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TEENTH-CENTURY

ITALIAN OPERA

from Rossini to Puccini

DANIÈLE PISTONE



Nineteenth-Century
**ITALIAN
OPERA**

from
Rossini
to
Puccini

Danièle Pistone

translated by E. Thomas Glasow

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From the Translator

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—E. Thomas Glasow

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PREFACE

*A*s an extension of my research in the field of French music and after several years' university teaching,¹ which have renewed my acquaintance with the Italian language and culture, I attempt here to present the high points of Italian opera from Rossini to Puccini. I relied mainly on the study of the musical scores and correspondence of the composers and librettists themselves, as well as on contemporary press reports and publications concerned with the same subjects. In a studied effort to avoid duplication, I have omitted any information about composers or works that is readily available elsewhere.²

My access to necessary documents was greatly facilitated by a number of librarians and archivists, especially those of the library of the Accademia di Santa Cecilia, the Biblioteca Alessandrina, the Biblioteca Casanatense, the Biblioteca Teatrale Buccardo, and the Istituto d'Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte in Rome; the Biblioteca Braidense, the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory, and the Museo Teatrale alla Scala in Milan; the Biblioteche Nazionali in Florence and Rome; the Biblioteca Beriana in Genoa; the Istituto di Studi Verdiani in Parma; and local libraries in Forlì, Pessia, and Reggio Emilia. Various musical pilgrimages were made as well to sites in

Bergamo, Busseto, Catania, Pesaro, and Torre del Lago and, in Paris, to the Bibliothèque Nationale and the library of Radio France. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to all those who allowed me the benefit of their assistance and advice.

INTRODUCTION

Since the Renaissance, the land of Michelangelo has been not only one of the principal European vanguards of the fine arts but a required setting for any cultural education. The *dramma in musica* sprang from this rich environment at the dawn of the seventeenth century, in Florence, rapidly attracting the attention of the most far-flung composers and conquering many major cities within the space of a hundred years. At the start of the Napoleonic era, on the heels of the triumphs of Pergolesi, Piccinni, and Cimarosa, Italian music still exerted the same influence: many Italian composers had established themselves abroad, and French musicians traveled to the Villa Medici to further their studies.¹

In a country where religious music had begun to go into a genuine slump, where keyboard music could not seem to capture the public's attention, where only the rare instrumental soloist rose to international renown after the death of the diabolical Paganini, and where nothing really new appeared in the symphonic repertoire until the age of Sgambati and Martucci,² the nineteenth century, unlike previous decades, would see a growth in the popularity of opera in Italy almost to the exclusion of all other forms of theater.

Between 1810 and the 1920s, from Rossini's first opera to

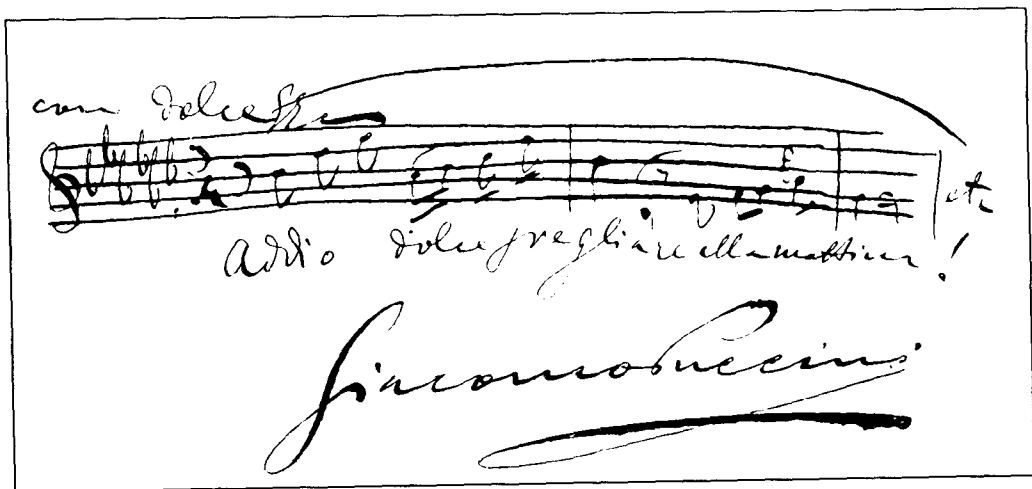


Principal states of Italy in 1815

1. Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia
2. Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia (Hapsburg)
3. Grand Duchy of Tuscany
4. Papal States
5. Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (Bourbon)

Puccini's last, Italy underwent a number of changes. Certainly the most important one occurred in 1861, on the political front, in those regions that—after the Bourbon-Hapsburg occupation in the first part of the century and the slow emergence of libertarian ideas—finally achieved their unification through the creation of the kingdom of Italy. From an artistic standpoint, neoclassicism was strongest among painters influenced by the Venetian Francesco Hayez (1791–1882), romanticism became more turbulent with Tranquillo Cremona (1837–1878), and realism starker with Lorenzo Delleani (1840–1908). Impressionists like Giovanni Segantini and Menardo Rosso were established by the end of the century, before the emergence of the Macchiaioli (Tachistes), among them Raffaello Sernesi, or the exponents of the turn-of-the-century floral style. They were succeeded by the futurists (1910) and, after the First World War, by the disciples of metaphysical painters like Giorgio de Chirico.

Stylistic developments made no less of an impact on Italian literature, from the time of Ugo Foscolo (1778–1827) to that of Giovanni Papini (1881–1956). First came the romantic age of

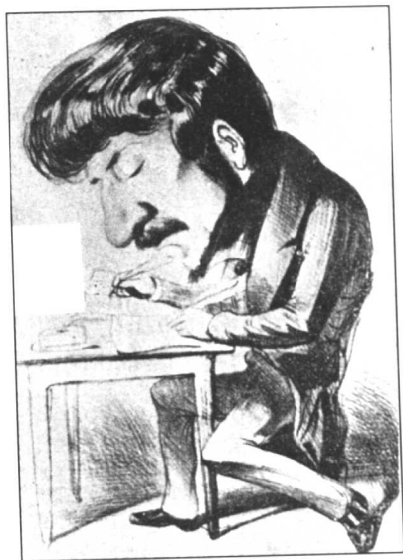


Facsimile of an autograph quote from *La bohème*,
Act III. In *Annuario dell'arte lirica e coreografica italiana*
(Milan: De Marchi, 1897–98), 9.

Manzoni, followed by the iconoclastic writings of the Scapigliatura, the Milanese bohemian circle that counted Arrigo Boito and Emilio Praga among its adherents. Next, the cruder style of veristic authors like Luigi Capuana and Giovanni Verga gave way to the heroic-hedonistic poetry of Gabriele D'Annunzio.

Over the course of the century, ideas of liberty and individualism prompted an acceleration of aesthetic change. Opera too underwent significant transformations, which often paralleled those of other art forms. From the period of *farsa* or *opera buffa* to that of *verismo*, length and form evolved considerably, as did the nature of the plots, vocal textures, and orchestral scoring. Great passion-filled dramatic works were inspired by the spirit of the Risorgimento, and the gradual rise in the popularity of operetta won acclaim for both Mascagni and Leoncavallo.

The most important of these creations, brought together in the following historical survey, are the very symbol of the evolution that shall be traced through the librettos, the music, and contemporary performance conditions.



Donizetti (1797–1848).
In *Musica*, April 1905.

Table 1. Chronology of major Italian operas. Dates are those of first performances. Composers' names and titles are followed by the name of the librettist(s) and the city of the premiere. Translations of Italian titles are given in the Index of Operas.

1810	Rossini	<i>La cambiale di matrimonio</i> (G. Rossi), Venice
1813	Rossini	<i>Tancredi</i> (G. Rossi), Venice
	Rossini	<i>L'italiana in Algeri</i> (A. Anelli), Venice
1816	Rossini	<i>Il barbiere di Siviglia</i> (C. Sterbini), Rome
	Rossini	<i>Otello</i> (F. Berio di Salsa), Naples
1817	Rossini	<i>La gazza ladra</i> (G. Gherardini), Milan
1818	Rossini	<i>Mosè in Egitto</i> (A. L. Tottola), Naples
1819	Rossini	<i>La donna del lago</i> (A. L. Tottola), Naples
1823	Rossini	<i>Semiramide</i> (G. Rossi), Venice
1827	Bellini	<i>Il pirata</i> (F. Romani), Milan
1829	Rossini	<i>Guillaume Tell</i> (de Jouy, Bis, Marrast), Paris
1830	Donizetti	<i>Anna Bolena</i> (F. Romani), Milan
1831	Bellini	<i>La sonnambula</i> (F. Romani), Milan
	Bellini	<i>Norma</i> (F. Romani), Milan
1832	Donizetti	<i>L'elisir d'amore</i> (F. Romani), Milan
1835	Bellini	<i>I puritani</i> (C. Pepoli), Paris
	Donizetti	<i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i> (S. Cammarano), Naples
1837	Mercadante	<i>Il giuramento</i> (G. Rossi), Milan
1839	Mercadante	<i>Il bravo</i> (G. Rossi), Milan
	Verdi	<i>Oberto</i> (T. Solera), Milan
1840	Donizetti	<i>La fille du régiment</i> (de Saint-Georges, Bayard), Paris
	Verdi	<i>Un giorno di regno</i> (F. Romani), Milan
	Pacini	<i>Saffo</i> (S. Cammarano), Naples
	Donizetti	<i>La favorite</i> (Royer, Vaéz), Paris
1842	Verdi	<i>Nabucco</i> (T. Solera), Milan
1843	Donizetti	<i>Don Pasquale</i> (G. Ruffini), Paris
	Verdi	<i>I lombardi alla prima crociata</i> (T. Solera), Milan
1844	Verdi	<i>Ernani</i> (F. M. Piave), Venice
	Verdi	<i>I due Foscari</i> (F. M. Piave), Rome
1845	Verdi	<i>Giovanna d'Arco</i> (T. Solera), Milan
	Verdi	<i>Alzira</i> (S. Cammarano), Naples

(continued)

- 1846 Verdi *Attila* (T. Solera), Venice
 1847 Verdi *Macbeth* (F. M. Piave), Florence
 Verdi *I masnadieri* (A. Maffei), London
 1848 Verdi *Il corsaro* (F. M. Piave), Trieste
 Donizetti *Poliuto* (S. Cammarano), Naples
 1849 Verdi *La battaglia di Legnano* (S. Cammarano), Rome
 Verdi *Luisa Miller* (S. Cammarano), Naples
 1851 Verdi *Rigoletto* (F. M. Piave), Venice
 1853 Verdi *Il trovatore* (S. Cammarano), Rome
 Verdi *La traviata* (F. M. Piave), Venice
 1855 Verdi *Les vêpres siciliennes* (Scribe, Duveyrier), Paris
 1856 Pedrotti *Tutti in maschera* (M. Marcello), Verona
 1857 Verdi *Simon Boccanegra* (1st version, F. M. Piave), Venice
 1857 Verdi *Aroldo* (F. M. Piave), Rimini
 1859 Verdi *Un ballo in maschera* (A. Somma), Rome
 1862 Verdi *La forza del destino* (F. M. Piave), St. Petersburg
 1867 Verdi *Don Carlos* (Méry, du Locle), Paris
 1868 Boito *Mefistofele* (A. Boito), Milan
 1871 Verdi *Aida* (A. Ghislanzoni), Cairo
 1876 Ponchielli *La Gioconda* (A. Boito), Milan
 1881 Verdi *Simon Boccanegra* (with revisions by A. Boito),
 Milan
 1884 Puccini *Le villi* (F. Fontana), Milan
 1887 Verdi *Otello* (A. Boito), Milan
 1889 Puccini *Edgar* (F. Fontana), Milan
 1890 Mascagni *Cavalleria rusticana* (Menasci, Targioni-Tozzetti),
 Rome
 1891 Mascagni *L'amico Fritz* (P. Suardon), Rome
 1892 Catalani *La Wally* (L. Illica), Milan
 Leoncavallo *I pagliacci* (R. Leoncavallo), Milan
 1893 Puccini *Manon Lescaut* (R. Leoncavallo, L. Illica,
 G. Giacosa), Turin
 Verdi *Falstaff* (A. Boito), Milan
 1895 Smareglia *Nozze istriane* (L. Illica), Trieste
 1896 Puccini *La bohème* (Illica, Giacosa), Turin
 Giordano *Andrea Chénier* (L. Illica), Milan
 1897 Leoncavallo *La bohème* (R. Leoncavallo), Venice
 Cilèa *L'arlesiana* (L. Marengo), Milan

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|------|--------------|--|
| 1898 | Mascagni | <i>Iris</i> (L. Illica), Rome |
| 1900 | Puccini | <i>Tosca</i> (Illica, Giacosa), Rome |
| | Leoncavallo | <i>Zazà</i> (R. Leoncavallo), Milan |
| 1902 | Cilea | <i>Adriana Lecouvreur</i> (A. Colautti), Milan |
| 1903 | Giordano | <i>Siberia</i> (L. Illica), Milan |
| 1904 | Puccini | <i>Madama Butterfly</i> (Illica, Giacosa), Milan |
| | Alfano | <i>Risurrezione</i> (C. Hanau), Turin |
| 1906 | Wolf-Ferrari | <i>I quattro rusteghi</i> (L. Sugana), Munich |
| 1910 | Puccini | <i>La fanciulla del West</i> (G. Civinini, C. Zangarini),
New York |
| 1911 | Mascagni | <i>Isabeau</i> (L. Illica), Buenos Aires |
| 1913 | Montemezzi | <i>L'amore dei tre re</i> (S. Benelli), Milan |
| 1914 | Zandonai | <i>Francesca da Rimini</i> (T. Ricordi), Turin |
| 1917 | Puccini | <i>La rondine</i> (G. Adami), Monte Carlo |
| 1918 | Puccini | <i>Il trittico: Il tabarro</i> (G. Adami), <i>Suor Angelica</i> (G.
Forzano), <i>Gianni Schicchi</i> (G. Forzano), New York |
| 1926 | Puccini | <i>Turandot</i> (G. Adami, R. Simoni), Milan |
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CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	vii
List of Tables	ix
Preface	xi
Introduction	xiii

PART I: *The Librettos*

Chapter 1. General Characteristics	3
Librettists • Genres • Sources of Subject Matter • Settings • Characters • Style	
Chapter 2. Principal Themes	17
Love • Death • Religion • Politics and Society • The Irrational	
Chapter 3. Stylistic Evolution and Boundaries	27
The Classical Tradition • Romanticism • Verismo • The Censor	

PART II: *The Music*

Chapter 4. Composers	35
Background and Formative Years • Output • Stylistic Overview	

- Chapter 5. The Voice 41
Italian Vocal Style • Voice Categories • From Recitative
to *Canto fiorito* • The Chorus
- Chapter 6. The Orchestra 59
The Instruments • Principal Symphonic Passages •
The Functions and Effects of Orchestration
- Chapter 7. Form and Language 69
Structure • Melody • Harmony • Foreign Influences

PART III: *Performance*

- Chapter 8. Administration 81
Opera Houses • Birth of the Spectacle • Repertoire
- Chapter 9. Interpreters 97
Singers • Instrumentalists and Conductors • Dancers •
Stage Designers and Directors
- Chapter 10. The Public 107
Different Categories of Spectators • Audience Tastes
and Behavior
- Conclusion 111
- Notes 115
Bibliography 129
Discography 163
Appendix 189
Main Characters • Famous Melodies • Celebrated Singers
• Celebrated Conductors • Principal Librettists
- Note on Italian Pronunciation 233
Glossary 235
Index of Musical Examples 237
Index of Operas 243
Index of Names 249

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Caricature of Leoncavallo. x
- Map of the principal states of Italy, 1815. xiv
- Facsimile of an autograph quote from Puccini's *La bohème*. xv
- Caricature of Donizetti. xvi
- Facsimile of a page from the autograph manuscript of Donizetti's *Il vedovo solitario*. 4
- The tenor Rubini. 15
- Verdi and Victor Emmanuel II. 16
- Facsimile of the La Scala playbill for Bellini's *Norma*, 1834. 6
- Principals de Nuovina and Lubert in a French production of Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*. 32
- Facsimile of a page from the autograph manuscript of Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*. 37
- The Verdi family tavern in Le Roncole. 38
- Eva Tetrazzini. 45
- Giuseppe Verdi, ca. 1845. 52
- Tamburini. 57
- Cover illustration from the score of Puccini's *Tosca*. 58
- Verdi's home at Sant'Agata. 77
- Set design for Act III, scene 1, of Verdi's *Falstaff*. 83

- Map of the principal nineteenth-century Italian opera
houses. 84
- Interior of Teatro Verdi in Busseto. 85
- Victor Maurel as Falstaff. 90
- Adelina Patti. 98
- Set design for Act I of Leoncavallo's *Zazà*. 104
- Verdi's tomb in Milan. 10
- Interior of Museo Donizettiano in Bergamo. 113
- Rossini, ca. 1860. 190
- Leoncavallo. 196
- Caricature of Verdi. 231
- Verdi, ca. 1900. 232
- Caricature of Verdi. 234
- Mme Héricléa-Darclée as Mascagni's Iris. 242
- Statue of Puccini in Torre del Lago. 259

TABLES

- Table 1. Chronology of major Italian operas. xvii
Table 2. Literary sources of librettos. 8
Table 3. Vocal categories in Italian opera scores. 46
Table 4. Great premieres of the major Italian opera houses. 82
Table 5. Most frequently performed composers and operas worldwide, 1888. 91
Table 6. List of works remaining in the repertoire of Italian opera houses, 1875. 92
Table 7. Programs of Italian opera houses, winter season of 1902–03. 94