re short and accompanied by the whole orchestra, integrating them more thoroughly into the action and into the development of each character.
- **Gluck’s** opera, particularly his later works, remained quite popular in Europe throughout the 19th century. But he was gradually forgotten in the 20th, displaced by exciting new contemporary works. Yet several of **Gluck’s** operas are genuine masterpieces.
- **Gluck** wrote his scores in line with the opera’s text similar to how modern composers compose film scores and also melded French and Italian operatic styles. **Gluck** led and established classical form of opera and directly led to **Mozart’s** further development of opera. In the late 1760s, **Gluck** allowed **Salieri** to study with him and become his protégé.
- **Franz Joseph Haydn** (1732-1809) was a remarkable composer, epitomizing the meaning of classical period composition, and though he wasn’t as flashy as the younger **Mozart**, his music always stayed true to form. **Haydn**, unlike most composers, had a “reliable and steady” job

composing, directing, teaching, performing, and managing musicians from the royal Esterházy family.

- The operas of **Joseph Haydn** are far less well known today than those of his older contemporary **Gluck** and his younger contemporary **Mozart** even though by the 1790s **Haydn** was the most famous composer in the world.
- **Haydn** wrote more than a dozen Italian operas, plus four Italian comedies (which, like his half-dozen German *Singspiele*, had spoken dialogue instead of recitative). His operas were not widely known because they were not generally presented in public theaters. Instead they were performed in the court theater at Esterháza, the rural Hungarian estate of the **Esterházy** dynasty, for a select audience of **Haydn's** aristocratic patrons and their guests. But after the Esterháza musical establishment was disbanded in 1790 on the death of **Haydn's** principal patron **Prince Nicolaus**, **Haydn's** operas fell into a neglect from which they have yet to fully recover.
- Il Mondo della Luna (The World on the Moon, 1777), with the possible exception of L'Infedeltà Delusa (Infidelity Outwitted, 1773), Il Mondo della Luna is probably **Haydn's** best-known opera. It features an old fool, Buonafede, who lusts after his young maid Lisetta while trying to thwart the suitors of his two daughters Flaminia and Clarice. One of the suitors, Ecclitico, convinces Buonafede that by consuming a "magic elixir" he can visit the Moon (really Ecclitico's garden). The amazed Buonafede is tricked into approving the marriages of three Moon couples—in reality, of course, the three young women and their chosen lovers.
- **Luigi Boccherini** (1743-1805) was an Italian classical era composer whose music retained a courtly and galante style while he matured somewhat apart from the major European musical centers. He was born in Lucca Italy and lived during the same time as **Haydn**. In fact, their music is so closely related; musicologists often refer to **Boccherini** as the "wife of Haydn." Unfortunately, **Boccherini's** music never approached the popularity of **Haydn's**. His most popular and instantly recognizable classical piece of music is his famous Minuet from the string quintet Op. 13, no. 5. In 1786 he was appointed as "Composer of Our Court" by Friedrich Wilhelm, the future King of Prussia. He remained in Spain while writing most of his music for Wilhelm. During this period he composed his only opera, a zarzuela (a Spanish lyric-dramatic genre that alternates between spoken and sung scenes) called La clementina (1786).
- **Antonio Salieri** (1750-1825) was an Italian classical composer, conductor and teacher born in Legnago, south of Verona, in the Republic of Venice, but who spent his adult life and career as a faithful subject of the Habsburg Monarchy in Vienna.
 - During his time in Vienna, **Salieri** acquired great prestige as a composer and conductor, particularly of opera. Among the most successful of his 37 operas staged during his lifetime were Armida (1771), La fiera di Venezia (1772), La scuola de' gelosi (1778), Der Rauchfangkehrer (1781), Les Danaïdes (1784), which was first presented as a work of **Gluck's**, La grotta di Trofonio (1785), Tarare (1787) (Tarare was reworked and revised several times as was Les Danaïdes), Axur, re d'Ormus (1788), La cifra (1789), Palmira, regina di Persia (1795), Il mondo alla rovescia (1795), Falstaff (1799), and Cesare in Farmacusa (1800).

- **Salieri** was a pivotal figure in the development of late 18th-century opera. As a student of **Florian Leopold Gassmann**, and a protégé of **Gluck**, **Salieri** was a cosmopolitan composer who wrote operas in three languages. **Salieri** helped to develop and shape many of the features of operatic compositional vocabulary and his music was a powerful influence on contemporary composers.
- Appointed the director of the Italian opera by the Habsburg court, a post he held from 1774 to 1792, **Salieri** dominated Italian language opera in Vienna. During his career he also spent time writing works for opera houses in Venice, Rome, and Paris. His dramatic works were widely performed throughout Europe during his lifetime. As the Austrian imperial Kapellmeister from 1788 to 1824, he was responsible for music at the court chapel and attached school. He was a highly sought-after teacher and his influence was felt in every aspect of Vienna's musical life. **Franz Schubert**, **Ludwig van Beethoven** and **Franz Liszt** were among the most famous of his pupils.
- He is still better known today for the renowned composers with whom he was associated than for his own many and varied compositions. While he cannot be ranked among the great masters himself, he has nevertheless come into view as an underrated and important composer deserving of closer attention.
- Tarare (1787) is generally considered his finest achievement in the genre, is a masterpiece. Tarare is a *tragédie lyrique*, composed to a French libretto by **Pierre Beaumarchais**. It was first performed by the Paris Opera at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin in 1787. **Salieri** also reworked the material into an Italian version retitled Axur, re d'Ormush which opened in Vienna in January 1788. Axur, re d'Ormush is a tragicomic opera in five acts. The libretto was written by **Lorenzo da Ponte**, the Italian-born poet and priest who was responsible for the texts of **Mozart's** Marriage of Figaro, Così fan Tutti, and Don Giovanni. Gifted with a hilarious sense of humor and comic timing, **da Ponte's** operas were invariably a smashing success. **Da Ponte** based his libretto on a livret called Tartare by **Beaumarchais**. **Da Ponte** and **Salieri** wrote this opera for Joseph II's *opera buffa* troupe, so the humor of the original drama was expanded and broadened. However the new drama preserved the grandeur of the original livret by **Beaumarchais**, which contained many powerful dramatic moments. **Da Ponte** and **Salieri** also kept the tragic elements, such as the on-stage suicide of King Axur, and thus created a hybrid genre with strong theatrical impact. The premiere took place in January 1788, in honor of the wedding of the Archduke Franz. It was highly successful, both with the royal family and the Viennese public, and was performed over 100 times between 1788 and 1805 in Vienna alone.
- **Salieri's** music slowly disappeared from the repertoire between 1800 and 1868, and was rarely heard after that period until the revival of his fame in the late 20th century. This revival was due to his dramatic and highly fictionalized depiction in the play and film Amadeus (1979, 1984) by **Peter Shaffer**.
- In November 2009 at the Teatro Salieri in Legnago occurred the first staging in modern times of his opera Il mondo alla rovescia.
- **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756-1791) produced some of the greatest operas in various styles:

- 1) Idomeneo, Re di Creta (1781) is the greatest *opera seria*.
- 2) The Marriage of Figaro (1786), Don Giovanni (1787) and Così fan tutte (1789) are considered the best 3 *opera buffas*.
- 3) The Magic Flute (1791) is a Mozart singspiel, German style opera.
 - **Mozart**, in many ways Gluck's successor, combined a superb sense of drama, harmony, melody, and counterpoint to write a series of comedies, notably Così fan tutte, The Marriage of Figaro, and Don Giovanni (in collaboration with **Lorenzo Da Ponte**). But **Mozart's** contribution to *opera seria* was more mixed; by his time it was dying away, and in spite of such fine works as Idomeneo and La Clemenza di Tito, he would not succeed in bringing the art form back to life again.
 - What Mozart's music gives us, for the first time in the history of opera, is a group of human beings with whom we can really identify, in whose behavior – good, bad, silly or simply expedient – we recognize characteristics that we know all too well in ourselves. Don Giovanni may be grander, Così fan tutte more sophisticated, The Magic Flute something altogether; behind the laughter, there is no more human opera than The Marriage of Figaro.
 - His Marriage of Figaro was based on a play by **Pierre-Augustin Beaumarchais** which was a clear attack on the French aristocracy. The play was initially banned in France and permanently banned in Austria. The libretto removed much of what was politically offensive (but Mozart's music put much of it back in).
 - Mozart was the first composer of opera to create “music drama.” He was also able to create characters that came alive on stage as real humans experiencing real human emotions – his characters were developed well beyond the use of shallow archetypes that were common in *opera buffa*. He also was able to successfully combine the best of Italian melody with German harmony.
 - The librettist of the three *opera buffas* by **Mozart** was **Lorenzo da Ponte** who was a brilliant and controversial figure. He stands along with **Metastasio**, **Boito** and **Hoffmanthal** as the greatest librettists in opera history.
- **Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770-1827) Fidelio was **Beethoven's** only opera for which he composed four different overtures.
 - Fidelio is not an example of German style opera – it is French style opera, based on a Spanish plot but sung in German language (this complexity and mixture may be a reason for **Beethoven's** difficulty in composing Fidelio). The gestation of Fidelio was a challenge that created more than the usual amount of trouble for the composer. **Beethoven** started work on Fidelio in early 1804, but it was not premiered until 1805. It was revised the following year (and performed with almost exactly the same cast), and revised again in 1814.
 - The libretto **Beethoven** used in the 1805 version was by **Joseph Sonnleithner**, based on a French libretto by Jean-Nicolas Bouilly for the 1798 opera Léonore, ou L'amour conjugal composed by **Pierre Gaveaux**.
 - Fidelio (Leonore or The Triumph of Married Love) is an opera with spoken dialogue in two acts. Leonore, disguised as a young (male) prison guard named Fidelio, manages to find her husband, Florestan, who has been kept as a political prisoner under the orders of a malevolent governor. She rescues him just as he is about to be murdered by the governor.

and the couple are happily reunited. These kinds of “rescue” operas, very popular in post-revolutionary France, were enjoying a renewed vogue as Napoleon’s army swept across Europe in the first decade of the 19th century. Although the plot is primarily about Leonore’s courage and her love for Florestan, the political undercurrents—highlighted in **Beethoven’s** version, especially—added some historical depth to the story.

- Fidelio was premiered at the Theater an der Wien in November 1805, only days after Napoleon and his army had occupied Vienna. With a popular storyline, contemporary political relevance, and nearly two years of effort by Europe’s leading composer of the day, Fidelio seemed to have all the ingredients for a success. But the performances were a disaster, attended by almost no one except for some of the composer’s friends and a handful of stray French soldiers. Problems with the libretto and **Beethoven’s** inherent difficulty with producing convincing music for the stage were the main issues. When he revised the opera the following year, it was performed by almost the same cast, and was slightly more successful. **Beethoven** had composed a new overture for the 1806 revision (now known as the “Leonore Overture No. 3”—the original 1805 overture is usually designated “Leonore Overture No. 2”), and tightened up the libretto, especially in the first half of the opera. It would have had a longer run had not **Beethoven** run into difficulties with the theater management. For a planned 1808 revival in Prague, **Beethoven** wrote a third overture (“Leonore Overture No. 1”), but the production was cancelled.
- Finally, with the help of **Georg Freidrich Treitschke**, **Beethoven** revised the opera yet again in 1814, including another new overture (the “Fidelio Overture”). This final version was, at last, a great success, even though (as **Beethoven** remarked to **Treitschke**) it had emerged with difficulty over a long period of time.

XIV. The Romantic Period and German Style Opera:

- Romantic opera, which placed emphasis on the imagination and the emotions, began to appear in the early 19th century (1800’s). Its arias and music gave more dimensions to the extreme emotions which typified the theater of that era.
- **Gioacchino Rossini** (1792–1868) initiated the Italian Romantic period; **Hector Berlioz** (1803–1869) initiated the French Romantic period; and **Carl Maria von Weber** (1786–1825) introduced the German Romantic period which was carried forward by **Richard Wagner** (1813–1883).
- In spite of its many religious conflicts, the German countries traditionally performed educational plays led to the creation of *Singspiel*. The first attempts at German style opera was after **Heinrich Schütz** (1585–1672) studied abroad in Venice. Later, **Heinrich Albert** (1604–1651), **J.J. Lowe**, **Ph. Stolle**, and **Johann Phillip Krieger** attempted various styles of opera. However, their attempts ended with mere adoptions of styles from France and Italy. **Händel** composed ‘Almira’ and ‘Nero’ which were imitations Italian style. **Georg Philipp Telemann** (1681–1767) composed for: plays of the middle ages, translations of French play, an Italian Intermezzo and other genres. However, his style was heavily influenced by Italian style opera.
 - Italian romantic opera in the 19th century (1800’s) was people oriented and focused on human emotions and relationships. German romantic opera was different:

- The German language does not feature the long vowels separated by distinct consonants as does Italian. German has few vowels and many harsh consonants. German opera grew to reflect these differences by down-playing arias.
- Melodies well suited for the characteristics of the German language and spoken dialogue in place of dry recitative.
- The plots are drawn from medieval history, legend and fairy tale.
- The stories typically involve supernatural events or beings.
- Lays stress on a background of the wild, mysterious and uncontrolled.
- Supernatural incidents are not incidental but essential parts of the plot which are intertwined with the fate of humans.
- Human characters often become agents of supernatural forces usually involving good vs. evil.
- Good normally wins out over evil in the form of salvation or redemption, with religious overtones.
- **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756-1791) - German-language and style opera arose with **Mozart's singspiel, The Magic Flute**.
 - The late development of German style opera had much to do with both the nature of the German artistic/intellectual class and the nature of the German language arias.
 - True German style opera – in terms of singing style and type of stories set to music – evolved from native German roots.
 - **Singspiel** literally means “sing-play” or “play with singing” (Play means a dramatic production for the stage). Singspiel as understood today is a partly sung partly spoken German theatrical genre that had its roots in popular culture.
 - **Mozart's** singspiel, **The Rescue from the Harem** (1782), elevated a popular genre to the level of high art with a single stroke.
 - **The Magic Flute** (1791) was the last major work by **Mozart** before his death. It is half fairy tale and half morality play (about Masonic initiation ritual and Enlightenment ideals).
 - A German operatic style and tradition was born, out of the popular tradition of *singspiel*.
 - Lacking a long, commercially profitable tradition, nineteenth century (1800's) German opera becomes more of an experimental genre than other national styles.
- **Carl Maria von Weber** (1786-1825) - Invented the German romantic style opera with **Der Freischutz** (The Free shooter or Marksman or **The Magic Bullets**) (1821). It is the definitive work that established nineteenth century German opera.
 - The famous “Wolf's Glen Scene” was a brilliant depiction of supernatural horror, completely different from contemporary Italian *bel canto* opera and French grand and lyric opera in terms of the pervasive use of spoken dialogue, expressive content and compositional technique.
- Richard Wagner (1813-1883)
 - The single most influential and controversial composer of the second half of the 19th century. He was a repulsive human being, anti-Semitic and his cries for racial purity approached madness.

- His two greatest musical influences were **Beethoven's ninth symphony** and **Weber's Der Freischütz**. He wrote and composed 13 complete operas.
- **Wagner** worked to establish his own theories of opera, similar to what had been done by the Florentine Camarata in the late 17th century. **Wagner** sought to replicate the Ancient Greek drama by using purely instrumental music, in place of Greek chorus, to serve the same purpose of expressing mood and emotions. **Wagner**, preferred instrumental music as a result of his influence by **Schopenhauer**.
- Wagner was a disciple of the philosopher, **Arthur Schopenhauer** and his 1818 work called "The World as Will and Representation." This book was based, to a large extent, on the philosophy of Buddhism. Among other things, **Schopenhauer** referred to the arts and instrumental music as the only means of escaping control by the "Will." He also suggested that abstract instrumental music is the only means of seeking "Truth." **Wagner** incorporated this view into his compositions. For example, in **Tristan and Isolde**, the characters on stage represent the phenomenal; they demonstrate many of the human attributes of: half-truths, delusions, unreality and dishonesty that characterize appearance (conscious interaction). However, the orchestra, speaking without the intervention of words, tells the truth. **Schopenhauer** also had a Buddhist view that only through total personal negation and death can salvation, transcendence and transfiguration be achieved.
- **Schopenhauer**: "instrumental music is entirely independent of the phenomenal (conscious, everyday world); it ignores it altogether. It is a copy of the will itself (the great inner truth). That is why the effect of instrumental music is so much more powerful and penetrating than the other arts. It expressed the essence behind appearance. Thus the creator of music reveals the inner truth of the world."
- **Tristan and Isolde** (1859) – Aside from **Beethoven's Symphony number 9**, was the most influential composition of the nineteenth century. It is a musical expression of **Schopenhauer's** doctrine that existence is an inherently insatiable web of longings, willings and strivings from which the only permanent liberation is the cessation of being (breaking the never-satiated cycle of death and rebirth to the freedom from desire and into nirvana). In **Tristan**, this is depicted by the unconsummated sexual desire that is only ended at the death of the lovers as they enter the universe of nothingness merged with all other matter of the phenomenal universe. One highly discussed issue is whether the love potion was really a placebo and the reaction of the pair to avoiding death was to feel the true mutual attraction that had already existed but had been denied to themselves by both. The musically intricate, radically chromatic idiom of the **Tristan** score that marks the real turning point in the history of music. For by fatally blurring the outlines of traditional tonality, it began the process that led progressively but inexorably, over the next half century, to the birth of atonality, the theories of **Schoenberg** and the principles of dodecaphonic composition in all its forms. Its effects are still with us.
- **Richard Strauss** (1864-1949) was a leading German composer of the late Romantic and early modern eras. He is known for: opera, which include **Der Rosenkavalier** and **Salome**; *lieder*, especially **Four Last Songs**; and tone poems: **Death and Transfiguration**, **Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks**, **Also sprach Zarathustra**, **An Alpine Symphony**, and other orchestral works, such

as Metamorphosen. **Strauss**, along with **Gustav Mahler**, represents the late flowering of German Romanticism after **Richard Wagner**, in which pioneering subtleties of orchestration are combined with an advanced harmonic style.

- While **Strauss** is a German composer and he composed in the romantic era (to the modern era), many categorize his style as “Expressionistic,” especially his opera: Salome. **Strauss’s** three great operas were: Salome (1905), Elektra (1908) and Der Rosenkavalier (1912).
- His classically oriented compositional technique disintegrated with his eventual (and inevitable) exposure to the Romantic music of **Hector Berlioz**, **Franz Liszt** and **Wagner**.
- The Strauss reached his peak in 1905 with the premiere of Salome (based on an **Oscar Wilde** 1892 play), one of the most controversial operas of all time. Filled with a degree of eroticism, intrigue and sexuality light years beyond that of the biblical account. The play itself was so controversial and sensational; it was not produced until 1896. **Salome** is a veritable textbook of psychopathology. Though many considered it pornography, it is first and foremost an opera representative of the experimental, post Victorian turn of the century.
- I viewed Elektra. This was very clearly an expressionistic opera. It was very bloody, dark and the music is very and constantly dissonant. The characters all looked ugly and distorted, except for the hero, Orestes. Elektra was superficially portrayed as insane. However, her character had somewhat of a heroic element to it in that she stood up to her mother and never wavered from seeking revenge for the murder of her father. Her character reminded me of Shakespeare’s Hamlet. Elektra is in a similar position to Hamlet, however and in contrast, she never waivers from being committed to revenge for her father’s murder. But she has to rely on her brother, Orestes, to carry out the revenge. Her sister is used as a foil who is only concerned with herself and is willing to forgive her mother and step-father so that she can live her own “happy” life and get married and have children. Throughout the opera, I was not thrilled, but I did find the end and overall opera to be dramatic and to be deep with many moral issues to consider.
- **Hans Werner Henze** (1926-2012) has written more than twenty operas and was routinely billed as Germany’s greatest living opera composer. He was a German composer of prodigious output best known for “his consistent cultivation of music for the theatre throughout his life.” His music was extremely varied in style, having been influenced by serialism, atonality, **Stravinsky**, Italian music, Arabic music and jazz, as well as traditional schools of German composition.
 - **Henze** was also known for his political convictions. He left Germany for Italy in 1953 because of a perceived intolerance towards his leftist politics and homosexuality. Late in life he lived in the village of Marino in the central Italian region of Lazio. An avowed Marxist and member of the Communist Party of Italy, **Henze** produced compositions honoring **Ho Chi Minh** and **Che Guevara**. At the 1968 Hamburg premiere of his requiem for Che Guevara, titled Das Floß der Medusa (The Raft of Medusa), the placing of a red flag on the stage sparked a riot and the arrest of several people, including the librettist. **Henze** spent a year teaching in Cuba, though he later became disillusioned with **Castro**.

- He began as a serialist (though one of his first breakthroughs was the lavish, post-Straussian opera Die Bassariden). Later, he also wrote any number of more spare works using classical guitar. Nonetheless, **Henze** seemed to have no problem reconnecting with a work he'd written more than a half century before: the 1961 opera Elegy for Young Lovers, a work that's challenging on all levels and one he referred to, affectionately, as "my odd old Elegy." Though frequently heard in Europe, Elegy for Young Lovers had a rare US outing in March of 2012 in an artistically successful co-production by Opera Company of Philadelphia and the Curtis Institute of Music. This suggested an escalation of interest in his operas, given his Phaedra had been produced there a year before.

XV. Russian Style Opera:

- The rise of cultivated Russian music had much to do with the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century (1800's).
 - The French Revolution of 1789 was a highly exportable model in an increasingly enlightened, middle-class Europe.
 - In 1848 insurrections broke out across Europe, all of them eventually quelled by the ruling powers.
 - Art replaced outlawed political activism as a mode of nationalistic self-expression.
 - An example is the rise of musical nationalism, which incorporated actual folk or folk-like music into the concerts and operas.
- Russian musical nationalism was a reaction less to the events of 1848 than to Russia's entry into the European sphere.
 - The development of concert music in Russia was had been dependent on the tastes of the aristocracy that lived in St. Petersburg.
 - Until the 19th century (1800's), cultivated music in St. Petersburg consisted of Italian opera, light Viennese and Italian instrumental music and aristocratic amateur concerts.
 - Russia "emerged" and became part of the greater European community as a result of Napoleon's defeat in 1812 and the Decembrist Revolt of 1825.
 - The spirit of individual freedom and nationalism that powered the Decembrist Revolt was felt throughout the intellectual and artistic classes.
 - In and around 1825, certain Russian writers, poets and musicians tried to cultivate a uniquely Russian artistic tradition. Preeminent among the Russian nationalists was the poet and author **Alexander Pushkin** (1799-1837).
 - 1) **Pushkin** was **Lord Byron** inspired – an individualistic/nationalistic rabble-rouser.
 - 2) **Pushkin** elevated the literary perception of Russian language through the model of his own works.
 - 3) Among **Pushkin's** works turned into operas:
 - Rulsan and Lyudmila (**Glinka**)
 - Boris Godunov (**Mussorgsky**)
 - Eugene Onegin (**Tchaikovsky**)
 - Queen of Spades (**Tchaikovsky**)
- **Mikhail Glinka** (1804-1857) – Started the history of Russian musical nationalism and opera.

- Ruslan and Lyudmila (1842) is considered **Glinka's** masterpiece. It is filled with the sort of folk-inspired melodies, orientalisms, rhythmic irregularities and orchestral effects that have come to be associated with Russian music. The opera was influenced by Glinka's viewing of Weber's Der Freischutz. It's really a fairy-tale based on a play by Pushkin. The music is exotic and the plot includes magic, magic spells, an evil dwarf who gets his power from his beard that is about 4 times longer than he is tall, etc. The ending is a classical happily ever after with the handsome prince marrying the beautiful princess and inheriting the kingdom. It's really quite a fun opera!
- After his death, **Glinka** was canonized and deified as the father of Russian music.
- One of Glinka's biggest innovations was the use of Russian (or Slavic style meter). Most folk music in Western European languages (Romance and German) as well as in opera, the meter follows a consistent pattern throughout (either the movement or the aria) based on a meter of either duple or triple meter. This meter stays consistent. In Russian (Bulgarian, Hungarian and all Slavic languages) the meter can be longer and varies substantially within a movement or aria. These differing groupings of beats in a meter provide an exotic sound to the Western ear. Glinka championed the use of traditional Russian meter in Russian opera.
- **Balakirev** and "**The Five**" – following **Glinka's** death, **Mili Balakirev** (1837-1910) – composer and teacher – quickly became the "czar" of Russian music. He gathered around him four young amateur composers who came to be known (along with **Baladirev**) as "The Five.":
 - 1) Aleksandr Borodin (1833-1887)
 - 2) **Cesar Cui** (1835-1918)
 - 3) Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881)
 - 4) Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)
- **The Five** were largely self-taught and created a characteristically "Russian" music:
 - Music utilizes Russian folk melodies or folk-like melodies as the essential thematic material.
 - Music is essentially thematic, with minimal development in the German sense.
 - Expressively powerful, lyric music that is often (to Western ears) emotionally unrefined.
- **Modest Mussorgsky** (1839-1881) was the first of the five to mature compositionally.
 - Known for only a handful of works, including his masterwork, Boris Godunov.
 - Based on a dramatic chronicle of **Pushkin**, the libretto was written by **Mussorgsky** himself.
 - No composer ever portrayed the peasant class as sympathetically as this. Critical to this sympathy is the extraordinary reproduction of Russian speech patterns in the music.
 - Boris Godunov is the 19th century Russian opera what Otello, Tristan und Isolde and Carmen are to 19th century Italian, German and French opera – the pinnacle.
- **Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov** (1844-1908) was also a member of The Five. He frequently used fairy tale and folk subjects for his music, for example, Scheherazade (1888). While he is best known in the West for his orchestral works, his operas are more complex, offering a wider variety of orchestral effects than in his instrumental. Excerpts and suites from them have proved as popular in the West as his purely orchestral works. The best-known of these excerpts is probably "The Flight of the Bumblebee" from The Tale of Tsar Saltan.
 - His 15 Operas fall into three categories:

- 1) **Historical drama:** The Maid of Pskov, and its prologue The Noblewoman Vera Sheloga, Mozart and Salieri, The Tsar's Bride, Pan Voyevoda and Servilya.
 - 2) **Folk operas:** May Night and Christmas Eve.
 - 3) **Fairy tales and legends:** The Snow Maiden, Mlada, Sadko, Kashchey the Deathless, The Tale of Tsar Saltan, The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya and The Golden Cockerel.
- American music critic and journalist **Harold C. Schonberg** wrote that Russian operas "open up a delightful new world, the world of supernaturalism and the exotic, the world of Slavic pantheism and vanished races. Genuine poetry suffuses them, and they are scored with brilliance and resource." According to some critics **Rimsky-Korsakov's** music in these works lacks dramatic power, a seemingly fatal flaw in an operatic composer. This may have been conscious, as he repeatedly stated in his writing that he felt operas were first and foremost musical works rather than dramatic ones. Ironically, his operas succeed dramatically, in most cases, by being deliberately non-theatrical.
 - The Golden Cockerel (1909) is an opera in three acts, with short prologue and even shorter epilogue. Its libretto, by **Vladimir Belsky**, derives from **Alexander Pushkin's** 1834 poem The Tale of the Golden Cockerel, which, in turn, is based on two chapters of Tales of the Alhambra by **Washington Irving**. The opera was completed in 1907 and premiered in 1909. Outside Russia it has often been performed in French as Le coq d'or. While The Golden Cockerel seems to have been set in a mythical kingdom, it was really the Russia of 1907. The opera's story surely struck uncomfortably close to home. It deals with a blatantly dimwitted tsar who is faced with the onset of war and follows the seemingly absurd advice of his advisors. The result is a catastrophe which destroys both the kingdom and the tsar himself. Not surprisingly, the government took a dim view. Though completed in 1907, the opera was initially banned and the composer never saw it performed. It was finally staged in 1909, one year after **Rimsky-Korsakov's** death.
 - **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky** (1840-1893) (anglicized as **Peter**) was a Russian composer and the first whose music made a lasting impression internationally. He attended the inaugural concert of Carnegie Hall in New York City in 1891.
 - His formal Western-oriented education set him apart from nationalist movement composers embodied by The Five, with whom his professional relationship was mixed. **Tchaikovsky's** training set him on a path to reconcile his western education with native musical practices. From this reconciliation, he forged a personal but unmistakably Russian style—a task that did not prove easy.
 - The principles that governed melody, harmony and other fundamentals of Russian music ran counter to Western European music. This seemed to reduce the potential for using Russian music in large-scale Western composition and caused personal antipathies that dented **Tchaikovsky's** self-confidence. Russian culture exhibited a split personality, with its native and adopted elements having drifted apart increasingly since the time of **Peter the Great**. This resulted in uncertainty among the intelligentsia of the country's national identity. In 1856 (while **Tchaikovsky** was still at primary school), **Anton Rubinstein**

formed the RMS, where critic **Vladimir Stasov** and an 18-year-old **Mili Balakirev**, met and agreed upon a nationalist agenda for Russian music.

- **Stasov** and **Balakirev's** efforts fueled a debate, begun by Russian intelligentsia in the 1830s, over whether artists negated their Russianness when they borrowed from European culture. **Rubinstein's** criticism of amateur (lacking professional musical training) efforts in musical composition and his pro-Western outlook fanned the flames further. His founding of a professional institute (the Russian Musical Society, RMS and its school the Saint Petersburg Conservatory), where predominantly foreign professors taught alien musical practices, heated the controversy to boiling point. **Balakirev** attacked **Rubinstein** for his musical conservatism and his belief in professional music training.
- **Tchaikovsky** and his fellow conservatory students were caught in the middle, well-aware of the argument but directed by **Rubinstein** to remain silent and focus on their own artistry. Nevertheless, **Tchaikovsky** became a target for The Five's scrutiny and was criticized for not following their precepts.
- In 1867, **Rubinstein** resigned as conductor of the RMS orchestra and was replaced by **Balakirev**. **Balakirev**, whose influence over the other composers in The Five had meanwhile waned, may have sensed the potential for a new disciple in **Tchaikovsky**. In 1869, they worked together on what became **Tchaikovsky's** first recognized masterpiece, the fantasy-overture Romeo and Juliet, a work which The Five wholeheartedly embraced. While ambivalent about much of The Five's music, Tchaikovsky remained on friendly terms with most of its members.
- The first Tchaikovsky opera to survive intact, The Oprichnik, premiered in 1874.
- **Eugene Onegin** (1879) is an opera in 3 acts. The libretto, organized by the composer and **Konstantin Shilovsky**, very closely follows certain passages in **Alexander Pushkin's** novel in verse, retaining much of his poetry. Eugene Onegin is an example of lyric opera (based on poetry), to which **Tchaikovsky** added music of a dramatic nature.
- The story concerns a selfish nobleman who lives to regret his blasé rejection of a young woman's love and his careless incitement of a fatal duel with his best friend.
 - 1) Eugene Onegin is young, intelligent, handsome, wealthy, well educated, and thoroughly bored by his hopelessly meaningless life.
 - 2) Tatyana is a naïve girl, bookish and romantic, who becomes a refined lady of exquisite grace and sadness.
 - 3) Lensky, Onegin's friend, is a young hothead and would-be Romantic poet.
 - 4) Olga, Tatyana's sister and Lensky's betrothed, is a featherbrained flirt.
 - 5) Prince Gremin is a retired old army general who weds Tatyana.
- It takes place in rural and urban northern Russia, in the 1820s. Lensky brings his rakish friend Onegin over to dine with the girls one night and Olga's quiet sister Tatyana falls head over heels in love with the debonair scoundrel. But Onegin, who has already broken many a young lady's heart, rejects her love and Tatyana is crushed.
- Sometime later, Lensky again asks Onegin to join him for a party at a country estate. Onegin takes out his frustration on Lensky by flirting with Olga. Lensky grows increasingly jealous,

until finally he challenges Onegin to a duel and early the next morning Onegin shoots Lensky—and kills him.

- Onegin leaves Russia to travel abroad and Tatyana moves to the city, where she eventually weds Prince Gremin, who loves her. When Onegin returns, a few years later, he meets Tatyana again. This time it is Onegin who falls in love with Tatyana and she who rejects him—not because she no longer loves him, but because she honors her marriage vow.

XVI. Verismo Opera (Realism):

- In opera, verismo (meaning "realism", from Italian *vero*, meaning "true") was a post-Romantic operatic tradition associated with Italian composers such as **Pietro Mascagni** (1863-1945), **Ruggero Leoncavallo** (1857-1919), **Umberto Giordano** (1867-1948) and **Giacomo Puccini**. They sought to bring the naturalism of influential late 19th-century writers such as **Émile Zola** and **Henrik Ibsen** into opera. It grew out of the 19th century (1800's) philosophical movements of positivism and naturalism.
 - Positivism proposes that the only reality is observable fact.
 - Naturalism is to understand, logically and scientifically, the essence of human society. It is an exhibition of people in their natural environment.
- The style began in 1890 with the first performance of **Mascagni's Cavalleria rusticana** (1890), peaked in the early 1900s, and lingered into the 1920s. The style is distinguished by realistic – sometimes sordid or violent – depictions of everyday life, especially the life of the contemporary lower classes. It rejects the historical or mythical subjects associated with Romanticism. The term may also be used more broadly to refer to the entire output of these composers and others of the *giovane scuola* ("young school") who were active in Italy during that period. There is disagreement among musicologists as to which operas are "verismo" operas, and which are not. However, non-Italian operas are generally excluded. **Giordano's Andrea Chenier**, **Mascagni's Cavalleria rusticana**, **Leoncavallo's Pagliacci**, and **Puccini's Tosca** and **Il tabarro** are operas to which the term verismo is applied with little or no dispute. The term is sometimes also applied to **Puccini's Madama Butterfly** and **La fanciulla del West**.
- **Pietro Mascagni's Cavalleria Rusticana** (Rustic Chivalry) (1889). An old culture, conservative Sicily in the early 1800's. A guy falls in love with a woman who marries another and the first guy impregnates another woman. The first woman lours him back and they commit adultery. The man and town ostracize the second woman for committing sin. Finally, the husband of the married woman kills the first guy in a duel. This was Mascagni's only successful opera and it established the verismo style. The music was outstanding with many great arias and the entire production was highly dramatic.
- **Ruggero Leoncavallo's Pagliacci** (The Clowns) (1892). This is often paired with *Cavalleria Rusticana* as "Cav and Pag" given they are both short (about 60 minutes each) and both deal with adultery and revenge. Features recitative. I loved this opera because its plot involves a group of traveling Italian entertainers (*commedia dell'arte*) from which opera stemmed. Further, there is a play within a play, similar to Shakespeare, however, as the internal play is developing the leading tenor loses his control and kills his adulterous wife and his rival. There are some very sad depictions of human nature – when the wife taunts and insults the secondary

clown. The lead tenor plays a clown in the internal play, intensifying the drama when he steps out of character. Music is wonderful and very dramatic.

- **Umberto Giordano's Andrea Chenier** (1896) Andrea Chenier and Fedoro are the only operas for which Giordano is known. Many very good arias and includes some spoken sections. The story takes place during the French Revolution and involves a noble and rich young woman who falls in love with a poet. The poet is framed by the Robespierre government for not being revolutionary and is condemned to the guillotine. The woman accompanies him to her death. The poets believe about the nature of love is quite romantic and is what attracts the noble woman to him. Many very good aria but I thought the ending was a little too unbelievable. I liked an opera with a historical background like the French Revolution and thought it brought out many of the political issues involved in the Revolution.
- **Umberto Giordano's Fedoro** (1898). This was to a Russian monarchy setting with very wealthy characters. I liked the story a lot (but not as much as Andrea Chenier – the second act is much better than the first), the music was good and the theme was quite sympathetic. The heroine, who causes the death of her lovers mother and brother, due to confused responsibilities, commits suicide when her lover learns of her guilt.
- **Giacomo Puccini's Il Tabarro (The Cloak)** (1918). Part of a trilogy called Il Trittico (the Triptych) but Il Tabarro is frequently performed alone. This opera presented some very depressing views on life overall – only work and no rewards or pleasure. Also a negative view on marriage and long-term love relationships. The dialog is all sung, no recitatives. The plot was similar, the husband and wife grow apart. The wife has an affair and the husband murders his rival. At the end, the husband hides the dead corpse of his rival beneath his coat (cloak) as his wife approaches him. He reveals the corpse to the horror of his wife.
- **Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)**
 - Was primary a man of theater. He composed 12 operas, three of which remain among the most popular of the repertoire: Tosca, La Boheme and Madame Butterfly.
 - He was not an innovator but was a superb and sympathetic melodist. His other non-compositional skills directly heighten the dramatic materials: stage action, impulsive feeling and often exaggerated expression.
 - Many important critics, composers and music historians of today have dismissed **Puccini** as an artless hack and have backed up their criticism with sound arguments regarding **Puccini's** compositional technique, content and the nature of his libretti. However, opera in Italy has always been a popular entertainment occasionally boarding on kitsch.
 - **Tosca** is an opera in three acts to an Italian libretto by **Luigi Illica** and **Giuseppe Giacosa**. It premiered at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome in 1900. The work, based on **Victorien Sardou's** 1887 French-language dramatic play, La Tosca, is a melodramatic piece set in Rome in June 1800, with the Kingdom of Naples's control of Rome threatened by Napoleon's invasion of Italy. It contains depictions of torture, murder and suicide, as well as some of **Puccini's** best-known lyrical arias.
 - **Puccini** saw **Sardou's** play when it was touring Italy in 1889 and, after some vacillation, obtained the rights to turn the work into an opera in 1895. Turning the wordy French play into a succinct Italian opera took four years, during which the composer repeatedly argued

with his librettists and publisher. Tosca premiered at a time of unrest in Rome, and its first performance was delayed for a day for fear of disturbances. Despite indifferent reviews from the critics, the opera was an immediate success with the public.

- Musically, Tosca is structured as a through-composed work, with arias, recitative, choruses and other elements musically woven into a seamless whole. **Puccini** used **Wagnerian** leitmotifs to identify characters, objects and ideas. While critics have frequently dismissed the opera as a facile melodrama with confusions of plot—musicologist **Joseph Kerman** famously called it a "shabby little shocker"—the power of its score and the inventiveness of its orchestration have been widely acknowledged. The dramatic force of Tosca and its characters continues to fascinate both performers and audiences, and the work remains one of the most frequently performed operas.
- Tosca tells the story of the love between the famous opera singer Floria Tosca and the painter and political activist Mario Cavaradossi. Cavaradossi sends the political escapee and former Roman Consul-General, Cesare Angelotti, to hide down the well in his garden. The evil Baron Scarpia is determined to have Tosca for himself and invites her to supper in order to discover the whereabouts of Angelotti. He orders the torture of Cavaradossi in her earshot to also learn of the whereabouts of Angelotti. Unable to bear his screams of pain, Tosca willingly gives up the information on Angelotti (who commits suicide to avoid capture) – but not before she has persuaded Scarpia to allow her and her lover to escape from Rome. He insists that to satisfy the authorities, Cavaradossi must undergo a mock execution and arranges this with one of his henchmen, Spoletta. He then provides Tosca with a note of safe-conduct for her and her lover. As Scarpia attempts to ravish Tosca, she stabs him. Before his body is discovered, she rushes to the prison in the Castel Sant'Angelo to tell Cavaradossi that he has to face the firing squad, that the muskets will contain blanks, and he will have to act his death. But Scarpia has tricked Tosca - the bullets are real! As Cavaradossi lies dead and Scarpia's henchmen approach, Tosca is left with no alternative and takes her own life.

XVII. Turning Point from late-Romantic to 20th Century Modernist Music:

- **Achille-Claude Debussy** (1862-1918) was a French composer in the style of Impressionist music (a term he dismissed). He more accurately is referred to as a Symbolist composer (an artistic style originated in France that is not unlike **Wagner's** Leitmotifs). **Debussy** is considered the most original musical mind of the turn of the century. By turning from the largely Germanic musical syntax of **Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms** to include non-European harmonies—notably Russian and Javanese—**Debussy** sought a modern music that would convey emotions and appeal to aesthetic sensibilities beyond conventional cultural constructs. **Debussy's** compositions questioned the very essence of western forms and thematic organization. Disregarding traditional ideas of chord structure and tonality, **Debussy** sought above all to evoke light, color, nuance, and atmosphere in his works.
- **Debussy** was not only one of the most influential French composers but also one of the most important figures in music at the beginning of the twentieth century. His music represented the transition from late-Romantic music to the twentieth century Modernist

music. In this, he was a profound influence on composers as diverse as **Bartok**, **Webern**, **Arnold Schoenberg**, **Edgard Varese** (1883-1965), **Igor Stravinsky**, **Olivier Messiaen**, **Pierre Boulez**, **Henri Dutilleux** (1916-2013) and the minimalist music of Americans: **Steve Reich** (1936-?) and **Philip Glass**. He also held sway on Jazz musicians, most notably **Duke Ellington** and **Bill Evans**.

- While he aimed to design a new style that would not emulate those of the acclaimed composers, his music does, to a degree, reflect **Wagner**, whose operas he heard on visits to Bayreuth in 1889. **Wagner's** techniques had a lasting impact on **Debussy's** subsequent compositions. Nevertheless, the heavy emotionalism exhibited by late-Romantic composers and **Wagner's** highly elaborate operas were surpassed in **Debussy's** symbolist opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902), his sole completed opera. Based on the play by **Maurice Maeterlinck** (1862-1949) (won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1911), it caught the attention of the younger French composers, including **Maurice Ravel**. Its understatement and deceptively simple declamation also brought an entirely new tone to opera — but an unrepeatable one. These works brought a fluidity of rhythm and color quite new to Western music.
- **Debussy** was viewed as a musical heretic. While at the Conservatory he shocked his teachers with unresolved seventh chords, parallel fifths, and counterpoint in parallel motion, to which he responded, "I can only make my own music." And his own music he did, not being subservient to restrictions of Classicism and Wagnerian excesses. Subject matter to him was secondary in importance, whereas light, color, nuance, and atmosphere were superior. To that end he assigned specific effects to individual chords, as a means of projecting color rather than for their relationship to chords that preceded or followed them.
- **Debussy**, along with other composers such as **Igor Stravinsky**, sought to explore new and innovative ways to expand harmonic language and in so doing move away from the Germanic influence of the previous two centuries. It was their view that Western harmony had exhausted its potentialities as a potent emotive syntax by the end of the nineteenth century (1800's). Like **Stravinsky**, he looked for inspiration in non-European harmonies. Having heard the sounds of Javanese gamelan music in Paris in 1889, **Debussy** became enamored with the exotic harmonic, rhythmic, melodic and orchestrational characteristics of this decidedly non-Western music and began incorporating these elements into his compositions.
- *Pelleas et Melisande* (1902) – is an opera in five acts. The libretto was adapted from **Maurice Maeterlinck's** Symbolist play of the same name. It premiered at the Opera-Comique in Paris, 1902 and is considered a landmark in 20th century music. This strange, haunting opera made **Debussy** the leader of the Symbolist school. It was a difficult opera, with arias replaced by song-speech, with the familiar diatonic scale often replaced by the whole-note scale, with prickly passages in parallel sevenths and with no obvious story. It is essentially a connoisseur's opera.
- I viewed a streamed version of *Pelleas et Melisande* and, although the music is a bit different, I did NOT find it to be a connoisseur's opera. The ancient human setting, before civilization in Europe was interesting. The story was also interesting and cynical about

people. It includes age discrimination and deals with the caprice of love along with the violence that uncontrolled emotions can cause. The older brother funds and helps the beautiful young girl who, in turn, agrees to marry him. This older brother views her as a replacement for his dead previous wife. However, the young girl then meets the younger (half) brother. She follows her instincts in pursuit of a man more likely to be able to provide her with children and a family and falls in love with him. She has a child by the younger brother and dies in child-birth. The older brother is enraged with jealousy and kills his younger half-brother. The older brother is torn and destroyed by primitive emotions that he cannot control.

- **Richard Strauss** (1864-1949) although categorized as German style, he is often considered influential on shifting the direction of opera from Romanticism to Modernism. His long career spanned modernism and his music passed through several stylistic periods: Romanticism, fin-de-siecle Decadence, Expressionism and Neoclassicism.
 - **Straus's Salome** is often called "expressionist" (a term primarily associated with the visual arts in Germany around this period – more below), frequently lingering on extreme perceptions and mental states and in which female characters seem especially prone to mental disorder (Salome and Elektra, as examples). It differs from realism which demonstrates real life situations as opposed to a raw demonstration of emotions in an abstract manner, detached from real situations.

XVIII. Modern:

- At the beginning of the 20th century, when modernism began to undermine the basic grammar of music, some of the principles that underpinned the workings of opera inevitably came under attack. Some composers continued to write operas in which the symbiotic relationship between the music, the words and the drama they conveyed was much the same as it had been for the previous 300 years. Others took the opportunity to reconsider basic assumptions about dramatic structure, and the role of music within it.
- In the years after the Second World War a whole generation of young avant garde composers viewed opera with suspicion. It was an outmoded art form, they decided, too heavily indebted to the past. Composers who still found it had something to offer (**Benjamin Britten** and **Hans Werner Henze** (1926-2012), for example) were generally regarded with disdain. Gradually, however, attitudes softened until almost all of the former hard-liners became more or less reconciled with the form, even if on their own terms.
- With the collapse of tonality, music had lost much of its narrative power, they reasoned, and so storytelling need no longer be a prerequisite of opera. The music would still contain, support and reinforce the onstage drama, but that drama didn't need to be linear: scenes could proceed simultaneously (as in **Bernd Alois Zimmermann's Die Soldaten**, 1965), present different versions of the same story (**Harrison Birtwistle's The Mask of Orpheus**), tell no story at all (**Philip Glass's Einstein on the Beach**) or dispense with a text altogether (**Wolfgang Rihm's Séraphin**, 1995).
- Other composers reimagined the form very differently. For them, the imperatives were less aesthetic than economic. In the 1960s and 70s, opera became a very expensive art form and

"difficult" new opera, which inevitably attracted smaller audiences, was more expensive still. Opportunities to write full-length operas, complete with a chorus and full orchestra, were few and so composers looked for cheaper alternatives, which were conveniently labeled as *music theatre*. With roots in works by composers as diverse as **Monteverdi** (*Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*); **Stravinsky** (*The Soldier's Tale*); and **Kurt Weill** (*Happy End*), these stripped-down pieces often had just a single protagonist, used a chamber ensemble rather than a full orchestra and were designed to be presented in concert halls, with a minimum of set and props.

- Since then, boundaries have blurred even more, and with the use of new technologies, including the incorporation of film or real-time video and digital electronics into the work, defining what is opera and what music theatre is sometimes very hard.
- "**Expressionism**" was probably first applied to music in 1918, especially to **Schoenberg**. Like the painter **Wassily Kandinsky** (1866–1944), **Schoenberg** avoided "traditional forms of beauty" to convey powerful emotional feelings in his music. **Theodor Adorno** (1903-1969, a musicologist) sees the expressionist movement, as seeking:
 - To "eliminate all of traditional music's conventional elements, everything formulaically rigid." This he sees as analogous to the literary ideal of the "scream."
 - "The truthfulness of subjective feeling without illusions, disguises or euphemisms."
 - Concern with the unconscious and states that "the depiction of fear lies at the centre."
 - Dissonance predominating, so that the "harmonious, affirmative element of art is banished."
- Following **Straus'** *Salome*, the three central figures of musical expressionism are **Arnold Schoenberg** (1874–1951) and his pupils, **Anton Webern** (1883–1945) and **Alban Berg** (1885–1935), the so-called Second Viennese School. This School used free atonality to express emotions and even the thought processes of the characters on the stage. The expression of madness and alienation was amplified with atonal music.
- Other composers that have been associated with expressionism are:
 - **Ernst Krenek** (1900–1991) (the *Second Symphony*, 1922);
 - **Paul Hindemith** (1895–1963) (*Die junge Magd*, 1922);
 - **Igor Stravinsky** (1882–1971) (*Three Japanese Lyrics*, 1913);
 - **Alexander Scriabin** (1872–1915) (late piano sonatas);
 - **Béla Bartók** (1881–1945) in early works, written in the second decade of the 20th-century, such as *Bluebeard's Castle* (1911), *The Wooden Prince* (1917), and *The Miraculous Mandarin* (1919).
 - American composers with a sympathetic "urge for such intensification of expression," who were active in the same period as **Schoenberg's** expressionist free atonal composition (between 1908 and 1921) include: **Carl Ruggles**, **Dane Rudhyar**, and, "to a certain extent", **Charles Ives** (whose song *Walt Whitman* is a particularly clear example). Important precursors of expressionism are **Richard Wagner** (1813–1883), **Gustav Mahler** (1860–1911), and **Richard Strauss** (1864–1949). Later composers, such as **Peter Maxwell Davies** (1934-?), "have sometimes been seen as perpetuating the Expressionism and **Heinz Holliger's** (1939-?) used the essentially lyric expressionism found in **Schoenberg**, **Berg** and, especially, **Webern**."

- **Alban Berg** (1885-1935) was an Austrian composer. He was a member of the Second Viennese School with **Arnold Schoenberg** and **Anton Webern** and produced compositions that combined Mahlerian Romanticism with a personal adaptation of **Schoenberg's** twelve-tone technique. **Berg** is remembered as one of the most important composers of the 20th century and is the most widely performed opera composer among the Second Viennese School. He is considered to have brought more human values to the twelve-tone system; his works seen as more emotional than **Schoenberg's**. Critically, he is seen to have preserved the Viennese tradition in his music. His popularity has been more easily secured than many other Modernists since he plausibly combined both Romantic and Expressionist idioms.
 - It was during the period that **Berg** was working with **Schoenberg**, that **Schoenberg** developed a method of composition called “atonal.” It was a method that had arisen, as he pointed out, from historical necessity, and in particular from devilments in the realm of harmony. Throughout the nineteenth century the treatment of this aspect of music had become more and more complex, until the rich and satisfying sounds to which audiences had become accustomed, were radically changed in the late Romantic Period. The works of **Wagner, Strauss** and **Debussy** were blurring the harmonic borderlines and undermining the distinctions that had traditionally governed harmony. The idea of a tonal center – the sense of a recognizable key as the basis of any piece of music – was gradually becoming lost. The familiar concepts of dissonance and consonance, of tension and release, had less and less meaning and the whole fabric of musical logic was under threat. From about 1907 onwards, **Schoenberg**, accepting the reality of this situation, began substituting for the old structural principles a system in which the twelve semitones of the octave were treated as exact equals, with no recognized center of gravity at all. It represented a complete brake with the basic principles which had governed the development of music over the century’s. **Berg**, in attempting this new work of harmonic uncertainty and structural ambivalence of a late romantic sensibility, that he found his own individual voice.
 - Wozzeck (1925) is the first opera by this Austrian composer (his second and, only other opera, Lulu, remained unfinished at his death - after six years of work); libretto by the composer. A typical performance of the work takes slightly over an hour and a half and it is considered technically very difficult. The subject matter—the inevitability of hardship and exploitation for the poor—is brutally and uncompromisingly presented. **Berg** wrote this opera before the period when he used serialism in his works. His teacher **Schoenberg** had not yet developed the twelve tone system. The music of Wozzeck has tonal music in the tradition of **Mahler**, but also some atonal music as some melodies were based on the whole tone scale. The music sounded very modern, at the time it was written.
 - In attempting the construction of a full-length opera in the new atonal idiom, **Berg** still faced the problem of structural coherence that had given **Schoenberg** pause. **Berg's** solution was entirely original and was later to attract much controversial publicity. It was **Berg's** deep and genuine concern for the inherent meaning of his opera, rather than the technical means by which it is achieved, that makes Wozzeck of the most powerfully moving experiences in the operated repertory.

- The opera is based on a play called Woyzeck by the German playwright **Georg Büchner** (1813-1837). Woyzeck was an unusual drama because, instead of being a story about someone important such as a king or a god, it was about a poor man who is not very smart and is bullied and misused by other people. When **Berg** wrote the opera nearly a century later, it was still an unusual story for an opera. Heroes in operas were usually important people; working people often had comic parts: they were often servants. But Woyzeck is a simple man who cannot help what is happening to him. In drama this is sometimes called an "anti-hero".
- A simple soldier is chewed up and destroyed by the oppressiveness of "the system." **Berg's** masterpiece uses a raw musical language to supreme emotional and theatrical effect. Woyzeck is generally regarded as the first opera produced in the 20th century *avant garde* style and is also one of the most famous examples of *Sprechgesang* (spoken singing - expressionist vocal techniques between singing and speaking). Though sometimes used interchangeably, *Sprechgesang* is directly related to the operatic *recitative* manner of singing.
- Much of the music is atonal, with which **Berg** used to use this to express the madness of Woyzeck. Sometimes the music becomes more tonal, especially when the story is telling about love and humanity. He also bases some of the music about the soldiers in folksong.
- Though the music is atonal in the sense that it does not follow the techniques of the major/minor tonality system, the piece used other methods to control pitch, to direct the harmonic flow and to create unity and coherence in the opera:
 - 1) Continually returns to certain pitches to mark out key moments in the plot. This is not the same as a key center but, over time, the repetition of these pitches establishes continuity and structure.
 - 2) Use of leitmotifs.
 - 3) **Berg** decided against the use of the classic operatic forms such as aria or trio. Instead, each scene is given its own inner coherence by the use of forms more normally associated with abstract instrumental music. The second scenes of Act II, for instance, consists of a prelude and triple fugue and the fourth scene of Act I, is a set of passacaglia variations.
- **Igor Stravinsky** (1882-1971) The Rake's Progress (1951) is the only full-length opera Stravinsky wrote. It is unusual because it was not written in modern style music of the 1950's. The story is set in the 18th century and the style of the music is deliberately of the same period. It is divided into arias and recitative.
 - **Stravinsky's** music in this opera is in the *neoclassical style*. He uses a lot of counterpoint, which helped him to later write serial music (music in which all 12 notes in an octave are equally important).
 - The opera tells the story of a man called Tom Rakewell. The word "rake" means someone (usually a man) who behaves immorally - has relationships with lots of women.
 - The word "progress" in the title is ironic because Tom does not make forward progress - he does not become a better man. He does, however, progress backwards. He starts off in a state of blissful innocence - he does not understand his life and he does not know about

good and bad. At the end he still does not understand his life, but that is because he has gone mad.

- Tom is similar to Faust because he sells his soul to the devil. In this opera the character Nick Shadow represents the devil. Tom leaves his lover Anne Trulove and goes to find other women in London. He has several adventures, which are all arranged by Nick. In the end Tom finds himself in Bedlam (a horrible building where mad people were sent in the 18th century).
- **Paul Hindemith** (1895-1963) was a German composer, born near Frankfurt. **Hindemith's** relationship to the Nazis is a complicated one. Some condemned his music as "degenerate" (largely based on his early, sexually charged operas such as Sancta Susanna). During a speech at the Berlin Sports Palace in December 1934, Germany's Minister of Propaganda, **Joseph Goebbels**, publicly denounced **Hindemith** as an "atonal noisemaker." The controversy around his work continued throughout the thirties, with the composer falling in and out of favor with the Nazi hierarchy. He finally emigrated to Switzerland in 1938 (in part because his wife was of partially Jewish ancestry). In 1935, the Turkish government commissioned **Hindemith** to reorganize that country's musical education. This development was supported by the Nazi regime: it got him conveniently out of the way, yet at the same time propagated a German view of musical history and education. In 1940, **Hindemith** emigrated to the United States. Once in the U.S. he taught primarily at Yale University where he had such notable students as **Lukas Foss**, **Graham George**, **Norman Dello Joio**, **Mel Powell**, **Yehudi Wyner**, **Harold Shapero**, **Hans Otte**, **Ruth Schonthal**, and Oscar-winning film director **George Roy Hill**. He became an American citizen in 1946, but returned to Europe in 1953, living in Zürich. **Hindemith's** most popular work, both on record and in the concert hall, is probably the Symphonic Metamorphosis of Themes by Carl Maria von Weber, written in 1943.
 - **Hindemith** was among the most significant German composers of his time. His early works were in a late romantic idiom and he later produced expressionist works, in the style of early **Arnold Schoenberg**. Later in the 1930's, he developed a leaner, contrapuntally complex style. This style has been described as *neoclassical*, but is very different from the works by **Igor Stravinsky** (labeled with that term), owing more to the contrapuntal language of **Johann Sebastian Bach** and **Max Reger** than the Classical clarity of **Mozart**.
 - Mathis der Maler (1938) is an opera in seven scenes and also a symphony. This opera is rarely staged. **Hindemith** began writing the opera in 1933, publishing the symphonic version consisting of parts of the opera in 1934. The opera itself was not completed until 1935. The piece was inspired by the work of the Renaissance painter **Matthias Grünewald**. **Hindemith** was moved by **Grünewald's** religious works, specifically the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, the *Karlsruhe Crucifixion*, and the *Stuppach Madonna*. Mathis der Maler's (Matthias the Painter) genesis lay in **Hindemith's** interest in the Protestant Reformation. **Hindemith** himself wrote the libretto for the opera, creating a personality for **Grünewald** out of his own imagination. While the opera ostensibly takes place in the Renaissance, it is really a strongly autobiographical work: the opera's principle idea, the artist struggling with his conscience and questioning the political and social responsibilities of art and the artist, reflected **Hindemith's** own difficult personal and artistic circumstances in pre-war Nazi

Germany in the 1930s. In fact, although the symphonic version of Mathis der Maler was performed in Germany, **Hindemith's** opera was banned by the Nazis and would not receive its premiere until 1938 in Zurich. Like **Hindemith**, the character Matthias is faced with the question of art in the time of political unrest. His response and **Hindemith's** is the same: "do what you must in all conscience, despite competing demands on you."

- The libretto describes Matthias' struggle with his employer, the archbishop of Mainz. Matthias is the socially conscious artist, while the archbishop is a politician. Their story is set against the background of the Peasant's War of 1524 - 1525, in which Matthias takes part on the side of the peasants. The conflict between Matthias and the archbishop is intensified when Ursula, who loves Matthias, is forced to wed the archbishop for political reasons.
- Musically, **Hindemith's** opera represents a blending of two different styles, the so-called "new objectivity" or neo-classicism of the 1920s and historical music. **Hindemith** spent much of his compositional career seeking to reconcile these two musical streams and in Mathis der Maler comes very close to a perfect synthesis. In the opera, **Hindemith's** neo-classicism is tempered by the inclusion of folk song, Reformation era religious song and Gregorian chant. Also significant is the use of "harmonic fluctuation," the progression of consonant chords towards increasingly dissonant combinations.
- Most of **Hindemith's** music employs a unique system that is tonal but non-diatonic. Like most tonal music, it is centered on a tonic and modulates from one tonal center to another, but it uses all 12 notes freely. One of the key features of his system is that he ranks all musical intervals of the 12-tone equally tempered scale from the most consonant to the most dissonant. He classifies chords in six categories; on the basis of how dissonant they are, whether or not they contain a tritone, and whether or not they clearly suggest a root or tonal center. **Hindemith's** philosophy also encompassed melody—he strove for melodies that do not clearly outline major or minor triads.
- It is ironic that Hindemith's great opera should have been banned by the Nazis, for as Hindemith's friend, **Willy Schreker**, recounted, Mathis der Maler was originally intended as a quintessentially German opera: "the theme," wrote **Schreker**, "is big and German." Unfortunately, **Hindemith's** enemies in the *Reichsmusikkammer* prohibited the performance of his work and, as Hitler himself was said to dislike Hindemith's music, the Nazi regime eventually turned against the composer.
- I viewed a streamed version of Mathis der Maler and found it to be one of my favorites. I understand Hindemith did use tonality but used a chromatic rather than a diatonic pitch collocation (scales). After a short time, I could not hear anything unusual. I found the music to be melodic and this very approachable. The opera was very dramatic and was fun in terms of considering various potential interpretations, similar to a Shakespeare play. I found the ensembles and choruses to be Mozartian in scope. The entire production was very dramatic and depicted two different but, I suppose, interrelated issues. The first was the Peasant's War of 1424/25 in Germany in which the common people were treated no better than slaves and were brutalized by the noble class. Secondly, it depicts the conflicts during the reformation between Catholics and Protestants within one community. The

Catholic conservatives burned books and threatened damnation for non-compliers. The representatives of Catholicism were very conservative and controlling (reminded me of current day orthodox Muslims). The opera did portray the local Cardinal as being more flexible and he ultimately resigned from his position when the Catholic leadership tried to force him to enforce their hard-line approach. The central character stood by his ideals throughout which ultimately led to his death. While he at first, had his mind opened by the plight of the peasants and supported their cause, he also stood up to the peasant mood as it was cruelly injuring the nobility (as they say, a mob is made up of many very nice individuals). In sum, I enjoyed Hindemith's music a lot and would like to try more.

XIX. 20th Century Opera (Decline of New Opera Production and Rise in Repeats of the Old Opera):

- In the late 19th century (late 1800's), the sheer difficulty of writing new operas – financial, musical, aesthetic, and even moral – began to weigh on new compositions. At first the existing repertoire existed comfortably alongside newly composed operas, with the latter still attracting greater prestige. But by the end of the 19th century, new works were failing more and more regularly:
 - The peculiar difficulty of modernist atonal music for an audience to comprehend.
 - Economics - fear of the expense involved in producing opera and the unpredictability of success. (A large contingent of the ruling class was permanently forced out by the 1848 revolutions. What generally took their place in the operatic economy, at least in Europe, was subsidy from the public purse. This never occurred in the US and European budgets later came under pressure).
 - Competition from more modern forms of entertainment.
 - Another important symptom of the modern operatic condition: the habit of aggressively updating the visual side of old works.
- Sometime during the decades before the Second World War, opera's procession of new and creative productions fragmented irredeemably. The 1930s-1960s period represented this hugely transitional period - a repertoire of past works in present performance gained popularity while a large number of world premiers took place each year but they increasingly failed. After this, new operatic composition dried to a trickle. Ironically, during this transition period, opera was so high on the popular radar that Hollywood considered it completely reasonable to expect profit from opera-themed movies.
- Hardly any of the new productions managed more than a handful of performances, let alone threaten to displace the classics. **Benjamin Britten** (1913-1976) was an unusual exception to the above. In 2005/2006, the top composers by number of performances were: **Verdi, Mozart, Puccini, Wagner, Rossini** and **Donizetti**. The first living composer on the list, at 52nd, was **Philip Glass**.
- The later twentieth and twenty-first centuries became a time in which opera began to reside in a mortuary, full of spectacular performances, but a mortuary nonetheless. The 20th century was also the first in history in which opera became a widely disseminated entertainment, accessible to many more people through electronic transmission and reproduction.

XX. 20th Century Opera and Nationalism:

- **Béla Bartók** (1881–1945) was a Hungarian composer, he and **Liszt** are regarded as Hungary's greatest composers and he is considered one of the most important composers of the 20th century. Through his collection and analytical study of folk music, he was one of the founders of comparative musicology, which later became ethnomusicology. After the Nazis came to power in the early 1930s, **Bartók** refused to give concerts in Germany. His anti-fascist political views caused him a great deal of trouble with the establishment in Hungary. **Bartók** reluctantly emigrated to the U.S. in 1941 and settled in New York City. Although he became an American citizen in 1945, shortly before his death, **Bartók** never became fully at home in the USA. He found the US a difficult place to compose. Although well known in America as a pianist, ethnomusicologist and teacher, he was not well known as a composer. There was little American interest in his music during his final years.
 - His music reflects two trends that dramatically changed the sound of music in the 20th century: the breakdown of the diatonic system of harmony and the revival of nationalism as a source for musical inspiration (a trend that began with **Mikhail Glinka** and **Antonín Dvořák** in the last half of the 19th century). In his search for new forms of tonality, **Bartók** turned to Hungarian folk music, as well as to other folk music of the Carpathian Basin and even of Algeria and Turkey. In so doing he became influential in that stream of modernism which exploited indigenous music and techniques.
 - His one act opera Kekszakalla Herceg Vara - Bluebeard's Castle (1918), was a troubling and fascinating work. A suggestive and decidedly 20th-century world in a study of loneliness, of the “failure to communicate,” and of illusion vs. reality. Libretto was written by **Béla Balázs** (1884–1949), film critic and writer. The libretto was loosely based on a publication (1695) by **Charles Perrault** but is given a heavily psychological reworking—some would say psychoanalytic or psychosexual. **Perrault's Bluebeard** was sourced from two stories:
 - 1) The first deals with a spurious fifth-century Breton chieftain, who murdered his wives and, in turn, each wife later found evidence of what had happened to her predecessor.
 - 2) The second concerns the historical figure of **Gilles de Rais**, who was executed by the Inquisition in Nantes in October 1440. At his trial, **De Rais** stood accused of "heresy, sacrilege and offences against nature." During its course, however, he confessed to the sexual assault and murder of more than 140 children. Historians have questioned whether the charges were fabricated. **De Rais** was known to have been estranged from his wife but it was rumored that he killed her when she found incriminating evidence in his torture chamber. His beard was so black that in a certain light it looked blue. It was said that **De Rais's** actions appalled even the devil so that the latter marked him with the blue beard to distinguish him from all other men.
 - The legend's (and operas) essential elements: Judith (his 4th wife) and Bluebeard arrive at his castle, which is dark. Bluebeard asks Judith if she wants to stay which she decides to do. Judith insists that all the doors be opened, to allow light to enter into the forbidding interior. She insisted that her demands were based on her love for Bluebeard. Bluebeard refuses, saying that they are private places not to be explored by others. He asked Judith to love him but ask no questions. Judith persists, and eventually prevails over his resistance. The first

door opens to reveal a torture chamber, stained with blood. Repelled, but then intrigued, Judith pushes on. Behind the second door is a storehouse of weapons and, behind the third, a storehouse of riches. Bluebeard urges her on. Behind the fourth door is a secret garden of great beauty; behind the fifth, a window onto Bluebeard's vast kingdom. All is now sunlit, but blood has stained the riches, and has watered the garden, and grim clouds throw blood-red shadows over Bluebeard's kingdom. Bluebeard pleads with her to stop: the castle is as bright as it can get but Judith refuses to be stopped after coming this far. She opens the penultimate, sixth door, as a shadow passes over the castle. This is the first room that has not been somehow stained with blood; a silent silvery lake is all that lies within, "a lake of tears." Bluebeard begs Judith to simply love him and ask no more questions, the last door must be shut forever. But she persists, asking him about his former wives, and then accusing him of having murdered them. She suggested that their blood was the blood everywhere, that their tears were those that filled the lake and that their bodies lie behind the last door. At this, Bluebeard hands over the last key. Behind the door are Bluebeard's three former wives, but still alive, dressed in crowns and jewels. They emerge silently and Bluebeard, overcome with emotion, prostrates himself before them and praises each in turn, finally turning to Judith and beginning to praise her as his fourth wife. She is horrified, begs him to stop, but it is too late. He dresses her in a similar crown and jewels, which she finds exceedingly heavy. Her head drooping under the weight, she follows the other wives along a beam of moonlight through the seventh door. It closes behind her, and Bluebeard is left alone as all fades to total darkness.

- This is a fascinating opera, in spite of being based on a macabre theme. The opera is obviously nationalistic and reminds me of a play by Shakespeare. One could endlessly analyze and discuss its meanings as it is filled with nuance, symbolism and double meanings. While the opera seems to be based on a theme of "failure to communicate," on a deeper level it explores differences between male and female perceptions and mental worlds. It also is a reflection of differences between young and curious; and old and experienced (almost cynical and bored). It can also be viewed as just the workings and conflicts in one persons mind (Bluebeards). The entire opera has a mystical feel to it so that you are never sure if it's really happening of just an illusion.
- **Leoš Janáček** (1854-1928), was a Czech composer, musical theorist, folklorist, publicist and teacher. Along with **Antonín Dvořák** (1841-1904) and **Bedřich Smetana** (1824-1884), he is considered one of the most important Czech composers and was one of the most important exponents of Czech musical nationalism of the 20th century. He was inspired by Moravian and other Slavic folk music to create an original, modern musical style. He presented folk music not as a colorful exoticism but as part of his distinctive style. The heart of **Janacek's** achievement is his vocal music, and above all his operas, which have become staples of the international repertoire. His later, mature works incorporate his earlier studies of national folk music in a modern, highly original synthesis, first evident in the opera Jenůfa. The success of Jenůfa (often called the "Moravian national opera") at Prague in 1916 gave Janáček access to the world's great opera stages. **Janáček's** later works are his most celebrated. They include operas such as Káťa Kabanová and The Cunning Little Vixen, the Sinfonietta, the Glagolitic Mass, the rhapsody

Taras Bulba, two string quartets, and other chamber works. His works were considered difficult because they were in Czech and because their dramatic intensity often taxed the range and technique of singers and musicians. **Janacek's** subject matter could also seem daunting: "The Cunning Little Vixen", for instance, requires most of the cast to appear as animals, and the heroine of "The Makropoulos Case" is a 300-year-old woman. But the popularity and stature of **Janacek's** music has risen steadily, thanks to the irresistible force of the composer's musical and dramatic imagination and to his unflinching capacity to make characters live.

- Jenufa premiered in 1904. The first of **Janáček's** operas in which his distinctive voice can clearly be heard. It is a grim story of infanticide and redemption and, like the playwright's original work, it is known for its unsentimental realism. While today it is heard in the composer's original version, Jenufa's early popularity was fostered by a revision by **Karel Kovařovic** of what was considered its eccentric style and orchestration. Thus altered, it was well-received, first in Prague, and after its Vienna première, worldwide. A stepmother secretly murders her unwed stepdaughter's child so the girl will be able to marry and have a chance at happiness. Its second act consists largely of two unforgettable soliloquies, the first by the mother girding herself to her terrible deed, then the daughter, moving from fear to desolation. Yet somehow the opera ends in an uplifting spirit of acceptance, forgiveness and new strength.
- Kat Kabanova premiered at the National Theater in Brno in 1921. By this time, most of the European music world had turned its back on nationalism. It is an opera in three acts to a libretto by **Vincenc Červinka**, based on The Storm, a play by **Alexander Ostrovsky**. The opera was also largely inspired by **Janáček's** love for **Kamila Stösslová** and the work is dedicated to her. Even in the teeth of fate, the tragic heroine of "Katya Kabanova" has a vision of the beneficence of nature. That vital cycle is also at the heart of The Cunning Little Vixen, with the human and natural worlds allied in the vital process of life. Though the witty creature of the title dies, as she must, she has left behind another generation of foxes and vixens. The opera's last scene is a radiant orchestral evocation of the harmony of things. In accordance with **Janacek's** wishes, this music was played at his funeral in 1928.
- The older **Janacek** grew, the more he celebrated life, even in its most unlikely aspects. In his penultimate opera, "The Makropoulos Case", the timeless heroine renounces her immortality because without death, the natural motion and emotion of existence cease. "In me life has stopped," she cries, as **Janacek's** broad, wise and exultant music surges around her. The composer's faith in life is even more movingly depicted in his posthumously staged opera, "From the House of the Dead". Based on **Dostoevsky's** prison diaries, it consists of convicts telling of broken lives.
- **Antonín Leopold Dvořák** (1841-1904) was a Czech composer. Following the nationalist example of **Bedřich Smetana**, **Dvořák** frequently employed features of the folk music of Moravia and his native Bohemia (then parts of the Austrian Empire and now constituting the Czech Republic). **Dvořák's** own style has been described as 'the fullest recreation of a national idiom with that of the symphonic tradition, absorbing folk influences and finding effective ways of using them'.

- Born in Nelahozeves, **Dvořák** displayed his musical gifts at an early age. His first surviving work, Forget-Me-Not Polka in C (Polka pomměnka) was written possibly as early as 1855. He graduated from the organ school in Prague in 1859. In the 1860s, he played as a violist in the Bohemian Provisional Theater Orchestra and taught piano lessons. **Dvořák's** music attracted the interest of **Johannes Brahms**, who assisted his career; he was also supported by the critics **Eduard Hanslick** and **Louis Ehlert**.
- After the premiere of his cantata Stabat Mater (1880), **Dvořák** visited the United Kingdom and became popular there; his Seventh Symphony was written for London. After a brief conducting stint in Russia in 1890, **Dvořák** was appointed as a professor at the Prague Conservatory in 1891. In 1892, **Dvořák** moved to the United States and became the director of the National Conservatory of Music of America in New York City, where he also composed. However, shortfalls in payment of his salary, along with increasing recognition in Europe and an onset of homesickness made him decide to return to Bohemia. From 1895 until his death, he composed mainly operatic and chamber music. At his death, he left several unfinished works. He has been described as "arguably the most versatile...composer of his time".
- In a 1904 interview, **Dvořák** claimed that opera was 'the most suitable form for the nation'. If this nationalist sentiment was at the heart of his opera compositions, he also struggled to find a style straddling Czech traditional melody and the grand opera style of **Giacomo Meyerbeer**, which he experienced as lead viola player in the orchestra of Prague's Provisional Theatre between 1862 and 1871, and whose influence is very evident in his works such as Vanda and Dimitrij. His later interest in the music of **Richard Wagner** also affected his operas, evident in the very extensive rewrite of Dmitirij in 1894, following its failure at Vienna.^[112]
- Of all his operas, only Rusalka, Op. 114, which contains the well-known aria "Měsíčku na nebi hlubokém" ("Song to the Moon"), is played on contemporary opera stages with any frequency outside the Czech Republic. This is attributable to their uneven invention and libretti, and perhaps also their staging requirements — The Jacobin, Armida, Vanda and Dimitrij need stages large enough to portray invading armies.
- There is speculation by Dvořák scholars such as Michael Beckerman that portions of his Symphony No. 9 "From the New World", notably the second movement, were adapted from studies for a never-written opera about Hiawatha.
- Rusalka, Op. 114, is an opera ('lyric fairy tale'). The Czech libretto was written by the poet Jaroslav Kvapil (1868–1950) based on the fairy tales of **Karel Jaromír Erben** and **Božena Němcová**. Rusalka is one of the most successful Czech operas, and represents a cornerstone of the repertoire of Czech opera houses. A Rusalka is a water sprite from Slavic mythology, usually inhabiting a lake or river. Dvořák had played viola for many years in pit orchestras in Prague (Estates Theatre from 1857 until 1859 while a student, then from 1862 until 1871 at the Provisional Theatre). He thus had direct experience of a wide range of operas by **Mozart**, **Weber**, **Rossini**, **Lortzing**, **Verdi**, **Wagner** and **Smetana**. Rusalka was the ninth opera **Dvořák** composed.

- For many years unfamiliarity with **Dvořák's** operas outside Czechoslovakia helped reinforce a perception that composition of operas was a marginal activity, and that despite the beauty of its melodies and orchestral timbres Rusalka was not a central part of his output or of international lyric theatre. In recent years it has been performed more regularly by major opera companies. In the five seasons from 2008 to 2013 it was performed by opera companies worldwide far more than all of **Dvořák's** other operas combined.
- The most popular excerpt from Rusalka is the "Song to the Moon" from act 1 which is often performed in concert and recorded separately. It has also been arranged for violin and used on film sound tracks.
- The opera Rusalka symbolizes the fear that deep love will end in terrible suffering. Rusalka, is about a water goddess who wants to love a human prince. She has a witch give her human form but the transformation comes with a curse: when her human lover is untrue, her embrace becomes deadly. The goddess's lover repents for straying and begs for her love. At the end of the opera, the goddess and the lover embrace, knowing that that embrace will kill the lover.
- **Dvořák's** music is generally through-composed, and uses motifs for Rusalka, her damnation, the water sprite and the forest. His word-setting is expressive while allowing for nationally inflected passages, and shows the composer at the height of his maturity. He uses established theatrical devices – dance sections, comedy (Gamekeeper and Turnspit) and pictorial musical depiction of nature (forest and lake). It has a "wealth of melodic patterns that are dramatic in themselves and its shimmering orchestration". One writer considered the final section of the opera – the duet for the Prince and Rusalka – as "[twelve] or so of the most glorious minutes in all opera" in their "majestic, almost hymnic solemnity" while another described the opera as a "vivid, profoundly disturbing drama".

XXI. New Grand Opera Buffa (1991):

- **John Corigliano** (1938-?) is an American composer and a distinguished professor of music at Lehman College in the City University of New York. Italian-American **Corigliano** was born and grew up in New York to a musical family. Most of **Corigliano's** work has been for symphony orchestra. He employs a wide variety of styles, sometimes even within the same work, but aims to make his work accessible to a relatively large audience. He has written symphonies, as well as works for string orchestra, and wind band. Additionally, **Corigliano** has written concerti for clarinet, flute, violin, oboe, and piano; film scores; various chamber and solo instrument works, and the opera, The Ghosts of Versailles, which enjoyed success at its premiere. His Clarinet Concerto is the first by an American composer to have entered the standard repertoire since that of **Aaron Copland**. **Corigliano**, himself, has summed up his artistic aims thus: "It has been fashionable of late for the artist to be misunderstood. I think it is the job of the composer to reach out to his audience with every means at his disposal... Communication of his most important ideas should be the primary goal." Throughout the development of his career, **Corigliano's** "primary goal" of communication with the audience has remained ever in his sight. In an atmosphere in which audience responses to new music so often range from

indifferent to adversarial; **Corigliano** takes a place among the few "serious" contemporary composers whose appeal has ranged beyond the new-music crowd to reach listeners steeped in more traditional, time-tested fare. He has continued to evolve a musical language in which architecture, color and overt drama are paramount. While his works are steeped in a Romantic aesthetic that makes liberal, unembarrassed use of tonality, **Corigliano's** inclusive sensibility has led him to also employ extended instrumental techniques, microtones, and elements of minimalism and serialism (sometimes in a parodistic context); more recently he has incorporated live electronics into his music. The orchestra is clearly **Corigliano's** native medium and the ensemble for which he has written his most compelling works. He has demonstrated an especial interest in the concerto. He both approaches the relationship between soloist and orchestra from a fresh perspective and makes notably creative use of the instrumental resources at hand. His Symphony No. 1 (1990), written in response to the AIDS crisis, is remarkable for its effective alchemy of intensely personal associations and musical potency; in 1991, it was awarded the Grawemeyer Award, the most lucrative prize in the world of contemporary classical music. The composer's affinity for the voice is at once evident in numerous vocal and choral works like the Dylan Thomas Trilogy (1959-76, 1999 revision) and the song cycle Tambourine Man: Seven Poems of Bob Dylan (2000). His most ambitious work to date, the opera The Ghosts of Versailles (1991), has earned worldwide plaudits and, in a rare instance among contemporary operas, has enjoyed repeated productions since its premiere.

- In 1979, James Levine suggested to **Corigliano** that he write an opera for the Met's centenary season, 1983–84 (to be commissioned by the Met); the three-hour work did not get written and produced until its 1991 premiere and was revived in 1994, both to sold out Met audiences. It was the first new opera commissioned by the Met in a quarter century or since **Samuel Barber's** Antony and Cleopatra and **Marvin David Levy's** Mourning Becomes Electra proved failures. The nationwide telecast of the Met's premiere production was released on videocassette and laser-disk by Deutsche Gramophone.
- **Corigliano** considers this work a "grand opera buffa" because it incorporates elements of the *Grand Opera* style (large chorus numbers, special effects) and the silliness of the *opera buffa* style. Commentators have noted how the opera satirizes and parodies accepted operatic conventions. Long in gestation and long in duration, The Ghosts of Versailles has arrived at the Metropolitan Opera as one of the most sumptuous productions seen on any operatic stage.
- At its premiere the opera was a popular success but drew mixed reviews, some of which faulted the score for its breezy juxtaposition of styles: everything from 12-tone-ish modernism to pastiches of **Mozart** buffa and **Rossini** patter. In today's less dogmatic times, composers and audiences embrace eclectic languages. **Corigliano's** intelligent and entertaining score has a seamless flow of arias and ensembles.
- After presentations by the Lyric Opera of Chicago, the University of Houston and one in Hannover, Germany, no other company was willing to shoulder the expense. A planned revival at the Met, scheduled for the 2009-10 season, was dropped for financial reasons. A scaled down version was performed in June 2009 by the Opera Theater of St. Louis. That production traveled to Ireland's Wexford Festival in October 2010 and the Vancouver Opera

in November 2011. The LA Opera plans a performance in 2015. In April 1999, Ghosts received its European premiere for the opening of the new opera house in Hannover, Germany.

- “Ghosts” is a pastiche, an original story (the libretto is by **William M. Hoffman** after **Beaumarchais’s** 1792 La Mère Coupable) that references historical events as well as operatic traditions and clichés. This was **Beaumarchais’s** third of his Figaro trilogy (the first put to music by **Rosinni** and the second by **Mozart**). The opera is set in an afterlife existence of the Versailles court of **Louis XIV**. In order to cheer up the ghost of **Marie Antoinette**, who is upset about having been beheaded, the ghost of the playwright **Beaumarchais** stages an opera using the characters and situations from his first two Figaro plays. In this new opera-within-an-opera, Count Almaviva is in Paris as ambassador from Spain. Together with his trusty manservant Figaro, he tries to rescue **Marie Antoinette** from the French Revolution. When things go awry, **Beaumarchais** himself enters the opera and – with the invaluable help of Figaro and his wife Susanna – attempts to rescue the queen. The ghosts of the title are Marie Antoinette and her court: The depressed queen bitterly relives her execution, while the playwright **Beaumarchais**, who is in love with her, tries to cheer her up with his new opera-within-an-opera, “A Figaro for Antonia,” **Beaumarchais** vows to use his art to change history and arrange for Antonia, as he calls the queen, to escape her fate. It’s a lively premise, but the shortened version of the opera, which the composer trimmed by about 30 minutes and now runs just less than three hours including intermission, feels overstuffed and chaotic.
- There are 10 principal characters, eight subordinate characters, a chorus and eight dancers. The first act alone presents five musically unrelated set pieces: the queen’s lament, a frantic *opera buffa* chase scene for Figaro that references the two earlier Figaro operas, a mock Iago-like declaration of evil from the villain, a lyrical quartet for two pairs of lovers, and a Turkish scene that spoofs the 18th-century fascination with the East. Other opera in-jokes abound, such as a jibe at supposedly stupid singers. While each scene has entertainment value (**Corigliano** writes really good tunes), most of them go on too long and the characters are cardboard. The elegant gray and white costumes for the ghosts, who watched and sometimes commented on the show, contrasted with the colorful garb of the characters of the opera-within-the-opera.

XXII. The 20th Century End of Opera:

The following two operas premiered within a few months of one another in 1925 to 1926, both conducted by legendary conductors. One represents the end of traditional Italian opera and the other is sometimes regarded as the perfect modernist opera, combining atonal techniques with a disturbing psychological analysis of its characters. Was this the one-two punch that was the beginning of the decline of opera due to audience alienation from the more difficult and non-melodic modern forms?

- **Giacomo Puccini** (1858–1924), Turandot premiered in 1926, in Milan, conducted by **Arturo Toscanini**. Libretto: **Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni**, after a play by **Carlo Gozzi**, Re

Turandot (1762) (or actually after **Friedrich Schiller's** German adaptation of **Gozzi, Turandot, Prinzessin von China**, from 1802).

- Turandot is based on an ancient fable, originating in Persia and set in China. It tells of a princess so desirable that men came by the hundreds, from all over the world and queued up to vie for her love. There was a catch, of course. To have a shot with Turandot, a suitor first had to answer three vexing riddles — and anyone who failed, wound up with his head on a stake, as a warning to all other suitors. The opera tells about the one fellow who did solve the riddles. But winning the heart of Turandot turns out to take more than just three clever answers. Turandot is subconsciously protecting her virginity but ultimately changes for a cold and frightened child to a warm and loving woman. In telling the colorful story, **Puccini** created an opera that's simultaneously extravagant, exotic, and musically powerful and dramatically "over the top." As a bonus, the man who eventually wins Turandot's heart gets more than just the lovely princess. He also gets to sing what may be the most famous number in opera, the soaring tenor aria "Nessun dorma!" — "None shall sleep!"
- Regarding the "Chinese" sound of the opera, the closest **Puccini** got to China was listening to the Chinese music box owned by his friend **Baron Fassini**, who had been to China. **Puccini** supposedly derived some of the opera's main themes from this music box. His reading on Chinese culture and ritual was extensive.
- The opera was left incomplete (ending in the middle of the third act, after the death of Liù) at the composer's death in 1924; finished by **Franco Alfano**, in consultation with **Toscanini**.
- **Alban Berg (1885–1935)**, Wozzeck Premiered in Berlin in 1925, conducted by Erich Kleiber. The play is derived from real events in Leipzig, in 1821, when **Johann Christian Woyzeck** (a barber and former soldier) had murdered his mistress, **Frau Woost**. His lawyer's defense of insanity was rejected by the court and **Woyzeck** was hanged publicly in Leipzig's market square in 1824. **Berg** saw the first performance of the play in Vienna in 1914 and immediately began sketching out plans for the opera. World War I delayed his plans. The full score was completed in 1922, the cost of which was underwritten by **Alma Mahler**, to whom the work was dedicated. The subject matter—the inevitability of hardship and exploitation for the poor—is brutally and uncompromisingly presented. The expression of madness and alienation was amplified with atonal music.

XXIII. Opera and Jazz:

- **Ernst Krenek** (1900–1991), was born in Austria of Czech origin.
 - His opera: Jonny Spielt Auf premiered in Leipzig in 1927. On New Year's Eve in 1925, **Krenek** saw an American Negro review called "Chocolate Kiddies" in Frankfurt, with music by **Duke Ellington** (who contributed two songs to an all-black revue that introduced European audiences to black American styles and performers Chocolate Kiddies starred legendary actress Josephine Baker). **Krenek** soon wrote the libretto himself for this early "jazz opera." By 1930, it had been shown in 70 different productions around Europe; making it the most often performed opera of the period. Jonny Spielt Auf made **Krenek's**

name and he lived off the royalties and repeated performances into the 1930s, when the Third Reich's opposition cut into his profits.

- Jonny Strikes Up is regarded today as a masterpiece, a prototype of period opera which brilliantly reflects the sentiments of the late 1920s. It portrays the open-mindedness toward the new developments of the Machine Age, a fascination with America and jazz, and combines surreal elements with operatic conventions. His constellation of characters is based on traditional opera schemes. Two pairs of lovers – a serious couple (Max and Anita) and a humorous couple (Jonny and Yvonne) – are thrown off balance by the rival Daniello's intrigues. **Krenek** demonstrates his skill as a perceptive observer, not only in portraying the carefree attitudes of his decade, but also the real doubts and hardships of (an artist's) life through the character of Max. At the same time, he reveals that the new attitude toward life in the 1920s is possible based on an illusion – a case of self-deception. The composition includes very catchy, popular modern rhythms, dances and harmonies, which, though described as ›jazzy‹, actually have nothing in common with real jazz.
- Due to Nazi opposition, the premiere of **Krenek's** later opera, Karl V, about the disintegration of the Austrian empire under Charles V, was canceled in 1934. The Nazis hated the black content of Jonny Spielt Auf and called **Krenek** a Bolshevik and decadent composer in 1938, at the infamous Entartete Musik exhibit in Dusseldorf (along with **Hindemith, Schoenberg, Berg**, and many others). The opera received its Prague premiere in 1938, the last opera performed there before German troops invaded. Although it evokes the devil-may-care sexual attitude of the 1920s and appealed to mass audiences by incorporating jazz and other dance sounds, the opera was a flop at its New York premiere. That was the beginning of the decline of jazz in opera, as more and more critics thought its musical style was more appropriate to operetta. The Nazis seized **Krenek's** assets, as well as the rights to his royalties, so when he emigrated to the United States, he landed in New York with almost nothing. **Krenek** taught briefly at Vassar and in Minnesota, before ending up in California.
- **George Gershwin's** (1898-1937) Porgy and Bess premiered at the Alvin Theater, New York City, in 1935. Libretto based on **DuBose Heyward's** (1885–1940), Porgy (novel from 1925, Broadway play with Dorothy Heyward in 1927). **Gershwin** sketched the opera in 1934 and prepared the orchestral score from September 1934 to September 1935. **Gershwin** had seen a performance of **Krenek's** Jonny Spielt Auf in Vienna during a European trip in 1928 when he also met **Alban Berg**. The Porgy and Bess plot features a homeless, crippled man who rescues a battered woman from an abusive relationship, only to lose her to a drug dealer. This was the first great popular opera in America.
- **Kurt Weill** (1900-1950) was born in Dessau, Germany and fled Nazi Germany in March 1933. A prominent and popular Jewish composer, **Weill** was officially denounced for his populist views and sympathies and became a target of the Nazi authorities
 - He started a theater revolution with his collaboration with **Bertold Brecht** on Die Dreigroschenoper (The Threepenny Opera), premiered in Berlin in 1928 (and included the ballad "Mack the Knife"). It was an updating of **John Gay's** The Beggar's Opera (1720). Die Dreigroschenoper cannot really be called an opera: it was staged but in a small theater, not

an opera house; no member of the original cast was a professional opera singer; the instrumentalists were not pit musicians and most belonged to dance hall bands. **Weill** said at the time that the work "presented us with the opportunity to make 'opera' the subject matter for an evening in the theater." He also said it was "the most consistent reaction to **Wagner**" and a positive step toward operatic reform. It is important to realize that this premiere took place less than three years after that of **Berg's Wozzeck**. **Marc Blitzstein** made an English translation that had great success and a huge influence through all **Weill's** Broadway musicals.

- **Weill** then premiered Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny (Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny), in 1930, in Leipzig. However, in March 1933, **Weill** fled Germany and spent some time in Paris, where he briefly collaborated on a "ballet with singing" for **George Balanchine's** troupe "Les Ballets 1933."
- He and his wife moved to New York City in 1935. He seldom (and reluctantly) spoke or wrote German again. Rather than continue to write in the same style that had characterized his European compositions, **Weill** made a study of American popular and stage music. He visited Harlem nightclubs to hear the newest musical idioms of black American jazz and blues. His American output, though held by some to be inferior, nonetheless contains individual songs and entire shows that not only became highly respected and admired, but have been seen as seminal works in the development of the American musical. **Weill** himself strove to find a new way of creating an American opera that would be both commercially and artistically successful.
- Weill's first hit in the U.S. was Lady in the Dark, a musical play about psychoanalysis by **Moss Hart**, with lyrics by **Ira Gershwin** in 1937. Street Scene premiered at the Adelphi Theater, New York in 1947. The libretto was adapted from a Pulitzer Prize-winning play (of the same title), produced in 1929, by New York-born **Elmer Rice** (1892-1967), with additional lyrics by **Langston Hughes**. The original production ran for 148 performances, leading **Weill** to remark, "Seventy-five years from now, Street Scene will be remembered as my major work."
- Weill and many critics have considered the score of Street Scene to be his masterpiece. The score contains operatic arias and ensembles, some of them, such as "Somehow I Never Could Believe" and "Let Things Be Like They Always Was," had links and references to the style of **Giacomo Puccini**. It also has jazz and blues influences, in "I Got a Marble and a Star" and "Lonely House." Some of the more Broadway-style musical numbers are "Wrapped in a Ribbon and Tied in a Bow", "Wouldn't You Like To Be On Broadway?" and "Moon-faced, Starry-eyed," an extended song-and-dance sequence. The opera was the first real American successor to Porgy and Bess.
- I viewed Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny from the Met Opera library. The opera was a satire on materialism and probably on the overall US culture. It was sung in English. 3 people who were running from the law, established a city (Mahagonny) in which they would sell everything and anything to try to make money. The city was located in Alabama but seemed to be a representation of Las Vegas. They attracted red-neck men with lots of money (a group of lumberjacks who had spent 7 bitter winters in Alaska making a lot of

money). The city founders sold lots of cheap alcohol and brought in some prostitutes to sell to the lumberjacks. Many aspects of the opera were similar to Weil's ballet – 7 deadly sins. In the end, a murderer is acquitted, as a result of bribing the judge, while another fellow (whose violation was missing payment on his bills and running out of money) was sentenced to death by electric chair. I wasn't thrilled by the opera but I enjoyed the satire of materialism and of the American culture. I also learned that Weil actually lived for many years in Haverstraw NY until his death. The most popular aria in the opera is called "Alabama song" (Whisky Bar) and was covered, very successfully, by the Doors.

XIV. Summary of Operas in America:

- **George Frederick Bristow** premiered his opera Rip Van Winkle (1855) at Niblo's Garden, in New York, "the first opera by an American composer on an American subject." At the time of his death in 1898, **Bristow** was at work on an opera on the life of Christopher Columbus. Another major event, in 1893, was the Denver premiere of The Martyr, by **Harry Lawrence Freeman**, "the first known performance of an opera by an African-American composer." **Scott Joplin's** first ragtime opera, A Guest of Honor, was premiered in St. Louis in 1903, but it has been lost. **Joplin's** opera Treemonisha, which takes place on a plantation run by freed slaves, was completed around 1907, with a piano-vocal score published in 1911. In spite of **Joplin's** efforts, the opera was not staged until 1975, at the Houston Grand Opera.
- **Victor Herbert** (1859–1924), was Dublin born and is most famous for the dozens of operettas he composed, such as Naughty Marietta and Babes in Toyland; he also composed an American Indian opera called Natoma, premiered by the Philadelphia-Chicago Opera Company in 1911. **Horatio Parker** (1863–1919) won a \$10,000 prize in a competition sponsored by the Met for his opera Mona which premiered in 1912, but received only four performances. **Howard Hanson** (1896–1981) premiered his neo-Romantic opera Merry Mount to stunning success at the Met, receiving 50 curtain calls at the premiere in 1934.
- **Virgil Thomson** (1896–1989) in the same year (1934) premiered a rather different opera, Four Saints in Three Acts, to celebrate the opening of the Avery Memorial wing of the Wadsworth Athenaeum Museum of Art, in Hartford, Conn, where it premiered. Libretto by **Gertrude Stein**. Working with the experimental expatriate author **Gertrude Stein**, **Thomson** completed the opera in Europe in 1928. An all-black cast premiered the opera, sponsored by a group called The Friends and Enemies of Modern Music, in a production choreographed by **Frederick Ashton** and directed by the painter **Maurice Grosser**. The American hymn tunes that pervade the opera were familiar to **Thomson** from his upbringing in a Baptist church in Kansas City, Missouri.
- **Thomson and Stein's** intriguing second opera, The Mother of Us All, on the life of activist **Susan B. Anthony**, was premiered on May 7, 1947, at Columbia University. **Thomson's** final opera, on the life of controversial Romantic poet **Lord Byron**, was first performed at the Juilliard School in New York.
- **Elliot Carter** (1908-2012) was an American composer, born in Manhattan in 1908, the son of a wealthy lace importer. As a teenager, he developed an interest in music and was encouraged by the composer **Charles Ives** (who sold insurance to Carter's family). Although **Carter** majored

in English at Harvard College, he did graduate work in music at Harvard, from which he received a master's degree in music in 1932. His professors at Harvard included **Walter Piston** and **Gustav Holst**. He then went to Paris to study with **Nadia Boulanger** (as did many other American composers). **Carter** worked with **Boulanger** from 1932 to 1935, and in that year received a doctorate in music (Mus.D.) from the École Normale in Paris. Later that same year, he returned to the US. After an early neoclassical phase, his style shifted to an emphasis on atonality and rhythmic complexity. **Carter's** early works were influenced by **Stravinsky, Harris, Copland, and Hindemith**, and are mainly neoclassical in aesthetic. He had a strict training in counterpoint, from medieval polyphony to **Stravinsky** which shows in his earliest music, such as the ballet Pocahontas (1938–39). Some of his music during the Second World War is fairly diatonic, and includes a melodic lyricism reminiscent of the American **Samuel Barber** (1910-1981).

- His music after 1950 is typically atonal and rhythmically complex, indicated by the invention of the term metric modulation to describe the frequent, precise tempo changes found in his work. He was extremely productive in his later years, publishing more than 40 works between the ages of 90 and 100, and over 20 more after he turned 100 in 2008.
- **Carter** is easily this country's most decorated composer, yet one of its least popular among audiences. He has won the Pulitzer Prize twice, received honorary degrees from the world's most prestigious universities and was the first composer to win the National Medal of the Arts. In Europe and in Germany in particular, he is both respected and appreciated. His popular success at home, however, has an unbroken track record of alienation in the concert hall despite a long string of critical successes. "I still write the music I want to write," **Carter** said in an interview at intermission. "America has always been a hard nut to crack."
- What's Next? (1999) is the only opera by **Carter**. **Paul Griffiths** wrote the libretto to the one-act work in 1997/98. Just shy of 91 years, **Carter** has described it as a one-act musical evocation of an auto accident, its aftermath, and the smug satisfaction that the walking wounded –aka mankind– take in selfishness and inner preoccupation. It is music without traditional harmony or melody, without the traditional sense of rhythm or pulse, and with a coy and literate libretto that lives in the absurdist and a directionless world. Almost a century after modernist composers like **Arnold Schoenberg** began refashioning late romantic music into something that was, paradoxically, both more orderly and more chaotic, **Carter** has produced the quintessence of everything they hoped to accomplish.
- It is ferociously difficult, with an orchestral texture based on long passages and a constant, rapid series of seemingly unrelated notes. The effect is both unnerving and strangely hypnotic, like listening to a TV channel filled with static. There are only six vocal parts (and no chorus), but each singer lives in a rhythmically unique world. The music world has been saying post-mortems for this kind of music for at least 20 years due to its alienation of audiences. The notion of music as a series of difficult problems with difficult solutions seems quaint today. In American opera houses, composers are now turning to classic American literature for inspiration and rely on musical styles that use tonality and engaging rhythmic patterns like a reward for good audience behavior.

- As the percussionists replicate the sounds of a car crash the characters wake up and discover themselves lost. The six primary characters engage in delusional “conversations” in which they speak but don’t listen creating a chaos of conflict. One primary character (the only one to remain sane) finally loses his temper and shouts "What?" to the audience. Another soprano character sings her highest possible note and then the lights go out.
- At **Christopher Hapka's** Web site, usopera.com, you can find lots of information on the history of opera in the United States.

XV. Opera and Minimalism:

- **Philip Glass** (1937-?), *Einstein on the Beach* premiered at the Avignon Festival in 1976, in a production by **Robert Wilson**. **Wilson** was born in Waco, Texas, and was trained principally in painting and in architecture. His interest in drama, especially in creating productions of operas and other theatrical works dominated by light, led **Eugene Ionesco** to label him as "America's most important dramatist." That production was brought from France and given two blockbusters, sold-out performances at the Met. It brought **Glass** immense fame and was the first major exposure of the minimalist style to a broad audience. The opera eventually became the first part of an opera trilogy about men who changed the world through their ideas. The two others were *Satyagraha*, on the life of Gandhi (1980), and *Akhnaten*, about the ancient Egyptian religious leader (1983).
 - **Glass** has often voiced his opposition to serialism (a method or technique of composition that uses a series of values to manipulate different musical elements). Serialism began primarily with **Arnold Schoenberg's** twelve-tone technique of post-tonal thinking that was popular among his contemporary composers.
- **John Adams** (1947-?) Is another of the post WW2 composers who has enjoyed unprecedented success with a number of commissioned operatic works, all of which have received multiple performances around the world. Adams attractions lie in the immediacy of his subject matter.
 - *Nixon in China* (1987) written in collaboration with **Alice Goodman** (libretto) and **Peter Sellars** (direction and “concept”) used as its source material the US president’s historic 1972 diplomatic mission which had occurred less than two decades earlier. In taking the path of such actualite, Adams went against the grain of post 1945 operatic fashion of overwhelmingly preference for remote, mythical or at least historical subjects. He quite possibly did this due to nervousness about operas fragile position in contemporary culture. There had been up-to-date operas in the past, but almost all of them were comic. *Opera buffa* of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries tended to be set in near-contemporary times where its social critique could function with maximum clarity. **Britten's** sole present-day opera was his only out-and-out comedy, *Albert Herrind* (1947). Given the ignominy with which Nixon’s tenure ended as president, the fact that **Adam's Nixon** treats the visit to China as high drama gave audiences and critics quite a shock. Opera, **Adams** seemed to tell audiences, does have a future and can address head-on contemporary society’s concerns.
 - Adams uses as his starting point the so-called “minimalist” style of composers such as Philip Glass and Steve Reich, a technique going back to the 1960s and 70s. The minimalist style superimposes sequences of endlessly repeated small musical figures form dense blocks of

internally active sound which shift gradually to other blocks over long stretches of time. Glass' avant-garde opera Einstein on the Beach (1976) shimmers somewhere behind Nixon. But **Adam's** blocks move at higher speeds, varying their orchestration, with piquant instrument combinations reminiscent of **Stravinsky**. The effect is often close to film music, especially the kind that accompanies grand outdoor vistas. Characters and prominent choral groups declaim the text with rigorous fidelity to natural accentuation, but with melodic shapes that derive from the sonorous orchestral backdrop. This warm bath of vast and slow-changing sound is no place to find comedy; even Richard Nixon this becomes heroic by default, simply by being pressing in such a soundscape.

- The big surprise in all this was Nixon's success. The experience of seeing familiar, within-living-memory events, narrated in an unmistakably high style but wrapped in a comfortingly familiar musical idiom, proved irresistible at the box office. Some critics complained about the musical manners and more austere composers were dismissive. **Adams** brought to the opera house a new immediacy and a new audience, many of them immigrants from cinema and other mass media. Small wonder that he and his collaborative team were soon commissioned again and complied with an even more up-to-date and politically sensitive sequel.
- The Death of Klinghoffer (1991) took as its theme the 1985 takeover by Palestinian terrorists of an Italian cruise ship and subsequent murder of Leon Klinghoffer, a Jewish-American passenger. Kinghoffer is darker in tone than Nixon but not much. The outdoor music and epic stance are in many ways identical. The opera begins with a pair of choruses: first of Exiled Palestinians then of Exiled Jews. The sense of a balanced approach to the opposing forces is emphasized by both the lack of music differentiation between the two and establishment of a detached, oratorio-like atmosphere. As with Nixon, **Adams'** characteristic style means that the plot must necessarily move forward. Onstage action is hardly possible; even though most obvious events have to be delivered through elaborate narration. In this case, the lack of musical differentiation – probably endemic given Adam's resources – caused a notable controversy. While only a few were concerned when Richard Nixon was ennobled by musical immersion in a minimalist hum, Palestinian terrorists were another matter. Accusations that the opera was anti-Semitic or condoned terrorism were soon raised – the opera was even picketed by Jewish groups in San Francisco. **Adams** was hurt, and claimed to be genuinely surprised that his opera could have aroused such passions. As he said in one interview, "All of us did a lot of research...I read a great deal of **Edward Said's** writings. I know **Alice Goodman** read most of the Koran." **Said** was a literary critic of great distinction and until his death in 2003. **Adams** seemed to be using **Said** as a guarantor of respectability. **Said** himself, who had a significant second career as a music critic, wrote at some length about the opera. In general he found it even-handed. But he pointed out that it is even-handed because the musical style was incapable of taking any strong position, or indeed of expressing meaningful dramatic contrast. As **Said** put it, the "music... frequently sounds strangely retrospective, vaguely or only partly convinced of where it's going." In the wake of the Kinghoffer controversy, **Adams** retreated, perhaps

chastened, to instrumental music and oratorio; his only recent opera has been Doctor Atomic.

- Doctor Atomic (2005), which features J. Robert Oppenheimer as its protagonist and involves the making of the first atomic bomb. Whether this will enjoy Nixon's fate is a question for time to tell.

XVI. 20th Century Opera in Russia:

- **Sergei Prokofiev** (1891–1953) was a Russian composer, pianist and conductor. As the creator of acknowledged masterpieces across numerous musical genres, he is regarded as one of the major composers of the 20th century. His works include such widely heard works as the March from The Love for Three Oranges, the suite Lieutenant Kijé, the ballet Romeo and Juliet – from which "Dance of the Knights" is taken – and Peter and the Wolf, as well as five piano concertos, nine completed piano sonatas and seven symphonies.
- **Prokofiev** initially made his name as an iconoclastic composer-pianist, achieving notoriety with a series of ferociously dissonant and virtuosic works for his instrument, including his first two piano concertos. In 1915 **Prokofiev** made a decisive break from the standard composer-pianist category with his orchestral *Scythian Suite*, compiled from music originally composed for a ballet commissioned by **Sergei Diaghilev** of the Ballets Russes. Diaghilev commissioned three further ballets from Prokofiev – *Chout*, *Le pas d'acier* and *The Prodigal Son* – which at the time of their original production all caused a sensation among both critics and colleagues. **Prokofiev's** greatest interest, however, was opera, and he composed more than ten operas, not all of them completed including The Gambler and The Fiery Angel. Prokofiev's one relative success in that genre during his lifetime was The Love for Three Oranges, composed for Chicago Opera and subsequently performed over the following decade in Europe and Russia.
- After the Revolution, **Prokofiev** left Russia with the official blessing of the Soviets and resided in the United States, then Germany, then Paris, making his living as a composer, pianist and conductor. In the early 1930s, the Great Depression diminished opportunities for **Prokofiev's** ballets and operas to be staged in America and Western Europe. **Prokofiev**, who regarded himself as composer foremost, resented the time taken by touring as a pianist, and in 1936 he finally returned to his homeland with his family. The Nazi invasion of the USSR spurred him to compose his most ambitious work, an operatic version of **Leo Tolstoy's** War and Peace. In 1948 **Prokofiev** was criticized for "anti-democratic formalism," and, with his income severely curtailed, was forced to compose Stalinist works such as On Guard for Peace.
- American reaction to The Love of Three Oranges varied. The Chicago production was generally successful despite one critic's comment that 'it left many of our best people dazed and wondering' and dismissal by another as 'Russian jazz with Bolshevik trimmings.' In 1922 it was given a severe reception in New York, where **Prokofiev**, by this time dubbed 'the Russian barbarian', compared his treatment at the hands of the critics to having his trousers torn to shreds by a pack of hounds. The European premiere was given in Cologne in 1925. It reached Moscow in May 1927.

- A Love for Three Oranges is the operatic version of a 16th - century Italian fable with a French libretto written in the Russian 20th-century modernist style for an American audience. The opera's problematic reception at its premiere is not altogether surprising, but the reasons for its lack of early critical success merit closer inspection. American audiences did not yet have the grounding in the techniques of modernism then being employed by European composers at the time Oranges was premiered in 1921, nor did they understand the *commedia dell'arte* traditions of the story and its stock characters. The musical language **Prokofiev** chose for his opera was also largely misunderstood by its first audiences. The dramatically logical, declamatory melodies were interpreted as altogether unmelodic and the "lack of singable tunes" was taken as a mark of insubstantiality. The considerable number of themes and motives employed to progress the plot are not subjected to extensive development and in many cases are repeated only rarely. Initially, it can be difficult to hear the subtle connections interwoven among the associative material and as the opera was given only two performances during its premiere run, many critics and connoisseurs were unable to discern **Prokofiev's** sophisticated compositional ideal.
- Basis Oranges plot: Amid an opening skirmish between competing groups of aesthetes, the Cranks (the Tragedians, the Comedians, the Lyricists and the Empty Heads) announce the beginning of the drama. In the royal palace, the Prince is suffering from hypochondria, which can only be cured by laughter. The King orders entertainments to aid his son's recovery. Alas, the prince does not find any of it amusing. The witch, Fata Morgana, curses the Prince with a fatal passion for three oranges, which he must chase to the ends of the earth. The oranges grow to enormous size and the prince cuts two of them open to get some juice. Realizing that his future lies with the third orange, the prince then cuts it open, and from it, Princess Ninetta emerges. Everyone still on stage drinks to the happiness of the prince and his new princess.
- At the time of its premiere, A Love for Three Oranges was simultaneously ahead and behind its time. American audiences did not yet understand the musical language. Chicago, being more progressive in its operatic tastes than New York, was still not quite prepared for the extravaganza of sound and sight that Prokofiev offered. In the 1920's, in the US, opera attendance was dwindling as people sought entertainment in the speakeasies, movie houses and jazz clubs. In the 1920's, the American vogue in opera was for verismo or exoticism, of which Oranges, was neither. There was a hero-worship mentality in America at the time of Oranges, signifying the country's obsession with celebrity. An ensemble designed to highlight the form and not the performers went against the general conception of entertainment. Artistic patronage was controlled by women of America's flaggingly bourgeoisie; the wives of wealthy businessmen who chose to use their philanthropic allowances to pronto and foster "culture." Many of these women were well-educated and were more aware than the average of current artistic trends but were quite prudish and conservative in their personal tastes.
- **Dmitri Shostakovich** (1906-1975).
 - The Nose (Russian: Hoc, 'Nos'), was **Shostakovich's** first opera, a satirical work completed in 1928 based on **Nikolai Gogol's** story of the same name (1836). The libretto is by

Shostakovich, Yevgeny Zamyatin, Georgy Ionin, and Alexander Preis. **Shostakovich** stated it was a satire on the times of Alexander I. The plot concerns a St. Petersburg official whose nose leaves his face and develops a life of its own. The apparent chaos is given structure by formal musical devices such as canons and quartets, a device taken from **Alban Berg's *Wozzeck***. According to the British composer **Gerard McBurney**: "The Nose is one of the young Shostakovich's greatest masterpieces, an electrifying tour de force of vocal acrobatics, wild instrumental colors and theatrical absurdity, all shot through with a blistering mixture of laughter and rage... The result, in Shostakovich's ruthlessly irreverent hands, is like an operatic version of Charlie Chaplin or Monty Python... despite its magnificently absurd subject and virtuosic music, The Nose is a perfectly practical work and provides a hugely entertaining evening in the theatre."

- Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District (premiered in Leningrad, 1934), with libretto by **Shostakovich** and **Alexander Preys**. The work incorporates elements of expressionism and verismo. It tells the story of a lonely woman in 19th century Russia, who falls in love with one of her husband's workers and is driven to murder. Despite great early success, on both popular and official levels, Lady Macbeth was the vehicle for a general denunciation of **Shostakovich's** music by the Communist Party in early 1936. After being condemned by an anonymous article (sometimes attributed to **Joseph Stalin**) in *Pravda*, it was banned in the Soviet Union for almost thirty years. Many people thus know the opera primarily for its role in the history of censorship. **Shostakovich** took the bare bones of **Leskov's** narrative and significantly altered its balance of sympathies. "In the book, she's much colder, but here, she's absolutely understandable." **Shostakovich** himself saw Katerina as the "tragic portrayal of the destiny of a talented, smart and outstanding woman, dying in the nightmarish atmosphere of pre-Revolutionary Russia. "I feel empathy for her," the composer added. "She is surrounded by monsters." The monsters include her impotent husband Zinovy, her atrocious father-in-law Boris - who bullies her, but would also like to bed her himself - and her lover Sergei, who promises fidelity, but who in reality chases everyone in a skirt. Murder, the opera argues, is a woman's only means of revolt in the male-dominated hell of the Tsarist epoch. **Shostakovich** dubbed the opera a "tragedy-satire": the score derives much of its power from the garish double perspective it forces on the listener. Katerina's soul-destroying loneliness and violent sexual passion is expressed in music of soaring lyricism.
- Whether **Shostakovich** set out to be provocative is unknown. The exact reason for the opera's official condemnation is still the subject of debate, though its heated, jolting style, far removed from the solid solemnity of Socialist Realism, was doubtless a major factor. Some have argued that **Stalin** saw himself in the domineering, hypocritical character of Boris. Others believe that he considered the minor figure of a Tsarist police chief to be a personal attack. The chief indiscriminately arrests people on account of their beliefs. Most assume, however, that it was the opera's sex scene that gave the greatest offence.
- Though the opera's view of sexual relationships is bleak, it's also subversive. It says stuff about how sexuality is very threatening to social structures. That kind of anarchic sexuality wouldn't have been pleasing to the Communist Party. Lady Macbeth's disappearance in

1936, however, was not the end of its fortunes during the Soviet period. In the post-Stalin thaw of the late 1950s, **Shostakovich** produced a revised, bowdlerized edition that he re-titled Katerina Izmailova. It was first performed in Moscow in 1963, with Khrushchev in the audience looking on benignly.

- **Alfred Schnittke** (1934-1998), composed three operas: Life with an Idiot (Amsterdam, 1992); Gesualdo (Vienna, 1995) and Historia von D. Johann Fausten (Hamburg, 1995). **Schnittke** was a Soviet and Russian composer whose early music shows the strong influence of **Dmitri Shostakovich**. He developed a polystylistic technique in works such as the epic First Symphony (1969-1972). In the 1980s, **Schnittke's** music began to become more widely known abroad with the publication of his Second (1980) String Quartet and the ballet Peer Gynt (1985-1987). As his health deteriorated, **Schnittke's** music started to abandon much of the extroversion of his polystylism and retreated into a more withdrawn, bleak style.
 - **Schnittke's** second opera, Gesualdo, is in seven scenes, a prologue and an epilogue. Libretto by Richard Bletschacher. **Schnittke** produced something that goes deeper than many works. An almost unbearable sadness looms over this work. There is no rebellion against death, but rather a mixture of fateful occurrences and of unbearable pain which will also cut wounds into the flesh of the listener. Gesualdo is the story of the Renaissance Prince composer who kills his lively wife, her lovers and finally – in a fit of madness – even his own child. **Schnittke's** opera concentrates the plot into a liturgy of death which follows an inner, inescapable logic with inexorable consistency, like a passion play. Therein lies the strength of the libretto, which lends a strong unity to the variety of the scenes. **Schnittke's** music, with its mixture of clarity and brash expressivity, more closely approaches the material with the means of absolute rather than operatic music. The libretto requires rapid change of scenes, thus corresponding to the symphonic “sweep” of the music which **Schnittke** must have had in mind from the beginning.

XVII. Post-Modern Opera:

Music of the postmodern era is music that follows the aesthetical and philosophical trends of postmodernism. As the name suggests, the postmodernist movement formed partly in reaction to modernism. Even so, postmodern music still does not primarily define itself in opposition to modernist music; this label is applied instead by critics and theorists. Postmodern music is not a distinct musical style but rather refers to music of the postmodern era. Indeed, postmodernists question the tight definitions and categories of academic disciplines, which they regard simply as the remnants of modernity.

- **Olivier Messiaen** (1908-1992), was a French composer, organist and ornithologist, one of the major composers of the 20th century. His music is rhythmically complex; harmonically and melodically it often uses *modes of limited transposition*, which he abstracted from his early compositions and improvisations. **Messiaen** also drew on his Roman Catholic faith for his pieces. He travelled widely and wrote works inspired by diverse influences such as Japanese music, the landscape of Bryce Canyon in Utah and the life of St. Francis of Assisi. He said he perceived colors when he heard certain musical chords (a phenomenon known as synaesthesia in its literal manifestation). Combinations of these colors, he said, were important in his

compositional process. For a short period **Messiaen** experimented with the parameterization associated with "total serialism," in which field he is often cited as an innovator. His style absorbed many exotic musical influences such as Indonesian gamelan (tuned percussion often features prominently in his orchestral works).

- Color lies at the heart of **Messiaen's** music. For him there were no modal, tonal or serial compositions, only music with or without color. In certain of **Messiaen's** scores, he notated the colors in the music to aid the conductor in interpretation rather than to specify which colors the listener should experience. Birdsong also fascinated **Messiaen** from an early age, and in this he found encouragement from his teacher, **Dukas**, who reportedly urged his pupils to "listen to the birds." **Messiaen** included stylized birdsong in some of his compositions.
- Saint François d'Assise (premiered in Paris in 1983) was his single opera. It is a speech-imbued work with many glorious, complicated instrumental sounds – especially bell sounds. **Messiaen's** only opera has a libretto also by **Messiaen**, culled from his reading on the medieval vitae of Saint Francis. In the end, however, nothing stands in the way of immortality but a lack of mad ambition. The grandest grand opera since Wagner's "Parsifal." Somehow, it has already acquired a historical aura, as if it were an antiquity whose head and paws are only now emerging from the sand. "St. Francis" may have to wait a century or two before it finds its proper public, but a few brave opera houses are venturing to stage it, and the history books should reward them. The artist who strives to create a work of everlasting genius faces many obstacles these days, not least a lack of popular demand.
- "St. Francis" is not easy listening. It is five hours long, devoutly Catholic in content, and by turns dissonant, jubilant, voluptuous, and austere. There are eight tableaux, each recording a stage in the life of the saint. Francis kisses a leper, speaks to the birds, receives the stigmata, and dies in a state of suffering joy. The libretto would have posed no problems for an audience of fourteenth-century Loire villagers. The music is something else again: a twentieth-century echo chamber in which prosaic turns of phrase acquire shattering overtones. The composer once remarked that he saw the Resurrection as an atomic explosion; likewise, his Francis has to undergo a death that sounds like the apocalypse. Sitting through the opera is at times a physical challenge—even **Wagner** knew better than to write a two-hour second act—yet the experience leaves one feeling strangely liberated. It harks back to one of those archaic Christian liturgies in which spells of boredom give way to precisely staged epiphanies—as when, in the Greek Orthodox Easter service, the church goes dark and the light of a single candle remains.
- **György Ligeti** (1923-2006), was a composer of contemporary classical music. He has been described as "one of the most important and innovative composers of the second half of the 20th century." Born in Transylvania, Romania, he lived in Hungary before emigrating and becoming an Austrian citizen. His single opera Le Grand Macabre (Stockholm, 1978) has received more than 30 productions. Libretto by **Michael Meschke** and **Ligeti**, after the play La balade du grand macabre by **Michel de Ghelderode**. The story takes place in an imaginary country called Breughelland ("run down but nevertheless thriving and carefree"), in an "anytime century." The name of the country refers to the main character of Nekrotzar, the

Grand Macabre, Death incarnate, depicted in Breughel's *The Triumph of Death* (oil panel, c. 1562).

- **Ligeti** adopts an eclectic style, re-examining tonality and modality (in his own words, "non-tonal" music). In the opera, however, he does not forge a new musical language. The music instead is driven by quotation and pastiche, plundering past styles through allusions to **Claudio Monteverdi**, **Gioachino Rossini**, and **Giuseppe Verdi**. *Le Grand Macabre* updates the traditions of opera with those of absurdist theatre, pondering the meaning of life in a licentious, ridiculous world. Such music is conspicuously different from the music of any era, challenging both the avant-garde conventions that dominated the early- and mid-20th century and the traditions of earlier opera. Neither classical nor modernist but referencing both, it is postmodernist, a milestone in the evolution of music, and particularly suited to the absurdist mockery of human foibles. *Le Grand Macabre* is **Ligeti's** personal reaction to the music of his upbringing and to religious and political dogma. Though it is rooted in the World War II and Cold War eras, it remains highly engaging artistically and relevant in a world beset by the politicking around terrorism and climate change.
- The setting is the fictional principality of Breughelland, and the characters are caricatures—Piet the Pot, a drunkard whom Nekrotzar enlists to support his mission; two insatiable lovers, Amando and Amanda; the astrologer Astradamors and his dominatrix partner Mescalina; Gepopo, the hysterical chief of secret police; and the impotent prince Go-Go and his fawning, bickering, manipulative ministers and brutal police. The satirical story addresses a range of political and social themes—Nekrotzar (the name suggests a dead tsar resurrected through necromancy) represents dictators from Hitler to Stalin who dominated Europe in **Ligeti's** youth, and the comet suggests nuclear missiles. Sex, death and drunkenness are central—Astradamors and Mescalina's sadomasochism represents the fickle ruler and the ruled. Amanda and Amando, in costumes resembling anatomical illustrations as if they have been flayed, seek unattainable pleasure. At various times, characters fake death or think they are dead, or are dead and are then revived, as if death is merely an alternative and contingent state. Ultimately, Piet and Astradamors get Nekrotzar so drunk that he fails in his mission (a lesson for us all), suggesting that men are all dissolute failures. Gender issues are also central, amplified by the confronting set design—women can be independent and controlling and can also be obsessed by desire. Gepopo and Venus are sung by the same actor, suggesting the interchangeability of the characters. Amanda and Amando are both played by female performers, further confusing gender identities.
- **Michael Nyman** (1944-?) is an English composer of minimalist music and is known for the many film scores he wrote, during his lengthy collaboration with the filmmaker **Peter Greenaway**. Nyman's instantly recognizable compositional style is characterized by his strong melodies and assertive rhythms. Since forming the **Michael Nyman Band** in the 1970's, his output has been wide and varied including five operas, eight concertos, five string quartets and substantial song cycles. Nyman is the person we have to thank for the word, 'minimalism', and a term he had used in one of his concert reviews, and it was in this musical style that he now started writing music for his 'band'. The commercial aspects of his new style of composition

soon found him in demand both in the concert hall, cinema and television. His music often enters the 'pop' charts in the classical ratings. He was now working in so many different fields, as diverse as string quartets and concertos. **Nyman** has drawn as many detractors as admirers, his style at times polarized to the excesses of the classical avant garde. At others he is composing in such an overtly romantic style that it is difficult to know whether his acute sense of fun is at work. Whatever the reaction, **Nyman** is one of today's most fashionable composers. His operas include The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat, Letters, Riddles and Writs, Noises, Sounds & Sweet Airs, Facing Goya, Man and Boy: Dada, Love Counts, and Sparkie: Cage and Beyond.

- The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat (premiered in 1986, London). The libretto by **Christopher Rawlence** is based on a case study by **Dr. Oliver Sacks** on one of his actual patients. **Oliver Sacks** is a British-American physician, best-selling author and professor of neurology at the NYU School of Medicine. **Sacks** is the author of the novel Awakenings, which is the basis for a movie of the same name, with Robin Williams and Robert DeNiro). This is a chamber opera with only three characters, Dr. P, the patient (bass); Mrs. P, his wife (soprano); and Dr. S (tenor), who is the neurologist, **Nyman** read the case study in November 1985 and it formed into an opera in his mind. On the surface, it might seem an improbable source for an opera. Dr. P., a distinguished singer and teacher, is gradually discovered to have lost the ability to associate visual images with his own life in any way; at one point in the opera, as a deliciously subtle throwaway, he reaches for his wife's head instead of his hat. But he manages to carry on a useful and creative existence by orienting himself through music. For him, every action is linked with a musical theme; he sings his way through life, making music's abstractions the bridge between himself and the everyday world. Dr. P.'s remarkable resilience is echoed by his doctor: "I can't tell you/What's wrong," he sings, "But I know what is right." The score for this opera is for piano, two violinists, a violist, two cellists and a harpist. It is clearly based on the restless patterning of Minimalism. But it's hardly stuck in the obsessive repetitiveness that annoys some people about Minimalism. It connects movingly with **Schumann's** song Ich grolle nicht (I don't protest), which Dr. P. sings as the centerpiece.
- **Nyman's** most recent opera, Man and Boy: Dada was premiered in London, 2004 (Dada or Dadaism was an art movement of the European avant-garde in the early 20th century). The libretto, by **Michael Hastings**, fictionally brings together the life of Dada artist **Kurt Schwitters** and the adolescent **Michael Nyman** (named only as Michael), who discover that they both collect bus tickets, for collage and collections, respectively. **Schwitters**, artist born in Hanover, Germany. He worked in several genres and media, including Dada, Constructivism, Surrealism, poetry, sound, painting, sculpture, graphic design, typography, and what came to be known as installation art.
- **Luciano Berio (1925-2003)** was an Italian composer. He is noted for his experimental work (in particular his 1968 composition Sinfonia and his series of virtuosic solo pieces titled Sequenza) and also for his pioneering work in electronic music. His collaboration in the early 1980's with the novelist **Italo Calvino** produced two operas of formidable postmodern credentials (La Vera Sottra 1981 and Un Re In Ascolto 1984) but with uncertain longevity. He

was an important innovator in electronic music, the combining of live and taped music, aleatory music, graphic notation, musical collage using borrowed material, and (perhaps most significantly) in musical performance pieces. Perhaps **Berio's** most notable contribution to the world of post-WWII non-serial experimental music, running throughout most of his works, is his engagement with the broader world of critical theory (epitomized by his lifelong friendship with linguist and critical theorist **Umberto Eco**). **Berio's** works are often analytic acts: deliberately analyzing myths, stories, the components of words themselves. In other words, it is not only the composition of the "collage" that conveys meaning; it is the particular composition of the component "sound-image" that conveys meaning, even extra-musical meaning.

- La Vera Storia (1981) (The Real Story) - As in many of **Luciano Berio's** musical dramas, there is no real plot to La vera storia, but rather a series of events. **Wolfgang Schreiber** said of the première at the Milan Scala in 1982: "**Berio's** theme is tension, and the violent conflict between individual and state or society, of people and power, of freedom and authority." In order to convey this, **Berio** and **Italo Calvino** created a storyline which draws elements of its plot from **Verdi's** Il Trovatore. More important than these elements of the plot, however, is the manner in which they are presented, which also draws on existing operatic models, including solo arias, duets, trios, chorales – archetypal operatic forms. As with many of his other music theatre works, in La vera storia **Berio** also attempts "to enhance our consciousness of the fact that we ourselves are the only ones who are able to fit a story as it is told into our own experience of the world." To say what happens in La vera storia is not easy, and I don't know that it's all that useful, granted that this is a work which tells its own story. The origins of La vera storia lie deep in the composers own personal story, involving many encounters with popular music (*Quattro canzoni popolari*, *Folk Songs*, *Questo vuol dire che...*, *Coro*, *Il ritorno degli Snovidenia*), but also the need to discover further functions implicit within an established musical proposition (*Chemins I-V* and *Corale*). La vera storia is a synthesis of these two preoccupations.
- Un Re In Ascolto (1984) (*A King Listens*), **Berio** also wrote the Italian libretto. It is based on a short story of the same name by **Italo Calvino**, but incorporates excerpts from **Friedrich Einsiedel's** 1778 libretto for an opera based on **Shakespeare's** The Tempest. This became Die Geisterinsel in 1798, set to music written by **Friedrich Fleischmann**. **Berio** himself described the work as an *azione musicale* (musical action) rather than an opera. It falls into 19 sections grouped into two parts. The premiered in Salzburg on in 1984.

XVIII. Avant-Garde Opera:

- **Daniel Catán** Born in Mexico City in 1949 and studied philosophy and music at University of Sussex and Southampton and received graduate degrees from Princeton University. Returning to Mexico City, he took the post of music administrator at the Palace of Fine Arts, where he became more deeply related to singing and opera and the world of the stage. **Catán** now resides in Los Angeles. Although a Mexican-American composer, **Catán**, has composed in a number of genres, he is particularly known for the intricate beauty of his operas. Sung in an elegant Spanish, his operas are rich with long-spun, mellifluous melodies supported by

delicately luscious harmonies and dramatic orchestration. **Catán** is a master storyteller, capturing the poetic ideas of the text in the music. His works embody a kind of traditional originality, 'one that embraces all operatic traditions from **Monteverdi** to **Alban Berg** but at the same time refreshingly contemporary and highly individual.

- **Catán** has recently finished his third opera, Salsipuedes, for Houston Grand Opera. With the San Diego Opera's American 1994 premiere of his second opera Rappaccini's Daughter (based on **Octavio Paz's** retelling of the Nathaniel Hawthorne story), **Catán** became the first Mexican composer to have an opera produced in the United States. **Gabriel García Márquez** (Nobel Prize winner for Literature), who was in attendance at the world premiere of Rappaccini's Daughter in 1991, offered to work with the composer on his next opera. That was the beginning of collaboration with **Marcela Fuentes-Berain**, who **Márquez** suggested as a librettist for Florencia en el Amazonas, an opera inspired by **Márquez's** writing.
- Florencia en el Amazonas (English title: Florencia in the Amazon) is an opera in two acts and was **Catán's** second opera. It contains elements of magical realism in the style of **Gabriel García Márquez** and uses a libretto by **Marcela Fuentes-Berain**, one of his pupils. The characters are inspired by **García Márquez**, but the story is not drawn directly from any of his works. Florencia was co-commissioned by Houston Grand Opera, Los Angeles Opera, and Seattle Opera and premiered in Houston on October 25, 1996.
- Loosely inspired by **Gabriel García Márquez's** Love in the Time of Cholera, the opera follows the story of Florencia Grimaldi, an aging opera singer who embarks upon a steamboat journey down the Amazon River. As the journey progresses, the boat is beset by pink rain, foul waters, and the threat of a cholera epidemic. As Florencia and her fellow travelers are carried deeper into the jungle, they experience various revelations, until finally the diva's spirit is transformed into a vast, emerald butterfly.
- Florencia has also been since produced in Seattle, Los Angeles, and Bogotá, and was revived by the Houston Grand Opera (the original commissioner) in early 2001. In **Catán's** words, "I set out to write beautiful music for a story of the journey to transcendent love; it concerns all of us who have lived love with all its intricacies, subtleties, wretchedness, and glorious happiness." Critical reaction has confirmed the success of **Catán's** intentions.
- In many ways, Florencia is a culmination of **Catán's** previous work -- an early piece for soprano and orchestra, Mariposa de obsidiana ("Obsidian Butterfly") was based on a poem by **Octavio Paz**, and his first opera, La hija de Rappaccini, was inspired by another tale of a magically transformed beauty, **Hawthorne's** "Rappaccini's Daughter" as retold by **Paz**. First produced in the United States by the San Diego Opera, La hija de Rappaccini was critically acclaimed and brought **Catán** to the attention of the Houston Grand Opera in 1994. Looking to commission a Spanish-language work to reflect the city's increasingly Latin character, HGO director **David Gockley**, in cooperation with opera houses in LA, Seattle, and Bogotá, asked **Catán** to produce a new work, an opera that celebrated the "artistic, musical, literary, and visual aspects of Latin America" as well as being "the most beautiful opera in the last fifty years." Given this marvelous opportunity (and not to mention somewhat daunting challenge), **Catán** turned to the works of **Gabriel García Márquez** for

inspiration. Failing to find one isolated story that suited his needs, he decided to borrow a few themes from Gabo's work in general, with an emphasis on Love in the Time of Cholera. Using a river-voyage down the Amazon as their setting, **Catán** and **Fuentes-Berain** plunged deep into the lush world of "magical realism" and crafted a story about love, redemption and transfiguration.

- Comparisons with **Puccini** are inevitable and certainly apt, but much of **Catán's** score touches upon the flowing Impressionism of **Debussy** and the vibrant colors of **Ravel** as well. It also contains some engaging touches quite compelling to the modern ear -- frequent marimbas add a slightly exotic flavor, and the percussion section underscores the music with intriguing Latin rhythms. **Catán** scores the opera for a relatively small orchestra, which adds a sense of precision and punch -- the strings never dominate, and each instrument is clearly articulated. The music simply shimmers, occasionally opening up into an expanse of surging sound, floating the vocals aloft on an iridescent wave of color. Happily, **Catán's** vocal writing is well-matched to his orchestral fluency. **Catán** is a believer in old-school lyricism and it comes as a delight to hear a work that takes pure, unadulterated pleasure in a flowing, beautiful line. A few critics have questioned whether **Catán** has really broken any new ground; but in a world where the definition of opera itself has been stretched to include such praiseworthy pieces as Einstein on the Beach, The Cave, and Jackie O, it comes as a relief to know that someone can still write that is immensely satisfying. Arioso blooms to aria with an unaffected grace and not a line feels clumsy or out of place. Still, while Florencia's lyricism might represent a welcome return to the Italian mode, there's really no single moment that particularly stands out.

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