

A History of Western Music, 10th Edition, Grout, et al.

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/ [CHAPTER 21. OPERA AND VOCAL MUSIC IN THE EARLY CLASSIC PERIOD](#) / [CH 21 OUTLINE](#)

I. Italian Comic Opera

A. Neapolitan comic opera

1. terms for comic opera: *opera buffa*, *dramma giocoso*, *dramma comico*, *commedia per musica*
2. originated in Naples, aimed at middle-class audience
3. plots entertained, served moral purpose
 - a. centered on ordinary people, present day
 - b. caricatured foibles of aristocrats and commoners
 - c. stock characters resemble *commedia dell'arte*
 - d. main plot revolved around serious characters
 - e. dialogue set in rapidly delivered recitative with continuo
4. arias
 - a. typically in galant style
 - b. Leonardo Vinci (ca. 1696–1730), pioneer of the style; *Li zite 'ngalera* (The Lovers on the Galley), Naples premiere, 1722
 - i. witty musical setting fits text, moves drama forward

B. Intermezzo

1. two or three segments performed between acts of a serious opera
 - a. originated in Naples and Venice ca. 1700
 - b. comic characters given own separate story
 - c. plots presented two or three people
 - d. alternating recitatives and arias
 - e. performed at court and public opera houses
2. *La serva padrona* (The Maid as Mistress, 1733) by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710–1736)
 - a. opera in miniature, only three characters
 - i. Uberto (bass), rich bachelor
 - ii. his maid, Serpina (soprano)
 - iii. his mute valet, Vespone
 - b. social hierarchy questioned
 - c. Serpina declines Uberto's marriage proposal (NAWM 109)
 - i. dialogue in simple recitative, harpsichord accompaniment
 - ii. Uberto's mutterings: accompanied recitative (usually reserved for dramatic situations)
 - iii. da capo aria: many melodic ideas, shifting thoughts and moods
 - iv. evokes serious opera, *ombra* (Italian for "shadow")
 - v. depiction of character and emotion: highly contrasting melodic ideas over light accompaniment

C. Opera buffa: distinctive style in 18th century

1. term coined by Venetian dramatist Carlo Goldoni (1707–1793)
 - a. full-length work, 3 acts, 6+ singing characters
 - b. lifelike dialogue, observations of everyday life
2. Baldassare Galuppi
 - a. collaborated with Goldoni, 12+ comic operas
 - b. works staged successfully across Europe, established model
3. ensemble finales
 - a. Goldoni/Galuppi featured ensembles: opening, extensive finales
 - b. all characters brought on stage
 - c. music depicts emotional states, conveyed dramatic action
 - d. unlike serious opera
4. contributions of Italian comic opera
 - a. comic opera derived from galant style:
 - i. periodic phrasing, tuneful melodies, simple harmonies, spare accompaniment
 - b. distinctive contributions to international idiom, later 18th century:
 - i. representation of dramatic action, direct expression, emotional fluidity, strong stylistic contrasts, amusing mixtures of elements

II. Opera Seria

A. Pietro Metastasio (1698–1782)

1. dramas set to music hundreds of times; Galuppi, Gluck, Mozart
2. court poet in Vienna, 1729
3. heroic operas present conflicts of human passions
 - a. stories based on Greek and Latin tales
 - b. opera promoted morality through entertainment
 - c. examples of merciful and enlightened rulers
 - i. noble behavior of rulers implicit compliment to patrons
4. conventional cast: two pairs of noble lovers surrounded by other characters
 - a. resolution of drama, deed of heroism or sublime renunciation
 - b. dramas extol virtues of self-control
5. three acts, alternating recitatives and arias
 - a. recitatives develop action through dialogues and monologues
 - b. arias: dramatic soliloquy by principal characters
 - c. occasional duets, few larger ensembles, rare choruses
 - d. orchestra serves mainly to accompany

B. Musical interest centered in the arias

1. da capo arias, favored form, first half of the century

2. abbreviated da capo
 - a. opening ritornello omitted in repetition
 - b. "dal segno" indicated parts to be repeated
 - c. some arias lacked contrasting B section
3. new features, 1720s and 1730s
 - a. succession of moods, variety of musical material
 - b. two keys contrasted in first vocal statement, material in second key recapitulated in the tonic
 - c. vocal melody dominates, orchestra provides harmonic support
 - d. melodies in short units, antecedent-consequent phrases
4. Johann Adolf Hasse (1699–1783)
 - a. great master of opera seria
 - b. music and opera director, court of the elector of Saxony in Dresden
 - c. years spent in Italy; Italian musical style
 - d. majority of his 80 operas use Metastasio librettos
 - e. *Digli ch'io son fedele* (Tell him that I am faithful) from *Cleofide* (1731) (NAWM 110)
 - i. graceful motive follows natural rhythms, inflections of text
 - ii. phrases end with accented suspensions on last stressed syllable
 - iii. syncopations and scales, reverse-dotted rhythms (Lombardic rhythms, Scotch snaps)
 - iv. perfect embodiment of galant style
 - f. Faustina Bordoni (1700–1781), Hasse's wife
 - i. title role of *Cleofide*, starred in most of Hasse's Dresden operas
 - ii. universally admired, success in Venice, Munich, Vienna, London
 - iii. known for her fluent articulation, trills, embellishments, expressive power

III. Opera in Other Languages

- A. Comic-opera librettos written in the national tongue
 1. accentuated national musical idioms
 2. historical significance:
 - a. reflected demand for simple, clear, "natural" singing
 - b. encouraged growth of separate national traditions
- B. France
 1. *Querelle des bouffons* (Quarrel of the Comic Actors)
 - a. pamphlet war, 1752–54 prompted by Italian comic opera in Paris
 - b. critical opposition to old-fashioned state-subsidized French opera
 - c. French intellectuals took part in the quarrel
 2. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778)
 - a. argued merits of Italian opera
 - b. praised emphasis on melody, emotion through melody
 - c. *Le devin du village* (The Village Soothsayer, 1752)
 - i. blends Italian and French styles
 - ii. most popular, frequently performed opera of 18th century
 - iii. style example: *J'ai perdu tout mon bonheur* (NAWM 111), opening air
 3. opéra comique
 - a. French version of opera with spoken dialogue
 - b. popular entertainment at suburban fairs
 - c. almost entirely popular tunes set to new words, *vaudevilles*
 - d. presence in Paris of Italian comic opera in 1750s
 - i. opéra comiques with ariettes, mixed Italian-French styles
 - ii. vaudevilles gradually replaced by ariettes
 - iii. end of 1760s all music freshly composed
 - iv. spoken dialogue instead of recitative
 4. serious plots
 - a. based on social issues before and during Revolution
 - b. works produced at the Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique in Paris
 - c. Belgian-born André Ernest Modeste Grétry (1741–1813), leading French opera composer
 - i. inaugurated vogue for "rescue" operas
- C. England
 1. ballad opera: opera in the local language
 - a. dialogue interspersed with songs, new words to borrowed tunes
 - b. fashion peaked in 1730s
 - c. over time, more original music; development parallel to opéra comique
 2. *The Beggar's Opera* (1728, NAWM 112), libretto by John Gay (1685–1732), music arranged by Johann Christoph Pepusch (1667–1752)
 - a. satirized London society
 - b. modern urban thieves and prostitutes and their crimes
 - c. poetry and music sometimes spoofed opera
 - d. incongruous juxtapositions of operatic conventions create humor
 - e. style examples: *My heart was so free* (NAWM 112a), *Were I laid on Greenland's coast* (NAWM 112b)
- D. Germany and Austria
 1. *Singspiel* (German for "singing play")
 - a. opera with spoken dialogue, musical numbers, comic plot
 - b. 1710s at Kärntnertheater in Vienna, earliest examples
 - c. English ballad operas translated into German
 - d. Johann Adam Hiller (1728–1804), principal composer, 1760s and 1770s
 - e. *Singspiel* tunes published in German song collections
 - f. lasting popularity, became folk songs
 - g. important precursor of German-language musical theater
- E. Russia
 1. visiting Italian troupe to Moscow, 1731
 - a. Italian opera encouraged by Tsaritsa Anna (r. 1730–40)
 - b. engaged Neapolitan chapelmaster and court composer Francesco Araja (1709–1770)
 - i. formed permanent Italian opera company at imperial court
 2. Russian serious opera
 - a. Tsaritsa Elizabeth (r. 1741–61), promoted Italian opera at imperial court
 - b. *Tsefal i Prokris* (Cephalus and Prokris, 1755), by Araja
 - i. first opera in Russian

ii. style of Italian opera seria

3. Russian comic opera

- a. Giovanni Battista Locatelli's troupe in St. Petersburg, 1757; operas by Galuppi
- b. Catherine the Great (r. 1762–96) subsidized opera buffa
- c. 1770s, French opéra comique and Singspiel in Russia
- d. inspired new comic genre of opera in Russian
- e. performed at theaters in cities or country estates

IV. Opera Reform

A. Changes reflected Enlightenment thought

1. sought to make opera more "natural"
 - a. more flexible structure, more expressive, less ornamented, varied musical resources
 - b. modified da capo aria, other forms introduced
 - c. alternated recitatives and arias more flexibly
 - d. greater use of accompanied recitative and ensembles; heightened drama
 - e. orchestra more important: depict scenes, evoke moods, added color and depth
 - f. reinstated choruses
2. *An Essay on the Opera* (1755) by Francesco Algarotti, influenced by French serious opera, classical Greek tragedy
 - a. sought to assert primacy of the drama, subordinate solo singers
3. Niccolò Jommelli (1714–1774)
 - a. blended Italian melody and French declamatory recitative; *Atilio Regolo* (1753)
 - b. later operas, more continuous dramatic flow
 - c. orchestra more important role, colorful use of woodwinds and horns
4. Tommaso Traetta (1727–1779)
 - a. combined French tragédie en musique and Italian opera seria; *Ippolito et Aricia* (1759)
 - i. libretto translated and adapted from Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie*
 - ii. borrowed Rameau's dance music and orchestral interludes
 - iii. included a number of choruses (French tradition)
 - iv. solo roles, Italian genres of recitative and aria
 - b. succeeded Galuppi, court composer to Catherine the Great, St. Petersburg

B. Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–1787)

1. winning synthesis of French, Italian, and German operatic styles
2. *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762), *Alceste* (1767)
 - a. strongly affected by reform movement in 1750s
 - b. resolve to remove abuses that had deformed Italian opera
 - c. music serves the poetry, advances the plot
 - d. overture: integral part of the opera
 - e. lessen contrast between aria and recitative
3. Chorus of Furies in Act II of *Orfeo ed Euridice* (NAWM 113)
 - a. music molded to the drama
 - b. recitatives, arias, choruses, intermingled in large unified scenes
 - c. opposition of performing forces, deepens dramatic conflict
4. French operas, climax of his career
 - a. *Iphigénie en Aulide* (Iphigenia in Aulis, 1774); *Iphigénie en Tauride* (Iphigenia in Tauris, 1779)
 - b. works of huge proportions, balance of dramatic and musical interest
5. Gluck's influence
 - a. models for subsequent works, especially in Paris

V. Song and Church Music

A. Song

1. songs for home performance
 - a. composed and published in many nations
 - b. growing interest in amateur music-making
 - c. accompaniment for keyboard instrument
 - d. simple, syllabic, diatonic, strophic
 - e. many were religious, plain hymnlike style
2. distinctive secular genres in different regions
 - a. France, *romance*: strophic song, sentimental text, expressive melody
 - b. Britain, *ballads*: printed on broadsides, texts sung to familiar tunes
 - c. late 18th century, fashion for Scottish and Irish folk songs
3. Lied, German song
 - a. second half of the century, more than 750 collections of Lieder
 - b. strophic, lyric poems; simple and expressive
 - c. syllabic settings, melody easy to sing
 - d. simple accompaniment subordinate to vocal line
 - e. important composers: Telemann, C. P. E. Bach, Carl Heinrich Graun (ca. 1704–1759)
4. the virtues of song
 - a. lack of affectation
 - b. spare accompaniment
 - c. little word-painting
 - d. direct expression of feelings
 - e. simple, clear melodies

B. Church music

1. Catholic music
 - a. composers conformed to prevailing secular style
 - b. musical idioms and genres of opera
 - c. composers same as leading opera composers
 - d. Italian oratorios almost indistinguishable from opera
 - e. older learned style blended with galant traits
2. Pergolesi's *Stabat mater* (The Mother Was Standing, 1736)
 - a. setting of medieval Marian poem, Jesus's crucifixion
 - b. exuberant melody and dramatic scene-painting
 - c. one of the most popular and frequently printed sacred works of the century
3. Lutheran music
 - a. drastic changes in church music
 - b. congregational hymns composed or adapted to galant style

- c. nonliturgical oratorio: principal medium for North German composers
- 4. Russian Orthodox music
 - a. Catherine the Great (r. 1762–96), composers free to experiment
 - b. Galuppi (court composer), numerous *kontserty* (sacred concertos) in Russian, up-to-date style
 - c. Dmitri Bortnyansky (1751–1825), most famous composer of sacred music for Russian Orthodox Church
- 5. English church music
 - a. traditional genres of Anglican music, the service, anthem, hymns
 - b. William Boyce (1710–1779) composer for Chapel Royal
- 6. New World
 - a. settlers drew on respective national styles
 - i. Spanish colonies: villancicos, other choral music
 - ii. French Canadians: emulated Catholic music in France
 - iii. British North America: diverse immigrant groups
 - b. notable groups: Puritans, Moravians
- 7. Puritans in New England, hymnody
 - a. Calvinists, worship centered on metrical psalm singing
 - b. *Bay Psalm Book* (1640), first book published in North America
 - c. trained amateurs sang psalm settings and anthems in parts
 - d. William Billings (1746–1800), *New-England Psalm-Singer* (1770)
 - i. 108 psalm and hymn settings, 15 anthems and canons for chorus
 - ii. first published collection of music entirely composed in North America
 - iii. first music book published in North America devoted to single composer
 - iv. most settings were “plain tunes”
 - v. later collections, fusing tunes, *Creation* (NAWM 114)
- 8. Moravians in Pennsylvania and North Carolina
 - a. German-speaking Protestants from Moravia, Bohemia, southern Germany
 - b. embellished service, concerted arias and motets in current styles
 - c. collected substantial libraries of music, sacred and secular

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