

Opera in the Early 19th Century

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Opera means Italian Opera

To most people at the beginning of the beginning of the 19 th century, music meant Opera, and Opera meant Italian opera.

(Nicholas Till, Rossini: His Life and Times, p. 20)

- ▶ In 19 th C. Italy, 200 towns have opera houses.
- ▶ In larger cities, three seasons per year of Opera; essentially year-round.

Italian Opera means Rossini

- ▶ Rivalry with Beethoven
- ▶ Global reach: in 1829, 11 of his operas performed in 1829 alone.
- ▶ *The invention of Beethoven and Rossini : historiography, analysis, criticism* (Cambridge), edited by Nicholas Mathew and Benjamin Walton

Opera Atmosphere

- ▶ “In their boxes, people could...chatter, play cards, ‘or anything else.’”
- ▶ Food, champagne, privacy (sex?)
- ▶ “sometimes the curtains are drawn, and you may imagine what you please” (Samuel Rodgers, english poet, quoted in Till, p. 22)
- ▶ Gambling! (outlawed in Milan, 1815)

Giaochino Rossini, 1792 - 1868

- ▶ Musical family: father played horn, mother was a soprano
- ▶ Traveled with Anna, early exposure to operatic tradition
- ▶ Enrolls in Accademia Filarmonica at age 14, gets lucky break at Teatro San Moise, eventually lives all over Italy and France, makes lots of money.
- ▶ Wrote 38 operas in 18 years, then retired.

Conventions: Rossini Overtures

- ▶ Template:
 - ▶ three part introduction
 - ▶ bithematic exposition (woodwind solo)
 - ▶ “bubbling crescendo codetta marking end of exposition”
 - ▶ **truncated recapitulation with “Rossini crescendo.”**
- ▶ Examples:
 - ▶ [La Scala di Seta, 1812](#) – romantic comedy of errors
 - ▶ [Il Signor Bruschino, 1813](#) – romantic comedy of errors
 - ▶ [Aureliano in Palmira, 1813](#) – opera seria set in Persia
 - ▶ [Elisabetta, Reghina d’Inghilterra, 1813](#) – political drama set in England
 - ▶ [Il Barbieri di Siviglia, 1816](#) – ‘prequel’ to the Marriage of Figaro of Pierre Beaumarchais
 - ▶ [Semiramide, 1823](#) – Opera seria, based on Voltaire, set in Assyria
 - ▶ [Guillaume Tell, 1829](#) – seria based on Schiller’s rendition of the William Tell fable; fabled Swiss patriot who assassinates Gessler, local despot.

““Opera,” not this opera, is what is being marked as festive.”
(Taruskin)

Self-borrowing

- ▶ Taruskin's account?
- ▶ Philip Gosset, "Compositional Methods," in *Cambridge Companion to Rossini* (p. 82):

Rossini notated ever one of these borrowed pieces anew. Some changes are obligatory...but throughout the composer recast his orchestration in large and small ways, modified vocal lines and rewrote cadenzas. There is nothing mechanical about his work, in short: he was both borrowing and recomposing. It hardly seems as if he saved very much time by engaging in this kind of self-borrowing, yet the practice may have eased somewhat the pressure of writing one new work after another, as many as five operas in a single year.

Rossini Crescendo

La Calunnia e un venticello, from the Barber of Seville: Don Basilio and Dr. Bartolo scheme about how to defeat the wily Almaviva.

Calunnia: Rumor

libretto

Notice:

- ▶ Self-referentiality
- ▶ Sophisticated/known frivolousness
- ▶ Skill in tone painting
- ▶ Orchestral imagination

No development: *Geist* vs *Sinnlichkeit*

Rossini antagonizes the Romantic sensibility; sparks debate that breaks down along national lines:

- ▶ *Geist*
- ▶ *Sinnlichkeit*: “Sensuality,” “sensuousness” (Anecdote: Debussy going out for a smoke during the development section)

Tancredi (1813)

- ▶ First real hit, esp. 'di tanti palpiti'
- ▶ Opera seria
- ▶ *Travesti* hero, woman playing a man
- ▶ Convoluted plot:
 - ▶ Set in Sicily at 1005, under threat from Muslims and warring Italian factions. Amenaide loves Tancredi, but it's forbidden by two warring families, headed by Argirio and Orbazzano (so typical) *overture, borrowed*
 - ▶ Amenaide promised to the wrong guy (Orbazzano), along with Tancredi's property.
 - ▶ Tancredi returns from exile to defend the city from moors, sings of his country and the too-famous "*di tanti palpiti.*"

Di Tanti Palpiti

Oh patria! dolce, e ingrata patria! alfine a te ritorno! Io ti saluto, o cara terra degli avi miei : ti bacio. E questo per me giorno sereno : comincia il cor a respirarmi in seno. Amenaide! o mio pensier soace, solo de' miei sospir, de' voti miei celeste oggetto, io venni alfin : io voglio, sfidando il mio destin, qualunque sia, meritarti, o perir, anima mia.

Tu che accendi questo core, tu che desti il valor mio, alma gloria, dolce amore, secondate il bel desio, cada un empio traditore, coronate la mia fà.

Di tanti palpiti, di tante pene, da te mio bene, spero mercà. Mi rivedrai... ti rivedrà... ne' tuoi bei rai mi pascero. Deliri, sospiri... accenti, contenti! Sarà felice, il cor mel dice, il mio destino vicino a te.

Oh Homeland! Sweet, ungrateful homeland! At last I come back to you! I greet you, oh dear land of my ancestors: I kiss you. This is for me a happy day: My heart begins to breath in my chest. Amenaide! My suave thought, the only cause of my sighs, of my vows, at last I came; I want to earn you, defying my fate, whatever it was, or die, my soul.

You who kindle this heart, you who awake my valour, blessed glory, sweet love, heed my desire, may an impious traitor fall, crown my faith.

For all these heartbeats, for all these pains, from you, my beloved, I hope for mercy. You'll see me again... I'll see you again... in your beautiful radiance I will have plenty. Deliriums, sighs... happy voices!... It will be glad, my heart tells me, my destiny - near to you.

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“His formulas became everyone’s formulas.” (Taruskin, p. 516)

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- ▶ Overture, ensemble, aria – 3 constituents to Opera
- ▶ Overture itself is formulaic
- ▶ Imbroglia: *L’Italiana in Algeri*, Act I finale
- ▶ Anatomy of an aria *scena*, e.g. ‘palpiti’:
 - ▶ *cantabile*
 - ▶ *tempo di mezzo*
 - ▶ *cabaletta*

“Music’s industrial revolution”

- ▶ Team effort: impresario, librettist, copyist, staff, singers, etc
- ▶ Accommodate virtuoso singers (divas)
- ▶ Four *farse* between 1812 and 1813
- ▶ Contract for Barber signed 15 December 1815, for a scheduled performance on Feb 20 1816
- ▶ Taruskin: his product, like any commercial product, was subject to all kinds of exigencies and prerogatives once it left his hands, with the result that, as Gossett puts it, “an Italian opera in the first half of the nineteenth century,” and no matter how distinguished the composer, “was treated as a collection of individual units that could be rearranged, substituted or omitted depending on local conditions of performance, local taste or, on many occasions, whim.”
- ▶ Composer is not the prima donna.
- ▶ “lazy” Rossini, bed anecdote

Antithetical with Beethoven

Inward/outward

Lonely/social

Calling/career

Sacred music after retirement

- ▶ Stabat mater, “cuius animus”, 1841
- ▶ Text and Translation
- ▶ Banned in 1903 by Pope Pius X:

Since modern music has risen mainly to serve profane uses, greater care must be taken with regard to it, in order that the musical compositions of modern style which are admitted in the Church may contain nothing profane, be free from reminiscences of motifs adopted in the theaters, and be not fashioned even in their external forms after the manner of profane pieces.

- ▶ Cf. Beethoven: sacralized secular music vs secular sacred music?

Domenico Gaetano Maria Donizetti 1797 - 1848

- ▶ Born poor, received musical education on a scholarship.
- ▶ Parents disapproved of music; serves in the military.
- ▶ Worked at a pace like Rossini – composed a total of 66 operas.
- ▶ Like Rossini, lived in Paris and Naples.
- ▶ Syphilis.

Lucia di Lammermoor, 1835

- ▶ The sixth operatic rendition of Walter Scott's 1819 *The Bride of Lammermoor*, one of the “waverly novels.”
- ▶ Scottish setting: romantic titillation.
- ▶ Plot: Lucia Ashton loves Edgardo, but he leads the political opposition to her family's house.
- ▶ Edgardo has to go to France. They secretly exchange rings.
- ▶ While he's away, Lucia is forced to marry Arturo, whose fortunes will save her family's household. They forge a letter from Edgardo that shows that he's found someone new in France. Lucia, heartbroken, agrees to marry Arturo.
- ▶ Then Edgardo shows up! Everyone, including Edgardo, blames Lucia. It's an *imbroglio*, but not funny.
 - ▶ Act II, scene II
 - ▶ libretto – search for 'per te d'immenso'
 - ▶ 'rispettate in me de dio'

Lucia act II, scene II: realism in opera seria

- ▶ Integration of buffa techniques for opera seria
- ▶ “Realism”: the integration of recitative and aria, more ensembles (used to be just for finales, but now they’re everywhere, including in seria)
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- ▶ Edgardo, Lucy, Enrico, Arturo, Raimondo
- ▶ Still observing cantabile/cabaletta aria structure

Lucia: 'il dolce suono'

- ▶ Lucia kills her husband to be, Arturo
- ▶ Makes a grand, delusional entrance to the wedding party
- ▶ **Il Dolce Suono**
- ▶ **libretto:** search for 'il dolce suono'
- ▶ **The Glass Armonica**
- ▶ In Walter Scott's novel, Edgardo, weirdly, falls into quicksand. In the opera, he stabs himself.
- ▶ Reminiscence Motifs
 - ▶ Armonica part recalls 'regnava nel silenzio' of Act 1 – Lucia's demented past
 - ▶ Lucia's entrance music to Act II imbroglia vs its reworking in 'il dolce suono'

Carl Maria von Weber, *Der Freischütz*, 1821

Taruskin: “With his *Der Freischütz* (The Free Marksman)...we encounter a new kind of musical Romanticism, a new kind of orchestral sound, and a new kind of national opera, an opera drawn from the people.

- ▶ Wolf's Glen – Act II finale
- ▶ Macabre
- ▶ *Das Volk, Volkstümlichkeit*
- ▶ Orchestration: Diminished 7th “phantasmagoria” – ¹

¹(See Anthony Newcomb, “New Light(s) on Weber’s Wolf’s Glen Scene,” in *Opera and the Enlightenment*, eds. T. Bauman and M. P. McClymonds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 61–88.)

Wagner on *Der Freischütz*

O my magnificent German fatherland, how must I love thee, how must I gush over thee, if for no other reason than that Der Freischütz rose from thy soil! How must I love the German folk that loves Der Freischütz, that even now believes in the wonders of artless legend, that even now, in manhood, feels the same sweet mysterious thrills that made its heart beat fast in youth! Ah, thou adorable German daydream! Thou nature-rapture, bliss in forests, gloaming, stars, moon, village clock-chimes striking seven! How happy he who understands thee, who can believe, feel, dream, delight with thee! How happy I am to be a German!