

Music: Structure and Culture

6. Opera & Music Drama

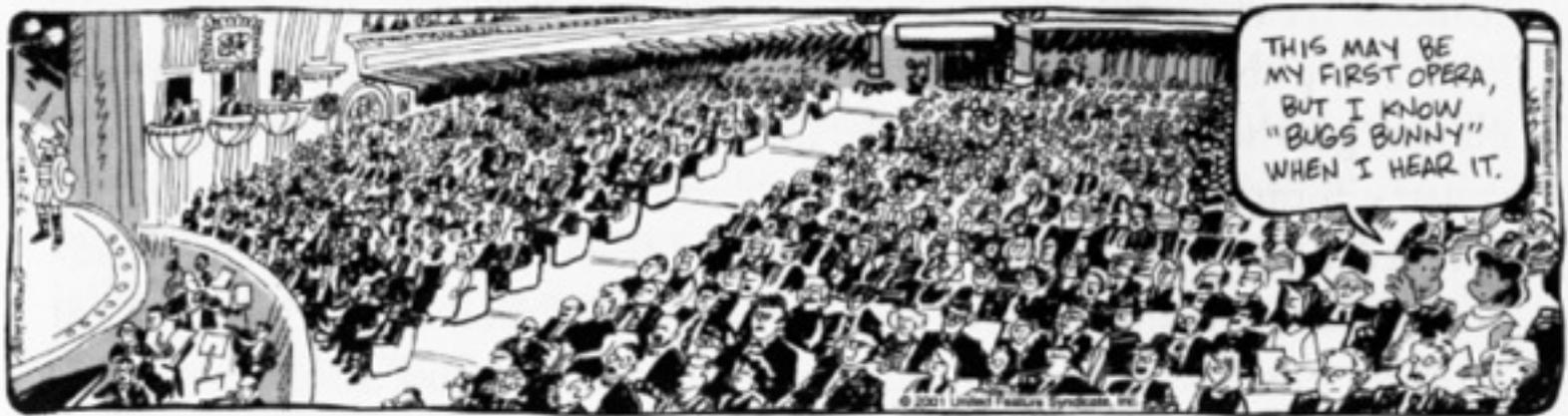


FIGURE 37 Robb Armstrong, *Jump Start*, July 2, 2001. Reprinted by permission of United Feature Syndicate, Inc.

From Ancient Greece to Modern Hollywood

500 BC

1600 AD

1791

1817

1875

1927

1937

2012



Greek Ritual Theatre



Orfeo



The Magic Flute



The Barber of Seville



The Pirates of Penzance



Girl Crazy



Snow White



Tangled

HISTORY OF MUSIC DRAMA



- **Ancient Greek theatre** (c. 500 BC)
 - "... a mixture of myth, legend, philosophy, social commentary, poetry, dance, music, public participation, and visual splendor." (Cohen p.64)
 - a religious ceremony - the ritual re-enactment of a myth.
 - Music was used to heighten the emotion of the event.
 - three forms of drama:
 - tragedy
 - comedy
 - satire



The Greek theatre at Epidaurus dates from the 4th century BC and blends so well with the landscape that it was rediscovered only in the 19th century. It has a 14,000 seat arena with near-perfect acoustics.

ORIGIN OF OPERA



- was “invented” in about 1600 by a group of Italian artists and musicians including Jacopo Peri and Vincenzo Galilei, (father of famous scientist Galileo).
 - an attempt to revive the power of ancient Greek religious theatre.
 - part of the wider revival of antiquity characteristic of the Renaissance.
 - stories often had a mythological basis.
 - an elite entertainment, for courts of the nobility only

THE FIRST OPERA



- **Orfeo** by Claudio Monteverdi (1607), based on the myth of Orpheus & Eurydice.

Orpheus goes to Hades to retrieve his dead bride from the powers of the underworld.



H. W. Bissen, 1798–1808: Orpheus pleading with Pluto and Proserpina to restore Eurydice to him. Photo © Maicar Förlag – GML.

So persuasive is his singing and pleading that she is returned to him ...





... on the condition that he not look back at her during the passage from the realm of the dead.

Jean-Baptiste Corot - *Orpheus Leading Eurydice from the Underworld* 1861

However, he does turn back and loses her again.

[Eurydice recedes into the Underworld](#)
[Bergamot, Renaissance](#)



Later he refuses to worship Dionysus, and for this is vengefully torn to pieces by the Thracian maenads.



Albrecht Durer *Death of Orpheus* 1494



His head remains alive and is able to foretell the future.



Woman with Head of Orpheus - Moreau, 1865

In Monteverdi's opera, however, he is saved by the god Apollo and allowed to look down on Eurydice from heaven.



*Nymphs Finding the Head of Orpheus, by
[John William Waterhouse](#)*

CHARACTERISTICS OF EARLY (BAROQUE) OPERA

- Mythological story
- Originated in an attempt to re-create the emotional power of ancient Greek Theatre
- Actors *sing* their lines on stage
- Songs, known as *arias*, alternate with quasi-spoken passages which advance plot and dialog, known as *recitative*
- Continuous musical accompaniment by an orchestra

BAROQUE OPERA (1600-1750)

- *The Doctrine of Affects* -- each song (aria) was presents a *single* emotion.
- castrati sang the higher pitched (woman's) roles
- Operas based on themes drawn from classical mythology.



The castrato Farinelli

Carlo Broschi (1705–82)

BAROQUE OPERA

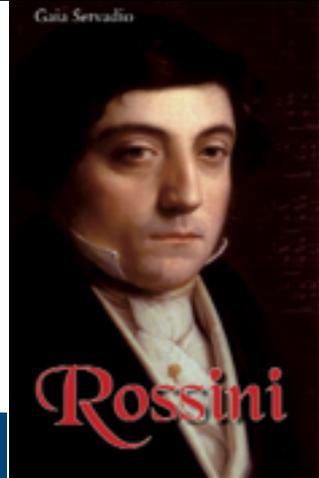


The Doctrine of Affects

A theory of musical aesthetics, widely accepted by late [Baroque](#) theorists and composers, that embraced the proposition that music is capable of arousing a variety of specific emotions within the listener.

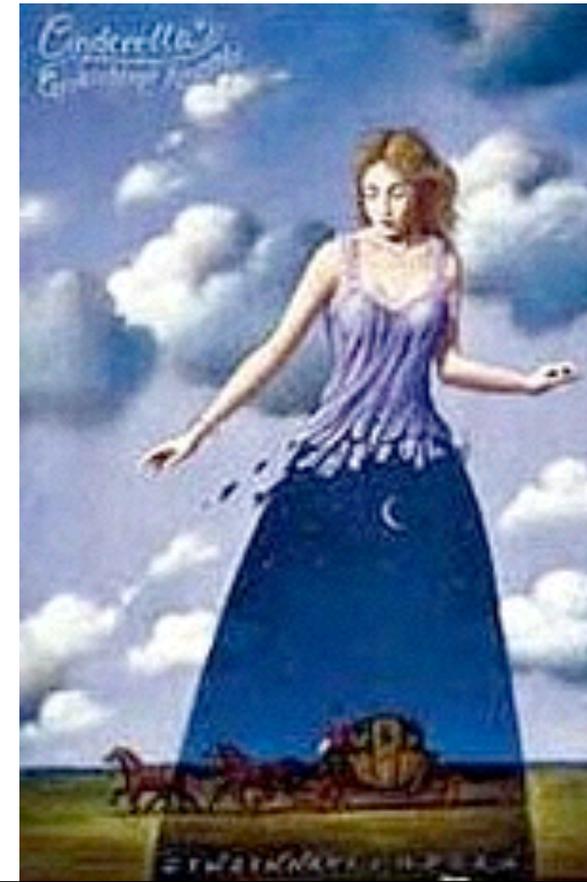
At the centre of the doctrine was the belief that, by making use of the proper standard musical procedure or device, the composer could create a piece of music capable of producing a particular involuntary emotional response in his audience.

Encyclopedia Britannica

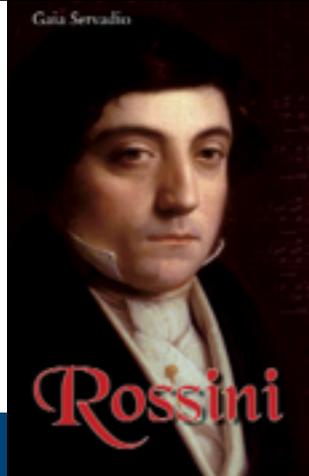


COMIC OPERA - ROSSINI

- Opera Buffa (Italian Comic Opera), Bel Canto
 - Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868)
 - born Pisaro, Italy
 - enjoyed enormous early success, retired at the age of 37
 - well known operas include:
 - *The Barber of Seville* (1815)
 - *The Thieving Magpie* (1817) - Overture
 - *Cinderella* (1817)
 - *William Tell* (1829) - Overture



COMIC OPERA - ROSSINI



• The Barber of Seville

Operavox - disc 224

- written in Rome, 1815, at the age of 23, in 13 days.
- Plot Summary:
 - Irrepressible Figaro, town barber and jack-of-all-trades, learns that dashing Count Almaviva loves the young, rich and beautiful Rosina, the ward and intended wife of strict Dr. Bartolo.
 - Rosina is equally smitten with the count, whom she has never met, and tosses him a love note from her balcony.
 - Figaro gleefully masterminds an elopement, employing a series of disguises and ruses that bring the lovers together in the nick of time.
- *Largo al Factotum* (Figaro's aria, Act 1)



"Ready to do everything both by
night and by day-perpetually in
bustle and in motion!
Figaro! Figaro! Figaro!"

COMIC OPERA - ROSSINI

Rossini

disc 118

- The Rabbit of Seville (WB, 1950)
 - dir. Chuck Jones
 - music entirely from the Overture to *The Barber of Seville*

Welcome to my shop
Let me cut your mop
Let me shave your crop!
Daintily! Daint-til-ly!



Grand Opera - Richard Wagner



- Richard Wagner (1818 – 1883) developed opera into what he called *Gesamtkunstwerk* - “The Complete Art Work” – a new art form combining all the other arts – drama, poetry, music & visual arts.
- His operas include the “Ring Cycle”, *The Ring of the Nibelung* – a series of four operas detailing the mythology of The Ring of Power which all draw upon myth and legend for their subject matter.



Bifrost, the Rainbow Bridge to Valhalla

Grand Opera - Richard Wagner



- *Die Walkure* (The Valkyrie)
- premiered 1870
- part II of *The Ring of the Nibelung*
- Musical interlude known as *The Ride of the Valkyries* has been much used in film, famously in *Apocalypse Now* (1976)

disc 213 - Disney
Valkyries Story Reel

The *Leitmotif* in Wagner's Operas



- Wagner invented the musical technique of the leitmotif, short melodic phrases which identify characters and situations in the story. The Valkyrie's melody is a well-known example.
- *leitmotif* technique was esp. used in his “*Ring*” operas (1850's-90s)
 - “leading motif” i.e. theme
 - melodic fragment, not a complete melody
 - principal characters and objects:

- *Seigfried* (heroic figure)



- *Wotan's Spear*



- *The Ring*

Alberich's Ring





The *Leitmotif* in Star Wars

Star Wars (1977)



Luke Skywalker



Darth Vader



Princess Leia



George Lucas himself called the trilogy as his “space opera” and admitted that there are many narrative and mythic parallels to Wagner’s Ring cycle. (interview with Richard Dyer)

The *Leitmotif* in LOTR

Lord of The Rings (2000-2004)



The Ring



Figure 17 History of the Ring theme.



The Shire



Figure 18 Shire theme.



The Fellowship



Figure 19 Fellowship theme.

Grand Opera - Richard Wagner

disc 71

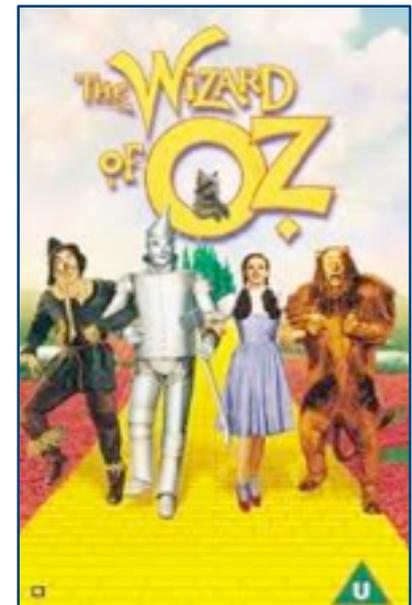
- *What's Opera, Doc?*
(WB, 1957)
 - dir. Chuck Jones
 - Parody of Wagnerian opera.
 - musical score arranged by Carl Stalling & Milt Franklyn includes many excerpts from Wagner's operas, including:
 - *Ride of the Valkyries*
 - *The Flying Dutchman*
 - *Rienzi*
 - *Tannhauser*



To America

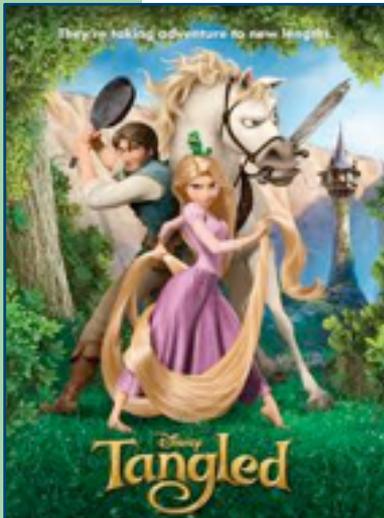
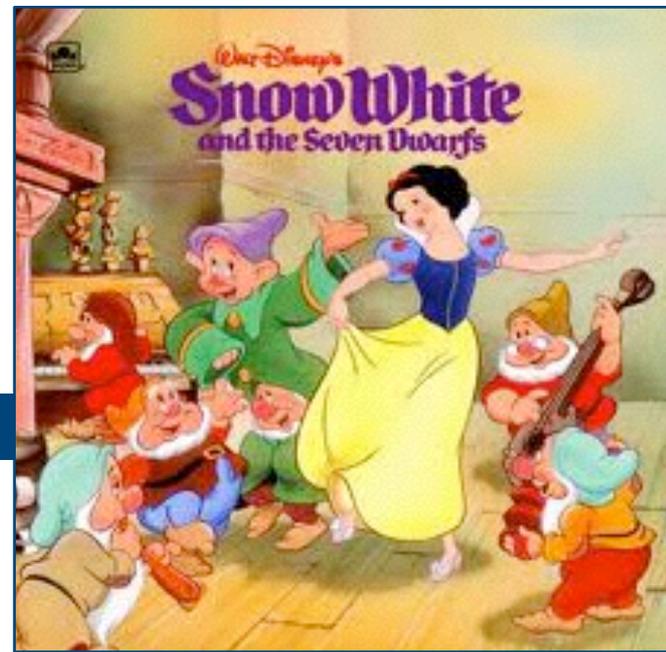
- 1920's - Musical Theatre (Broadway)
 - George & Ira Gershwin, *Girl Crazy* (1927)
 - Rogers & Hammerstein, *Oklahoma* (1943)
 - Leonard Bernstein, *West Side Story* (1957)
 - *The Sound of Music* (1961)

- 1930's - Hollywood Musical Films
 - Busby Berkely, *Gold Diggers of 1935*
 - *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)
 - *Singin' in the Rain* (1952)



Further Developments

- 1930's - 2012 - Disney
 - *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937),
 - *Pinocchio* (1939),
 - *Dumbo* (1940),
 - *Alice in Wonderland* (1951),
 - *The Jungle Book* (1967),
 - etc. through to
 - *The Lion King* (1994),
 - *Tangled* (2010)
 - *Frozen* (2013)



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Orfeo



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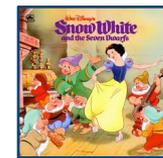
The Barber of Seville



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Girl Crazy



Snow White



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