Inside Opera: Spring 2013

What Makes Opera Tick

19th Century Italian Opera
Overview

1. The Path to Bel Canto
   *The Journey to Reims*

2. Mid-Century Romanticism
   *La traviata*

3. Toward the End of an Era
   *Falstaff*
SESSION 1 – The Path to Bel Canto

A Quick Look: Opera history before the 19th century

- Early Baroque
- High Baroque
- Reform/Classical

Rossini & the Bel Canto Style

Fach

- Coloratura soprano
- Rossini tenor
- Basso cantante / basso buffo

Producing Bel Canto Operas
Florentine Camerata (1570’s-80’s)

Vincenzo Galilei (mathematician, musician)
Count Giovanni de’ Bardi (host)
Giulio Caccini (musician)
Pietro Strozzi (military leader)
Ottavio Rinuccini (poet)
Girolamo Mei (historian)

Theory precedes practice.
Words must be understood; polyphony obscures text.
Music should reflect cadence of words rather than dance.
The Birth of Opera: 400 Years Ago

Jacopo Peri & Ottavio Rinuccini

Dafne (~1594)

Jacopo Peri & Ottavio Rinuccini
Giulio Caccini & Ottavio Rinuccini

Euridice (1600)
Discussing Style: Our Vocabulary

Melody  the “tune”
Harmony  chords, combinations of notes
Rhythm  arrangement of sound in time
Texture  colors of sound; orchestration
Amplitude  loudness, volume
Text  words, lyrics
Form  structure, architecture
Early Baroque

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melody</td>
<td>in service of text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony</td>
<td>spare, slow-moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm</td>
<td>text-driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texture</td>
<td>strings, keyboards, token winds; fluid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amplitude</td>
<td>relatively small range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>of supreme importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>device: word painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form</td>
<td>through-composed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Baroque: *(Portuguese)*
“mis-shapen pearl”
Monteverdi
(1567-1643)

Handel
(1685-1759)
The Pendulum Swings...

*From*
- Simplicity
- Clarity
- Balance

*To*
- Complexity
- Passion
- Vocal Fireworks

Florentine Camerata  
1590’s  

High Baroque  
~1650-1750
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Baroque</th>
<th>High Baroque</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Monteverdi)</td>
<td>(Handel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in service of text</td>
<td>Melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spare, slow-moving</td>
<td>coloratura, fioratura, melismas, ornaments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rhythm of speech</td>
<td>Harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strings, keyboards</td>
<td>some counterpoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>token winds</td>
<td>increasingly complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relatively small range</td>
<td>more winds: flute, oboe, trumpet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of supreme importance</td>
<td>Amplitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mythology &amp; history</td>
<td>terraced dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>through-composed</td>
<td>Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mythology &amp; history</td>
<td>secondary in importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form</td>
<td>Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Da capo aria: ABA form</td>
<td>mythology &amp; history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rigid “number” operas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Baroque Opera Seria:  
A Rigid Recipe

Strict singer hierarchy (prima donna... assoluta...e sola!)
Each main performer must have one aria in each act
  Lesser artists: *Aria di sorbetto*
No performer may have two arias in succession
No aria may be followed by another of the same type
Prima donnas traveled with an *Aria di baule* (luggage)
Happy ending required: *Deus ex machina*
The Pendulum Swings…

From
Simplicity
Clarity
Balance
Florentine Camerata
1590’s
Reform/Classicism
~1750-1800

To
Complexity
Passion
Vocal Fireworks
High Baroque
~1650-1750

Organic structure (form ≠ formula)
Fluid range of emotion
Focus on human drama
Balance between singing, text, orchestra
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Baroque</th>
<th>Classical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>coloratura, fioratura, melismas, ornaments</td>
<td>Melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>some counterpoint</td>
<td>stripped of excesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increasingly complex</td>
<td>Harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more winds:</td>
<td>clear foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flute, oboe, trumpet</td>
<td>Rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>terraced dynamics</td>
<td>more aligned vertically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>secondary in importance</td>
<td>Texture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mythology &amp; history</td>
<td>clarinet, horns (dbl winds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rigid “number” operas</td>
<td>Amplitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Da capo</strong> aria: ABA form</td>
<td>growth in orchestration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>organic, serving the drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“regular people”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>overture as introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>many more ensembles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bel Canto* = Beautiful Singing

ROSSINI
1792-1868

BELLINI
1801-1835

DONIZETTI
1797-1848

“Bellini is the red wine, Donizetti is the white wine, and Rossini is the champagne!”

(Edita Gruberova)

(*Term not used until about 1880; reaction to Wagner?)
Gioacchino Rossini  (1792-1868)

Dominated opera in first half of 19th century
Wrote 40 operas in just under two decades
Retired from opera at 37

Il barbiere di Siviglia
La gazzetta
Otello
La cenerentola
La gazza ladra
Armida
Adelaide di Borgogna
Mosè in Egitto
Adina
Ricciardo e Zoraide
Ernione
Eduardo e Cristina
La donna del lago
Bianca e Falliero
Maometto secondo
Matilde Shabran
Zelmira
Semiramide
Il viaggio a Reims
Le Siège de Corinthe
Moïse et Pharaon
Le Comte Ory
Guillaume Tell
D.H. Lawrence
“I love Italian opera – it’s so reckless. Damn Wagner, and his bellowing at Fate and death... I like the Italians who run all on impulse and don’t care about their immortal souls and don’t worry about the ultimate.”

Hector Berlioz
“Rossini’s melodic cynicism, his contempt for dramatic expression and good sense, his endless repetition of a single form of cadence, his eternal puerile crescendo and brutal bass drum, exasperated me to such a point that I was blind to the brilliant qualities of his genius, even in his masterpiece, The Barber of Seville.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classical</th>
<th>Bel Canto</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>stripped of excesses</td>
<td>coloratura, fioratura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clear foundation</td>
<td>proscribed ornamentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vertically aligned</td>
<td>straightforward, diatonic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clarinet, horns (dbl winds)</td>
<td>increased use of rubato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>balance melody, text, orch</td>
<td>secondary to vocal display,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>growth in orchestration</td>
<td>except in <em>opera buffa</em> patter!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organic, serving the drama</td>
<td>“Rossini crescendo”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>restored to importance</td>
<td>more formulaic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“regular people”</td>
<td>undemanding plot lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overture as introduction</td>
<td>Aria/Tempo di mezzo/Cabaletta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>many more ensembles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
19th-century Opera Building Blocks

Recitative = Dialogue
  Secco
  Accompagnato

Aria = Monologue
  Aria (Cavatina) – Tempo di mezzo – Cabaletta

Ensembles = Simultaneous Conversations
  Monologues, dialogues, internal monologues
Opera Buffa: The Lighter Side of Bel Canto

Developed from 18th century *intermezzi*
Derived from *commedia dell’arte* theatrical tradition

Components

- Farcical story
- Quick recitatives
- Patter songs
- Higher proportion of ensembles
- Happy ending
FACH

Categorization system for opera singers
German = “subject”

Caveats…

Some singers defy categorization.
Some roles can be sung by voices in more than one category (Zwischenfach).

Fach is affected by size of venue, taste of impresario, composition of cast.

Dangerous when taken to extreme!
**FACH: Determining Factors**

### The Highs and the Lows
- **Range**: singable notes
- **Tessitura**: common range
- **Registration**: strongest area
- **Passaggio**: register transition ("break")

### Loudness and Projection
- **Timbre**: color
- **Weight**: loudness, thickness

### Fluidity
- **Agility**: coloratura
- **Flexibility**: variety in dynamic and color
TYPICAL VOCAL RANGES
Fach Overview – Soprano

Until the late 18th century, all female singers were sopranos.

**Soubrette** (French *soubrette* = shrewd)
Bell-like silvery quality; “ina/etta” maids, servants
Susanna, Despina, Zerlina, Adina, Norina, Marzelline, Adele, Nannetta, Sophie

**Coloratura** (*Koloratur*: add to an idea using main thought as point of departure)
Great agility, decorative  (Subtypes: lyric coloratura, dramatic coloratura)
Lucia, Queen, Gilda, Zerbinetta, Fiordiligi, Konstanze, Manon, Juliette

**Lyric** (“of a lyre”)  
Communicate beauty, romance, pathos (JB Steane: “the world’s girlfriend”)
Mimi, Violetta, Marguerite, Micaëla, Liù, Countess, Marschallin, Lauretta

**Spinto** (*spingere*: to push) / **Lyric Dramatic**
Tonal beauty of the lyric and power of the dramatic
Butterfly, Tosca, Aida, Leonoras, Lady Macbeth, Sieglinde, Ariadne

**Dramatic** (“horn-and-helmet”)
Cut thru large orchestra; warm *and* metallic; powerful; flexibility compromised
Salome, Elektra, Brünnhilde, Isolde, Marie, Turandot
Rossini Soprano: Coloratura

*Koloratur* (German): adding to an idea using the main thought as point of departure

Characteristics:
- Great agility
- Decorative potential

Subtypes
- Lyric coloratura
- Dramatic coloratura

Examples: Lucia, Queen, Gilda, Zerbinetta, Manon
# Fach Overview – Tenor

(From *tenere* (to hold): the important line in polyphonic music)

## Tenore di grazia / Leggiero

Flexible, tessitura high (Ottavio, Nemorino, Des Grieux)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coloratura</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agility, extremely high range; bel canto specialist (Almaviva, Ernesto, Arturo)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comic (Spieltenor)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Character type (Beppe, Goro, Pedrillo, Tanzmeister, Monostatos)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lyric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beauty of tone; “squillo” to project over large orchestra (Lensky, Faust, Rodolfo) (Before 1830’s, no full voice above passaggio)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lirico-Spinto to Tenore Robusto</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heroic; stamina and volume (Cavaradossi, José, Otello, Radames, Calaf)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heldentenor / Tenore di forza</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baritonal hue; powerful midvoice (Florestan, Lohengrin, Siegmund, Tannhäuser)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rossini Tenor: Coloratura

Characteristics:
- Great agility
- Decorative potential
- Very high range

Examples: Almaviva, Ernesto, Arturo
## Fach Overview – Bass

*Distinctions between lower voices began in second half of the 19th century*

| **Bass-baritone** | Baritone w/bottom extension, bass w/top extension  
|                  | Don Giovanni, Figaro |
| **Basso cantante** | Lyrical (“singing”) bass voice, typically not particularly large  
|                  | Handel low roles |
| **Basso buffo (Spielbass)** | Comic bass  
|                  | Osmin, Leporello, Basilio, Bartolo, Ochs |
| **Lyric bass / Basso cantabile** | More heft than basso cantante, slightly lower tessitura  
|                  | Dapertutto, Escamillo, Sarastro, Ferrando |
| **Dramatic bass / Basso profondo** | King Philip, Wagner roles |
Rossini Basses

**Basso cantante**
Lyrical ("singing") bass voice, typically not particularly large
Rossini Basses

Basso buffo (Spielbass)
Osmin, Leporello, Basilio, Bartolo, Ochs
Session 1: *Viaggio* Excerpts
Venue: Vienna 1998
Conductor: Riccardo Muti
Production by Luca Ronconi

Cast:
Corinna                                      Cecilia Gasdia
La Marchesa Melibea                         Lucia Valentini-Terrani
La Contessa di Folleville                  Lella Cuberli
Madama Cortese                             Montserrat Caballe
Il Cavaliere Belfiore                       Frank Lopardo
Il Conte di Libenskof                       Chris Merritt
Lord Sidney                                 Ferruccio Furlanetto
Don Profondo                                Ruggero Raimondi
Il Barone di Trombonok                      Enzo Dara
Don Alvaro                                  Carlos Chausson
Don Prudenzio                               Giorgio Surjan
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