



Opera

What is opera and how does it connect to New York City?

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WHAT IS OPERA?



Verdi's *Macbeth* performed at the Savonlinna Opera Festival in 2007

In Italian, the word "opera" can be translated directly to "work," referring to art. Similar to musical theater, opera uses singing and music to tell a story. Opera is often considered the direct precursor to musical theater. Opera is known for its dramatic stories and

ORIGINS OF OPERA



Painting depiction of *Dafne*

Opera can be traced back to back to Florence, Italy in the late 1500s, where a small group of artists decided to recreate the storytelling of a Greek tragedy. This work titled *Dafne* is widely considered to be the first opera. From that point on, opera became increasingly popular in Europe and began to take shape in various new styles throughout various periods.

STYLES OF OPERA



Opera has many different styles depending on the time period or country it was written. Operas within time periods and national styles also have different characteristics that separate them into different categories.

1

Opera Seria

Opera Seria is what many people think of when they think of opera. These works are typically very "serious" and dramatic. They often focus on noble characters, dramatic conflicts and can contain elements of mythology and ancient history.

Famous Example: Handel's *Giulio Cesare*

2

Opera Buffa

Opera Buffa is often considered the opposite of Opera Seria. It contains lighter and more comedic elements. Opera Buffa also uses elements of royalty and also peasant life, making it relatable for many audiences at the time.

Famous Example: Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*

3

Opera Verismo

The word "Verismo" can be directly translated to "realism" from Italian. This is what Opera Verismo is; depictions of real-life scenarios on the opera stage. This makes the genre very popular, as audiences can find elements of their own lives in the opera.

Famous Example: Puccini's *La Bohème*

4

Operetta

Operettas contain both song and spoken dialogue, making them very similar to musical theater. Operettas are typically a good bridge between musical theater and opera.

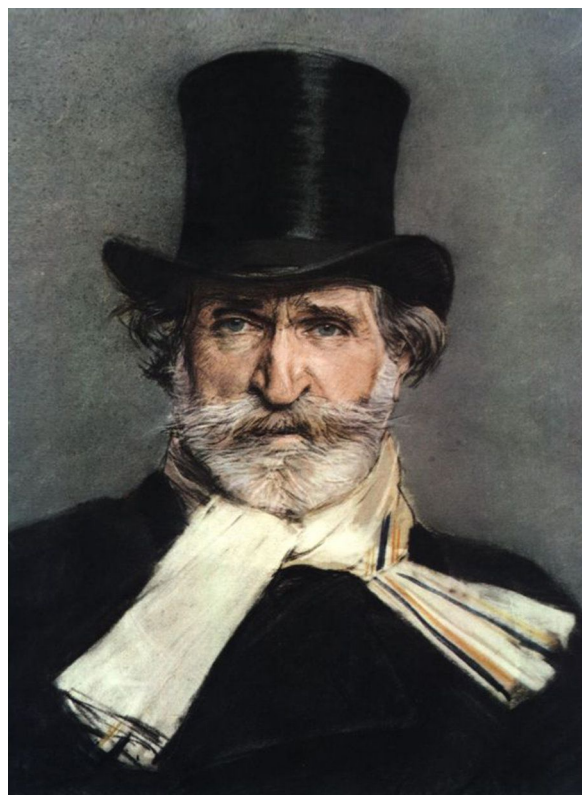
Famous Example: The Sullivans and Gilbert's *The Pirates of Penzance*



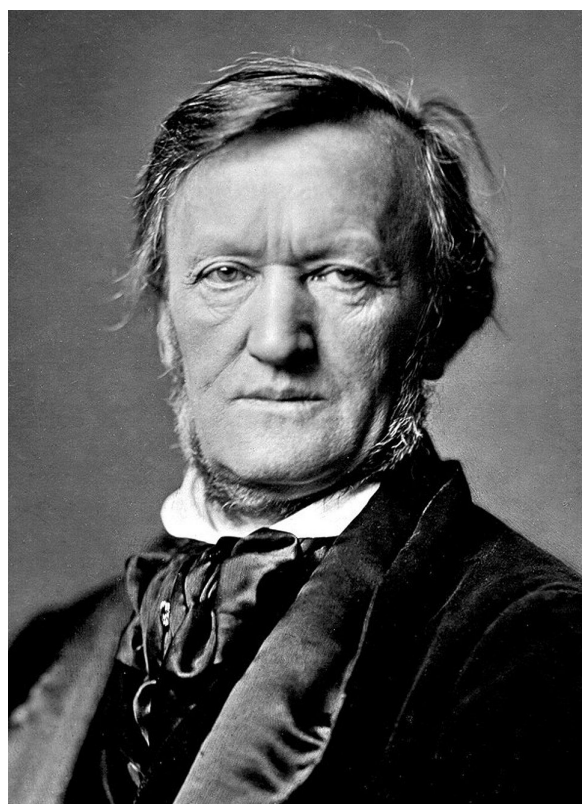
Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Metropolitan Opera

Puccini's *La Bohème* at the Metropolitan Opera





Giuseppe Verdi, famous Italian composer



Richard Wagner, famous German composer

1

Italian Opera

Opera has a long and rich history when it comes to opera. Italian opera contains many different styles of writing but are known for their beautiful and soaring melodies as well as impressive showcases of vocals.

Famous Composers: Verdi, Puccini

2

French Opera

French operas are known for their elegant orchestration and often contain elements of dance or ballet. French operas are also dramatic and contain lavish sets and elaborate costumes.

Famous Composers: Lully, Bizet

3

German Opera

German operas are often known for their elaborate and extensive use of the orchestra and their innovative harmonies. German operas also contain many elements of mythology and philosophy.

Famous Composers: Wagner, R. Strauss

4

English Opera

English opera prioritizes the audience's understanding, containing clear diction and understandable text. Similar to German operas, English operas also use the orchestra to tell the story.

Famous Composers: Britten, Purcell



Mozart's *The Magic Flute* at the Metropolitan Opera

Strauss' *Salome* at the Metropolitan Opera



1

Baroque Opera (1600-1750)

Baroque operas contain ornamented melodies as well as dramatic contrasts. Baroque operas also use the recitative, which is speech-like singing as well as smaller orchestras.

Famous Example: Monteverdi's *L'orfeo*

2

Classical Opera (1750-1820)

Classical operas contain clear and balanced melodies with less ornamentation when compared to Baroque operas. They also emphasize form and structure.

Famous Examples: Mozart's *The Magic Flute*

3

Romantic Opera (1800-1910)

Romantic operas are known for their larger orchestras and more dramatic emotions. These operas place an emphasis on love, heroism, and tragedy. They contain rich harmonies and expressive melodies. During these period, national opera styles began to grow more distinct.

Famous Example: Verdi's *La Traviata*

4

20th Century/Modern Opera (1900-Present)

"Modern" or 20th Century operas contain experimentation with harmony and tonality. They utilize innovative staging, lighting, and technology and often tell stories in unconventional or abstract ways.

Famous Example: Strauss' *Salome*

PERA IN NEW YORK CITY



Lincoln Center, the home of the Metropolitan Opera

Opera has been an important part of New York City's cultural fabric since the mid 1800s. New York City is home to one of the world's most famous and largest opera houses: The Metropolitan Opera. The Metropolitan Opera House is a major tourist attraction for opera fans around the world.

THE MET OPERA



Interior of the opera house

The Metropolitan Opera has existed in New York City since the 1830s. However, the current opera house was built in 1960 in order to feature more seating and staging capabilities. The current house in Lincoln Center features some of the finest staging capabilities of any opera house in the world.

THE MET OPERA (cont.)



Luciano Pavarotti's final curtain call at the Metropolitan Opera House

The Metropolitan Opera has featured performances by numerous famous opera vocalists, including Luciano Pavarotti. Several famous conductors have also conducted at the house. This has made the Metropolitan Opera House a cultural center for opera.

THE MET OPERA (cont.)



Backstage at the Met Opera

The Met Opera is known for its lavish sets and costumes as well as its extraordinary vocalists and orchestra. The Met Opera is also technically advanced, featuring impressive staging capabilities through stage elevators and turntables.

WHY IS OPERA IMPORTANT?



The Met Opera's 2025 Production of Bizet's Carmen

Opera is important because it combines music, theater, storytelling, and visual art into one art form. For centuries, opera has reflected human emotion, history, and culture, allowing audiences to experience the story in an immersive way. Opera preserves artistic traditions while also inspiring modern works and creativity.

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