

**Two Sides to every Story:
How two Composers treat the same
Plot**

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Two Composers, one Opera Theme

- In opera history it is not unusual that more than one composer has used the same opera theme and even the same libretto.
- From the beginning of the first opera *I'Orfeo* by Monteverdi in 1607 to Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* 1762 to Offenbach's *Orphee aux enfers* 1858, composers set music to the same stories.
- The Metastasio libretto for *La Clemenza di Tito* was set to music 40 times before Mozart used it for his opera to celebrate the coronation of Leopold II in 1791.

Two Composers, one Opera Theme

- In this lecture we will compare 5 opera stories set to music by two composers during the 19th Century.
- We will compare the operatic styles of the beginning to the last part of the 19th century.
- I will present to you similar events in each opera to illustrate the differences in the use of orchestration and emphasis on the characters.
- Some of the lesser known operas are only available as a recording and not in DVD. You will see the translations on the screen for the Audio.

Two Sides to every Story: How two Composers treat the same Plot

Otello: Willow song

Giachino Rossini 1816

Giuseppe Verdi 1887

Romeo and Juliette: Tomb scene with Romeo

Vincenzo Bellini 1830

Charles Gounod 1867

Mermaid (Undine) Operas: Mermaid Love Songs

Albert Lortzing 1845

Antonin Dvorak 1901

Two Sides to every Story: How two Composers treat the same Plot

Falstaff, after being thrown into the Thames

Otto Nicolai 1849

Giuseppe Verdi 1893

La Boheme: Musetta's Waltz

Ruggiero Leoncavallo 1897 Giacomo Puccini 1896

Otello

- **Rossini's opera from his Naples period is romantic with light orchestration and a lot of coloratura embellishment of the arias.**
- **Verdi has heavier orchestration with dramatic presentation of many arias to emphasize the characters.**
- **The story in Rossini's Otello follows closer to the Shakespeare play and starts in Venice. Verdi's opera starts in Cypress where Otello is sent by the Doge of Venice to fight the Turks.**

Otello

- **Rossini's opera has three tenors: Otello, Jago and Rodrigo. In Verdi's opera Otello is a dramatic tenor and Jago a dramatic baritone.**
- **The willow song is sung by Desdemona in the last act before she retires to bed with ominous forebodings for the events to come.**
- **You will hear in succession the Rossini audio recording with Patricia Ciofi: CD3, Act III, Tract 3**
- **Verdi DVD with Renee Fleming Act V, Chapter 41 and 42.**

Rossini's Willow Song

Desdemona

Seated at the foot of a willow, plunged in grief,
Isaura moaned, wounded by most cruel love:
A soft breeze repeated her voice among the
branches.

The crystal brooks united the murmur of their
different paths to her sigh of love:
A soft breeze repeated her voice among the
branches.

Willow, delight of love!

Rossini Willow Song continued

**Cast a merciful shade, heedless of my misfortunes,
onto my fatal grave;**

**And never may the breeze repeat the sound of my
laments**

What have I said!..Ah, I was mistaken!..

This is not the gloomy end of my song. Hear me..

(A gust of wind shatters some panes of the window)

Oh God!

What is this noise! What an ill omen!

Rossini Willow song continued

Emilia

Fear not; look: it is a raging wind blowing.

Desdemona

I thought that somebody..

Oh, how the Heavens join in my laments!

Hear the end of my mournful story.

“But weary at last of pouring sorrowful sighs and tears, the afflicted virgin died, ah besides the willow.

But weary at last of weeping she died...how sad! The ungrateful man, alas... but tears do not let me continue.”

Go, receive your friends last kiss.

Rossini Willow song end

Emilia

O, what are you saying!

I obey... oh, how I tremble!

Romeo and Juliette

- **The Bellini version of *E Capuleti E I Montecchi*, the Capulets and the Montagues, is based on the sources which Shakespeare used for his play.**
- **The Gounod version is based closely on the Shakespeare play.**
- **Some of the characters have different positions in the two operas. In the Bellini version it is Tebaldo who is elected by Juliette's father to be her husband, in the Gounod opera it is Paris.**
- **In Bellini's opera Romeo is sung by a mezzo-soprano in a trouser role, in Gounod's opera Romeo is a lyric tenor.**

Romeo and Juliette

- In Gounod's opera the emphasis is on the relationship of Romeo and Juliette where in the Bellini opera the strife between the warring fractions is also a prominent part of the story.
- Lorenzo is a doctor who gives Juliette the sleeping potion in Bellini's opera and is a priest in Gounod's opera.
- The Queen Mab ballad is only in the Gounod opera.

Romeo in the Tomb Scene

- You will see in succession DVDs of both operas
- The Bellini opera is from a 2006 production of the Festival della valle d'Itria di Martina Franca in modern dress (typical of some European Regie driven operas) sung by mezzo-soprano Clara Polito. Act II, Chapter 10, stop when he lies down
- In Gounod's opera we have an opulent traditional production from the Royal Opera Covent Garden with lyric Tenor Roberto Alagna from 1994
Act V, Chapter 24, stop after he drinks the poison.

Mermaid (Undine) Operas, Mermaid Love Songs

- **Mermaids (Undine) are water creatures that look like humans but do not have a soul. They can obtain it if a human loves them and marries them.**
- **First mention of mermaids is documented in the 16th century by Paracelsus.**
- **The novel by Friedrich de la Motte-Fouque 1811 influenced 16 Mermaid operas starting with E.T.H. Hoffmann's Undine 1816 to Dvorak's Rusalka 1901 and even in the 20/21st Century the present Broadway musical about the Little Mermaid Ariel.**

Mermaid Operas and Mermaid Love Songs

- **In the present repertoire are still Lortzing's Undine 1845 and Dvorak's Rusalka 1901.**
- **Lortzing's Undine is a fairy tale opera in the Romantic light German Singspiel style with light lyrical orchestration and arias.**
- **Dvorak's Rusalka is influenced by Wagner's symphonic orchestration and Czech Folk music.**
- **The Knight Hugo (Undine's love) is a Lyric Tenor and the Prince in Rusalka is a dramatic Helden Tenor.**

Mermaid Operas and Mermaid Love Songs

- We will compare the love song of Undine for her husband and her tale about mermaid life with Rusalka's Song to the Moon about her love to the prince.
- Audio recording CD 1, Act II, Tract 4 1967 remastered 1986 and 1995 with *Anneliese Rothenberger* as Undine followed by
- Rusalka (*Renee Fleming*) DVD in a modern production from Opera National de Paris.
Disc 1, Act I, Chapter 6 2003

Undine's Love song and Mermaid Tale

Undine

**Know that in all the elements there are beings that look like
you;**

**Salamanders play in the fiery flames, and gnomes dwell deep
in the earth.**

**In the blue sky and in the rivers live spirits of a variety of
races. (pointing below).**

**It is wonderful to live in the crystal vaults, where tall coral
trees glow:**

**And those who live down there are beautiful to behold ,
And generally much more attractive than humans.**

Undine's Tale

Many a fisher has had the chance to observe a delicate water sprite when she emerges from the waves, singing.

Men call such rare women : Undines..

And such a being now stands before you.

(Hugo recoils with a shudder)

Undine

O don't turn away from me, beloved husband!

We're the same as you in mind and body and live harmlessly and contentedly.

Undine's Tale

In one point we are different from you, in that we cannot expect eternal salvation, since we were given no soul.

(Hugo makes another gesture)

Undine

But it is possible on earth and in the most intimate union with you to share in this great happiness.

Don't you feel what moves me, what stirs within me?

I have a soul and I will be grateful eternally, if your fidelity does not waver and you do not make me miserable.

Undine's Tale End

So decide now my dearest may I from now on,
blissfully rest upon your bosom?

O speak , o speak, my beloved! For I love you so
inexpressibly.

*(Hugo, overcome with emotion, spreads out his
arms. Undine sinks on his breast).*

Undine

I remain yours! You remain mine! Accept my eternal
thanks.

I have been awakened to a new life. I can hardly
bear it; It makes me so happy and blissful.

Falstaff, after being thrown into the Thames

- **Otto Nicolai's Operatic Falstaff version from 1849 in the Merry wives of Windsor is a fusion of the German Romantic Singspiel and Italian Opera Buffa .**
- **Nicolai was educated in Germany and in Italy where he was exposed to the music of Bellini, Rossini and Donizetti.**
- **Verdi's last opera from 1893 was influenced by Wagner and the Verismo style orchestration**

Falstaff, after being thrown into the Thames

- **The Merry Wives of Windsor are light hearted and Sir John Falstaff is the jolly good drinking fellow, the companion of Prince Hal.**
- **In Verdi's opera he is a far more complex character and can show that he can be a sad miserable old man.**
- **There are many serious elements in Verdi's opera which is therefore more a drama giacosa. (Funny and serious elements mixed)**
- **The DVD of Verdi's Falstaff is a production from the Royal Opera Covent Garden with costumes in the Comedia d'el Arte style which however still shows the sad aspect of Falstaff's character.**

Falstaff, after thrown into the Thames.

- **There is only one real aria in Verdi's Falstaff which is the aria Fenton sings of his love for Nannetta.**
- **The story of both operas follows the Shakespeare plays. In the Nicolai version a few characters are different than in Verdi's. The libretto by Arrigo Boito is more focused and contains the character of Mrs. Quickly.**
- **Both operas have a fugue in the finale: in Nicolai's opera it is a lyrical musical ending, in Verdi's opera the famous fugue with the Shakespeare words: He who laughs last , laughs best.**

Falstaff, after thrown into the Thames

- You will hear in succession Falstaff's drinking song the morning after he was thrown into the Thames from Nicolai's opera
- Audio recording CD 1, Act II, Tract 6 2003
Falstaff *Franz Hawlata*
- DVD Covent Garden Production of Verdi's Falstaff 1999/
Falstaff *Bryn Terfel*
Disc 1, Act III, Chapter 20
Falstaff's lament.

Falstaff's drinking Song

Falstaff (*Franz Hawlata*)

As a tiny lad at my mother's breast,

With a hey and a ho by rain and wind,

Sack was already my passion,

For the rain it rains every day.

Come brown Hanna, here, fill my wineskin!

Quench the fire in my throat,

Drinking is no disgrace

Bacchus drank too, yes

Be ready!

La Boheme, Musetta's Waltz

- **Puccini and Ruggiero Leoncavallo were rivals to write an opera about the story of the novel by Muerger telling the lives of the Bohemians in Paris in the 1840ties.**
- **Puccini finished first in 1896 with a libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica. Leoncavallo wrote his own libretto.**
- **Puccini's opera focuses on the relationship of Rudolfo and Mimi and Leoncavallo focuses on Marcello and Musetta.**

La Boheme, Musetta's Waltz

- **In Leoncavallo's opera Musetta sings about romantic love of couples.**
- **In Puccini's opera Musetta uses her flirtations to get Marcello back and to brake down his defenses to the annoyance of Alcindoro while Rudolfo, Schaunard and Colline comment on her behavior.**

La Boheme, Musetta's Waltz

- Both operas are in the Verismo style with sumptuous orchestration and wonderful arias, duets and ensemble scenes.
 - We will compare the flirtatious Musetta in both operas. Musetta's temperament is expressed in both operas in waltz like rhythm.
 - You will hear in succession:
 - a production of Leoncavallo's opera from the Teatro la Fenice as Audio recording with *Martha Senn* as Musetta and Marcello *Mario Malagnini*
- CD1, Act I, Tract 7 and CD2, Act II, Tract 4 1990

La Boheme, Musetta's Waltz

- Puccini's Boheme of the Teatro alla Scala from 2003 with the delightful Musetta of *Hei Kyung Hong* is DVD

Act II, Chapter 16.

Leoncavallo's Musetta's Characterization

Translation Joseph J. Mancini

Marcello

Oh Musetta, always cheerful and smiling.

Your ardent youth, perpetual laughter, your crystal clear voice
and carefree song make you so enchanting.

I feel blessed when you are near me.

Musetta (laughing)

Take care I don't hide my faults.

I have a care free temperament. I am vain and capricious.

I go my own way singing. Take care, take care!

Marcello

Oh Musetta, you have me at your side, you are my life.

Leoncavallo's Musetta's Waltz

Tutti

Yes, yes Musetta, sing a Waltz about love.

Musetta

Attracted to the lovely sound of the Waltz, already the couples inebriated and celebrating, are drawn to the music and to each other like a butterfly drawn to a flower.

Already languishing for love they are ready to give their hearts to each other, confident of beautiful dreams in the future.

During this night of dancing, hope springs eternal.

Leoncavallo's Musetta's Waltz

Their provocative lips are ready for delirious kisses as the waltz accelerates in tempo and rhythm and excitement that transports every worry. The surge of excitement ends in sweet whispers.

Sweetly rising the couples disembrace and wander off phantasizing what is to come.