Opera Comes of Age -- Thanks to the Works of Mozart, Rossini, Berlioz, and Wagner

A Course Outline, November 2023

--CC YOUNG -- "The Point": THURSDAY, November 9, and TUESDAY, November 14; 10:00am - 11:30am

To appreciate why opera survives into our era and flourishes, there's no better way than getting to know the earliest of the late18th-century-early-19th-century-opera greats - Mozart, Rossini, Berlioz, and Wagner. Together we will examine salient facts and observations about each composer, short selections that contribute to a better sense of the composer, and selections from one masterpiece for each composer. Through discussion and YouTube extracts, we will consider both the context as well as the content of some of the true high points of western music; and we will examine why these four remarkable artists and their works continue to touch hearts and minds, generation after generation, the world over.

I, Steve Dubrow (smdubrow@gmail.com), have been a devotee of opera since my childhood, attending, over the years, many hundreds of opera and vocal recital performances in the U.S. and Europe and maintaining an extensive CD collection focused on the classical vocal arts. Having graduated summa cum laude from Columbia, I did graduate work in Romance Languages and Literatures at Princeton and taught French at Brown University. A specialist in press and cultural affairs, I served for 25 years as a U.S. Foreign Service Officer, working in Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, Slovenia, Congo, Poland, Belgium, France, Austria, and – of course – in Washington, DC. I retired in 1998 as a member of the Senior Foreign Service. From 2000 until 2019, I taught world languages (French, Latin, Spanish, Italian) in high school in Montgomery County, MD, where I became a National Board Certified Teacher. My wife, Jeannette, and I retired and moved to Denton in June of 2019, joining our poet and essayist daughter Jehanne, UNT Professor of English, and her husband, Jeremy Schaub (our next-door neighbors, by the way) but, alas, leaving our son Eric behind in Maryland.
NOVEMBER 9

Today, the class will proceed chronologically and focus on the contributions of the two earliest of our operatic masters - Mozart and Rossini. (At our next meeting, we shall consider Berlioz and Wagner.) We shall follow the same format for each of our four composers. I will present and, when appropriate, illustrate with YouTube selections, five "things to remember" about the composer and his works. These "five things" are meant to emphasize the extraordinary creative genius of each composer. They will also serve as an entry point to the composer's masterpiece, providing the background and the context that will help us home in on the representative YouTube videos I have selected.

**MOZART (1756-1791)**

1. 600 compositions: operas (22), liturgical music for solo voices and chorus, symphonies and concertos, chamber music, and music for solo instruments
   (4.5 minutes) Excerpt of the Andante from Mozart’s Piano Concerto no. 21 in C-major played and conducted by Daniel Barenboim with the Berlin Philharmonic
   [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jmyARdhrGk&list=PLFXm33g1Zx9za2P6vf3CSPB7NW_wB2G4h&index=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jmyARdhrGk&list=PLFXm33g1Zx9za2P6vf3CSPB7NW_wB2G4h&index=1)

2. At14, Mozart composed MITRIDATE, RE DI PONTO (still performed today).
   (3) Beginning of Sifare’s aria "Lungi da te, mio bene" from Act 2 of MITRIDATE with Ann Murray as Sifare
   [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=namDGTYZQd0&list=PLFXm33g1Zx9za2P6vf3CSPB7NW_wB2G4h&index=2&t=139s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=namDGTYZQd0&list=PLFXm33g1Zx9za2P6vf3CSPB7NW_wB2G4h&index=2&t=139s)

3. Operas in two different national traditions - Italian and German
   (2.5 - 05:30-08:02) Pagageno/Papageno duet from Act 2 of DIE ZAUBERFLOETE with Simon Keenlyside and Ailish Tynan (the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden)
   [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9PCRhnNmNhNY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9PCRhnNmNhNY)

4. Mozart's characters resemble real and complex human beings.
(5) Don Giovanni’s seduction of Zerlina from Act 1, scene 3, of DON GIOVANNI with Thomas Allen and Susanne Mentzer (La Scala)  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqcA2fx04Y8

5. Shift of emphasis from the typical to the individual marks Mozart’s kinship with the 19th and early 20th century composers.

**Le Nozze di Figaro (The Marriage of Figaro) - 1786**

An indication of the full range of Mozart's mastery of all aspects of music is the unusually important use of ensembles - almost 50% of the "Nozze" numbers are ensembles.  
(10 - 1:20-1:30) Act 4 finale - the Salzburg Festival production of 2006  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVyxjDNStWM

**ROSSINI (1792-1868)**

1. Between 1812 and 1829 (17 years), 37 Rossini operas saw the light of day.

2. Rossini’s greatest success of all (and, indeed, making every contemporary list of the world's ten most performed operas) - IL BARBIERE DE SEVILLA (THE BARBER OF SEVILLE)  
(5) Figaro's entrance aria, "Largo al factotum" from act 1, THE BARBER OF SEVILLE, with John Rawnsley  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZtMLcyhSxVg&list=PLFXm33g1Zx9za2P6vf3CSPB7NW_wB2G4h&index=6

3. The characteristic "Rossinian crescendo"
(4) Don Basilio's aria, "La Calunnia," from act 1, with John Relyea in the Metropolitan Opera production of 2007  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHgYwOuOFsE&list=PLFXm33g1Zx9za2P6vf3CSPB7NW_wB2G4h&index=7&t=1s

4. The first composer to appreciate and write leading roles for the contralto and mezzo-soprano voices
(4.5) Isabella's entrance aria, "Cruda sorte," from act 1, L'ITALIANA IN ALGERI, with Stephanie Blythe in a Metropolitan Opera production  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJ6PIn8RU78
5. With his last opera, GUILLAUME TELL, Rossini helped change the course of opera: "grand opera" becomes the coming generations' touchstone of what opera should be.

**Guillaume Tell (William Tell) - 1829**

In TELL, the richness and scope, the pull of varying influences and styles that never cease to fascinate, and what is new to Rossini - pictorial representation of nature - combine to make a memorable grand opera. (14.5 - 1:20-1:34.5) excerpts from Act 4 - the Vienna State Opera product of 1997 with Thomas Hampson as Tell

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6HQib-99rg&list=PLFXm33g1Zx9za2P6vf3CSPB7NW_wB2G4h&index=9&t=4826s

**NOVEMBER 14**

**BERLIOZ (1803-1869)**

1. Hector Berlioz can claim lasting fame not only in the domain of opera but also in the domains of symphonic music, of choral music and oratorio, and of art songs.

(2 - 4:50-6:35) Finale of the "March to the Scaffold," the 4th movement of the SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE, performed by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra conducted by Jader Bignamini

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_s7A_W8Rcg&t=87s

2. Orchestration

(2 - 6:44-8:40) "Le carnaval romain," an overture Berlioz derived from themes from his opera BENVENUTO CELLINI, played here by the WDR Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Jukka-Pekka Saraste

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4qZrpGI-fk

3. During Berlioz's lifetime, the history of his operas is one of failure.

(3) Irresistible! Benedict discovers his love for Beatrice - aria in the form of a rondo from act 1 of BEATRICE ET BENEDICT sung by Paul Appleby at Glyndebourne (2016)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QszwK74A4E
4. On most occasions, Berlioz served as his own librettist. 
(5.5) Finale (the fall of Troy), act 2 of LES TROYENS, with Ana Catarina Antonacci as Cassandra in the 2003 production of the Théâtre du Châtelet
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yujWl4rjAE&list=PLFXm33g1Zx9za2P6vf3CSPB7NW_wB2G4h&index=35

5. LES TROYENS: a masterpiece that remained largely unknown for over a century

**Les Troyens (1856-1858)**

The grandest of grand operas
(9) The love duet (Act 4) between Dido (Susan Graham) and Aeneas (Gregory Kunde) - ("Nuit d'ivresse") culminating in Mercury's solemn warning "Italie" (the 2003 production of the Théâtre du Châtelet)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_YVq1pGmIL4&list=PLFXm33g1Zx9za2P6vf3CSPB7NW_wB2G4h&index=14

**WAGNER (1813-1883)**

1. Opera's most innovative and influential composer - "leitmotifs
(1.5 - 24:20-25:42) DAS RHEINGOLD, scene 2, the introduction of the Valhalla motif played by the Berlin Philharmonic, Herbert von Karajan, conductor
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFCFq6WWmGE

2. Wagner's chromaticism
(1.5 - 01:30-03:15) Very beginning of the Prelude to TRISTAN UND ISOLDE played by the Bayreuth Festspiel Orchester, Daniel Barenboim, conductor
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdjFBW-S3z0
3. Wagner's DAS RING DES NIBELUNGEN
(5 - 9:00-14:00) Conclusion of Brünnhilde's Immolation, the final scene of the entire Ring, sung by Gwyneth Jones as part of the Bayreuth "Ring" of 1980 (conducted by Pierre Boulez)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfy-dLpAneo&list=PLFXm33g1Zx9za2P6vf3CSPB7NW_wB2G4h&index=17

4. Bayreuth

5. "Gesamtkunstwerk"

**Die Walküre (1852-1856)**

The *Ring Cycle - in particular, DIE WALKURE* - is the best example for leitmotifs in all of opera.
(20.5 - 45:00-1:05:30) The end of the act 3 finale, Wotan's Farewell, performed by Gwyneth Jones (Brünnhilde) and Donald McIntyre (Wotan) in the 1976 Bayreuth Ring
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U77kwX1xEjk&t=42s