Oxford Handbooks Online

What Is Opera?

Tim Carter

The Oxford Handbook of Opera
Edited by Helen M. Greenwald

Print Publication Date: Nov 2014 Subject: Music, Musicology and Music History
Online Publication Date: Apr 2015 DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195335538.013.001

Abstract and Keywords

Chapter 1 provides an overview of possible answers to the question of its title by establishing the terminology, then moving through considerations of what one might call the opera industry and the institutions that support it, of the artists who engage in it in the theater, of the repertory from the Baroque period to modern times, and of the issues and techniques that might underpin a given libretto and how it is set to music. This leads to a discussion of the oft-claimed exoticism and irrationality of opera and how one might best respond.

Keywords: opera, terminology, opera industry, theater, libretto, music, exoticism

It was a sad day for opera aficionados when the great Italian tenor Luciano Pavarotti died (on September 6, 2007). It was also headline news. In scenes reminiscent of another great singer's funeral—Nelly Melba's in Melbourne, Australia, on February 26, 1931—the cameras showed the crowds outside Modena cathedral applauding Pavarotti's coffin as it was carried into the nave: thousands then passed through the church to pay their respects. The eulogies on US and UK television covered his career: an Italian baker's son who found a voice at the age of four, sang in a church choir, starred at a Welsh Eisteddfod, then hit the operatic stage for an illustrious career that spanned several decades and included most of the great tenor roles of Italian opera (but never Wagner) with all the eminent divas. These eulogies each reached their climax at precisely the same point: that breathtaking moment when Pavarotti sang "Nessun dorma" from Puccini's *Turandot* as part of the "Three Tenors" concert (with José Carreras and Plácido Domingo), first on the eve of the final soccer match of the 1990 World Cup in Rome, then for the finals in Los Angeles (1994), Paris (1998), and Yokohama (2002). His audiences went wild. What is opera?—one might ask. Surely not this; but then again…

Great singers have always been celebrated as larger-than-life individuals (often quite literally) with seemingly superhuman powers, doing gladiatorial battle with themselves, and with each other, on the stage. *Vincerò—Vin-CE…-rò* ("I will be victorious"): Puccini's music sets the personal challenges that singers must overcome if they are not to be booed off the stage in ignominy. Operatic characters and the performers who bring them to life become conflated in complex metonymies: we set a premium on, and have paid through the nose for, Plácido Domingo's Rodolfo, Renée Fleming's Lucia, or Jon Vickers's Peter Grimes, although we then argue his pros and cons versus the singer for whom Benjamin Britten originally wrote that last role: Peter Pears. For many, these warbling throats are indeed what opera is all about.

Composers and librettists might not agree: after all, without their music and words, singers would have no stage to display their vocal prowess. Of course, many composers have had close connections with singers for whom they have wisely crafted their (p. 16) music: there is scant point in writing something that a singer cannot, or will not, sing. Mozart was by no means alone in being very reluctant to write an aria until he knew the voice that would perform it—he temporized by writing recitatives and ensembles—and in exploiting the best characteristics of that voice when doing so: just trace the path of the young Anna Gottlieb from Barbarina in *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786; Gottlieb was twelve) to Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* (1791). Likewise, there is some merit in recognizing the voice of baritone Felice Varesi in Donizetti's music for Antonio in *Linda di Chamounix* (1842) and in Verdi's for the title roles in *Macbeth* (1847) and *Rigoletto* (1851), and for Giorgio Germont in *La traviata* (1853). The corollary—that singers taking on a role not written for them can plausibly expect some accommodation within it either by the original composer, by some other composer, or just by importing their favorite arias—had significant force through the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries; it also leads to some curious quandaries (should we prefer Mozart's 1786 *Le nozze di Figaro* or his 1789 one?). The counterargument is the well-known story of Handel threatening to throw a recalcitrant soprano, Francesca Cuzzoni, out of a window for refusing to sing her first aria as Teofane in his *Ottone* (1723)—though Handel learned his lesson and went on to write a series of major roles for her.

Many scholars also have problems with singers. At least until recently, we have preferred to study works, not their performances, and works are fixed in texts both verbal (librettos) and musical (scores). For example, analyzing the treatment of leitmotifs in Wagner's *Ring*, or the handling of serial techniques in Berg's *Lulu*, focuses the attention on the printed page, and on compositional process, which therefore forces a consequent downplaying of performative contingencies. Thus we have tended to worry more about, say, Monteverdi's musical symbolism in *Orfeo* than what it took to get that work on the stage. This has the advantage of being straightforward and even comfortable; it also runs the risk of perceived irrelevance to the operatic enterprise, and also to its experience. Even here, however, we cannot always decide where to start: should it be from the libretto (where most composers began) or from the music (where they ended up)? Treating an opera as, in effect, a symphony with words may seem to have impeccable Wagnerian credentials, but it forces a formalist approach that ignores, or conflicts with,

the theatrical world (Abbate and Parker 1989); it also marginalizes the much larger number of works that seemingly fail to meet the high standards of formalism by being either too conventional, and therefore uninteresting, or too wayward, and therefore unmanageable.

Opera is by definition messy, both for those producing and experiencing it, and for the critic observing it from a scholarly distance: not for nothing did musicology once privilege other, more "abstract" genres. But the discipline has shifted in the past decades as canonic operas have found their place in the scholarly canon, embracing the gamut from much-needed critical editions (Gossett 2006) to no-less-needed critical theory (Koestenbaum 1993). Messiness—or if you prefer, plural multiplicities—has become the liberating norm in this postmodern age, and as has always been the case with opera, it might even be viewed as cause for celebration.

(p. 17) What's in a Word?

The entry "Opera" in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* also directs the reader to a bewilderingly large number of other subject entries by genre: *azione teatrale*, ballad opera, *ballet de cour, ballet-héroïque*, burlesque, *burletta*, chamber opera, *comédie-ballet, divertissement, drame lyrique, dramma giocoso, dramma per musica, entrée, extravaganza, farsa, favola in musica, festa teatrale*, film musical, *grand opéra, intermède, intermedio, intermezzo, Lehrstück*, libretto, *Liederspiel*, madrigal comedy, *Märchenoper*, masque, medieval drama, melodrama, *melodramma*, monodrama, musical, music drama, music theatre, number opera, *opéra-ballet, opéra bouffon, opera buffa, opéra comique, opéra-féerie, opera semiseria, opera seria*, operetta, pantomime, *pasticcio*, pastoral, *pastorale-héroïque, Posse*, puppet opera, puppet theatre, *rappresentazione sacra*, rescue opera, *sainete, Schuldrama, Schuloper*, semi-opera, *sepolcro, serenata, Singspiel, Spieloper, tonadilla*, tourney, *tragédie en musique, vaudeville, verismo, zarzuela, Zauberoper, Zeitoper*. Of these sixty-nine entries, nineteen use Italian words, fifteen French, ten German, three Spanish—which is a fairly representative distribution of the genre itself, save for eastern Europe—and twenty-two English (*New Grove* is, after all, an Anglo-Saxon encyclopedia), although most of the last are not necessarily English-specific and have their foreign-language equivalents. Only twenty of these terms have "opera" (*opera, opéra, Oper*, or their cognates) in the heading (three Italian, five French, five German, seven English). Some identify national genres (*zarzuela*) or subgenres (*opera seria, opéra comique, Märchenoper*); some suggest generic mixtures (*comédie-ballet*, masque); some are function-specific (*entrée, Lehrstück, Schuloper*); and a significant number place more emphasis on the theater than does the simple word "opera" (*azione* or *festa teatrale, rappresentazione sacra*, music theatre), or on drama (*dramma giocoso, dramma per musica, favola in musica, melodramma, drame lyrique, tragédie en musique, Singspiel*, music drama, and others). Clearly, we are in a terminological minefield. Even the *New Grove*'s opening definition of "opera" ("Most

narrowly conceived, the word ‘opera’ signifies a drama in which the actors sing throughout…”) admits “so many” exceptions—Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte* and Beethoven’s *Fidelio* would not be operas by this reckoning—as to force revision (“…the word should be more generically defined as a drama in which the actors sing some or all of their parts”). But even this broader definition still remains problematic: So Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!* is an opera?

Anglo-Saxon usage is, as usual, imprecise and confusing. In Paris one might just as well see *drames lyriques* or *opéras comiques*, while the statutes of the Teatro alla Scala in Milan refer to its mission to perform *spettacoli lirici* (although the preferred Italian term for opera is *melodramma*). If one goes to the “opera” in France or Germany, one goes to a place such as the Paris Opéra (whether at the Palais Garnier or the Bastille) or the Deutsche Staatsoper, unless one is a Wagner fanatic lucky enough to procure tickets to the Bayreuth Festspielhaus. At the opera house, one attends a performance by a resident (p. 18) or visiting opera company, but in Continental Europe what one sees there can have, at least for an educated audience, a number of more nuanced generic labels that would be resisted at, say, the Royal Opera House or the Met. However, the apparent absurdity caused by elliptical English (and still more, American) usage—one goes to the opera to see the opera perform an opera—does serve one useful purpose in terms of revealing the complex intermingling of space, agency, and outcome embedded within the term. Even its etymology (the plural of the Latin *opus* taken over as a singular noun) carries a suggestion of multiple “works” while also exposing a dual meaning: work as action and the “work” as its result. Opera is essentially a collaborative venture that focuses in the end on the event of performance; this is what makes it so intriguing—and so difficult—to study. Moreover, what defines an opera as “opera” can sometimes be as much about where it is done, and by and for whom, as its generic proprieties or innate qualities. This is particularly true of works that cross between the worlds of opera and of musical theater. While the Met is unlikely to perform Jonathan Larson’s *Rent* (which opened on Broadway in 1996) alongside its model, Puccini’s *La bohème*, or Elton John and Tim Rice’s *Aida* (2000) alongside Verdi, Leonard Bernstein nevertheless recorded (1985) his *West Side Story* (1957) with a set of opera stars including Kiri Te Kanawa, José Carreras, Tatiana Troyanos, and Marilyn Horne—with somewhat unfortunate results, it must be said. More experimental approaches to the musical stage have always produced still more problems of definition, as in the case of Debussy’s *Le martyre de St. Sébastien* and the Brecht-Weill collaborations of the late 1920s, while Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess* has always posed special challenges since its premiere on Broadway (at the Alvin Theatre) in 1935.

Operatic Operations

One place to start untangling this operatic messiness might well be the business of opera (Agid and Tarondeau 2010). According to its 2007–2008 *Annual Review*, London's Royal Opera House (ROH), Covent Garden, more or less broke even, with a total expenditure that year of £90.1 million against an income of £90.4 million provided by government grants (£26.3 million), box-office receipts (£35.6 million), donations, legacies and the like (£15.3 million), and other income from commercial operations, touring, and so on (£13.2 million). The New York Metropolitan Opera's 2006–2007 *Annual Report* lists much higher operating expenses at $239.6 million against revenues of $138.5 million (with $90.5 million from box office receipts), the "loss" being covered by contributions and bequests ($133.8 million) and investment returns ($24 million), such that net assets increased over the year from $378.9 million to $410.4 million. In both cases, the proportion of expenditure covered by box office receipts—39.5 percent for the ROH and 37.8 percent for the Met—was close to the rule-of-thumb 40 percent for high-end arts-promoting organizations, which usually need to find at least three-fifths of their annual budgets from other sources. The striking differences between the ROH and the (p. 19) Met are, of course, the ROH's reliance on government grants (mostly from Arts Council England), covering 29.2 percent of total expenditure, and the relative importance of their donor income and investment returns (for the ROH, covering 17 percent of expenditure; for the Met, 65.9 percent). This reflects different funding regimes on the one hand (with government subsidies for the arts being more common in Europe), and on the other, the importance in the United States of philanthropy, encouraged by an enabling tax system. The ROH seems to be running chiefly on a year-to-year basis; the Met appears to have healthier reserves, although it is worth noting that its endowment investment valued at $336.2 million as of July 31, 2007 (again, according to the 2006–2007 report) would normally be expected to generate (at a 5 percent return, by another rule of thumb) an annual income of only $16.8 million, which will, of course, decrease in lean economic times. From that point of view, both the ROH and the Met seem to live precariously.

Comparison with the spoken theater is also instructive. For 2007–2008 (the period discussed for the ROH, above), the *Annual Report* of London's Royal National Theatre (RNT) notes an income of £49 million against expenditures of £47.5 million, that is, just over half of the ROH, a difference that is all the more striking given that the RNT ran productions in three house theaters (if with a total seating capacity, at 2,450, only some 200 more than the ROH, at 2,256). Box-office receipts were £15.4 million (31.4 percent of income); government grants amounted to £18.4 million (covering 38.7 percent of expenditure); and £4.9 million was gained by fundraising (10.3 percent of expenditure). At the risk of crass generalization, the RNT made proportionally less money from selling tickets (top-price tickets at its main stage cost about one-fifth of those at the ROH); it gained more in UK government grants (opera is widely regarded as elitist and therefore less worthy of state support); and it had a harder time fundraising (rich donors are more willing to give to opera).

Opera costs money, and it cannot normally be expected to generate a profit. The earliest court operas were essentially paid from princely coffers with little or no regard for any return on large expenditures: Jacopo Peri's *Euridice* (widely regarded as the first "opera" to survive complete) and Giulio Caccini's *Il rapimento di Cefalo* were both performed during the festivities in Florence celebrating the wedding of Maria de' Medici to King Henri IV of France in October 1600 (though this was not the first staging of *Euridice*), and save where Grand Duke Ferdinando de' Medici persuaded others to pick up at least part of the tab (as seems to have occurred in part with *Euridice*, sponsored by the Florentine patron Jacopo Corsi), he would have regarded their cost simply as the price of entertaining his guests in an appropriately sumptuous manner. Later in the seventeenth century, some Italian courts operated what one might call a "mixed-mode" system for opera, contracting with impresarios who could charge for tickets but would also receive guarantees against loss (Duke Francesco II d'Este in Modena is a good example). Other monarchs, princes, and prelates could regularly be accused—at least when times were bad—of squandering their treasury on frivolous entertainment: the charge was leveled against the Barberini family in Rome in the early 1640s (immediately after the death of Maffeo Barberini, Pope Urban VIII), and periodically against King Louis XIV of France, although it was usually answered by some combination of *noblesse oblige*, on (p. 20) the one hand, and the necessary prestige to be granted by conspicuous consumption, on the other.

A different model was established in Venice in 1637 with "public" or "commercial" opera, as it is often called. This necessarily lacked princely support—Venice was a proud republic—marking a fundamental shift in the mechanisms of opera production in favor of market forces and a ticket-buying public (Glixon and Glixon 2006). But it still benefited from financial backing by individual or collective patrons, whether or not as investors hoping to turn a profit. The pattern also held true for opera in Handel's London in the 1720s (with support from one or other member of the extended British royal family) or in Mozart's Vienna in the 1780s (from Habsburg Emperor Joseph II). In the nineteenth century, princely patronage gradually changed in favor of state funding—what in one context has been called the "urbanization of opera" (Gerhard 1998)—although more slowly than some might expect: even Wagner was beholden to King Ludwig II of Bavaria, who from 1864 paid him a large annual stipend of 4,000 *gulden*, and who made possible the construction of the Bayreuth theater. The Paris Opéra has in effect received national funding (from royal, republican, or imperial coffers, depending on the regime in place at the time) from its founding in 1671, while the shift from German court theaters (Hoftheater) to civic ones supported by the local or regional tax base depended on changing political circumstances, and even Covent Garden still retains a vestige of its status as one of London's "royal" theaters. In most European or European-influenced countries (including North and South America), an opera house and the company associated with it have come to be seen as a matter of civic pride and responsibility, although arguments inevitably persist over the prices worth paying for it, and the compromises needed to assure them.

The Venetian model was brought into action remarkably quickly, presumably because it drew at least in part on mechanisms already in place for the spoken theater. It also established models for what soon became an opera industry supported by complex interactions between theater owners, impresarios, and independent entrepreneurs (poets, composers, singers, instrumentalists, dancing masters, stage designers, costume manufacturers, and so on and so forth down the line) selling their services at a price. The impact was immediate. In the Italian courts, opera had been relatively infrequent, and not always popular. In Venice, however, five new operas appeared in the three seasons following the opening of the Teatro San Cassiano in 1637 (soon followed by three other opera houses in the city), and by the end of the 1646–1647 season, some thirty-three new works and six revivals had been staged there. Regardless of profit or loss, output was enormous. To judge by Claudio Sartori's catalogue of printed Italian librettos to 1800, the number of seventeenth-century operas stretches into four figures, even accepting that not every surviving libretto represents a different opera. In effect, composers operated on a production line. There are thirty operas securely attributed to Francesco Cavalli (1602–1676), and perhaps another ten by him, while Alessandro Scarlatti (1660–1725) wrote some thirty-five operas before 1700, and another thirty or so after. Lully's output of *tragédies en musique*, protected as he was by a court position, pales in comparison (fourteen, at a rather leisurely rate of one per year from 1673 to 1687). These numbers are (p. 21) not unusual for later periods: Handel wrote forty-six operas, Mozart twenty, Cimarosa almost sixty, Paisiello eighty or so, Rossini thirty-nine, Donizetti some sixty-five, and Verdi twenty-eight. Add to those the countless works by lesser (we assume) composers and it becomes clear that with only a few obvious exceptions, opera was very largely a disposable commodity. A huge number of works lie unperformed, unstudied, and therefore unknown.

Although the Venetian model favored constant innovation in order not to jade the palate, it also fostered the notion of a repertory, something hitherto lacking within the genre wherein operas were essentially one-off events. Tried-and-tested operas could be revived in successive seasons in order to mitigate the risk of new works becoming flops, and could also be taken on tour by independent companies operating on the model of the *commedia dell'arte*. One early example is the rather amorphous group known as the Febiarmonici, with performances of operas such as Francesco Sacrati's *La finta pazza* and Cavalli's *Didone, Egisto*, and *Giasone* in smaller centers across northern Italy before members associated with the troupe settled in Naples, where they revived works by Cavalli and also Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. In the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, independent touring companies provided the main access to opera in significant urban centers, as with Manuel García's company that brought Italian operas to New York City in the 1820s, and Fortune T. Gallo's San Carlo Opera Company that toured from 1913 to 1951. Even now, in the UK and elsewhere, regional opera companies will often have some touring obligations as part of their grant-earning requirements.

Like any industry, opera needs both to cultivate a market and to find the skilled personnel needed to sustain its output. The most obvious are the singers, who inevitably come at a premium—they are often paid very well indeed—and can make or break a performance. As opera burgeoned in the seventeenth century, the infrastructure to train its prized workers was fairly quickly put into place, as music conservatoires were established, particularly in Venice and Naples, and curricula were created to identify and nurture the talent demanded by the genre (Rosselli 1992). Even more special treatment was offered to the type of singer most in demand until the early nineteenth century—the castrato—because of the sacrifices required to achieve that exalted, and relatively rare, status. These conservatoires quickly achieved a hegemony over Europe—matching the hegemony of Italian opera in general, save in certain specific countries (notably, France)—also creating myths that still endure today about what it takes to be an opera star. As is typical of any industry, too, its chief workers became highly specialized in terms both of voice types and their subdivisions (viz., the German *Fächer*) and, at least at the highest level, of repertory, although there have always been exceptions (i.e., singers able and willing to take on a wide variety of roles), and the profession is changing in part in response to new aesthetic preferences (singers who can also act) and economic circumstances.

As for the market, it may seem small and relatively narrow, but it exists and, contrary to popular belief, may even be expanding. Ticket prices may seem exorbitantly high in most Western houses (they are often much less so in former Communist Europe, for **(p. 22)** obvious reasons), but in New York City, at least, their range is not so different from a Broadway musical save perhaps at the top end (often aimed at corporate entertainment), and claims that opera is elitist do not square with the fact that on a good day one can buy three cheap tickets for the Metropolitan Opera for the cost of one for *Wicked* or *The Lion King*. The Met's 2006–2007 report records playing to 84 percent capacity—which is on a par with the more successful commercial theaters—and sold-out performances are a norm, at least in the first-class houses: try getting a ticket for the Wiener Staatsoper sometime, although one can queue to stand at the back of the stalls for next to nothing. Opera's reach was broadened by way of publishing (printed collections of favorite arias for domestic consumption), radio (the Met's legendary Saturday afternoon broadcasts from 1933 on), and then, if less successfully, television, and it has gained significant new energies from film and DVD releases (Citron 2000), and still more from live broadcasts to cinemas, stadiums, and other outdoor locations; these have also garnered younger audiences that have surprisingly little resistance to the genre's rather fantastical mixing of the audio and the visual, perhaps because of their exposure to music videos. Yet opera houses have also had to adjust to global economies of scale, for example by way of the increasingly common practice of sharing product lines (i.e., productions). Save the relative rarities produced by enterprising opera festivals, on the one hand, and record labels, on the other, choices of repertory also tend to play on the side of safety: innovation is usually achieved within the context of the familiar rather than the new, save for the occasional token commission, or the unknown old.

There is a strong tendency for the major houses to favor Italian opera, then German, then French, then opera from other countries (Russian, Czech, etc.). If one can trust the endlessly fascinating online *Operabase*, from January 1 to December 31, 2008, there were 524 performances of Puccini's *Tosca* in eighty-seven cities worldwide from Albuquerque to Zürich, with thirteen new productions (other top favorites included Verdi's *La traviata* with 516 performances and Puccini's *La bohème* with 512, each in eighty-two cities), and only seven of Berg's *Lulu* in one. The statistics of 2008 performances by a relatively haphazard selection of composers still reveal clearly the opera industry's fairly narrow orientation: Verdi (2,373), Puccini (2,108), Mozart (1,760), Rossini (805), Wagner (721), Richard Strauss (508), Handel (342), Tchaikovsky (329), Janáček (184), Gounod (162), Massenet (159), and Monteverdi (111). Our modernist friend Berg had 58 performances and our Baroque one Cavalli had 42, which beats Lully (23) and at least competes well enough with Hans Werner Henze (44), John Adams (37), Philip Glass (34), Kaija Saariaho (19), and Helmut Lachenmann (1).*

A more recent set of *Operabase* statistics might prompt a less jaded picture over the longer term. Over the five seasons from 2005–2006 to 2009–2010, there were more than 100,000 performances of 2,156 different operas by just over a thousand composers, over (p. 23) half of whom were still living. Of the total number of performances by country in the 2009–2010 season (about 23,000), almost a third occurred in Germany (7,315)—reflecting the importance of civic opera houses there—followed a long way behind by the United States (1,979), Austria (1,361), France (1,275), Italy (1,182), and the UK (1,076). In terms of the number of performances of individual operas from 2005–2006 to 2009–2010, however, the canon continued to rule the roost (and those living composers came way down the list): the top four were Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (a surprise), Verdi's *La traviata*, Bizet's *Carmen*, and Puccini's *La bohème*, with Wagner only making an entrance (with *Der fliegende Holländer*) at place twenty-five.

The conservatism and biases of the repertory are probably not so different from other spheres of so-called classical music. However, over the past half century they have encouraged the phenomenon of so-called *Regietheater* and its Anglo-American equivalents, with star directors and designers achieving their own cult status, and with familiar works needing to be done in new ways (Levin 2007). As with spoken theater, opera productions must negotiate a path between "traditional" stagings and those "updated" in pursuit of relevance, in some cases motivated also by Brechtian notions of alienation. Well-known controversial examples include, among many others, Patrice Chéreau's centennial *Ring* cycle at Bayreuth in 1976 (an anti-capitalist, Marxist reading, with the Rhinemaidens as whores and the gods as industrialist oppressors), Jonathan Miller's *Rigoletto* in the mafia underworld of 1950s New York (English National Opera, 1982), Peter Sellars's Mozart trilogy at the PepsiCo Summerfare in Purchase, NY, in 1989 (with *Le nozze di Figaro*, for example, set in Trump Tower), and Calixto Bieito's toilet-themed *Un ballo in maschera* (Barcelona, 2001). The willingness of audiences to accept

such interpretations will vary from country to country, and house to house, but they often provoke some kind of scandal.

Despite periodic attempts to remove opera from the pantheons of high art and into more experimental theatrical (and even non-theatrical) performance spaces, it remains a highly specialized activity limited to specific performance environments. But while its patrons may be open to ridicule, the genre itself is often treated with respect and even affection, as the Marx Brothers' hilarious movie *A Night at the Opera* (1935) reveals. Other Hollywood films that bring operatic performances squarely into their frame also suggest how they can offer a key to social mobility (*Moonstruck*), to self-awareness (*Pretty Woman*), to spiritual transformation (*The Shawshank Redemption*), and even to transcendent consolation (*Philadelphia*). These are powerful moments that reveal an endless fascination with what opera as drama, or even opera as not-drama, can do.

Dramma per Musica

The tendency of non-English operatic terms to introduce some notion of drama into the reckoning (*melodramma, tragédie lyrique, Singspiel*) poses aesthetic dilemmas as well as historiographical ones. Although the libretto tends to come first when composing an (p. 24) opera, it tends to diminish thereafter within the operatic reckoning. *Prima la musica e poi le parole* (first the music, and then the words) was a catchphrase enshrined in the title of a satirical *divertimento teatrale* by Antonio Salieri (1786)—it was also addressed by Richard Strauss in *Capriccio* (1942)—but it finds its resonances within opera audiences, on the one hand, and in the scholarly literature, on the other.

One problem for English-speaking audiences is, of course, the simple fact that opera is often in languages that they do not readily understand (Robinson 2002): a Russian listening to Tchaikovsky, or a Spanish-speaker to de Falla, will have a far richer time of it. Surtitles help but in the end are fairly crude, and singing opera in translation raises difficulties not just in terms of perceived "dumbing down" but also because a composer's musical accents will often be language specific—Mozart writes very differently when setting Italian texts compared with German ones—such that the "wrong" language can often seem, well, wrong. Nor are singers always prized for their diction, especially when they have learned their parts phonetically, while musical setting can tend to interfere with verbal understanding. The resulting difficulties have led even to the oddity of opera in English for English-speaking audiences with English surtitles. On the whole, however, the presumption with opera has often been that once one has the gist of the plot (usually from a prior reading of a synopsis), one can just leave the melody to carry things along. For that matter, one hardly goes to the opera house expecting to see Shakespeare, Corneille, Goethe, or Ibsen, or if one does, it will be radically shortened: in the case of Verdi's *Otello*, to a libretto by Arrigo Boito, Act IV, scene 3 (where Desdemona dies), takes up forty lines in total, whereas Shakespeare has twenty-two lines of wonderful iambic pentameters ("It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul…") just to get to the point where Desdemona first speaks to her husband. Boito and Verdi cut those lines completely in favor of a long orchestral introduction to the scene, with a very detailed stage direction, where the music and action are presumed to stand in for the speech.

In fact, many librettos of *Otello* published for Anglo-Saxon readers will make those forty lines appear almost double in number because their editors are unaware of, or disregard, one simple fact: at least until the late nineteenth century, and often beyond, texts for opera in almost all languages are written in some kind of poetry, not in prose. In the case of Boito's *Otello*, for example, Act IV, scene 3, is in free-rhymed eleven-syllable lines (in Italian the eleven-syllable line has a similar classical status to the iambic pentameter in English, or the alexandrine in French, and its characteristic stress patterns are readily identifiable). The principle that texts for musical setting must be in verse extends back long before the beginnings of opera: on the one hand, it reflects the notion that poetry is itself "musical" by virtue of its meter and rhyme, as well as its elevated language; on the

other, poetic meters have strong musical implications in terms of melodic patterns and phrase structures, further influenced by whether line-endings are feminine (ending on a weak syllable) or masculine (on a strong one).

In effect, the librettist's poetry directs the composer in terms of what should happen musically at any given moment in terms of form and articulation. The very first Italian opera librettos by Ottavio Rinuccini (*Dafne*, first performed in 1598, and *Euridice* of 1600) followed the precedent of plays in verse: Rinuccini has the action take place in (p. 25) *versi sciolti*, that is, free-rhyming seven- and eleven-syllable lines (*settenari* and *endecasillabi*); such lines can also be divided between two or more characters in order to create a sense of flow. Formal moments of lyrical expression for one or more characters, or for a chorus, will be distinguished from the *versi sciolti* by one or more of regular rhymes, stanzaic structures, and other line-lengths (e.g., four-, five-, and eight-syllable lines; in Italian, six-, nine-, and ten-syllable lines are also possible). This creates a clear poetic distinction between musical "speech" and song. Very roughly speaking, the "speech" is where action occurs (things happen, characters interact, etc.) and the song is where characters fix the circumstances or consequences of that action, reflect upon it, or establish a position that will determine the action to come. This distinction was very soon formalized in musical terms as one between recitative and aria, which in turn has become characterized (though somewhat wrongly) as a contrast between dramatic action and emotional expression. Thus a typical Handel opera, say, will have passages in *recitativo semplice* (sometimes called *secco*—"dry"—recitative) in a fast-flowing speech-like style for voice and continuo accompaniment, and more elaborate arias for voice and orchestra, with the occasional use of *recitativo stromentato* (a more intense form of recitative with orchestral accompaniment) at moments of high drama, somewhat in the manner of the soliloquy. As was established by Rinuccini, Handel's recitative texts will be in seven- and eleven-syllable *versi sciolti*. On the other hand, arias will usually have texts in two stanzas, the second of which mirrors the first in terms of the number of lines (usually four), their meter, and their rhyme scheme. Aria texts will often, but not always, be in single line-length other than the mixed *settenari* and *endecasillabi* used for recitative (*quinari, senari*, and *ottonari* are common), and this two-stanza format becomes set musically in the ternary form typical of the "da capo" aria, that is, A (stanza 1)–B (stanza 2)–A (stanza 1).

Similar poetic principles apply in later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Italian librettos that introduce action-ensembles (duets, trios, quartets, etc.) and two- or three-tempo numbers that seek to encapsulate some kind of dramatic progression (as in the *cantabile–tempo di mezzo–cabaletta* sequence), as well as in operas where the orchestra plays throughout and therefore seemingly softens any clear textural distinction between recitative and aria. These principles also apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to librettos in other languages: their verse will exploit different types and degrees of poetic formality in terms of meter, rhyme, and stanzaic organization so as to shift the dramatic focus to, from, or within a given combination of action and expression. Reading an opera libretto on its own

—and in its original language—can be very instructive indeed, not just for its content, but also for the way in which it maps out the musical design of the work.

Does this matter? Certainly yes, if one wants to understand why opera composers do what they do when they do it. The issue becomes still more important when a composer seemingly contradicts a librettist's instruction. Take, for example, the rare cases where Mozart goes against Lorenzo Da Ponte's poetic choices, as at Donna Elvira's first entrance in *Don Giovanni* ("Ah chi mi dice mai," which Da Ponte cast as an aria but which Mozart turned into a trio by bringing Don Giovanni and Leporello's succeeding recitative into the (p. 26) musical number); another case is the "letter" quintet in Act I of *Così fan tutte* ("Di scrivermi ogni giorno"), which Da Ponte designed as recitative. These are very revealing of Mozart's handling of a character (Why is Donna Elvira denied a proper entrance aria?) or of a situation (Is he taking the "letter" quintet too seriously, or is he overexaggerating the moment for ironic effect?). Likewise, presumably it is worth knowing that in Act II, scene 6, of *La traviata*, Verdi took a line of verse that his librettist, Francesco Maria Piave, simply intended as the first of a closing rhyming couplet in *endecasillabi* (Violetta's "Amami, Alfredo, quant'io t'amo! Addio!"—"Love me, Alfredo, as much as I love you! Farewell!") and turned it into a moment of glorious lyrical expansion that also became thematic for the opera as a whole (Violetta's melody dominates the opera's orchestral prelude).

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, these standard poetic structures within opera librettos started to break down in the search for a more naturalistic verbal, and therefore musical, expression. However, the connection is not quite as direct as one might think. While Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* and Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* are usually hailed as masterpieces of the new *verismo*—opera that was somehow "true" to life—in poetic terms their librettos differ little, if at all, from their predecessors. The trend in the early twentieth century in favor of so-called *Literaturoper* (using a spoken play directly as an opera's text) necessarily forced a different approach depending on the source-play's use of language, ranging from Maeterlinck's prose-like but elevated *vers libres* (in Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*) through Oscar Wilde's prose-based *Salome* (Richard Strauss) to Georg Büchner's wholly prosaic *Woyzeck* (set by Berg). The impulse also derived from Wagner, whose arguments in favor of a free-flowing musical drama gained significant influence, even if his self-authored librettos are still in verse, and indeed still often fall into sections with identifiable beginnings and endings. However, the loss of poetry was not necessarily music's gain, and even Berg, in his *Wozzeck*, seeks to find a range of musical means to restore a sense of form and balance denied him by Büchner's forceful but unstructured text.

It is commonly argued that "great" poetry is too powerful to be set to music but must be left to stand alone. However, there is no logic to the corollary, that poetry for music must, by definition, be second-rate, even if it usually must, in the end, be different, and although there are good librettists and bad, their work usually deserves greater recognition than is often the case. Lully's librettist Philippe Quinault may not have been a Racine or Molière, but he certainly knew what he was doing and did it well; Lorenzo Da

Ponte, Francesco Maria Piave, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal are worthy of similar credit. A significant number of opera librettos merit high literary status, and some certainly gained it within the canon: Pietro Metastasio's *Artaserse* was set either in its original or in some revised form by eighty composers, ranging from Leonardo Vinci's opera of 1730 to Charles Lucas's of 1840, and his *Didone abbandonata* by sixty between 1724 (Domenico Sarro) and 1824 (Karl Gottlieb Reissiger). Whether or not in collaboration with a composer, a librettist will identify or create a plot, pace the drama within (or sometimes outside) the genre-based conventions of the day, accommodate the requirements of staging, decide who sings what and where, and even, if the composer is lucky, come up with words worthy of taking wings of song.

(p. 27) Dramma in Musica

The term *dramma per musica* places the emphasis not just on drama, but also on what exists prior to the composer's handling of it. But a drama "for" music will not necessarily produce a drama "in" music, unless one uses the term just to signify an object and not some kind of action or result. While the terms *dramma per musica* and *dramma in musica* were more or less interchangeable in Italian opera in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—save where they served to distinguish a libretto from its particular setting—they open up a debate that has recurred constantly in operatic history. Although that debate has usually been cast in terms of the relative priorities of word and music, the more fundamental question is whether opera can or should be dramatic in the first place. It may seem an odd one to ask, given that the genre has often sought to vindicate itself by some appeal to its dramatic pretensions. However, it has not always been thus: there are plenty of accounts of eighteenth-century onlookers yawning (talking, drinking, gambling, flirting…) through the recitatives of an *opera seria*, returning their attention to the stage only when their favorite singer began an aria. And while some patterns of audience behavior may have changed since then, those operatic moments that focus the attention may not. The notion that opera indissolubly melds music and drama in some superior heightened experience has often been a convenient fiction for the genre, its protagonists, and its advocates, but it is a dangerous strategy for works that inevitably, and perhaps even necessarily, fail to meet such elevated expectations (Kivy 1988).

It depends, of course, on how one defines "drama." If one is talking about larger-than-life characters and situations engaging monumental existential issues, or about grand settings and pageantry, then a good many operas fit one or other bill. Cozier domestic comedies would seem, on the face of it, less well suited to the operatic stage, although they were a trend in the *opera buffa, opéra comique*, and *Singspiel* traditions of the second half of the eighteenth century, and one that regained some favor during the neoclassical revival in the mid-twentieth. It would probably be unreasonable to expect operas to have complex plots—although some can certainly appear confusing—working their way to subtle conclusions, and their pacing will usually be more variable than in

spoken plays, with greater pause for reflection and commentary. Operas that aspire to naturalism or realism have a harder time of it than those that do not, at least without some redefinition of what might be “natural” or “real”: the genre handles Stanislavski’s theories less well than it does Brecht’s.

A sure sign of the tensions within and between these different notions of what might constitute the “drama” in opera is the periodic call for reform, based on the claim that a supposedly “pure” art form has become corrupted by forces working from within but essentially out of control, be they empty-headed librettists, foolish composers, or vainglorious singers. Purge the genre of these contaminations, so the argument goes, and all will be right with the world. Gluck made the point in and through his “reform” operas (p. 28) of the 1760s and 1770s, with the preface to his *Alceste* (1767), written by librettist Ranieri de’ Calzabigi but signed by the composer, serving as his manifesto. Wagner did much the same thing: his manifesto was *Oper und Drama* (1850–1851). It is revealing that neither Gluck nor Wagner were Italians—Italian opera being, of course, one *bête noire*—although Wagner had not much good to say about earlier German opera, while his view of the French soured still more after the disastrous reception accorded his *Tannhäuser* in Paris in 1861. It is also revealing that both were, of course, composers: even when the argument was in favor of drama gaining the upper hand, the musician needed to stay in charge. These and other reform movements often harked back to the Utopian age when opera emerged from the pure, literary ideals of the Florentines who invented the genre, and further still to the roots that they also claimed as their own: ancient Greece. For the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Hellenism had its own special resonances in terms of nobility, severity, and purity, as well—for Wagner, at least—as republicanism. In the early twentieth century, the thrust could be against Wagner, against Puccini, or against Romantic opera in general. The main point, however, was to restore a degenerate art to one or other kind of former glory, an issue that often went beyond the aesthetic to the political.

What composers say and what they do need not always be the same thing; for that matter, if composers always did what they said, the musical results might not be very successful. Gluck’s preface to *Alceste* and Wagner’s *Oper und Drama* are powerful documents, albeit a bit muddleheaded in places, and reading these and similar polemics promulgated throughout the history of opera forces the consideration of issues that may not be uppermost in one’s mind during the immediate operatic experience. These issues also direct—some might claim, divert—the discussion of opera in the scholarly literature, whether that discussion involves attempts to rescue late Baroque opera from the accusation of being merely a concert in costume; to demonstrate how Mozart exploits the potentials of contemporary musical forms and syntaxes to establish dramatic conflict and resolution; to argue that Rossinian coloratura serves also to illustrate character and purpose; to show that in Wagner’s music dramas the orchestra can, by way of its leitmotifs, present a complex narrative independent of, and supplemental to, what is in

fact happening on the stage; or even to defend a seemingly outmoded genre in these modernist and postmodernist times.

While music can delineate characters both separately and, within limits, simultaneously, it cannot fairly represent their interactions, save in the broadest terms. Even in the best-written ensembles—as, for example, the Act III sextet from Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*—characters tend to polarize in musical groups, albeit in shifting alliances (which is in part the point), and dramatic tensions get played out in a fairly obvious manner. For all its subtlety in other ways, music tends to paint emotions with a broad brush, even if its very wordlessness offers the sense that it is plumbing pre-rational, and therefore more intense, emotional depths. And whatever music can reveal about a character's inner feelings—allowing the expression of what cannot be said—it would probably be foolish to claim that the result smacks of any psychological sophistication. Indeed, what more often grabs the attention in the opera house is precisely the lack of any such (p. 29) sophistication when a raw emotion delivers a punch to the stomach. Add to that one's innate pleasure in the visual and aural spectacle of performance, plus the aesthetic contemplation of the musically beautiful, and drama, as it were, tends to go out the window. At that point, opera needs neither defense nor apology, save an appeal to accept it for what it is, rather than what we might wish it to be.

Exotic and Irrational?

A drama “in music” would seem to be an odd concept anyway. In principle, it is no stranger than a drama in iambic pentameters (unless you happen to believe that Julius Caesar did indeed address Mark Antony in five-feet lines), or for that matter, one in Elizabethan English purporting to represent life in ancient Rome. Of course, Shakespeare has conditioned most of us to accept the convention with nary a question, and a willing “suspension of disbelief” is part of the contract required to gain admission to the theater. But while we can believe—or at least, temporarily agree not to disbelieve—in pentameters, music may seem one step too far.

The issue hinges on verisimilitude, which is one subtext of Dr. Johnson’s well-known characterization of opera as “an exotic and irrational entertainment.” This was a somewhat throwaway, and anti-Italian, remark in Johnson’s *Life of Hughes* (one of his set of biographical sketches of English poets written between 1777 and 1781); for his famous dictionary, Johnson instead borrowed the more reasonable definition of the genre from Dryden’s preface to *Albion and Albanus* (1685) as “a poetical tale or fiction, represented by vocal and instrumental musick, adorned with scenes, machines, and dancing.” Suspicion of, yet delight in, the exotic and the irrational have always animated the history of opera since it emerged in Florence at the end of the sixteenth century (Tomlinson 1999). Jacopo Peri and Ottavio Rinuccini sought to solve the problem in two ways. They deliberately placed their *favole in musica* in the context of a revival of the putative performance practices of ancient drama, a matter of some debate in the course of the Renaissance but which provided a hallowed precedent. Their choice of subject matter was also significant. The hero of *Euridice* is, of course, Orpheus, the greatest musician of classical myth; the work is also set in a pastoral Arcadia, a land of milk and honey where shepherds and shepherdesses could plausibly carry out their day-to-day lives in song. Likewise, in Monteverdi’s *Orfeo* (1607), Orpheus sings a highly virtuosic aria to charm the powers of Hades to grant him access to rescue his beloved Eurydice from death. Earlier in the same opera, he also performs songs about his joy on his wedding day, while his pastoral companions sing and dance in praise of the happy couple. These songs are inherently lifelike (some would call them diegetic, although the term is problematic): People sing at weddings, and by report, Orpheus sang at the gates of the Inferno, so such songs can plausibly be heard as onstage performances. The same would apply to other non-deities who use the voice by profession, be it a troubadour, a would-be Meistersinger, or even a singing barber. In other words, operas commonly veer between (p. 30) two types of music—with complex shades between—one presented as verisimilar in the narrow sense of the term, and the other not.

Opera has customarily attempted to meet at least some principles of verisimilitude by providing occasions for music that is, to use Carolyn Abbate’s term, phenomenal, as distinct from the noumenal music to which operatic characters usually appear deaf (Abbate 1991: 119). (A third possible category—where the music invokes natural sounds

audible to those onstage such as birdsong or a storm—is a very special case.) The use of "real" music on the stage—that is, performances that characters can themselves be reckoned to hear—usually provides an excuse for a lyric interlude that may or may not have a dramatic point (Cherubino's "Voi che sapete" in Act II of *Le nozze di Figaro*, with Susanna "playing" her guitar to accompany him; Alfredo's *brindisi* toward the beginning of *La traviata*; Musetta's waltz in Act II of *La bohème*; the tenor who suddenly appears in Act I of *Der Rosenkavalier*). Likewise, representing actual music-making and dancing with or without onstage musicians has become a virtuoso (for the composer) cliché, and Mozart's ingenious dance music in the Act I finale of *Don Giovanni*—providing a background to onstage action—had a strong influence on the opening of Verdi's *Rigoletto*, also fixing a trope that echoes through Act III, scene 3 of his *Un ballo in maschera*, the tavern scene in Berg's *Wozzeck* (II.4), and even the "Jazzbo Brown" opening to Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. Similar motives underpin hunters' or sailors' songs, military marches, spinning songs, and lullabies, for which excuses can usually readily be found, assuming the right subject matter.

Moving away from the phenomenal, but still plausibly within its boundaries, are standard set-pieces with which "real" music conventionally becomes associated, such as prayer-scenes (Micaëla in Bizet's *Carmen*, Act III, scene 5; Desdemona in Verdi's *Otello*, Act IV, scene 2) on the one hand, and magical incantations on the other (Alcina's "Ombre pallide" in Handel's eponymous opera; the "Wolf's Glen" scene in Weber's *Der Freischütz*), given that music is often associated with heightened invocation. The principle may extend to exhortations, whether in person (the choruses of prisoners in Beethoven's *Fidelio* or Verdi's *Nabucco*) or by letter (Tatyana in Tchaikovsky's *Yevgeny Onegin* is the obvious example), and also to "mad"-scenes (Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*) where the recourse to music further gains verisimilitude by virtue of the situation (sane people do not normally hear flutes twittering in the air around them). Exhortation and madness usually also combine in another typical set-piece, the lament, although there was some debate, at least in the seventeenth century, over whether laments are better framed as musical speeches (so, in an impassioned recitative, as in the only surviving part of Monteverdi's *Arianna*) or as formal arias (the heroine in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, over her famous ground bass).

These tropes or their derivatives can usually be found to some degree woven by librettists and composers in any opera, even those that seemingly eschew conventional set-pieces to seek a more "natural" form of musical drama. Other conventions include the "I"-songs in which characters introduce or explain themselves to each other or to the audience (Leporello's "Notte e giorno faticar" at the beginning of *Don Giovanni*; "A Wand'ring Minstrel I" in Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*; Rodolfo's "Chi son? (p. 31) Sono un poeta" in *La bohème*); narrative songs in which a character offers an account of prior events that provide the backstory necessary to understand the action (Senta's ballad in Act II of Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*); or songs that simply set a time and a place (Clara's "Summertime" in *Porgy and Bess*). A special form of the "I"-song is the monologue where the character alone on stage muses on matters of life or death, somewhat in the manner of the formal soliloquy in spoken plays. One might also add

other song-types to this list, such as the revenge aria, love duet, and so forth. While all such settings are rarely phenomenal, strictly speaking, they tend to have a formality that makes them appear nearly so, while also setting them somehow apart from the other dramatic and musical action.

Of course, this leaves a great deal of operatic music unexplained, at which point the argument tends to return once more to notions of emotional truth or psychological penetration. But how a given opera moves between episodes of greater or lesser verisimilitude—or if you prefer, different versions of verisimilitude—can be very revealing. So, too, is the tendency to play on whether the characters hear only each others' words or also their music. Much depends on the subject matter: mythical deities (whether Greek, Roman, or Norse), Arcadian shepherds and shepherdesses, ancient Egyptian rulers, and exotic non-Western Others pose fewer problems than characters from European history (whether Julius Caesar or Richard Nixon) or from "real life" contemporary to the opera. Much also depends on the period in terms of whether opera is just accepted as a theatrical norm (as it was for the most part in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries) or requires some manner of special pleading. However, the genre can often appear skittish about its *raison d'être*. Early operas often had prologues to justify their aesthetic premises, and the technique returned in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the genre once more came under suspicion: thus Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* has the protagonist Tonio first appear as the "Prologo" to emphasize the claims of *verismo*, and Busoni's *Doktor Faustus* uses a spoken prologue to explain the composer's choice of subject. Similar is the use of other framing devices that somehow distance the plot from the lives it represents: whether by establishing it as a lesson-bearing exemplar (the power of Amor in Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*; the "school for lovers" in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*), as the telling of a "story" (Offenbach's *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel*, Benjamin Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* and *Billy Budd*), or as part of an overtly theatrical exercise (the circus-master in Berg's *Lulu*, the theater director in Poulenc's *Les mamelles de Tirésias*, and the Choregos in Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy*) or debate (the beginning of Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges*).

The technique has been extended still further to the rather self-conscious trick of making an opera be "about" opera: Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Capriccio*, and Berio's *Un re in ascolto*, are different cases in point. Such narrower self-reflexivity, which can also extend to a rather knowing self-parody, seemingly stands in contrast to more grandiose claims for opera's universality embodied in Wagnerian music drama and its modernist successors (such as Prokofiev's *War and Peace* and Stockhausen's *Licht* cycle), although they are, in the end, two sides of the same coin. Opera composers (p. 32) may have variously sought in different ways, times, and places to prove the eminent Dr. Johnson wholly wrong, but we all know, deep down, that he was exactly right.

See also: Genre, Musical Theater(s), Operatorio? The Concept of Opera, Verisimilitude

Bibliography

Abbate, Carolyn. 1991. *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Abbate, Carolyn, and Roger Parker, eds. 1989. *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Agid, Philippe, and Jean-Claude Tarondeau. 2010. *The Management of Opera: An International Comparative Study*. Basingstoke, UK, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Citron, Marcia J. 2000. *Opera on Screen*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Gerhard, Anselm. 1998. *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, translated by Mary Whittall. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Glixon, Beth L., and Jonathan E. Glixon. 2006. *Inventing the Business of Opera: The Impresario and His World in Seventeenth-Century Venice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gossett, Philip. 2006. *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Groos, Arthur, and Roger Parker, eds. 1988. *Reading Opera*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kivy, Peter. 1988. *Osmin's Rage: Philosophical Reflections on Opera, Drama, and Text*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Koestenbaum, Wayne. 1993. *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire*. New York: Poseidon Press.

Levin, David J. 2007. *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lindenberger, Herbert. 1998. *Opera in History: From Monteverdi to Cage*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Metropolitan Opera. *Annual Report 2006–07*. Online. Available: **http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/about/report.aspx** (accessed May 14, 2009).

Operabase. Online. Available: **http://operabase.com** (accessed January 16, 2012).

Robinson, Paul. 2002. "A Deconstructive Postscript: Reading Libretti and Misreading Opera." In *Opera, Sex, and Other Vital Matters*, 30–51. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Originally published in Groos and Parker 1988, 328–346.

Rosselli, John. 1992. *Singers of Italian Opera: The History of a Profession*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Royal National Theatre. *Annual Report and Financial Statements 2007–2008*. Online. Available: **http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/41321/annual-reportreview/annual-report-0708.html** (accessed May 14, 2009).

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden (London, UK). *Annual Review 2007/08*. Online. Available: **http://www.roh.org.uk/about/annualreview/index.aspx** (accessed May 14, 2009).

Sartori, Claudio. 1990–1994. *I libretti italiani a stampa dalle origini al 1800: Catalogo analitico con 16 indici*. 7 vols. Cuneo: Bertola & Locatelli.

Tomlinson, Gary. 1999. *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Notes:

(*) These figures were available on the public version of the *Operabase* site when accessed on May 14, 2009, but have since been removed and replaced by more generic statistics (accessed January 16, 2012) that cannot always be reconciled with the ones given above given that the parameters appear to have changed.

Tim Carter

Tim Carter is the author of W.A. Mozart: “Le nozze di Figaro” (Cambridge, 1987), Jacopo Peri (1561–1633): His Life and Works (Garland,1989), Music in Late Renaissance and Early Baroque Italy (Batsford, 1992), Music, Patronage and Printing in Late Renaissance Florence (Ashgate, 2000) and Monteverdi and his Contemporaries (Ashgate, 2000), Monteverdi’s Musical Theatre (St. Edmundsbury, 2002), and “Oklahoma!” The Making of an American Musical (Yale, 2007). He has just edited Kurt Weill and Paul Green’s 1936 musical play, Johnny Johnson (Kurt Weill Foundation, 2012), and his Orpheus in the Marketplace: Jacopo Peri and the Economy of Late Renaissance Florence, co-authored with economic historian Richard Goldthwaite, is forthcoming. He is currently David G. Frey Distinguished Professor of Music at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.