
OPERA: OF CONVENTIONS AND INNOVATION UP TO 1950

by **Dr John Galea**

There are some scholars that maintain that Opera can boast of two places that mark the threshold that eventually contributed solidly to the birth of this most eloquent of art-forms: Firenze (1598) with the performance of *Dafne* by Jacopo Peri, and Venice (1637) with the opening of the first commercial opera-house, the Teatro San Cassiano with the performance of *Andromeda* by Benedetto Ferrari. This duple birth marks a basic difference that has become largely synonymous with the *raison d'être* of this genre that has been also termed as the most irrational of art-forms. It is a matter of fact that in the case of Florence, opera was an “aristocratic entertainment” whilst in the Venetian case it can be defined as a “commercial enterprise opera”.

Just before the official birth of opera as an aristocratic art-form and its development through its various expansions and branching out towards various other Italian states in the very late Renaissance, there were several embryonic forms that proved to have a seminal role in the emergence of this genre. Such forms included the *intermedio*, the *intermezzo*, the *balletto*, the *masquerade* and the so called madrigal cycles. All these forms have invariably contributed towards the emergence and the codification of opera as the art-form that grew out of the spectacles presented in Florence in 1565 on the occasion of the fabulous wedding of Francesco de' Medici and Giovanna of Austria. These spectacles mirrored the prestige, both political and cultural, that various aristocratic courts were intent on displaying to pass the message across of the magnanimity of the ruling houses. Similar *intermedii* took place on the occasion of the marriage of Ferdinando de' Medici with Christine of Lorraine. In the meantime, an intellectual group headed by Vincenzo Galilei (father of the famous astronomer), referred to as the *Camerata* that met regularly at Giovanni de'Bardi's, Count of Vernio's quarters; published

a Dialogo della musica antica et moderna in 1581. Here Galilei stated that, melodies and rhythms that were set to multiple vocal texts could never explicitly convey the text and instead created a disarray of conflicting impressions that disrupted the meaning of the text. Vincenzo Galilei did compose some verses for tenor solo and accompaniment to prove his theory, although none of these are extant. These were followed by Peri's *Dafne*, whose views were quite divergent from those of Galilei, but written in a new solo vocal style known as 'monody', that is the novel way expounded in the theories of the 'nuova musica'.

Although not acknowledged as the first opera, Claudio Monteverdi's *La Favola d'Orfeo*, was produced for the *Accademia degl' Invaghiti* within the Gonzaga's Mantuan court. It is Monteverdi's first attempt at opera that also bore the distinguishing hallmark of the emergent art-form, possessing all its essential ingredients, i.e., recitative, songs, dance and instrumental sequences. It is the earliest opera that continues to hold its place steadfastly in the operatic repertoire. With the death of the Duke of Mantua in 1612, Monteverdi accepted the post of Master of Music for the Venetian republic and *maestro di cappella* at St Mark's Basilica, resuming duties in 1613. Although now entering a venerable age, Monteverdi still remained active through a rekindled interest in the art-form that sparked the opening of public theatres of Venice. He composed three new operas *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* (1639-40), *Le Nozze di'Enea e Lavinia* (1641), and *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (1642-43), revised in 1651, after its premiere at the Teatro S.S. Giovanni e Paolo in Autumn 1642.¹ Monteverdi is the first opera composer to dramatise intense human emotions that even a modern audience would find his settings full of subtle naturalism. It must also be pointed out that subsequently; Venetian opera differed from operatic genres in other Italian cities

primarily in its formal emphasis on arias, attention to vocal elegance; elaborate stage machinery, lavish costumes and lesser use of chorus. Slightly later, notable composers that contributed to the Venetian genre would include Claudio Pallavicino, Tommaso Albinoni, and Antonio Vivaldi. The success encountered by this art-form was so colossal that before the close of the century the Venetian republic could boast of no less than eleven theatres, thriving prosperously on operatic productions.



Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)



Title page of Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*

Concurrently, this new form of entertainment spread also rapidly across Central and Southern Italy, Rome and Naples. Rome started producing variants through Cardinal Barberini, whose palace boasted of an imposing opera house and Filippo Neri, a priest who started to accommodate a resurgent, populist service at the 'oratory' in Rome. In Cardinal Barberini's opera house,

operatic productions differed in subject-matter from its other Italian counterparts. Roman opera, exemplified through Stefano Landi's *Sant' Alessio*, treated the life of the fifth-century saint Alexis rather drawing on classical mythological characters. Philip Neri, is to be justly recognized for his contribution towards the emergence of a related art-form - the sacred drama: *La Rappresentatione dell'Anima, et di Corpo* with music by Emilio de' Cavalieri. This work proved to be such an enormous success that it did eventually give rise to a hybrid genre and had various successors that were half-oratorio, half-opera.

Operatic developments in France can be singled out with one notable example that proved to be of cardinal importance to the history of ballet: *Le Balet comique de la Royne*, performed on 15th October, 1581 at the wedding of the Duke of Joyeuse and Mlle de Vaudemont; where spectacle, scenery, costumes, music for dance and singing were combined in a sequence that followed the basic ingredients of a story: exposition, tension and resolution. The music was composed by Jacques Salmon and Lambert de Beaulie under the guidance of the Piedmontese Baldassarino de Belgioiosò. It was also another ecclesiastical prelate, Cardinal Mazarin of France that introduced Italian opera to France and in 1655, the first French opera *La Triomphe de l'amour* by La Guerre. A year later, the first attempt at English opera was secured by William Davenant's *Siege of Rhodes*. This can be seen as a direct consequence of the French school, and the transplant grafted with the musical scenario on the banks of the Thames, blossomed into a brief brilliant spell under the greatest musical genius that England produced, Henry Purcell. The monarch Charles II was not a profound musician, but possessed a vision strong enough to send one of the most promising of the 'Children of the Chapel Royal', Pelham Humphrey, over to Paris to learn all that was newest in music at the hands of Lully. When Humphrey returned to England, his own music displayed the French influence so much strongly that it even reflected itself and found an intense English character in the music of his pupil Purcell (1658-1695). *Dido and Aeneas*, is Purcell's only opera, reputedly written at

the age of seventeen. It shows a complete knack for the intricacies that surround the fashionable art-form thus becoming the first English attempt at opera where the music is continuous throughout. Airs and recitatives, choruses and instrumental pieces succeed each other, as in the operas of the Italian and French schools. Although never surpassing the quality work of *Dido and Æneas*, successive attempts at the indigenous form resulted in *King Arthur* (1691, with a text by Dryden) and *The Fairy Queen* (1692, based on A Midsummer Night's Dream).



Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

The Paris Opéra opened at the Académie d'Opéra in 1671, that shortly thereafter became the Académie Royale de Musique, with a production of Robert Cambert's opera *Pomone*, considered as the first French opera. But it was the Florentine Giovanni Battista Lulli, who later gallicized his name to Jean-Baptiste Lully who exerted a huge influence on French music. His passionate energy towards the art-form, coupled with ambition and flair for intrigue soon brought him to the notice of Louis XIV. Lully also brokered artistic friendship with Molière, a man of the theatre whose real name was Jean-Baptiste Poquelin. Out of this collaboration a new gallican art-form, the Comédie-Ballet was forged. More acquaintances with top people, especially with Philippe Quinault helped Lully in setting a pattern for French opera through successive developments like the *tragédie en musique* and the *tragédie-lyrique*. Examples of the genre include *Alceste*, *Armide* and *Proserpine* amongst others. The whole essence that contributed to the delineated character of the *tragédie en*

musique is found in the assimilation of the inflexions of the French language mirroring themselves in the musical settings, especially through recitatives. Dance was given a huge importance so much so that it remains the distinguishing characteristic of the much later French Grand-Opéra. Choruses also played a distinguished role in the gallican art-form while orchestral solid 'a5' texture become its most salient characteristic. It must be said that the orchestral introduction to opera resulted in the 'French-overture' that is different from its Italian counterpart. The French overture opens with a stately movement where a profusion of impressive dotted rhythms prevail, followed by a fast fugal second section that is rounded off by a return to the opening section.



Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687)

This novel fashion of music-drama soon crossed the Alps and in 1627 Heinrich Schütz wrote the first German opera based on a translation of the Ottavio Rinuccini libretto to Peri's *Dafne*, but German opera was slow to develop partly because it imitated Italian opera and even alternated the two languages in one work; and also because of religious revivalists (during the later decades of the reformation) who poured scorn on the characters taken from classical mythology). These attempts at a national opera were taken some steps further by Reinhard Keiser (1673-1739) who produced no fewer than a hundred and sixteen operas.

The year 1679 marks the first performance of the first of Alessandro Scarlatti's operas, an oeuvre that helped to change the current operatic style by expressing drama primarily through music, retaining the basso continuo for *recitativo secco*

and orchestral accompaniment for *recitativo accompagnato*. He is to be credited also with the introduction of the ‘ensemble of perplexity’ where singers express different thoughts and emotions simultaneously, a novelty that was later to develop into the *finale concertato* at the end of an act. In his operatic works Keiser flouted Italian conventionalisms and for many years Hamburg was perhaps the only German town where the art-form thrived and where such musical activity was noteworthy.



Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725)

Sooner, Italian opera degenerated to such an irksome level that melodic invention remained the only redeeming factor, with complete disregard to the intelligibility of the plot and characterisation. Italian opera was thus reduced to a series of arias strung together by recitatives. Another factor that contributed to this degenerative trend was the emergence of a particular penchant by singers who progressively started to dominate the musical stage with their vocal pyrotechnics. This craze even reached a saturation point where the mingling of tunes by different composers was even encouraged, resulting into the venerable pastiche genre (*pasticcio*). It is an acknowledged fact that Handel’s first London success, *Rinaldo*, is a near ‘pasticcio’. It employs the fashionable way of “transformative imitation” through which composers could borrow freely and emulate other composers’ works.³ Handel did truly craft an art out of this august practice and in this context he still needs to be properly evaluated. The impressive list of Handel’s thirty operas in the next twenty

years, feature *Giulio Cesare* and *Tamerlano* (1724), *Rodelinda* (1725), *Alcina* (1735) and *Xerxes* (1738) amongst others. After 1741, Handel grazed new pastures and abandoned writing opera as a conspicuous declining interest in the genre was becoming more and more evident. This was largely due to the astronomical fees being asked by singers and the disdainful tantrums of temperamental opera artists. Other possible discontents were the language barrier, the artificial nature of recitatives and naive plots.⁴ In 1728, Italian opera lyrics were parodied and ridiculed in the extraordinary success of John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*. This novel experiment that used the ‘pasticcio’ expedient and incorporated spoken dialogue, established ballad-opera in England and sparked further ballad-opera production especially *The Devil to Pay* that was often re-set on the continent. The miserable failure of Handel’s last opera *Deidamia* (1741) did make Handel ponder about the commercial viability of his Italian opera in England and he turned to the laborious production of English oratorio, a genre which likewise started a lively kicking success tradition for the next 180 years.



George Friderick Handel (1685-1759)

Meanwhile in Italy, Pergolesi started to compose comedy operas in the Neapolitan dialect giving rise to the important offshoot of opera known as ‘opera buffa’. The genre became instantly popular due to its subject-matter. Many of the stock characters of the *commedia dell’arte* permeated comic opera and successful composers include Feo, Porpora, Traetta, Piccinni, Vinci, Anfossi, and

Durante. The paradigm of such stock characters was Pantalone, who is invariably found foolishly courting a much younger girl from a lower social rank. Another exemplar from the *commedia dell'arte* is Columbina, who combines a mixture of sentimentality, charm and knowing pertness with an element of shrewdness. Comic opera's adoption of the Pantalone and Columbina archetypes represents one its mainstays, their counterparts immediately recognisable in the most famous of all early Neapolitan comic pieces, Pergolesi's *La serva padrona*.



Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710-1736)



Title page of Pergolesi's *La serva padrona*

By the mid-18th century the conventions of Italian opera had settled into a pattern of stultifying unreality, with elaborately artificial plots regularly grinding to a halt to allow the famous castrato singers of the day to show their paces - or indeed to show them twice, for no aria

ends until it has been repeated *da capo* (from the top). An Italian poet, Pietro Metastasio, cornered the market for librettos in this style (known as *opera seria*). Every composer did turn first to him when venturing into operatic composition. Some of Metastasio's texts are given forty or more different operatic settings. From 1730, Metastasio dominated the operatic scene as a librettist at the Court theatre in Vienna. It will be the same city that will witness the operatic reform advocated by Gluck in 1762. In partnership with Raniero de' Calzabigi, a librettist critical of Metastasian conventions, Gluck devises a reform of opera where words and music work together to convey the powers of musical drama. Such theories were put to practice in *Orfeo et Eurydice*. Gluck becomes thus the first composer to anticipate the mood of the opera in the overture, to avoid the secco recitative. He also exploited the strategic dramatic use of chorus and strived to aim for "simplicity, truth and naturalness" that resulted in unity through the concept that words and music are equal partners, as maintained in the preface of his *Alceste*.⁵ Other operas written in French for Paris include *Iphigénie en Aulide* (1774), *Armide* (1777), *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1778).

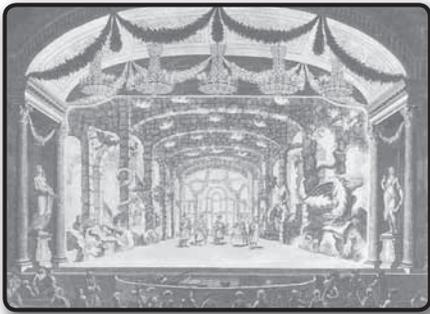


Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782)

Gluck's operatic pre-eminence was ardently being challenged in Paris by supporters of Piccini, and the end result was the 'Guerre des Buffons', where the italoophile 'Picciniste' and the Francophile 'Gluckiste' exchanged fierce tirades about the virtues and liabilities of opera.



Christoph Willibald von Gluck (1714-1787)



An anonymous Dutch engraving, c. 1770, of Orfeo in Hades, from Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*.

Later on in France, Grétry took centre stage and established a trendy niche through a prolific output of more than fifty operas, most especially *Zémire et Azor* (1771) and *Richard Coeur-de-Lion* (1754).

In central Europe, a new comet grazed the musical firmament and ploughed valiantly leaving behind an enormous trail of light. This was Mozart who started his astronomic career with his opera seria *Idomeneo*. In this work Mozart's genius adds an unprecedented charge of dramatic emotion to the withering state of opera seria. After this initial success, *Idomeneo*, was largely forgotten and it is in Vienna that Mozart's busy opera career takes off with a commission from the emperor Joseph II. The ruler's wish for a cheerful German opera was commendably fulfilled by Mozart in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782). This opera

was an instant success and Mozart's fame spread like wild fire. During the same year, the similarly prolific but drier composer Paisiello produced *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. Mozart struck a new collaboration with Lorenzo da Ponte, who would adapt the controversial Beaumarchais' play *Le Mariage de Figaro* (1784), subversive in its comedy at the expense of the aristocracy. At first Joseph II forbade its performance but was later persuaded by Da Ponte about the innocent gaiety that is primarily crafted to achieve a new synthesis between comedy and passion. Mozart's musical skill was so brilliant that it outshone his superb character drawing and resulted in great theatre music. This acute sense of theatre protracted in his last operas *Così fan tutte* and *Don Giovanni* together with the singspiel *Die Zauberflöte* and the opera seria *La Clemenza di Tito*.

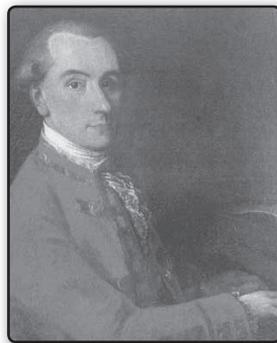


Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

The year of Mozart's death, 1791 also saw the typically impressive *Lodoiska* by Cherubini followed by Cimarosa's famous comic opera *Il Matrimonio Segreto* (1792). Oddly enough, by 1798, Italian opera that had hitherto been highly upheld in esteem in Russia was banned. No doubt this move was meant to encourage Russian opera, for which Catherine the Great had supplied several libretti.

The entrance of Russia into the realm of opera is heralded by Mikhail Glinka who headed the creation of a national school with the production of his folk-opera *A Life for the Tsar*.

The Slavophile faction demanded independence from Western musical tradition and in its drive to portray vividly Russian life, it drew inspiration from Slav religious and folk music. The emergent Russian national school would later become of age with the 'Mighty Five'; a group of five composers, Mily Balakirev, Modest Mussorgsky, Alexander Borodin, best known for his national opera *Prince Igor*, César Cui, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, with a considerable output of fifteen operas, that gave birth to the pan-slavic vision.⁶



Nicolò Isouard (1773-1818)

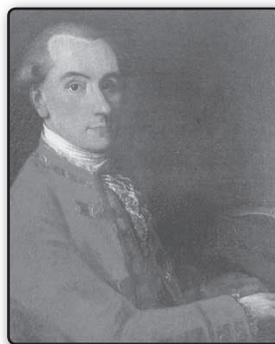


Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857)

About 1800 opera seems chiefly to have thrived in Paris, with graceful composers such as Étienne Méhul, François-Adrien Boieldieu, the Maltese composer Nicolò Isouard and Nicolas Dalayrac. Later developments were foreshadowed by Gaspere Spontini's *La Vestale* (1807) and the Parisian sojourn of Rossini, most notably through his grand opera *Guillaume Tell* (1829). It must be said that this last opera by Rossini came after a string of highly charged Italian comic operas, *L'Italiana in Algeri* (1813), *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (1816), and *Cenerentola* (1817) that proved the Pesaro composer to be a singular dispenser of tuneful and effervescent melodies, coupled with colourful orchestrations and pyrotechnical *fioriture*.

The 19th century heralded the rise of operatic romanticism begun by Louis Spohr's *Faust* (1816) and established by Carl Maria von Weber's *Der Freischütz* and *Oberon*. This novel romantic ingredient was skilfully grafted into works like Daniel Auber's *La Muette de Portici* and *Fra Diavolo* and Vincenzo Bellini's *Norma* and *La Sonnambula*. Equally romantic but differing in style were Ferdinand Harold's *Zampa* and Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* (both written in 1831), Gaetano Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore* (1832), *Lucrezia Borgia* (1833) and *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835). Throughout its colourful five hundred year history, the opera house was the melting pot of innovative ideas and experimentation. This fact was perhaps most pronounced during the romantic period where composers were striving for the union of the arts. Together with an all encompassing desire to present human experience, opera became the perfect vehicle for this romantic expression with France taking the lead through grand opera that ruled the Parisian stage in the post-Napoleonic era. Giacomo Meyerbeer became the acknowledged master of the genre that offered a feast of colour, movement and sound through brilliant solos and ensembles, vivid use of the orchestral palette, spectacular ballets and décor. *Les Huguenots* (1836), *Le Prophète* (1849) and *L'Africaine* (1864) are recognised as cornerstones of heroic grand-opera.⁷ In this regard Meyerbeer's contribution came after Jacques Halévy's *La Juive* (1835) which is an opera that is considered as one of the grandest of grand operas through its impressive array of colour, formal ballet, major choruses, grand processions

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and celebrations. Several French composers of opera achieved notoriety during the latter part of the century. Charles Gounod's fame rests largely on his *Faust* (1859) that achieved an exceptionally unparalleled success while Camille Saint-Saëns scored a triumph with his spectacular biblical opera *Samson et Dalilah* (1877). The composer Jules Massenet also contributed to the genre, especially with his masterpiece *Manon* (1884) based on the poignant novel of Abbé Prévost.



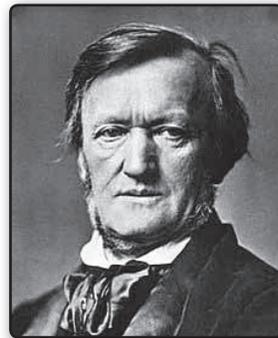
Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848)



Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864)

1813 marks the birth of both Richard Wagner and Giuseppe Verdi. Without Wagner the course of post-romantic music would have been sadly deficient because it is he who gives shape to the theory of 'gesamtkunstwerke' – the all encompassing ideal of the symbiosis of music and dramatic expression which is the focal point of Wagnerian *music-drama*.⁸ He did away with the old fashioned 'number' operas

with arias, duets, ensembles and choruses. Instead he proposed a radical concept that provides a continuous musical tissue – the "endless" melody – that pervades the entire act and indeed the whole opera, to serve the drama by never allowing emotions to cool. Another fundamental tenet was the role of the orchestra. Coming to grips with the German symphonic tradition that he inherited after Beethoven, he strove to achieve the same measure of symphonic content in opera, thus developing and establishing a primary role for the orchestra. This role expects the Wagnerian orchestra to reveal, act, comment and flood the action, singers plus audience with an extravagantly sonorous and dramatic soundscape. The orchestral fabric also employs the 'leitmotif' (leading motives), that help to connect the dramatic tissue throughout the work. Leitmotifs carry specific meanings and help to suggest an emotion, idea or object through continual transformation. Wagnerian operatic philosophy indeed did bring about a powerful rethinking of the possibilities that underlie the merger between music, poetry, drama, dancing, acting, painting and architecture. This constitutes his *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, (The Artwork of the Future), a theory that found its practical adoption in his music dramas *Tristan und Isolde*, *Meistersinger* and the 'Ring' cycle that comprise four inter-connected operas: *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, *Götterdämmerung*.



Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Giuseppe Verdi born during the same year as Wagner but outliving him for eighteen years is the other great man of the theatre. Verdi's musical eloquence spoke

to the heart and permeated dramatic action with shattering expressiveness. Verdi based his art on melody coupled with a sure-handed orchestration that never drowns the vocal line. Of his first fifteen operas, the most important is *Macbeth* (1847), derived from Shakespeare's masterpiece. This was followed by another three operas that established his fame as a flamboyant portrayer of human emotions: *Rigoletto* (1851), *Il Trovatore* (1853) and *La Traviata* (1853). As the years progressed, Verdi embarked on more ambitious operatic projects that assimilated elements of French grand opera: *Un Ballo in Maschera* (1859), *La Forza del Destino* (1862) and *Don Carlos* (1867). Through these trails the ever inquisitive Verdi started to explore higher concepts of dramatic unity until he produced a stunning work that ushered in his final period: *Aida* (1871). Apart from the eminent *Messa da Requiem* (1874), built on one of the most dramatically powerful texts of the catholic liturgy, Verdi found his ideal librettist in Arrigo Boito, himself the composer of *Mefistofele* and an exponent of the 'Scapigliatura' literary movement that took Italian romanticism to task.⁹ As a result of this fruitful collaboration, *Otello* (1887) is born, becoming the apex of three hundred years of Italian lyric opera. Although on the threshold of eighty, Verdi's lyric fount still had to gush forth the luminous opera *Falstaff* (1893), a fitting crown to a lifetime of achievements.

In the late years of the 19th century, a style of operatic composition known as 'Verismo', a term borrowed from literary circles to denote the portrayal of "everyday" characters and raw naturalism. The most important and influential exponent of this literary school was Giovanni Verga, whose output shared analogies with the naturalism of Emile Zola and Henrik Ibsen and their contemporaries. The landmark *verismo* opera is Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1890), based on a short story by Verga. It is set in contemporary times in a mountain village in Sicily, portraying peasant folk, retributions, jealousy and murder. It can however be asserted that this landmark of was precursored by Georges Bizet's *Carmen* (1874), based on a work by Prosper Mérimée where raw emotions are portrayed so vividly. Mascagni's eponymous opera was followed by Ruggiero Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* (1892) and Umberto Giordano's *Andrea Chenier* and *Fedora* (1898) and

culminated in the works of Giacomo Puccini, a composer with a flair for communication that speaks a refined sensibility directly to the heart.



Giovanni Verga (1840-1922)

Puccini was a practical man of the theatre and knew that one of the quandaries of modern opera lay in problematical libretti. In Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa he found a tandem that would provide him with the librettos for three of the most successful operas of the twentieth century: *La Boheme* (1896), *Tosca* (1900) and *Madame Butterfly* (1904). A rightful heir to the Italian master that preceded him, Puccini possessed a gift for sensuous melody that primarily takes its contours from the vocal tessitura to explore the subterranean emotions of the soul. His orchestrations are full of light and shade that complement the atmospheric lush harmonies that range from the pungent to the heavenly. These operas together with *La Fanciulla del West* (1910) brought about an invigorating booster to the twilight of Wagner's operatic idiom. His final opera *Turandot* is a work of flawless artistry and its score poses the hypothetical question: what would Puccini have produced after this opera?

The twentieth-century scenario presents lesser contemporary composers in whose works further operatic subtleties can be traced. These include Gustave Charpentier's *Louise* (1900), Francesco Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur* (1902) and Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari's *I gioielli della Madonna* (1911). A distinctive analytical psychology also gets enmeshed in the operatic genre as in Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*,

an opera known for its atmospheric musical frissons. Similar psychological delvings are to be found in the Richard Strauss' *Salome* (1906) and *Elektra* (1909). Continuing in this psychological immersion, Arnold Schönberg's monologue opera *Erwartung* (1909), *Moses und Aron* (unfinished by 1951) and Béla Bartók's *Duke Blackbeard's Castle* (revised 1917) are two representative works that take 20th-century vocality to unprecedented heights together with Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*. Recitative had by now become ultra-realistic and perhaps very close to the Florentine Camerata's notions. A new type of notation for 'Sprechstimme' a type of half-spoken, half-sung recitative was devised, differently from that used for sung passages.¹⁰



George Gershwin (1898-1937)

The post-war years can perhaps be seen as the fulfilment of that unity intended by the first experimenters of the operatic genre, Gluck, Mozart and Wagner through the rise of the producer-musician and the composer-man of the theatre. It is thus that contemporary music takes its place as the rounded expression of our culture. In addressing the needs of this culture, the operatic composer seeks to affirm the need to communicate, a need that no artist can ever escape.



Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

Since the inter war years, opera has linked up closely with contemporary populist music as in Ernst Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf* (1927), Kurt Weill's *Dreigrosschenoper* (1927) and *Mahagonny* (1928), Paul Hindemith's satirical opera *Neues vom Tage* (1929) and George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (1935). The revolt against the cheap popularity of the operatic genre produced Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* (1927) and *The Rake's Progress* (1951), Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler* (1938) and Benjamin Britten's *Rape of Lucretia* (1946), *Billy Budd* (1951), *The Turn of the Screw* (1954), and *A Midsummer's Night Dream* (1960). Another link up was the embracing of an effective theatricality as in Shostakovich's *The Nose* (1929) and *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (1934), Giancarlo Menotti's *The Medium* (1946).

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