

THE STORY OF OPERA – UCT Summer School 2021

LECTURE 2: MOZART, and Early 19th Century Opera in Germany and France

Presented by Elizabeth Handley – *MUSIC OF NOTE* 🎵

INTRODUCTION

I WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-91)

Placing Mozart into Historical Context

- In 1756: Prince- Archbishop Sigismund von Schrattenbach ruled the state of Salzburg.
- Father, Leopold Mozart (1719-87), Vice-Kapellmeister at court; sister Maria Anna (1751-1829.)
- **Music during the mid-18th C:** a musical revolution: the complex *polyphonic* style of the Baroque Era (Bach and Handel; *castrati* (Carlo Broschi – aka Farinelli)) was displaced by a simpler style: *homophony*.

The CLASSICAL PERIOD: order, balance, simplicity, poise, grace and elegance. *Good taste*.

- **The Age of Enlightenment - or the Age of Reason, French Revolution 1789:** 18th C philosophers. Was secular, liberal, equalitarian, progressive and cosmopolitan; *simpler* mode of musical expression.
- Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732-99): *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786).
- Humanitarian ideals: the universal brotherhood of man; Freemasonry - Mozart.
- Emergence of a new middle class. The element of **satire:** Swift, Sheridan, Hogarth.

The Rococo Period: Fragonard, Watteau, Boucher.

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809): *Esterháza* – the chateau of Prince Nicolas Esterhazy.

Mozart's early youth

- *La Finta Semplice* (1768) (*The Pretended Simpleton*): Italian *opera buffa* (comic opera), Carlo Goldini.
- *Bastien und Bastienne* (1768): *Singspiel* (German light opera; speech instead of recitative.)
- *Mitridate, re di Ponto* (1770) & *Lucio Silla* (1772): *opera seria*. Commissioned by Milan.

Mozart's first masterworks

- **1777:** journey to Paris: fruitless, due to the second stage of the *Guerre des Bouffons*.
- **1779:** appointed organist at the Archbishop's Court and the Salzburg Cathedral, and *Konsertmeister*.
- *Idomeneo re di Creta* or *Ilija e Idamante* (1781): Italian *opera seria* for the Munich Carnival. Libretto by Giambattista Varesco, the first of Mozart's really great dramatic works. Based on Trojan legend.

The Vienna Period: (1781-91)

- Emperor Joseph II's court: trifling appointment (in 1787) as Court Chamber Music Composer.
- *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782): *Singspiel* - first great comic masterpiece, anticipated the "rescue" operas of the 19th Century, inspired by the French Revolutionary period.
- **1782:** married gifted singer Constanze Weber (1762-1842), cousin of Carl Maria von Weber.
- **Lorenzo da Ponte (1749 – 1838): libretti:** *Marriage of Figaro* (1785-6): based on Beaumarchais's play: epitome of 18th C Italian *opera buffa*, *Don Giovanni* (1787): commissioned by Prague, *Così fan tutte* (1790): *opera buffa*.

The last year: 1791

- *La Clemenza di Tito*: *opera seria*, libretto by the poet Metastasio.
- *The Magic Flute*: *Singspiel*, libretto by Emanuel Schikaneder (1751-1812), a German "magic opera".
- **Mozart's significance:** laid the foundations for Italian and German opera, and for modern opera.

II GERMAN ROMANTIC OPERA

- Early 19th C: German opera still not as popular as the French and Italian works.
- **Ludwig von Beethoven (1770-1827)**: only one opera, *Fidelio*, a classic “rescue opera”. German libretto commissioned in **1803** by Emanuel Schikaneder and prepared by Joseph Sonnleithner, from the French version by Jean-Nicolas Bouilly.

German Romanticism

- Literary giants: Heine, Goethe, Schiller and Klopstock, & composers: Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, and Richard Strauss → **the Lied** (German art song) → “song cycles”.
- ***Sturm und Drang*** (storm and stress): restless, passionate Romantic German music and literature.
- **Opera** - a special role to play in the **Romantic Movement**.
- **19th C German opera**: represented a world outside the French and Italian orbit; an interest in German folk music, fairy tales and legends; the Brothers Grimm.

Carl Maria von Weber (1786 – 1826): 9 operas: esp. *Der Freischütz* (1821 – The Wolf’s Glen Scene), *Euryanthe* (1823) and *Oberon* (1826).

Otto Nicolai (1810 – 1849): 5 operas, esp. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1850), based on Shakespeare.

III OPERA IN FRANCE

- After Mozart’s death in 1791, **Paris** became *the* operatic epicentre of Europe.
- From the mid-18th Century, French opera evolved into 2 opposing streams:
 - a) The lofty, serious style derived from Lully, with sung recitative, and
 - b) *opéra comique*, with spoken dialogue in French.

The French Revolution and Rescue Opera

- *Opéra comique*, eg. **Grétry’s Guillaume Tell (1791)** about the Swiss revolutionary leader, a subject used later by Rossini.
- An interest in classical mythology, eg. 2 Italian composers writing in French: **Luigi Cherubini (1760 – 1842)**: *Médée* (1797), and **Gasparo Spontini (1774 – 1851)**: Napoleon’s favourite composer, *La Vestale* (*The Vestal Virgin*) (1807). Also composed “rescue operas”, very popular.

French Romanticism and Grand Opera

- Fuelled by the French Revolution’s break with the past. No longer an age of patronage.
- During Napoleon’s Empire Period (1804-1815): the most popular opéras comiques were composed by **François-Adrian Boieldieu (1775 – 1834)** and **Daniel Auber (1782 – 1871)**: wrote 47 operas, 38 set to libretti by **Eugène Scribe (1791 – 1861)**: esp. *Fra Diavolo* (1830), **Ferdinand Hérold (1791-1833)**: ballet *La fille mal gardée* (1828) & opera *Zampa* (1831), and **Jacques Halévy (1799-1862)**, *La Juive* (1835).
- **Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791 – 1864)**: most striking and influential French Romantic opera composer: esp. *Les Huguenots* (1836).
- **Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)**: 4 operas: *Benvenuto Cellini* (1838), *Les Troyens* (*The Trojans*) (1869) and *Béatrice et Bénédicte* (1862) after Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*.
- **Charles-François Gounod (1818-1893)**: 6 operas, esp. ***Faust* (1859)**, libretto compiled by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré.
- **George Bizet (1838 – 1875)**: ***Carmen* (1875)** (also a ballet, and 2 orchestral Suites); based on a short novel by Prosper Mérimée (1845), NB the first opera featuring **Verismo – REALISM**. Also *Les pêcheurs de perles* (*The Pearl Fishers*) (1863).

List of Musical Illustrations

- 1: **MOZART:** *Le nozze de Figaro*: Overture
- 2: **MOZART:** *Le nozze de Figaro*: *Amanti costanti* (Beloved friends)
- 3: **MOZART:** *Bastien und Bastienne*: Closing Trio: *Lustig! (Funny!)* Bastien (Peter Schreier, tenor), Bastienne (Adele Stolte, soprano) & Colas (Theo Adam, bass) Kammerorchester/Helmut Koch
- 4: **MOZART:** *Idomeneo*: Act I: *Quando avran fine omai.... Padre, germani, addio! (When will my harsh misfortunes ever end)* – *Arioso*. Anna Netrebko (soprano)
- 5: **MOZART:** *Die entführung aus dem Serail*: the Janissaries' Chorus
- 6: **MOZART:** *Marriage of Figaro*: Countess Almaviva & her maid Susanna (duettino): *Sull'aria... Che soave zeffiretto* - the "Letter Duet" - **artists unknown**
- 7: **MOZART:** *Don Giovanni*: *Là ci darem la mano* (Give me your hand) – **artists unknown**
- 8: **MOZART:** *Don Giovanni*: Overture (Slow introduction)
- 9: **MOZART:** *Così fan tutti*: *Come Scoglio (Like a rock)* Kiri te Kanawa (soprano)
- 10: **MOZART:** *The Magic Flute*: *The Queen of the Night's aria: Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen!* (The vengeance of hell burns in my heart!) Katarina Kmetova (Slovak soprano)
- 11: **BEETHOVEN:** *Fidelio*: Act 2 No.15: *O namenlose Freude! (O joy without words!)*: Christa Ludwig (soprano) & Jon Vickers (tenor)
- 12: **WEBER:** *Der Freischütz*: The Huntsmen's Chorus
- 13: **MEYERBEER:** *Les Huguenots* Act I: Urabain, the page: *Nobles seigneurs, salut!* (Greetings, noble lords!) Frederica von Stade (Soprano)
- 14: **GOUNOD:** *Faust* (1859): *Ah! Je ris de me voir (I am laughing to see...)*, the "Jewel Song": Angela Gheorghiu (Romanian soprano)
- 15: **BIZET:** *Carmen* (1875): *La habanera: L'amour est un oiseau rebelle (Love is a rebellious bird)* [with cut] So-called because it is written in the rhythm of the Cuban dance, the *Habanera* - rather like a tango: Maria Callas (soprano) (1923-77): also 2 *Carmen Suites* and a ballet, *Carmen*.
- 16: **BIZET:** *The Pearl Fishers*: *Au fond du temple saint* – artists unknown.