

THE STORY OF OPERA: UCT Summer School 2021:

Lecture 3: THE ITALIANS, from Rossini to Puccini

Presented by Elizabeth Handley – *MUSIC OF NOTE* 🎵

I ITALIAN OPERA IN THE PRIMO OTTOCENTO (1800-1850)

INTRODUCTION

- Early 19th C Italy: new works expected every season -> a system of rapid production, self-borrowing and plagiarism. Quantity rather than quality. Opera house the centre of Italian social life.
- The *aria del sorbetto* (sorbet aria) and the *aria di baule* ([trunk] aria).
- **Opera seria** – still the most prestigious genre for star singers: splendid sets and costumes, expensive.
- *Castrati* phased out -> new types of singer emerged. Tenors allotted more major roles.
- A new breed of singing actress, eg. Isabella Colbran (1785-1845) & Giuditta Pasta (1797-1865).

1. Gioachino Antonio Rossini (1792 – 1868)

- The most creative and influential opera composer of the early 19th C.
- Developed new musical forms, eg. the *cavatina* (slow) & virtuosic *cabaletta* (fast); the *scena* (scene).
- The “Rossini crescendo”: to increase the excitement.
- **Jenny Lind (1820-87)**: the “Swedish Nightingale”.

Recommended Listening:

La Scala di Seta (1812): Overture

Il Signor Beruschino (1812): Overture

Tancredi (1812-13): *Di tanti palpiti*

L'Italiana in Algeri (1813): Overture

Il Barbiere di Siviglia (1816) - same Beaumarchais play as Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*: *Ecco ridente in cielo, La calunnia e un venticello, Fredda ed immobile, Buona sera, mio signore*

Otello (1816)

La Cenerentola (1816-17): *Signor, una parola, Nacqui all'affanno...Non piu mesta*

La Gazza Ladra (1817): Overture

Mosè in Egitto (1818): *Dal tuo stellato soglio*

Semiramide (1822-23): Overture, *Bel raggio lusinghier* (coloratura)

Le Comte Ory (1828)

William Tell (1828-29): Overture

Stabat Mater and *Petite messe solonelle*

Donizetti and the “Rossiniani”

2. Gaetano Donizetti (1797 – 1848) - over 70 operas

Recommended Listening:

Anna Bolena (1830)

L'Elisir d'amore (1832): *Una furtive lagrima*

Lucia di Lammermoor (1835): *Regnava nel silenzio, Veranno a te sull' aure, Se tradirmi tu potrai, Chi mi frena*

La Fille du Régiment (1840)

Linda di Chamounix (1842): *O, luce di quest' anima* (Olga Peretyatko)

Don Pasquale (1843): *Quel guardo il cavaliere, Com' è gentil*

3. Vincenzo Bellini (1801 – 1835) - only 11 operas, mainly tragic

- Brought **Romanticism** to Italian theatre.
- Principal librettist: Felice Romani (1788 – 1865)

Recommended Listening:

La Sonnambula (1830), *Norma* (1831): *Va crudele, Mira, O Norma!, Deh, non voleri vittime*

I Puritani (1835)

- Great coloratura sopranos: Adelina Patti (1843-1919), Nellie Melba (1861-1931), Amelita Galli-Curci (1882-1963), Lily Pons (1898-1976), Joan Sutherland (1926-2010), Beverly Sills (1929-2007), etc.

Summing up:

- In Italy, the progression to Romanticism was slower than in France and Germany.
- The Italians had no tradition of spoken drama of their own...used the literature of France and England, eg. Sir Walter Scott and Shakespeare.
- Orchestration thin on the ground – merely to accompany the voices. BUT also for dramatic effect.

II GIUSEPPE VERDI (1813 – 1901) - Italian melodramma

- Verdi - a symbol of Italian liberty: raised with foreign repression and Italian nationalism.
- The political background: the Italian *Risorgimento*, led by Garibaldi -> Unification of Italy 1860.
- Victor Emmanuel, King of Sardinia – **Vittorio Emanuele Re D'Italia** - a covert *Risorgimento* slogan.
- Political elements often present in Verdi's operas eg. *Nabucco*, *Un ballo in maschera*, *I vespri Siciliani*
- Verdi's operas comprised of "numbers" (items): arias, choruses, recitatives and orchestral interludes for costume and scenery changes.
- Used great dramatists, eg. Victor Hugo, Schiller and Shakespeare, for his plots.

Recommended Listening:

Nabucco (1842)

Rigoletto based on Victor Hugo's *Le Roi s'amuse* (1851): *Questa o quella*, *Pari siamo*, *Caro nome*, *Piangi, fanciulla*, *La donna è mobile*

Il Trovatore (*The Troubadour* – 1853): *Tacea la notte placida*, *La Zingarella*, *Stride la vampa!*, *Ah, si, ben mio coll' essere*, *D'amor sull' ali rosee*, *Miserere*, *Ai nostri monti*

La Traviata (1853) based on Alexander Dumas' *La dame aux camellias* : *Prelude*, *Libiamo, libiamo, ne lieti calici* (*Brindisi*), *Un di felice*, *Ah fors' è lui*, *Addio del passato*

Les Vêpres Siciliennes (1855) - librettist Eugène Scribe (1791-1861)

Simon Boccanegra (1857 rev. 1881)

Un ballo in maschera (1859): *Eri tu che macchiavi quell'anima*

La Forza del destino (1862 rev. 1869): *La vergine degli angeli*, *Solenne in quest'ora*

Don Carlos (1867 rev.1884)

Aïda (1871): *Celeste Aida*, *Ritorna vincitor*, *Grand March*, *O patria mia*, *O terra, addio*

Otello (1887). *Falstaff* (1893) – Verdi's only comedy

III Verismo (Realism/Naturalism):

- *Verismo* began with the French *naturaliste* writers, led by Emile Zola (1840-1902).
- In the visual arts: the "Barbizon" School (1830-1870): Millet, Courbet, Rousseau, and later Corot.
- *Verismo* plots: fast-moving, violent and sensational; little elaboration or "filler" material.

1. Pietro Mascagni (1863 – 1945)

- Composed the first Italian *verismo* opera - *Cavalleria rusticana* (1890) (*Rustic Chivalry*); based on a one-act play by the Sicilian novelist Giovanni Verga.

2. Ruggiero Leoncavallo (1858 – 1919)

- *I pagliacci* (1892): a play within a play -> reality and play-acting become confused.

IV GIACOMO PUCCINI (1858 – 1924) - only 12 operas

- Teacher, Milan Conservatoire: Amilcare Ponchielli (1834-86): *La Gioconda* (1876: *Dance of the Hours*).
- Puccini very particular about his choice of subjects. 2 librettists: Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica.
- Like Wagner, he thought in terms of the *whole production*: staging, costumes and lighting.
- Puccini brilliantly delineates the characters in his operas. Also: musical themes representing various characters and concepts, eg. love
- The settings are usually exotic: Paris, Japan, California, or ancient China.
- He created his own melodic style: each note of the melody corresponds to a syllable in an Italian word -> the distinction between aria and recitative blurred. BUT still many show-stopping arias.
- Puccini's doomed heroines: Manon, Mimi, Tosca and Butterfly.

Recommended Listening:

Manon Lescaut (1883): *Donna non vidi mai, In quelle trine morbide, L'ora o Tirsi, è vaga e bella, Intermezzo, Sola, perduta, abbandonata.*

La Bohème (1896): *Si, chiamano Mimi, O soave fanciulla, Quando me 'n vo', Addio, dolce svegliare, Ah Mimi, tu piu non torni*

Tosca (1900): *Ricondita armonia, E lucevan le stelle*

Madame Butterfly (1904): *Ancora un passo, Dolce notte, Tutti I fior, Intermezzo* (the Humming Chorus)

La Fanciulla del West (1910): *Ch'ella mi creda*

La Rondine (*The Swallow*) (1917)

Trittico (*Triptych*) (1918): *Il tabarro* (*The Cloak*), *Suor Angelica* (*Sister Angelica*) & *Gianni Schicchi: O mio babbino caro*

Turandot (1926, completed by Franco Alfano (1876 -1954): *In questa reggia*

LIST OF MUSICAL ILLUSTRATIONS

1: ROSSINI: *The Thieving Magpie*: Overture: Coda (closing section)

2: ROSSINI: *The Barber of Seville: Una voce poco fa* (A voice just now) – *Cavatina & Cabaletta*: Joan Sutherland (soprano)

3: ROSSINI: *Il Turko in Italia* (1814): *Caro padre, madre amata*: Sumi Jo (b 1962) (top D) & Chorus

4: DONIZETTI: *Lucia di Lammermoor: Il dolce suono mi colpì di sua voce!* (*The sweet sound in his voice*)...*Spargi d'amoro pianto* (*Shed tears of love*) (Mad Scene) Pretty Yende (Live performance)

5: BELLINI: *Norma: Casta diva* (*Chaste one*) Joan Sutherland

6: VERDI: *Nabucco*: Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves: *Va Pensiero, sull' ali dorate* (*Let my thoughts fly back to Jordan*): excerpt

7: VERDI: *Il Trovatore - Di quella pira* Manrico: José Cura (tenor)

8: VERDI: *La Traviata: Sempre libera* (*Always free*), Anna Netrebko (soprano) & Rolando Villazon (tenor), with

9: VERDI: *Aïda: Quale insolita gioia Nel tuo sguardo!* (*What rare joy shines on your face!*): Agni/Agnes Baltsa (soprano) & Plácido Domingo (tenor)

10: VERDI: *Rigoletto* quartet: *Bella figlia dell'amore* (*Fairest daughter of love*)

11: MASCAGNI: *Cavalleria rusticana* "Easter Hymn": *Regina coeli* (*Heavenly Queen*)

12: PUCCINI: *La Bohème: Che gelida manina* (*Your tiny hand is frozen*)

Rodolfo: Ludovic Spiess (Romanian) (tenor) (b 1938)

13: PUCCINI: *Tosca: Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore* (*I lived in art, I lived in love*) Catherine Naglestad (soprano)

14: PUCCINI: *Madame Butterfly: Un bel dì vedremo* (*One fine day*) Cio-Cio San: Marelli Freni (soprano, b 1935): closing section

15: PUCCINI: *Turandot: Nessun dorma* (*None shall sleep*): second half, with chorus: Luciano Pavarotti (Tenor 1935-2007)

16: ROSSINI: *The Barber of Seville: Largo al factotum*: closing tongue-twister: Philharmonia Orchestra, London, baritone unknown.