The words of an opera are known as:

- **The libretto** (literally "small book"). Some composers, notably Wagner, have written their own libretti; others have worked in close collaboration with their librettists, e.g. Mozart with Lorenzo Da Ponte.

- **Traditional opera**, often referred to as "number opera", consists of two modes of singing: recitative, the plot-driving passages sung in a style designed to imitate and emphasize the inflections of speech, and aria (an "air" or formal song) in which the characters express their emotions in a more structured melodic style.

- **Vocal duets, trios and other ensembles** often occur, and choruses are used to comment on the action. In some forms of opera, such as singspiel, opéra comique, operetta, and semi-opera, the recitative is mostly replaced by spoken dialogue.

- **Melodic or semi-melodic passages** occurring in the midst of, or instead of, recitative, are also referred to as arioso. The terminology of the various kinds of operatic voices is described in detail below. During both the Baroque and Classical periods, recitative could appear in two basic forms, each of which was accompanied by a different instrumental ensemble: secco (dry) recitative, sung with a free rhythm dictated by the accent of the words, accompanied only by basso continuo, which was usually a harpsichord and a cello; or accompagnato (also known as strumentato) in which the orchestra provided accompaniment. Over the 18th century, arias were increasingly accompanied by the orchestra. By the 19th century, accompagnato had gained the upper hand, the orchestra played a much bigger role, and Wagner revolutionized opera by abolishing almost all distinction between aria and recitative in his quest for what Wagner termed "endless melody". Subsequent composers have tended to follow Wagner’s example, though some, such as Stravinsky in his *The Rake’s Progress* have bucked the trend.

- **Opera seria and opera buffa**: broad comedy blended with tragic elements in a mix that jarred some educated sensibilities, sparking the first of opera's many reform movements, sponsored by the Arcadian Academy, which came to be associated with the poet Metastasio, whose libretti helped crystallize the genre of opera seria. Comedy in Baroque-era opera was reserved for what came to be called opera buffa.
1600

Giulio Romolo Caccini (also known as Giulio Romano) composes his first opera *Euridice*.

Caccini (1551 - 1618) was an Italian composer, teacher, singer, instrumentalist, and a writer of the very late Renaissance and early Baroque eras. He was one of the founders of the genre of opera, and was one of the most influential creators of the then-new Baroque style. He was also the father of musical daughters opera composer Francesca Caccini and her sister, singer Settimia Caccini. He wrote music for three operas—*Il rapimento di Cefalo* (1600), excerpts of which were published in the first *Nuove musiche*), and *Euridice* (1602), though the first two were collaborations with other composers (mainly Peri for the first *Euridice*). It seems also that Caccini’s character was less than perfectly honorable, as it is said he was frequently motivated by envy and jealousy, not only in his professional life, but for personal advancement with the Medici family. His rivalry with both Emilio de’ Cavalieri and Jacopo Peri seems to have been intense: he may even have been the one who arranged for Cavalieri to be removed from his post as director of festivities for the wedding of Henry IV of France and Maria de’ Medici in 1600 (an event which caused Cavalieri to leave Florence in fury). He also seems to have rushed his own opera *Euridice* into print before Peri’s opera on the same subject could be published. Today, none of his music for multiple voices survives, even though the records from Florence indicate he was involved with polychoral music around 1610.

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**October 6, 1600**

Jacopo Peri’s opera, *Euridice* is performed at the Pitti Pace in Florence to celebrate the wedding of Maria de Medici to France’s Henri IV.

Jacopo Peri (1561–1633), also known under the pseudonym *Il Zazzerino*, was an Italian composer and singer during the transitional period between the Renaissance and Baroque styles of music. He is often called the *inventor of opera*, and his first composition that could be called an opera was *Dafne*, which was composed around 1597. While Jacopo Peri’s *Dafne* is generally recognized as the *first work in the opera genre* and the earliest surviving opera is Peri’s *Euridice*, Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo* is the earliest opera that is still regularly performed today. Unlike today, early music dramas usually took place in the apartments of palaces, which placed performers and audiences in close quarters with one another. The season of “Carnival” was when most of these early music dramas were held, and, because often times spectactors were masked, the lines between observer and observed and fantasy and reality were blurred.

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**February 24, 1607**

Claudio Giovanni Antonio Monteverdi’s opera, *Orfeo*, is performed before an exclusive audience at the Ducal palace in Mantua, Italy.

Italian composer Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) is recognized as furthering the development of opera during the 17th century. His *L’Orfeo*, sometimes called *La favola d’Orfeo*, is a late Renaissance/early Baroque favola in musica, or opera, with a *libretto* by Alessandro Striggio. It is based on the Greek legend of Orpheus, and tells the story of his descent to Hades and his fruitless attempt to bring his dead bride Eurydice back to the living world. It was written in 1607 for a court performance during the annual Carnival at Mantua. Later works by this composer include *L’Arianna* (1608), *Il ritorno d’Ulisse in patria* (The Return of Ulysses to his Homeland) (1940), *Le nozze d’Aenea e Lavinia* (The Marriage of Aeneas and Lavinia), (1641), (music now lost), and *L’incoronazione di Poppea* (The Coronation of Poppea) (1643). Today, his only surviving operas are: *L’Orfeo, Il ritorno d’Ulisse in patria,*
May 28, 1608
Claudio Monteverdi's second opera, L'Arianna, is performed as part of the musical festivities for a royal wedding at the court of Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua.
Over time, all the music from this opera, except for the extended recitative known as the “Lamento d'Arianna” (“Ariadne’s Lament”) has been lost. The libretto, which survives complete, was written in eight scenes by Ottavio Rinuccini, who used Ovid’s Heroides and other classical sources to relate the story of Ariadne’s abandonment by Theseus on the island of Naxos and her subsequent elevation as bride to the god Bacchus. The composer later said that because of the time constraints that were imposed on him, the effort of creating it almost killed him. The initial performance, produced with lavish and innovative special effects, was highly praised, and the work was equally well received in Venice when it was revived under the composer’s direction in 1640 as the inaugural work for the Teatro San Moisè.

February 3, 1625
Francesca Caccini’s opera, La liberazione di Ruggiero Dall’Isola D’Alcina (the liberation of Ruggiero from the Island of Alcina) is first performed at the Villa di Roggio Imperiale in Florence, Italy, for the visiting crown prince of Poland, Ladislaus Sigismondo (later Władysław IV).
Francesca Caccini (1587 after 1641) was an Italian woman operatic composer, singer, lutenist, poet, music teacher of the early Baroque era, and, as well, was also the daughter of the then well-known musician/composer Giulio Caccini. She was also known by the nickname “La Cecchina”, which was given to her by the Florentines, which was probably a diminutive of “Francesca.” Her composition La liberazione di Ruggiero Dall’Isola D’Alcina combined witty parodies of early opera’s stock scenes and self-important characters with moments of surprising emotional intensity, and it is said her score shows that, by the time La liberazione was composed, she had both already mastered a full range of musico-theatrical devices as well as a strong sense of large-scale musical design. La liberazione so pleased the prince that he had it performed in Warsaw in 1628, and it is the only operatic work of hers that survives today. Caccini left Medici service where she was employed on 8 May 1641 and promptly disappeared from the public record.

1643
Claudio Monteverdi's last opera, L'incoronazione di Poppea, with a libretto by Giovanni Francesco Busenello, is performed at the Teatro SS Giovanni e Paolo, in Venice during Carnival season.
L'incoronazione di Poppea is one of the first operas to use historical events and people, and it describes how Poppaea, mistress of the Roman emperor Nero, is able to achieve her ambition and be crowned empress. Written when the genre of opera was only a few decades old, the music for L'incoronazione di Poppea has been praised for its originality, its melody, and for its reflection of the human attributes of its characters. The work helped to redefine the boundaries of theatrical music and established Monteverdi as the leading musical dramatist of his time. The opera was revived in Naples in 1651, but was then neglected until the rediscovery of the score in 1888, when it became the subject of scholarly attention in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Since the 1960s, this opera has been performed and recorded numerous times.

February 22, 1642
Italian opera composer Luigi Rossi's first opera, Il Palazzo Incantato, is performed in Rome in a lavish production at the Teatro delle Quattro Fontane (Palazzo Barberini).
Il Palazzo Incantato (The Enchanted Palace) or Il Palagio d'Atlante, overo La Guerriera Amante (The Palace of Atlantes, or The Warrior Woman in Love as it was sometimes known) is an opera with a prologue and three acts by the composer. The libretto, by Giulio Rospigliosi, the future Pope Clement IX, is based on Ariosto’s Orlando furioso, and Rossi was criticized for giving too much music to his friend, the castrato Marc’Antonio Pasqualini, who played Bradamante, at the expense of the other roles. Some of the highly complicated stage machinery also failed to work during this first performance, too.
March 2, 1647
Italian Baroque composer Luigi Rossi's second opera L'Orfeo (Orpheus), premières at the Théâtre du Palais-Royal in Paris.

Luigi Rossi (c. 1597 – February 1653) was an Italian Baroque composer. He composed just two operas: Il palazzo incantato, which was given at Rome in 1642; and Orfeo, written after he was invited by Cardinal Mazarin in 1646 to go to Paris for that purpose. This opera has three acts, a prologue, and an epilogue, with the libretto by Francesco Buti. It was based on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, and is one of the earliest operas to be staged in France. Again, in keeping with the local style in France at the time, Rossi also included a ballet scene. He had returned to Rome from France by 1650 and never attempted anything more for the stage.

January 5, 1649
Italian composer Francesco Cavalli's enormously successful opera Giasone premières at the Teatro S Casino in Venice, Italy.

Francesco Cavalli (1602-1676) was a singer, but is chiefly remembered for his operas. He began to write for the stage in 1639 (Le nozze di Teti e di Peleo) soon after Venice's first public opera house the Teatro San Cassiano opened. He established so great a reputation that he was summoned to Paris from 1660 until 1662, where he revived his opera Il Xerse and produced the opera Ercole amante. During his lifetime, Cavalli wrote forty-one operas, twenty-seven of which are still in existence today being preserved in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana (Library of St Mark) in Venice. Copies of some of the operas also exist in other locations as well. In addition, two operas (Coriolano and Masenzio), which are clearly attributed to him, are lost. As well, there are twelve other operas that have been attributed to him, but, since the musical scores have been lost, too, attribution has been impossible to prove.

January 19, 1674
Jean-Baptiste Lully's Alceste premières at the Paris Opéra.

Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687) was an Italian-born French composer, instrumentalist and dancer. He is considered a master of the French baroque style and is known for disavowing any Italian influence in French music of the period. His operas were described as "tragédies in music" (tragédies en musique). The point of departure was a verse libretto, in most cases by the verse dramatist Philippe Quinault. For the dance pieces, Lully would hammer out rough chords and a melody on the keyboard, and Quinault would invent words. For the recitative, Lully imitated the speech melodies and dramatic emphasis used by the best actors in the spoken theater, and his attentiveness to transferring theatrical recitation to sung music shaped French opera and song for a century. Unlike Italian opera of the day, which was rapidly moving toward opera seria with its alternating recitative and da capo airs, Lully’s operas focused on drama, expressed by a variety of vocal forms: monologs, airs for two or three voices, rondeaux and French-style da capo, airs where the chorus alternates with singers, sung dances, and vaudeville songs for a few secondary characters.

January 10, 1676
Jean-Baptiste Lully's Atys is performed for the royal court at the Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye and, following this, is first performed in public in April at the Théâtre du Palais-Royal in Paris.

Atys (Attis) is a tragédie en musique, a type of early French opera, in a prologue and five acts set to a libretto by Philippe Quinault and based on Ovid’s Fasti. Although this opera was met with indifference by the Parisian audience when it first premièred, later on, it became known as "the king’s opera" because of King Louis XIV’s love for it.

1679
Pietro Alessandro Gaspare Scarlatti’s opera Gli equivoci nel sembiante is performed in Rome, Italy.
Pietro Alessandro Gaspare Scarlatti (1660 – 1725) was an Italian Baroque composer, known especially for his operas and chamber cantatas. He is considered the founder of the Neapolitan school of opera. As well, he was also the father of two other composers, Domenico Scarlatti and Pietro Filippo Scarlatti. The above opera gained him the support of Queen Christina of Sweden, who was living in Rome at the time. In February 1684, he became maestro di cappella to the viceroy of Naples, perhaps through the influence of his sister, an opera singer, who might have been the mistress of an influential Neapolitan noble. Here he produced a long series of operas, remarkable chiefly for their fluency and expressiveness, as well as other music for state occasions. Although today his operas are rarely performed, Scarlatti’s operas were enormously popular and influential in their day. From about 1697 onwards (La caduta del Decemviri), influenced partly perhaps by the style of Giovanni Bononcini and probably more by the taste of the viceregal court, his opera arias become more conventional and commonplace in rhythm, while his scoring is hasty and crude, yet said not without brilliance. The operas composed for Ferdinando de’ Medici are lost; they might have given a more favourable idea of his style as his correspondence with the prince shows that they were composed with a very sincere sense of inspiration.

John Blow's tragic opera Venus and Adonis premières, either in London or at the court of Windsor in England.

John Blow (1649 - 1708) was an English Baroque composer and organist, appointed to Westminster Abbey in 1669. His pupils included William Croft, Jeremiah Clarke and Henry Purcell. In 1685, he was named a private musician to James II. Venus and Adonis was composed with three acts and a prologue was written for the court of King Charles II, and is considered by some to be either a semi-opera or a masque, although The New Grove names it as the earliest known English opera. The story is based on the Classical myth of Venus and Adonis, which was also the basis for Shakespeare’s poem Venus and Adonis, as well as Ovid’s poem of the same name in his Metamorphoses. Shakespear’s poem tells the story of Venus, the goddess of Love; of her unrequited love; and of her attempted seduction of Adonis, an extremely handsome young man, who would rather go hunting.

February 15, 1686

Jean-Baptiste Lully’s final collaboration with librettist Philippe Quinault, Armide, premières at the Paris Opéra in France.

Armide’s libretto is based on Torquato Tasso’s poem La Gerusalemme liberata (Jerusalem Delivered). The work is in the form of a tragédie en musique, a genre invented by Lully and Quinault. Critics in the 18th century regarded Armide as Lully’s masterpiece, and it continues to be well-regarded, featuring some of the best-known music in French baroque opera. Arguably, Armide was ahead of its time in its psychological interest because, unlike most of Lully’s operas, Armide concentrates on the sustained psychological development of a character focusing on Armide, who repeatedly tries without success to choose vengeance over love.
English composer Henry Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas* is performed for performance by students at a Josias Priest's girls' school in London.

This story by Henry Purcell (1659-1695) is based on Book IV of Virgil's (an ancient Roman poet of the Augustan period) *Aeneid*. Virgil is traditionally ranked as one of Rome's greatest poets. His *Aeneid* has been considered the national epic of ancient Rome since the time of its composition. Modeled after *Homer's Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid* follows the Trojan refugee Aeneas as he struggles to fulfill his destiny and reach Italy, where his descendants Romulus and Remus were to found the city of Rome. This opera recounts the love of Dido, Queen of Carthage, for the Trojan hero Aeneas, and her despair when he abandons her. A monumental work in Baroque opera, *Dido and Aeneas* is remembered as one of Purcell's foremost theatrical works, and, as well, it is his only true opera and only all-sung dramatic work. Known as being one of the earliest known English operas, it is said England owes much to this opera both in structure and in overall effect, and the influence of Cavalli’s opera *Didone* also being apparent. [citation needed]

May 2, 1692

**Henry Purcell's semi-opera, The Fairy-Queen, premieres at the Dorset Garden Theatre in London, England.**

The libretto for this opera is an anonymous adaptation of William Shakespeare’s wedding comedy, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. It portrays the events surrounding the marriage of Theseus, the Duke of Athens, to Hippolyta, the former queen of the Amazons. These include the adventures of four young Athenian lovers and a group of six amateur actors (the mechanicals) who are controlled and manipulated by the fairies who inhabit the forest in which most of the play is set. The play is one of Shakespeare’s most popular works for the stage and is widely performed across the world. The *Fairy-Queen* might be called a “semi-opera,” but it requires a whole crowd of performers -- essentially three separate casts comprising singers, dancers, and in its original form, actors, as well. Although based on Shakespeare’s popular play *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Purcell disregarded it at will to make room for self-contained musical masques (or scenes) in each of its five acts. Eventually, the musical numbers eventually became so dominant that in modern performances the spoken portions of the drama are often eliminated altogether. The *Fairy-Queen* was composed three years before Purcell’s early death at the age of 35. Following his death, the score was lost and only rediscovered early in the twentieth century. Of note is the fact that the masques in *The Fairy-Queen* are related to the play metaphorically, rather than literally, and many critics have stated that they bear no relationship to the play. Recent scholarship has shown that the opera, which ends with a masque featuring Hymen, the God of Marriage, was composed for the fifteenth wedding anniversary of William III and Mary II. *The Fairy-Queen* was the most lavish of what were called semi-operas at the time, and this particular production was said to have been so extravagant that additional performances had to be organized the following year just to cover the expenses.

1694

**Tomaso Giovanni Albinoni’s first opera, Zenobia, regina de Palmireni, is performed at the Grimani Theatre of the SS. Giovanni and Paolo in Venice, Italy.**

**Tomaso Giovanni Albinoni** (1671 – 1751) was an Italian Baroque composer. While famous in his day as an opera composer, he is known today for his instrumental music, especially his concertos. He is especially remembered today for a work called "Adagio in G minor", supposedly written by him, but probably written by Remo Giazotto, a modern musicologist and composer, who was a cataloger of the works of Albinoni. While Zenobia was his first opera, His last was, *Artamene*, which was given at the Teatro Sant’Angelo in Venice during the carnival of 1740. Most of Albinoni’s operatic works have been lost, largely because they were not published during his lifetime. During his lifetime, however, he wrote at least fifty operas, of which twenty-eight were produced in Venice between 1723 and 1740. He, himself, claimed 81 operas (naming his second-to-last opera, in the libretto, as his 80th). In spite of his enormous operatic output, today he is most noted for his instrumental music, especially his oboe concerti (from 12 Concerti a cinque op. 7 and, most famously, 12 Concerti a cinque op. 9).
January 30, 1700
Pietro Alessandro Gaspare Scarlatti’s opera *L’Eraclea* is performed at Naples, Teatro S Bartolomeo in Italy.
*L’Eraclea*, with libretto by Silvio Stampigliak, is an opera that was composed in three acts. In the tradition of earlier Venetian opera, Scarlatti also mixed comic scenes into the otherwise serious story in this opera. Although born in Sicily, most of his finest operatic works were considered to have been composed in Rome: *Telemaco* (1718); *Marco Attilio Regolo* (1719); and his final work, *Serenata*, which was composed for the marriage of the prince of Stigliano, but which was left unfinished when he died on October 22, 1725, aged 65, in Naples.

January 8, 1705
Georg Frideric Händel’s first opera *Almira* – announced as a *Singspiel*, although it has no spoken dialogue – premieres at the opera house in Hamburg, Germany.

George Handel, (born Georg Friedrich Händel (1685 - 1759) was born in Halle-upon-Saale, Germany. He was a German, later British, *Baroque* composer, who spent the bulk of his career in *London*, becoming well-known for his *operas*, *oratorios*, *anthems*, and *organ concertos*. He received important training in Halle-upon-Saale and worked as a composer in Hamburg and Italy before settling in London in 1712 and becoming a naturalised British citizen in 1727. Today, he is particularly noted for his operas, oratorios, and instrumental compositions composed during the Baroque period. An Italian *libretto* was written by Giulio Pancieri in Venice in 1691 for Giuseppe Boniventi’s opera *L’Almira*, however, the German translation used by Handel was made by Friedrich Christian Feustking. The recitatives of the opera are in German, while some of the arias are in German and others in Italian, as was the custom at the opera house in Hamburg. *Almira* is the sole example among Handel’s many operas with no role for a *castrato* — a male singer castrated in boyhood so as to retain a soprano or alto voice, an invasive procedure, which was finally banned in the early 19th century; however, Italian doctors continued to create castrati until 1870 for revered performances at the Sistine Chapel.

April 27, 1720
*Radamisto* George Handel’s first opera for the newly-formed Royal Academy of Music premieres in London.

*Radamisto* is an *opera seria* in three acts by George Frideric Handel to an Italian *libretto* by Nicola Francesco Haym, based on *L’amor tirannico, o Zenobia* by Domenico Lalli and *Zenobia* by Matteo Noris. The opera’s plot is loosely based on incidents from Tacitus’s *Annals of Imperial Rome*. As with most *opere serie*, *Radamisto* went unperformed for many years, but with the revival of interest in Baroque music and *historically informed musical performance* since the 1960s, *Radamisto*, like all Handel operas, receives performances at festivals and opera houses today.
January, 1721
Alessandro Scarlatti’s *Griselda* premieres at the Teatro Capranica, in Rome, Italy.

*Griselda* is an opera seria in three acts by the Italian composer Alessandro Scarlatti, the last of Scarlatti’s operas to survive completely today.[clarification needed] The libretto is by Apostolo Zeno, with revisions by an anonymous author. Zeno wrote his work in 1701, and it had already been set by Pollaro and Antonio Maria Bononcini (Albinoni, Giovanni Bononcini and Vivaldi would later produce versions). It is based on the story of Patient Griselda from Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. When the opera was performed at the Teatro Capranica, it was with an all-male cast: five castratos and a tenor.

February 13, 1725
George Handel’s *Rodelinda* premieres at the King’s Theatre in London, England.

*Rodelinda*, regina de’ Longobardi (HWV 19) is an opera seria in three acts, which was composed for the first Royal Academy of Music. The libretto is by Nicola Francesco Haym, based on an earlier libretto by Antonio Salvi, and *Rodelinda* has long been regarded as one of Handel’s greatest works. Handel was strongly influenced both by the great composers of the Italian Baroque and by the middle-German polyphonic choral tradition, and, during twelve months between 1724 and 1725, he wrote three outstanding and successful operas, *Giulio Cesare, Tamerlano* and *Rodelinda*. His operas are filled with da capo arias, such as *Svegliatevi nel core*. And, after composing *Sile te venti*, he concentrated on opera and stopped writing cantatas such as *Scipio*, from which the regimental slow march of the British Grenadier Guards is derived. Musicologist Winton Dean writes that his operas show that “Handel was not only a great composer; he was a dramatic genius of the first order.” Handel composed more than forty operas in over thirty years, and, since the late 1960s with the revival of baroque music and historically informed musical performance, interest in his operas has grown.

January 29, 1728
British poet and composer John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*, a ballad opera in three acts and with music arranged by Johann Christoph Pepusch, takes London by storm.

*The Beggar’s Opera*, composed by John Gay (1685 - 1732) was a ballad opera produced by John Rich, in which Sir Robert Walpole, a British statesman was caricatured. This famous piece, which was said to have made “Rich gay and Gay rich”, was an innovation in many respects. Part of the success of *The Beggar’s Opera* may have been due to the acting of Lavinia Fenton, afterwards Duchess of Bolton, in the part of Polly Peachum. The play ran for sixty-two nights. Other opera works by Gay include: *Acis and Galatea* (1718) considered a pastoral opera; *Polly* (1932), which, because of censorship, was never performed during his lifetime; and *Achilles* (1733), which also premièred following his death.

September 5, 1733
Giovanni Battista Pergolesi’s opera seria *Il prigioniero superbo* premieres at Teatro S Bartomeomo, in Naples, Italy.

Giovanni Pergolesi (1710 – 1736) was an Italian composer, violinist and organist. *La serva padrona* was one of the most popular intermezzi in the 18th century and has become the ‘textbook’ intermezzo familiar to most students of music. *Il prigioniero superbo* (*The Proud Prisoner*) is an opera seria in three acts composed by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi to a libretto attributed to Gennaro Antonio Federico and based on an earlier libretto by Francesco Silvani for Gasparini’s opera, *La fede tradita e vendicata*. After its premiere, it received further performances in October. The opera, with its labyrinthine plot involving the rivalry of Metalce (King of the Gothos) and Viridate (Prince of Denmark) for the hand of Rosmene (a Norwegian princess whose father is Metalce’s prisoner), soon sank into oblivion, but its comic intermezzo, *La serva padrona* (also by Pergolesi) was to achieve considerable success when performed on its own. Among Pergolesi’s other operatic works are his first opera *La Salustia* (1732), *Lo frate innamorato* (The brother in love, (1732), to a text in the Neapolitan language), *L’Olimpiade* (January 1735) and *Il Flaminio* (1735), to a text also in the Neapolitan language). His operas all were premiered in Naples, apart from *L’Olimpiade*, which was first given in Rome. Pergolesi died of tuberculosis. He was only 26 years old.
August 23, 1735
Jean-Philippe Rameau’s opéra-ballet, Les Indes galantes, premières at the Paris Opéra and is a fascinating window on 18th century exoticism.

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764) was one of the most important French composers and music theorists of the 18th century. He replaced Jean-Baptiste Lully as the dominant composer of French opera and is also considered the leading French composer for the harpsichord of his time, alongside François Couperin.[2] From 1733, Rameau dedicated himself almost exclusively to opera. On a strictly musical level, 18th-century French Baroque opera is richer and more varied than contemporary Italian opera, especially in the place given to choruses and dances but also in the musical continuity that arises from the respective relationships between the arias and the recitatives. Another essential difference: whereas Italian opera gave a starring role to female sopranos and castrati, French opera had no use for the latter. Les Indes galantes was followed by two tragédies en musique, Castor et Pollux (1737) and Dardanus (1739), and another opéra-ballet, Les fêtes d’Hébé (also 1739). All these operas of the 1730s are among Rameau’s most highly regarded works.[17] However, the composer followed them with six years of silence, in which the only work he produced was a new version of Dardanus (1744). The reason for this interval in the composer’s creative life is unknown, although it is possible he had a falling-out with the authorities at the Académie royale de la musique.

1747
Maria Teresa Agnesi Pinottini’s opera the Cantata Pastorale Il Restauro di Arcadia (lost) premières at the Teatro Degio Ducal in Milan.

Maria Teresa Agnesi Pinottini (1720 – 1795) was an Italian composer. Though she was most famous for her compositions, she was also an accomplished harpsichordist and singer, and the majority of her surviving compositions were written for keyboard, the voice, or both. Not much is known about Maria Teresa other than she was born to an overbearing man. She had a restrictive marriage. She also had several famous performances, perhaps the most famous on July 16, 1739, when famous French traveler Charles de Brosses was very impressed by her music. He was not the only one; the Count Gerolamo Riccati wrote several letters praising her compositions and musical talent. Another very famous performance was the above theatrical debut, in which she dedicated her piece to various rulers of the surrounding areas of Saxony and Austria. Agnesi enjoyed the patronage of Maria Theresia, holy Roman Empress and sovereign of Lombardy, and Maria Antonia Walpurgis, a gifted composer and contemporary, and it said that the Empress herself sang at the Il Restauro di Arcadia performance. Her other operas were: La Sofonisba (dramma eroico, 3, G.F. Zanetti); Ciro in Armenia (dramma serio, 3, ? Agnesi), Milan, Teatro Regio Ducal, (26 Dec 1753), Act 3 fragments; Il re pastore (dramma serio, 3, P. Metastasio), (?1755); La Insubria Consolata (Componimento drammatico, 2), Milan, 1766-Nitocri (dramma serio, 3, A. Zeno), Act 2 fragments; Ulisse in Campania (serenata, 2).

Autumn, 1754
Niccolò Piccinni’s first opera, Le donne dispettose, is performed at the Teatro dei Fiorentini in Naples.
Niccolò Piccinni (1728 - 1800) was an Italian composer. Although he is somewhat obscure today, Piccinni was one of the most popular composers of opera—particularly the Neapolitan opera buffa—of his day. In 1760, when this opera was performed in Rome, it "enjoyed a two-year run and was played in all the important European capitals. It can probably be called the most popular opera buffa of the 18th century...[even more than]... Pergolesi’s La serva padrona...[and]... was the first of the new era, culminating in the masterworks of Mozart.”

February 6, 1760
Niccolò Piccinni’s opera La buona figliuola (The Good-Natured Girl or The Accomplish’d Maid) premieres at the Teatro delle Dame in Rome with an all-male cast.
The libretto for La buona figliuola was by the great Carlo Goldoni and was adapted from Samuel Richardson’s hugely popular English novel, Pamela. This was Piccinni’s most successful Italian opera. There was a sequel entitled La buona figliuola maritata (1761) and La buona figliuola supposta vedova by Gaetano Latilla, which followed in 1766.

Christoph Willibald (Ritter von) Gluck
Portrait by Joseph Siffred Duplessis (Art Project)

December 26, 1767
Christoph Willibald (Ritter von) Gluck’s reform opera, Alcestis, premieres at the Vienna Burgtheatre.
Gluck (1714-1787) was a composer of Italian and French opera in the early classical period. Born in the Upper Palatinate and raised in Bohemia,[4] both part of the Holy Roman Empire, he gained prominence at the Habsburg court at Vienna. There he brought about the practical reform of opera’s dramaturgical practices for which many intellectuals had been campaigning. With a series of radical new works in the 1760s, among them Orfeo ed Euridice and Alcestis, he broke the stranglehold that Metastasian opera seria had enjoyed for much of the century.
Gluck introduced more drama by using simpler recitative and cutting the usually long da capo aria. His later operas have half the length of a typical baroque opera.
Fusing the traditions of Italian opera and the French (with rich chorus) into a unique synthesis, Gluck wrote eight operas for the Parisian stage. Iphigénie en Tauride was a great success and is generally acknowledged to be his finest work. Though he was extremely popular and widely credited with bringing about a revolution in French opera, his mastery of the Parisian operatic scene was never absolute, and, after the poor reception of his Echo et Narcisse, he left Paris in disgust and returned to Vienna to live out the remainder of his life.

Painting
The Death of Alcestis
By Angelica Kauffmann

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Painting: Anonymous, 1763
Possibly by Pietro Antonio Lorenzoni
On commission from Leopold Mozart
September/October, 1768
Twelve-year-old Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart gives a probable performance of singspiel Bastien und Bastienne at the home of Dr. Franz Anton Mesmer, the inventor of 'magnetism therapy,' which Mozart would later parody in his opera, Così fan tutte.

Wolfgang Mozart (1756-1791) composed more than 600 works, many acknowledged as pinnacles of symphonic, concertante, chamber, operatic, and choral music. He is among the most enduringly popular of classical composers, and his influence is profound on subsequent Western art music. Ludwig van Beethoven composed his own early works in the shadow of Mozart, and Joseph Haydn wrote: “posterity will not see such a talent again in 100 years”. Bastien und Bastienne was allegedly commissioned by Viennese physician and ‘magnetist’ Dr. Franz Mesmer (who himself would later be parodied in Così fan tutte) as a satire of the ‘pastoral’ genre then prevalent, and specifically as a parody of the opera Le devin du village by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The story of tested love, the German libretto is by Friedrich Wilhelm Weiskern, Johann Heinrich Friedrich Müller (de) and Johann Andreas Schachtner, based on Les Amours de Bastien et Bastienne by Justine Favart and Harny de Guerville. After its supposed premiere in Mesmer’s garden theater (that is only corroborated by an unverified account of Nissen), it was not revived again until 1890. It is not clear whether this piece was performed in Mozart’s lifetime. The first known performance was on 2 October 1890 at Architektenhaus in Berlin.

May 1, 1769
Mozart’s first full opera buffa, La finta semplice (The Fake Innocent), is performed at the Archbishop’s palace in Salzburg. The day is uncertain, but it was probably the first day of May. La finta semplice (The Fake Innocent), K. 51 (46a) is an opera buffa in three acts for seven voices and orchestra, composed in 1768 by then 12-year-old Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Young Mozart and his father Leopold were spending the year in Vienna, where Leopold was trying to establish his son as an opera composer. He was acting on a suggested request from the Emperor Joseph II that the young boy should write an opera. Leopold chose an Italian libretto by the Vienna court poet Marco Coltellini, which was based on an early work by Carlo Goldoni. During rehearsals, the opera was the victim of intrigues from competing composers claiming that the work was not from the 12-year-old boy, but from his father. Threatened with a sabotaged first night by the impresario Giuseppe Affligio, Leopold prudently decided to withdraw, and the opera was never staged in Vienna. It was probably performed the following year in Salzburg at the request of the Prince-Archbishop. Mozart produced a full score of three acts, 26 numbers, in a manuscript of 558 pages. It includes an overture/Sinfonia, one coro, one duet, three ensembles (at the end of each act), and 21 arias.

December 26, 1770
Mozart’s first opera seria, Mitridate, re di ponte, premières at the Teatro Regio Ducal (at the Milan Carnival), in Italy despite the composer’s youth and the opera’s running time: six hours. Mitridate, re di Ponto (Mithridates, King of Pontus), K. 87 (74a), is an early opera seria in three acts by Mozart. The libretto is by Vittorio Amedeo Cigna-Santi (it), after Giuseppe Parini’s Italian translation of Jean Racine’s play Mithridate, and Mozart wrote Mitridate while touring Italy in 1770. The subject is drawn from ancient history. Mithridates VI Eupator reigned over the kingdom of Pontus, around the Black Sea. Famous for having gradually accustomed to poisons through mithridatization, he long resisted the Romans. He finally killed himself after being betrayed by his own son. The musicologist Daniel E. Freeman has recently demonstrated that this opera was composed with close reference to the opera La Nitteti by Josef Mysliveček. The latter was the opera being prepared for production in Bologna when Mozart met Mysliveček for the first time with his father in March 1770. Mitridate was a success, and was performed twenty-one times despite doubts because of Mozart’s extreme youth – he was 14 at the time. No revival took place until the 20th century. This opera features virtuoso arias for the principal roles, but only two ensemble numbers: the act 2 ending duet between Aspasia and Sifare (“Se viver non degg’io”), and the brief quintet that ends the opera, very characteristic of standard baroque opera seria where the opera ends with a short coro or tutti number.
August 3, 1777
(Franz) Joseph Haydn's *Il mondo della luna* premières at Eszterháza.

Joseph Haydn (1732 – 1809) was an Austrian composer of the Classical period. ... He was a friend and mentor of Mozart, a teacher of Beethoven, and the older brother of composer Michael Haydn. His operas were mostly composed to the taste of his employers at Eszterháza, and, although his operas never achieved the international stature of either his instrumental works or the operas by his younger contemporary (Mozart), they have begun to receive more attention in recent years. During his lifetime he wrote 107 symphonies in total, as well as 83 string quartets, 45 piano trios, 62 piano sonatas, 14 masses and 26 operas, amongst countless other scores.

January 29, 1781
Mozart's first mature opera, *Idomeneo*, premières at the Cuvilliés Theatre in Munich, Germany. *Idomeneo, re di Creta ossia Ilia e Idamante* (Italian for *Idomeneus, King of Crete, or, Ilia and Idamante*; usually referred to simply as *Idomeneo, K. 366*) is an Italian language opera seria. The libretto was adapted by Giambattista Varesco from a French text by Antoine Danchet, which had been set to music by André Campra as *Idoménée* in 1712. *Idomeneo* is an opera seria on the story of Idomeneus’s return to Crete. In this version, Poseidon (Neptune in the opera) spares Idomeneo’s son Idamante, on condition that Idomeneo relinquish his throne to the new generation. Mozart and Varesco were commissioned in 1780 by Karl Theodor, Elector of Bavaria for a court carnival. He probably chose the subject, though it might have been Mozart.

July 16, 1782
Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (The Abduction from the Seraglio) premières at the Vienna Burgtheater. Mozart's opera, *The Abduction from the Seraglio; also known as Il Seraglio*, is an opera Singspiel in three acts by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The German libretto is by Gottlieb Stephanie, based on Christoph Friedrich Bretzner’s *Belmont und Constanze, oder Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. The plot concerns the attempt of the hero Belmonte, assisted by his servant Pedrillo, to rescue his beloved Konstanze from the seraglio of Pasha Selim. Mozart conducted this premiere performance.

September 15/26, 1782
Giovanni Paisiello's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* premières at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Giovanni Paisiello (or Paesiello) (1740 – 1816) was an Italian composer of the Classical era and was the most popular opera composer of the late 1700s. Rossini’s opera, also now known as *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, is now acknowledged as Rossini’s greatest work, while Paisiello’s opera is only infrequently produced—a strange instance of poetical vengeance, since Paisiello himself had many years previously endeavoured to eclipse the fame of Giovanni Battista Pergolesi by resetting the libretto of his famous intermezzo, *La serva padrona*. Paisiello left Russia in 1784, and, after producing *Il re Teodoro in Venezia*, he entered the service of Ferdinand IV of Naples, where he composed many of his best operas, including *Nina* and *La Molinara*. After many vicissitudes, resulting from political and dynastic changes, he was invited to Paris (1802) by Napoleon, whose favour he had won five years previously by composing a march for the funeral of General Hoche. Paisiello is known to have composed 94 operas, many of which are known for their gracefully beautiful melodies. Perhaps the best-known tune he ever wrote is *Nel cor più non mi sento* from *La Molinara*, immortalized when Beethoven composed variations based on it. Manuscript scores of many of his operas were presented to the library of the British Museum by Domenico Dragonetti. Though his *Il barbiere di Siviglia* opera was fated to be eclipsed by Rossini’s later setting of the same story, this opera achieved enormous success at the time.
February 26, 1784
Joseph Haydn’s final opera, Armida, premières at Eszterhàza Court Theatre.

Armida, Hob. XXVIII/12, is an opera in three acts by Joseph Haydn, set to a libretto based upon Torquato Tasso’s poem Gerusalemme liberata (Jerusalem Delivered): To prevent the capture of Jerusalem by the knights of the First Crusade, The Prince of Darkness has sent the enchantress Armida into the world to seduce the Christian heroes and turn them from their duty. The bravest of these, Rinaldo, has fallen under Armida’s spell. She comes to love him so deeply that she cannot bring herself to destroy him. The story in purely instrumental terms contains occasional echoes of Sarti’s Giulio Sabino, played at Esterháza in 1783, and it went on to receive 54 performances from 1784 to 1788 at the Esterháza Court Theatre. During the composer’s lifetime it was also performed in Pressburg, Budapest, Turin and Vienna, and Haydn himself regarded Armida as his finest opera. Armida then disappeared from the general operatic repertoire; it was revived in 1968 in a concert rendition in Cologne, and later a production in Bern. The United States premiere of the opera was given at the Palace Theatre in Manchester, New Hampshire, with the New Hampshire Symphony Orchestra for the Monadnock Music Festival in September 1981. Sarah Reese sang the title role; the director Peter Sellars set the production during the Vietnam War.

Rinaldo Enchanted by Armida
Painting by Battista Tiepolo (Art Project)

André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry

October 21, 1784
André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry’s rescue opera, Richard Coeur-de-Lion, premières at the Comédie-Italienne, Paris.

André Ernest Modeste Grétry (1741 - 1813) was a composer from the Prince-Bishopric of Liège (present-day Belgium). He worked from 1767 onwards in France and took French nationality. He is most famous for his opéras comiques. Altogether he composed some fifty operas. His masterpieces are Zémire et Azor and Richard Coeur-de-lion—the first produced in 1771, the second in 1784. The latter in an indirect way became connected with a great historic event. In it occurs the celebrated romance, O Richard, O mon Roi, l’univers t’abandonne, which was sung at the banquet — “fatal as that of Thyestes,” remarks Carlyle — given by the bodyguard to the officers of the Versailles garrison on 3 October 1789. La Marseillaise not long afterwards became the reply of the people to the expression of loyalty borrowed from Grétry’s opera. Richard Cœur de Lion was translated and adapted for the English stage by John Burgoyne.[citation needed]. Following this, Grétry sat out the bad times, then brought this opera back when Napoleon proclaimed himself emperor.

May 1, 1786
Mozart’s Le nozze di Figaro (The Marriage of Figaro) is the first of his three great collaborations with librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte, and has its premiere at the Vienna Burgtheater.

The Marriage of Figaro is an opera buffa (comic opera) in four acts, with an Italian libretto written by Lorenzo Da Ponte. The opera’s libretto is based on a stage comedy by Pierre Beaumarchais, La folle journée, ou le Mariage de Figaro (“The Mad Day, or The Marriage of Figaro”), which was first performed in 1784. It tells how the servants Figaro and Susanna succeed in getting married, foiling the efforts of their philandering employer Count Almaviva to seduce Susanna and teaching him a lesson in fidelity. The opera is a cornerstone of the repertoire and appears consistently among the http://www.apple.com/ top ten in the Operabase list of most frequently performed operas.

Early 19th Century Engraving depicting Count Almaviva and Suzanna in Act 3
Mozart's *Don Giovanni* premières at the Prague Italian opera at the National Theatre (of Bohemia) now called the Estates Theatre.

*Don Giovanni* complete title: *Il dissoluto punito, osia il Don Giovanni* (literally *The Rake Punished, namely Don Giovanni* or *The Libertine Punished*) is an opera in two acts with music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Italian libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte. It is based on the legends of Don Juan, a fictional libertine and seducer. Da Ponte's libretto was billed as a *dramma giocoso*, a common designation of its time that denotes a mixing of serious and comic action. Mozart entered the work into his catalogue as an *opera buffa*. Although sometimes classified as comic, it blends comedy, melodrama and supernatural elements. A staple of the standard operatic repertoire, *Don Giovanni* for the five seasons 2011/12 through 2015/16 was ninth on the *Operabase* list of the most-performed operas worldwide.[2] It has also proved a fruitful subject for writers and philosophers. Although the legendary title character serves as the centra force of the story, it is said that it is the three women, whose lives are altered through their encounters with him, are the characters that audiences remember.

**Antonio Salieri**

*Painting by Joseph Willibrord Mühler*

**January 8, 1788**

Antonio Salieri's *Axur, re d'Ormus* premières to a libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte.

Antonio Salieri (1750 – 1825) was an Italian classical composer, conductor, and teacher. He was born in Legnago, south of Verona, in the Republic of Venice, and spent his adult life and career as a subject of the Habsburg Monarchy. *Axur, re d'Ormus* (“Axur, king of Ormus”) is an operatic *dramma tragicomico* in five acts, with the libretto was by Lorenzo da Ponte. *Axur* is the Italian version of Salieri's 1787 French-language work *Tarare* which had a libretto by Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais. The finale of *Axur* appears in the 1984 film *Amadeus*. In this opera, Axur, King of the Persian Gulf kingdom of Ormus, orders one of his soldiers, Altamor, to abduct Aspasia. She's the wife of Atar, the heroic commander of Axur's army. Not knowing who kidnapped Aspasia but suspecting an overseas enemy, Atar speaks with the king and begs for justice. Moved by his appeal, Axur allows Atar to take a ship and seek his wife. Before Atar leaves, Axur’s slave-servant, Biscroma, tells the general that the king has abducted Aspasia and hidden her in the royal harem. Enemy troops now threaten to invade Ormus, and the people plead with Atar to save them. Axur undermines Atar by telling the people that the general has better things to do than lead the army. Enraged, Atar declares himself ready to stand at the head of the army and wipe out the nation's enemies.[1] While a feast is being held prior to the battle, Biscroma disguises Atar as a Nubian and smuggles him into the harem. Axur discovers "the Nubian" in the harem, but does not realize who he is. Axur decides to marry Aspasia to the Nubian as punishment for being unfaithful to Atar. Axur then changes his mind, and instead sends a squad of soldiers into the harem to kill "the Nubian". The soldiers discover "the Nubian's" true identity. They decide not to kill Atar, because they only have orders to kill "the Nubian" and not the general of the army. But they have orders to arrest Atar, so they do so and bring him before the king. Atar is dragged into court as Axur is wooing Aspasia. The husband and wife embrace. Axur sentences Atar to death for violating the royal harem, and Atar is dragged off to the place of execution. But a crowd surrounds the palace and demands Atar’s freedom so that he can save the nation. Axur, realizing he has lost the love of the people, removes his crown and commits suicide. The people proclaim Atar the new King of Ormus. Among the other most successful of Salieri's 37 operas staged during his lifetime were *Armida* (1771), *La fiera di Venezia* (1772), *La scuola de' gelosi* (1778), *Der Rauchfangkehrer* (1781), *Les Danaïdes* (1784), which was first presented as a work of Gluck's, *La grotta di Trofonio* (1785), *Tarare* (1787) (*Tarare* was reworked and revised several times as was *Les Danaïdes*), *La cifra* (1789), *Palmira, regina di Persia* (1795), *Il mondo alla rovescia* (1795), *Falstaff* (1799), and *Cesare in Farmacusa* (1800).
1790

Canadian opera composer Joseph Quesnel's first opera, Colas et Colinette, première in Montreal, Quebec.

Quesnel (1746 - 1809) was a French Canadian composer, poet, and playwright, and Colas et Colinette is considered to be Canada's first opera. Inspired by Rousseau’s philosophy, the plot centres on Monsieur Dolmont’s ward, the shepherdess Colinette, who would rather have Colas, a simple and honest young shepherd, as a husband than le Bailli, who claims to be well established but is old and depraved. The score consists of 14 musical pieces, comprising arias for each character, duos, and a final chorus. The libretto and music are of French inspiration and recall certain works by Quesnel’s contemporaries Grétry, Monsigny, and Philidor. The tunes are suited to the personalities of the characters, vivacious or noble according to the situation. Occasionally the style is even dramatic. The score does not state the type of voice required for each role, but the tessitura assigns a soprano to Coline ete, a tenor to Colas, and basses to le Bailli and Monsieur Dolmont. The ABA form used in several pieces applies to the harmonic and metric structure more often than to melodic reprise. His other works are Lucas et Cécile; LAngomanie and Républicans Français. Quesnel's son Jules Maurice Quesnel travelled with Simon Fraser on his journey to the Pacific Ocean; the town of Quesnel, British Columbia is named for him. Quesnel was also the subject of the comic opera Le Père des amours, written by Eugène Lapière in 1942.

January 26, 1790

Mozart's Cosi fan tutte, premières at the Burgtheater in Vienna, Austria.

Cosi fan tutte, ossia La scuola degli amanti; (All Women Do It, or The School for Lovers), K. 588, is an Italian-language opera buffa in two acts with the libretto by written by Lorenzo Da Ponte, who also wrote Le nozze di Figaro and Don Giovanni. Although it is commonly held that Cosi fan tutte was written and composed at the suggestion of the Emperor Joseph II, modern-day research does not support this idea. There is evidence that Mozart’s contemporary Antonio Salieri tried to set the libretto, but left it unfinished: In 1994, John Rice uncovered two terzetti by Salieri in the Austrian National Library. The opera was given only five times before the run was stopped by the death of the Emperor Joseph II and the resulting period of court mourning. It was performed twice in June 1790 with the composer conducting the second performance, and, again, in July (twice) and August (once). After that it was not performed in Vienna during Mozart’s lifetime. According to William Mann, Mozart disliked prima donna Adriana Ferrarese del Bene, da Ponte’s arrogant mistress for whom the role of Fiordiligi had been created, and knowing her idiosyncratic tendency to drop her chin on low notes and throw back her head on high ones, he filled her showpiece aria Come scoglio with constant leaps from low to high and high to low in order to make Ferrarese’s head "bob like a chicken" onstage. Considered both irresistible as well as controversial when it was first staged, the subject-matter did not offend Viennese sensibilities the time, but in the 19th and early 20th centuries its storyline was considered risqué, vulgar, and even immoral so it was rarely performed during this period. After World War II it regained a place in the standard operatic repertoire and is now frequently performed.

September 6, 1791

Wolfgang Mozart's opera La clemenza di Tito, premières at the Estates Theatre in Prague.

La clemenza di Tito (The Clemency of Titus), K. 621, is an opera seria in two acts composed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to an Italian libretto by Caterino Mazzolà, after Pietro Metastasio. It was started after the bulk of Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute), the last opera that Mozart worked on, was already written. In this opera, the Queen of the Night persuades Prince Tamino to rescue her daughter Pamina from captivity under the high priest Sarastro; instead, he learns the high ideals of Sarastro’s community and seek to join it. Separately, then together, Tamino and Pamina undergo severe trials of initiation, which end in triumph, with the Queen and her cohorts vanquished. The earthy Papageno, who accompanies Tamino on his quest, fails the trials completely but is rewarded anyway with the hand of his ideal female companion Papagena.
Portrait
Domenico Cimerosa

February 7, 1792
Domenico Cimerosa's *Il matrimonio segreto (The Secret Marriage)*, premieres at the Vienna Burgtheater in the presence of Emperor Leopold II.

Domenico Cimarosa (1749 - 1801) was an Italian opera composer of the Neapolitan school. He wrote more than eighty operas including his above masterpiece, *Il matrimonio segreto* during his lifetime. *Il matrimonio segreto* is Cimarosa's only work still to be regularly performed, and is arguably one of the greatest 18th century opera buffa apart from those by Mozart. It is an opera in two acts, music by Domenico Cimarosa, on a libretto by Giovanni Bertati, based on the play *The Clandestine Marriage* by George Colman the Elder and David Garrick where a wealthy citizen of Bologna, Geronimo, has two daughters, Elisetta and Carolina, and a sister Fidalma, who runs the household. He also has a young secretary, Paolino, who is secretly married to the younger daughter, Carolina, and who becomes entangled in trying to get the older sister married so that his and Carolina's will be acceptable. When the interrelationships become enormously complicated, the two have to finally own up that they are already secretly married. This opera's premiere was the occasion of the longest encore in operatic history, and Leopold II, who was in attendance, was so delighted he ordered supper served to the company and the entire opera repeated immediately after.

The 1800s

Ludwig Van Beethoven

November 20, 1805
Beethoven's rescue opera, *Fidelio*, premieres at the Vienna Theater an der Wien.

*Fidelio* (originally titled *Leonore, oder Der Triumph der ehelichen Liebe*; *Leonore, or The Triumph of Marital Love*), Op. 72, is Ludwig van Beethoven's only opera. The German libretto was originally prepared by Joseph Sonnleithner from the French of Jean-Nicolas Bouilly. The libretto, with some spoken dialogue, tells how Leonore, disguised as a prison guard named "Fidelio", rescues her husband Florestan from death in a political prison. Bouilly's scenario fits Beethoven's aesthetic and political outlook: a story of personal sacrifice, heroism, and eventual triumph. With its underlying struggle for liberty and justice mirroring contemporary political movements in Europe, such topics are typical of Beethoven's "middle period". Notable moments in the opera include the "Prisoners' Chorus" (*O welche Lust"—"O what a joy"), an ode to freedom sung by a chorus of political prisoners, Florestan's vision of Leonore come as an angel to rescue him, and the scene in which the rescue finally takes place. The finale celebrates Leonore's bravery with alternating contributions of soloists and chorus. The following year, Stephan von Breuning helped shorten the work from three acts to two. After further work on the libretto by Georg Friedrich Treitschke, a final version was performed at the Kärntnertortheater on 23 May 1814. By convention, both of the first two versions are referred to as *Leonore*. Although critics have noted the similarity in plot with *Orfeo ed Euridice*, the underground rescue mission in which the protagonist must control, or conceal, his emotions in order to retrieve his or her spouse, we do not know whether or not Beethoven or any of the librettists had this in mind while constructing the opera. Beethoven cannot be said to have enjoyed the difficulties posed by writing and producing an opera, since, in a letter to Treitschke he said, "I assure you, dear Treitschke, that this opera will win me a martyr's crown. You have by your co-operation saved what is best from the shipwreck. For all this I shall be eternally grateful to you." The full score of *Fidelio* was not published until 1826, and all three versions are known as Beethoven's Opus 72.
May 22, 1813
Gioachino Antonio Rossini's *L'italiana in Algeri* premieres at Teatro S Benedetto, Venice, Italy.

Gioachino Rossini (1792 – 1868) was an Italian composer who wrote 39 operas as well as some sacred music, songs, chamber music, and piano pieces. He was a precocious composer of operas, and he made his debut at age 18 with *La cambiale di matrimonio*. His best-known operas include the Italian comedies *The Barber of Seville* (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), *The Italian Girl in Algiers* (*L'italiana in Algeri*), and *Cinderella* (*La Cenerentola*). He also wrote a string of serious operas in Italian, including works such as *Tancredi*, *Otello*, and *Semiramide*, and *The Thieving Magpie* (*La gazza ladra*) which features one of his most celebrated overtures. Despite an unenthusiastic welcome in Venice of *L'italiana in Algeri*, the opera went on to great success being also the first of the composer's operas to be produced in Germany.

February 20, 1816
Gioachino Antonio Rossini’s *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, set to the same libretto as Paisiello's opera of 1782, premieres at the Teatro Agentina in Rome, Italy.

*Il barbiere di Siviglia*, (*The Barber of Seville* or *The Useless Precaution*) is an opera buffa in two acts with an Italian libretto by Cesare Sterbini. The libretto was based on Pierre Beaumarchais’s French comedy *Le Barbier de Séville* (1775). Rossini’s Barber has proven to be one of the greatest masterpieces of comedy within music, and has been described as the opera buffa of all “opere buffe” and, after two hundred years, it remains a popular work. The initial premiere was a disaster: the audience hissed and jeered throughout, and several on-stage accidents occurred. Furthermore, many of the audience were supporters of one of Rossini’s rivals, Giovanni Paisiello, who played on mob mentality to provoke the rest of the audience to dislike the opera. The second performance, however, was successful.

January 25, 1817
Gioachino Antonio Rossini’s much loved *La Cenerentola*, with its Cinderella setting, premières at the Teatro Valle in Rome, Italy.

*La Cenerentola*, ossia *La bontà in trionfo* (*Cinderella, or Goodness Triumphant*) is an operatic dramma giocoso in two acts. The libretto was written by Jacopo Ferretti, based on the fairy tale *Cendrillon* by Charles Perrault. Rossini composed *La Cenerentola* when he was 25 years old, following the success of *The Barber of Seville* the year before. *La Cenerentola*, which he completed in a period of three weeks, is considered to have some of his finest writing for solo voice and ensembles. Rossini saved some time by reusing an overture from *La gazetta* and part of an aria from *The Barber of Seville* and by enlisting a collaborator, Luca Agolini, who wrote the secco recitatives and three numbers (Alidoro’s “Vasto teatro è il mondo”, Clorinda’s “Sventurata!” and the chorus “Ah, della bella incognita”). The facsimile edition of the autograph has a different aria for Alidoro, “Fa’ silenzio, odo un rumore”; this seems to have been added by an anonymous hand for an 1818 production. For an 1820 revival in Rome, Rossini wrote a bravura replacement, “La, del ciel nell’arcano profondo”. At the first performance, the opera was received with some hostility, but it soon became popular throughout Italy and beyond; it reached Lisbon in 1819, London in 1820 and New York in 1826. Throughout most of the 19th century, its popularity rivalled that of Barber, but as the coloratura contralto, for which the leading role was originally written, became rare, it fell slowly out of the repertoire. From the 1960s onward, Rossini’s work enjoyed a renaissance, and a new generation of Rossini contraltos ensured that *La Cenerentola* would once again be heard around the world. The opera is now considered a staple of the standard repertoire.

June 18, 1821
Carl Maria von Weber’s ‘magic opera,’ *Der Freischütz*, (*The Marksman*) premieres at Berlin's Schauspielhaus in Germany.
Political concerns have also contributed to the varying fortunes of the work. The opera was Rossini's last, although he lived for hours of music, and casting requirements, such as the high range required for the tenor part, have contributed to the difficulty of producing the work. When performed, the opera is often cut. Performances have been given in both French and Italian. Political concerns have also contributed to the varying fortunes of the work. The opera was Rossini’s last, although he lived for nearly 40 more years. Fabio Luisi said that Rossini planned for William Tell to be his last opera even as he composed it.

*Tell is arrested for not saluting Gessler’s hat*

(mosaic at the Swiss National Museum

Hans Sandreuter (1901)
December 26, 1830
Gaetano Donizetti's Anna Bolena, one of his several operas on subjects from English history, premiere at the Teatro Carcano in Milan.

Donizetti (1797 - 1848) was a leading composer of the bel canto opera style during the first half of the nineteenth century. Over the course of his career, he wrote almost 70 operas. An offer in 1822 from Domenico Barbaja, the impresario of the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples, which followed the composer's ninth opera, led to his move to that Naples and his residency there, which lasted until the production of Caterina Cornaro in January 1844. In 1830, when Anna Bolena was premiered, Donizetti made a major impact on the Italian and international opera scene and this shifted the balance of success away from primarily comedic operas,[6] although even after that date, his best-known works included comedies such as L'elisir d'amore (1832) and Don Pasquale (1843). In 1847 he was confined to an institution for the mentally ill. He died in Bergamo, Italy, the place of his birth.

March 6, 1831
Vincenzo Bellini's La sonnambula premiere at the Teatro Carcano in Milan, Italy.

La sonnambula (The Sleepwalker) is an opera semiseria in two acts, with music in the bel canto tradition by Vincenzo Bellini set to an Italian libretto by Felice Romani, based on a scenario for a ballet-pantomime written by Eugène Scribe and choreographed by Jean-Pierre Aumer called La sonnambule, ou L'arrivée d'un nouveau seigneur. The story concerns a Swiss village girl (Admina), engaged to fellow villager. All is happy in their pastoral paradise until the arrival of a mysterious stranger, Count Rodolfo (the suave Michele Pertusi), whose admiration for Amina causes jealousy in Elvino. This is exacerbated when Amina is discovered in Rodolfo's room at the local inn late at night. The misunderstanding is happily resolved when it becomes clear that Amina is an innocent sleepwalker, a somnambulist. The ballet had first premiered in Paris in September 1827 at the height of a fashion for stage works incorporating somnambulism.

November 21, 1831
Giacomo Meyerbeer's first great success, Robert le diable, premiere at Paris Opéra.

Giacomo Meyerbeer (Jacob Liebmann Beer) was born in Tasdorf (now a part of Rüdersdorf), near Berlin, then the capital of Prussia, to a Jewish family. His father was the enormously wealthy financier Judah Herz Beer and his mother, Amalia (Malka) Wulff, to whom he was particularly devoted, also came from the moneyed elite. His 1824 opera Il crociato in Egitto was the first to bring him Europe-wide reputation, but it was Robert le diable (1831) which raised his status to great celebrity, and with Robert le diable he became the first to give the genre of grand opera its 'decisive character.' To achieve his grand opera style, the German orchestra style and Italian vocal tradition were merged. These were employed in the context of sensational and melodramatic libretti created by Eugène Scribe, were enhanced by the up-to-date theatre technology of the Paris Opéra, and set a standard, which helped to maintain Paris as the opera capital of the nineteenth century. During Meyerbeer's, public career lasted until his death. He was at his peak with his operas Les Huguenots (1836) and Le prophète.
(1849), and his last opera (L’Africaine) was performed posthumously. His operas made him the most frequently performed composer at the world’s leading opera houses in the nineteenth century. During the twentieth century, however, with the critical assaults of Wagner and his supporters and Nazi suppression of his work in Germany, his operas declined in popularity. In the 21st century, however, his major French grand operas have begun to reappear in the repertory of numerous European opera houses. Meyerbeer died in Paris on 2 May 1864, and it is said that Rossini, who, not having heard the news, came to his apartment the next day intending to meet him, was shocked, fainted, and was so moved, he wrote a choral tribute to the composer on the spot (Pleure, pleure, muse sublime!).

May 12, 1832
Gaetano Donizetti’s L’elisir d’amore premières in the Teatro Cannobiana, Milan, Italy.

L’elisir d’amore (The Elixir of Love) is a comic opera (melodramma giocoso) in two acts by the Italian composer Gaetano Donizetti. Felice Romani wrote the Italian libretto, after Eugène Scribe’s libretto for Daniel Auber’s Le philibre (es) (1831). L’elisir d’amore follows Adina, the beautiful but fickle landowner, and Nemorino, the clumsy but lovable young man, through the ups and downs of their love story. Nemorino is madly in love with Adina, but Adina holds him at arm’s length, feigning indifference to tease him. Over and over again, he professes his love to her, but she tells him to move on. Adina teases him by pretending to marry the pompous Sergeant Belcore. Desperate, Nemorino purchases an “elixir” that will make Adina fall in love with him, which actually is red wine that simply makes him tipsy. Convinced that she will fall for him, he begins to pretend not to love her anymore, which causes Adina to act out of jealousy, moving the wedding forward. After many twists and turns, Adina finally realizes and confesses her love for Nemorino, and they rejoice with the town. Written in haste in a six-week period, L’elisir d’amore was the most often performed opera in Italy between 1838 and 1848 and has remained continually in the international opera repertory. Today it is one of the most frequently performed of all Donizetti’s operas.

1833
Richard Wagner begins composing his first complete opera, Die Feen (The Fairies), which is not performed until after his death.

Wilhelm Richard Wagner (1813 - 1883) was a German composer. For Die Feen, he both composed the opera imitating the style of von Weber, and wrote the libretto after Carlo Gozzi’s La donna serpente as well. Although then as now, it has never established itself firmly in the operatic repertory, it does receive occasional performances, on stage or in concert, most often in Germany. Having returned to Leipzig in 1834, Wagner held a brief appointment as musical director at the opera house in Magdeburg during which he wrote Das Liebesverbot (The Ban on Love), based on Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure. This was staged at Magdeburg in 1836 but closed before the second performance, and this, together with the financial collapse of the theatre company employing him, left the composer in bankruptcy. Until his final years, Wagner’s life was characterised by political exile, turbulent love affairs, poverty and repeated flight from his creditors. His controversial writings on music, drama and politics have attracted extensive comment, notably, since the late 20th century, where they express antisemitic sentiments. The effect of his
January 24, 1835

**Vincenzo Bellini’s final opera, I Puritani, with its now-famous ‘mad scene,’ premières at the Théâtre Italien, Paris, France.**

I puritani (The Puritans) is an opera was originally written in two acts and later changed to three acts on the advice of Gioachino Rossini, with whom the young composer had become friends. The music was set to a libretto by Count Carlo Pepoli, an Italian émigré poet whom Bellini had met at a salon run by the exile Princess Belgiojoso, which became a meeting place for many Italian revolutionaries. The subject was Têtes Rondes et Cavaliers (Roundheads and Cavaliers), written by Jacques-François Ancelot and Joseph Xavier Saintine, which some sources state was based on Walter Scott’s novel Old Mortality, while others state that there is no connection. The story: Lord Valton, a puritan supporter of Cromwell, is preparing the wedding of his daughter Elvira to Arturo, to the great displeasure of Riccardo who vehemently yearns after her. However, Arturo belongs to the rival Stuart clan and saves the mysterious prisoner who Valton is tasked with taking to prison, Queen Enrichetta. Elvira, believing she has been abandoned, sinks into madness…. Under the terrible dictatorship of Cromwell in England in the 17th century, the Puritans preached in favour of an austere lifestyle, focused on the Bible. A love story emerging from adverse winds offered Bellini a subject that was most definitely conducive to exploiting the facets of the nascent romantic opera style, but also to articulating a wide range of human passions. Elvira’s scene of madness is only equalled by another from a contemporary work, Lucia di Lammermoor. Based on a true story, this last work by Bellini was composed over a long time, taking nine months. The master amended the libretto and rearranged the music following the advice of Rossini. Its first performance was triumphant.

![Princess Amalia of Saxony](Portrait by: Vincente López y Portaña)

September 17, 1835

**Princess Amalia of Saxony’s La casa disabitata premières in the court theatre of Pillnitz Castle in Dresden.**

Amalie Marie Friederike Auguste (1794 – 1870), Princess of Saxony, (full name Maria Amalia Friederike Augusta Karolina Ludovica Josepha Aloysia Anna Nepomucena Philippina Vincentia Franziska de Paula Franziska de Chantal), was a German composer, who wrote under the pen name A. Serena, and a dramatist under the name Amalie Heiter. She was the daughter of Prince Maximilian of Saxony and Princess Carolina of Parma and granddaughter of Frederick Christian, Elector of Saxony; niece of Frederick Augustus I, King of Saxony and Anthony, King of Saxony; sister of Frederick Augustus II, King of Saxony and John, King of Saxony; and aunt of Albert, King of Saxony and George, King of Saxony. Her composition La casa disabitata (The Uninhabited House) is a comic opera in one act composed by the Princess to her own Italian-language libretto.

After this one, the opera had no further performances until it was revived in 2012 as part of the Dresden Music Festival after its manuscript score was found in a Moscow library. La casa disabitata was the last of the 12 short comic operas, which the Princess had composed to her own libretti as entertainments for the Saxon court in Dresden. Its story is not original. The opera’s title, plot, setting, and characters are the same as those of Giovanni Giraud’s one-act farce La casa disabitata, first performed in 1808 and published in 1825. Giraud’s play was also the basis of the two-act opera La casa disabitata, composed by Lauro Rossi to a libretto by Jacopo Ferretti. Rossi’s opera premiered at La Scala to great success in 1834, a year before Princess Amalia’s version, and was subsequently performed throughout Italy and in Paris.

September 26, 1835

**Gaetano Donizetti’s Lucia di Lammermoor premières at the Teatro S Carlo in Naples.**

Lucia di Lammermoor is a dramma tragico (tragic opera) in three acts. Salvatore Cammarano wrote the Italian-language libretto loosely based upon Sir Walter Scott’s historical novel The Bride of Lammermoor. The story concerns the emotionally fragile Lucy Ashton (Lucia), who is caught in a feud between her own family and that of the Ravenswoods. The setting is the Lammermuir Hills of Scotland (Lammermoor) in the 17th century. The obbligato accompaniment to the famous mad scene, usually heard on flute and performed on that instrument in the first production, was originally composed for glass harmonica, which contributes to the eerie quality of the scene. Significant historical dramas did appear and succeed,
and they included *Lucia di Lammermoor* (the first to have a libretto written by Salvatore Cammarano), and one of the most successful Neapolitan operas. In all, **Naples presented 51 of Donizetti’s operas.**

1835

**Mary Anne à Beckett (1815 – 1863) composes her first opera: Agnus Sorel.**

Beckett was an English composer, primarily known for opera. She was the wife of the writer Gilbert à Beckett, who provided the libretti for two of her operas. Their children included the writers Gilbert Arthur à Beckett and Arthur William à Beckett. Her theatrical connections included her brother, the actor and producer impresario Augustus Glossop Harris, and his eldest son, also an impresario, Sir Augustus Harris. She composed songs, piano pieces, incidental music, and three operas: *Agnès Sorel* (1835), *Little Red Riding Hood* (1842) and *The Young Pretender* (1846). The most successful of these was the first, described as “an operatic farce”, loosely based on the life of Agnès Sorel, mistress of Charles VII of France.

**February 29, 1836.**

**Giacomo Meyerbeer’s grand opera Les Huguenots premières at the Paris Opéra.**

*Les Huguenots* is a French opera by Giacomo Meyerbeer, one of the most popular and spectacular examples of the style of grand opera. In five acts, to a libretto by Eugène Scribe and Émile Deschamps, it premiered in Paris in 1836. The story culminates in the historical St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in 1572 in which thousands of French Huguenots (Protestants) were slaughtered by Catholics in an effort to rid France of Protestant influence. Although the massacre was a historical event, the rest of the action, which primarily concerns the love between the Catholic Valentine and the Protestant Raoul, is wholly a creation of Scribe. A short orchestral prelude, featuring the Lutheran chorale *Ein feste Burg*, replaces the extended overture Meyerbeer originally intended for the opera. *Les Huguenots* was the first opera to be performed at the Opéra more than 1,000 times (the 1,000th performance being on 16 May 1906) and continued to be produced regularly up to 1936, more than a century after its première. The Paris Opera scheduled performances of *Les Huguenots* for 2018, the first time since 1936 for the opera to be performed there. Its many performances in all other of the world’s major opera houses give it a claim to being the most successful opera of the 19th century.

**December 9, 1836**

**Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka’s A Life for the Tsar, considered the first full Russian opera, premières at the Bol’shoy Theatre in St. Petersburg.**

Mikhail Glinka (1804 – 1857) was the first Russian composer to gain wide recognition within his own country and is often regarded as the **fountainhead of Russian classical music.** His compositions were an important influence on future Russian composers, who took Glinka’s lead and produced a distinctive Russian style of music. *A Life for the Tsar* was the first of Glinka’s two great operas and it was originally entitled *Ivan Susanin*. Set in 1612, it tells the story of the Russian peasant and patriotic hero Ivan Susanin who sacrifices his life for the Tsar by leading astray a
Overture the music was worth anything. Wagner actually sold the sketch to the Director of the Thése were composed for an audition at the Paris Dutchman's crew in the same scene. Senta's Ballad, the Norwegian Sailors' song in act 3 ("Steuermann, lass die Wacht!") and the subsequent Phantom song of the recitative which binds the whole work, and the orchestration is masterly, foreshadowing the orchestral writing of later Russian composers. The Tsar rewarded Glinka for his work with a ring valued at 4,000 rubles. And, during the Soviet era, the opera was staged under its original title Ivan Susanin).

**Giuseppe Verdi**

**Portrait by Giacomo Brogi**

**November 17, 1839**

Giuseppe Fortunino Verdi first opera premieres at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan, Italy. begins composing his first opera (Oberto) to a libretto by the journalist Antonio Piazza.

Giuseppe Fortunino Verdi (1813-1901) was born near Busseto, Italy to a provincial family of moderate means and was able to receive a musical education with the help of a local patron. Oberto, Conte di San Bonifacio is an opera in two acts. It was written over a period of four years and set to a libretto by journalist Antonio Piazza. The story takes place in 1228, and, before the action takes place, a battle has been fought between Oberto, Count of San Boniface, and the Salinguerra, led by Ezzelino da Romano. Oberto has lost and has retreated to Mantua. Meanwhile, his daughter Leonora has been seduced and abandoned by Riccardo, Count of Salinguerra, and Riccardo is about to marry Cuniza, Ezzelino’s sister. Leonora makes her way to Bassano on Riccardo’s wedding day, intent on confronting him. He came to dominate the Italian opera scene after the era of Vincenzo Bellini, Gaetano Donizetti, and Gioachino Rossini, whose works significantly influenced him. By his 30s, he had become one of the pre-eminent opera composers in history, and, while he was working on his second opera Un giorno di regno, Margherita, his wife, died of encephalitis at the age of 26. Devastated, his opera Un giorno, a comedy, was premiered only a few months later. It was a flop and only given one performance. Following its failure, it is claimed Verdi vowed never to compose again, but in his Sketch he recounts how Merelli persuaded him to write a new opera. Verdi was to claim that he gradually began to work on the music for Nabucco, the libretto of which had originally been rejected by the composer Otto Nicolai: By the autumn of 1841 it was complete, originally under the title Nabucodonosor. Well received at its first performance on 9 March 1842, Nabucco underpinned Verdi’s success until his retirement from the theatre, twenty-nine operas (including some revised and updated versions) later.

**January 2, 1843**

**Richard Wagner's first mature opera, Der Fliegende Holländer,** (The Flying Dutchman) premiers at the Königliches Sächsisches Hoftheater, in Dresden, Germany.

Wagner wrote the first prose draft of the story in Paris early in May 1840, basing the story on Heinrich Heine's satire "The Memoirs of Mister von Schnabelewopski" ("Aus den Memoiren des Herrn von Schnabelewopski") published in Der Salon in 1834. In Heine’s tale, the narrator watches a performance of a fictitious stage play on the theme of the sea captain cursed to sail forever for blasphemy. Heine introduces the character as a Wandering Jew of the ocean, and also added the device taken up so vigorously by Wagner in this, and many subsequent operas: the Dutchman can only be redeemed by the love of a faithful woman. In Heine’s version, this is presented as a means for ironic humour; however, Wagner took this theme literally and in his draft, the woman is faithful until death. By the end of May 1841 Wagner had completed the libretto or poem as he preferred to call it. Composition of the music had begun during May to July of the previous year, 1840, when Wagner wrote Senta’s Ballad, the Norwegian Sailors’ song in act 3 ("Steuermann, lass die Wacht!") and the subsequent Phantom song of the Dutchman’s crew in the same scene. These were composed for an audition at the Paris Opéra, along with the sketch of the plot. Wagner actually sold the sketch to the Director of the Opéra, Léon Pillet, for 500 francs, but was unable to convince him that the music was worth anything. He composed the rest of the Der Fliegende Holländer during the summer of 1841, with the Overture being written last, and by November 1841 the orchestration of the score was complete. While this score was designed...
to be played continuously in a single act, Wagner later divided the piece into a three-act work. In doing so, however, he did not alter the music significantly, but merely interrupted transitions that had originally been crafted to flow seamlessly (the original one-act layout is restored in some performances). In his original draft Wagner set the action in Scotland, but he changed the location to Norway shortly before the first production staged in Dresden and conducted by himself in January 1843. The Flying Dutchman is a legendary ghost ship that can never make port and is doomed to sail the oceans forever. The myth is likely to have originated from the 17th-century golden age of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). The oldest extant version has been dated to the late 18th century. Sightings in the 19th and 20th centuries reported the ship to be glowing with ghostly light. If hailed by another ship, the crew of the Flying Dutchman will try to send messages to land, or to people long dead. In ocean lore, the sight of this phantom ship is a portent of doom.

March 11, 1851
Giuseppe Verdi's Rigoletto, based on Victor Hugo's novel, Le roi s'amuse premières at Teatro La Fenice in Venice, Italy.

Rigoletto is an opera in three acts. The Italian libretto was written by Francesco Maria Piave based on the play Le roi s'amuse by Victor Hugo. Despite serious initial problems with the Austrian censors who had control over northern Italian theatres at the time, the opera had a triumphant premiere. Rigoletto is widely considered to be the first of the operatic masterpieces of Verdi’s middle-to-late career. The opera’s original title, La maledizione (The Curse), refers to a curse placed on both the Duke and Rigoletto by a courtier whose daughter the Duke has seduced with Rigoletto’s encouragement. The curse comes to fruition when Gilda falls in love with the Duke and sacrifices her life to save him from assassins hired by her father. From 1852, Rigoletto began to be performed in major cities worldwide, reaching as far afield as Alexandria and Constantinople in 1854 and both Montevideo and Havana in 1855. The UK premiere took place on 14 May 1853 at what is now the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden in London with Giovanni Matteo Mario as the Duke of Mantua and Giorgio Ronconi as Rigoletto. In the US, the opera was first seen on 19 February 1855 at New York's Academy of Music in a performance by the Max Maretzke Italian Opera Company. In modern times, Rigoletto has become a staple of the standard operatic repertoire, although in several of these modern productions, the original setting has been radically changed.
Charles Gounod

March 19, 1859
Charles Gounod’s most popular opera, Faust, premières at the Théâtre Lyrique in Paris.

Gounod (1818 - 1893) wrote his first opera, Sapho, in 1851 at the urging of his friend, the singer Pauline Viardot; it was a commercial failure. He had no great theatrical success until Faust, derived from Goethe. This remains the composition for which he is best known; and, although it took a while to achieve popularity, it became one of the most frequently staged operas of all time, with no fewer than 2,000 performances of the work having occurred by 1975 at the Paris Opéra alone. The story of Faust is complex: he is bored and depressed with his life as a scholar. After an attempt to take his own life, he calls on the Devil for further knowledge and magic powers with which to indulge all the pleasures of the world. In response, the Devil’s representative, Mephistopheles, appears. He makes a bargain with Faust: Mephistopheles will serve Faust with his magic powers for a set number of years, but, at the end of the term, the Devil will claim Faust’s soul, and Faust will be eternally enslaved. During the term of the bargain, Faust makes use of Mephistopheles in various ways. In many versions of the story, particularly Goethe’s drama, Mephistopheles helps Faust seduce a beautiful and innocent girl, usually named Gretchen, whose life is ultimately destroyed when she gives birth to Faust’s bastard son. Realizing this unholy act, she drowns the child, and is held for murder. However, Gretchen’s innocence saves her in the end, and she enters Heaven after execution. In Goethe’s rendition, Faust is saved by God via his constant striving—in combination with Gretchen’s pleadings with God in the form of the eternal feminine. However, in the early tales, Faust is irrevocably corrupted and believes his sins cannot be forgiven; when the term ends, the Devil carries him off to Hell. Gounod’s other works include the romantic and melodious Roméo et Juliette (based on the Shakespeare play Romeo and Juliet), which premiered in 1867. Mireille, first performed in 1864, has been admired by connoisseurs rather than by the general public. The other Gounod operas have been lost.

November 4, 1863

Louis-Hector Berlioz (1803 - 1869) was a French Romantic composer. Les Troyens was composed with five acts, and the libretto was written by Berlioz himself from Virgil’s epic poem the Aeneid. The score was composed between 1856 and 1858, and Les Troyens is Berlioz’s most ambitious work, the summation of his entire artistic career, but he did not live to see it performed in its entirety. Under the title Les Troyens à Carthage, the last three acts were premièred with many cuts by Léon Carvalho’s company, the Théâtre Lyrique, at their theatre (now the Théâtre de la Ville) on the Place du Châtelet in Paris on 4 November 1863, with 21 repeat
performances. Today, Berioz is best known for his compositions Symphonie fantastique, Harold en Italie, Roméo et Juliette, Grande messe des morts (Requiem), L’Enfance du Christ, Benvenuto Cellini, La Damnation de Faust, and Les Troyens. His influence was critical for the further development of Romanticism, especially in composers such as Richard Wagner, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Franz Liszt, Richard Strauss, and Gustav Mahler.

Bedřich Smetana

January 5, 1866
Bedřich Smetana’s opera The Brandenburgers in Bohemia is performed at the Czech Provisional Theatre in Prague.

Bedřich Smetana (1824 – 1884) was a Czech composer, who pioneered the development of a musical style that became closely identified with his country’s aspirations to independent statehood. The opera is set in Prague during the 13th century when Bohemia is occupied by forces of the Margraviate of Brandenburg. Upon the death of King Ottokar II in the 1278 Battle on the Marchfeld, his widow Kunigunda had called in the Brandenburgian troops to lend aid against the army of victorious Rudolph of Habsburg. Rudolph retires to Austria, but nevertheless the Brandenburgers soon act like occupants: they arrested Kunigunda and her seven-year-old son Wenceslaus at Bezděz Castle and agreed with Rudolph that they would retain the Bohemian rule for the next five years. The Prague people led by mayor Volfram Olbramovič from the Brandenburg occupation, and the citizen Junoš reports on plundering and looting by Brandenburgian troops. Ludiše, the mayor’s daughter, rejects the approaches made by the German townsman Jan Tausendmark, who thereupon joins the occupants. The serf Jíra is designated the leader of a rebel movement. He openly charges Tausendmark with the kidnapping of the three daughters of the mayor, Ludiše, Vlčenka and Děčana. To avoid clashes of arms, Olbramovič has Jíra arrested. The mayor’s daughters are kept by Brandenburg troops and Olbramovič asks Tausendmark to arrange for their liberation. However, the Brandenburg captain Varnemann demands a high ransom. Meanwhile, Jíra is put on trial and condemned to death. However, it is Junoš, in love with Ludiše, who manages to save Jíra. Tausendmark, who intends to abduct Ludiše, fails to reach an agreement with Varnemann. He and the Brandenburgers are driven out of Prague, and the city is liberated. Smetana has been regarded in his homeland as the father of Czech music. Internationally he is best known for his opera The Bartered Bride and for the symphonic cycle Má vlast (“My Homeland”), which portrays the history, legends and landscape of the composer’s native land. Of his later operas, The Two Widows and The Secret were warmly received, while The Kiss was greeted by an “overwhelming ovation”. The ceremonial opera, Libuše, received thunderous applause when performed, but, in October, 1882, The Devil’s Wall was not well received. A complete Má vlast cycle followed in November, and at the end of Blaník the audience was beside itself and the people it is said could not bring themselves to take leave of the composer.”

Ludwig and Malvina Schnorr von Carolsfeld
in the first performance,
conducted by Hans von Bulow
Photo by: Joseph Albert

June 10, 1865
Wilhelm Richard Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde premieres at the Königliches Hof-und Nationaltheater in Munich.

Wilhelm Richard Wagner (1813 – 1883) was a German composer, theatre director, polemicist, and conductor who is chiefly known for his operas (or as some of his later works were known, “music dramas.” Tristan und Isolde is an opera, or music drama, in three acts, set to a German libretto by the composer, based largely on the 12th-century romance “Tristan” written by Gottfried von Strassburg. It was composed between 1857 and 1859 and premiered with Hans von Bülow conducting. Wagner referred to the work not as an opera, but called it “eine Handlung” (literally a drama, a plot or an action), which was the equivalent of the term used by the Spanish
playwright Calderón for his dramas, and the composition of *Tristan und Isolde* was inspired by the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer (particularly *The World as Will and Representation*), as well as by Wagner’s affair with Mathilde Wesendonck. Widely acknowledged as one of the peaks of the operatic repertoire, *Tristan* was notable for Wagner’s unprecedented use of chromaticism, tonal ambiguity, orchestral colour and harmonic suspension. This opera was enormously influential among Western classical composers and provided direct inspiration to composers such as Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss, Karol Szymanowski, Alban Berg, Arnold Schoenberg and Benjamin Britten. Other composers like Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel and Igor Stravinsky formulated their styles in contrast to Wagner’s musical legacy. Many see *Tristan* as the beginning of the move away from *common practice harmony* and tonality and consider that it lays the groundwork for the direction of classical music in the 20th century. Both Wagner’s libretto style and music were also profoundly influential on the symbolist poets of the late 19th century and early 20th century.

**December 24, 1871**

Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi’s *Aida* premières at the newly-opened Khedivial Opera House in Cairo, Egypt.

Giuseppe Verdi (1813 - 1901) was an Italian opera composer. He was born near Busseto to a provincial family of moderate means, and developed a musical education with the help of a local patron. He came to dominate the Italian operafter the era of Vincenzo Bellini, Gaetano Donizetti, and Gioachino Rossini, whose works significantly influenced him. By his 30s, he had become one of the pre-eminent opera composers in history. *Aida*, set in ancient Egypt, is a timeless story of love and betrayal against the backdrop of war: Aida is an Ethiopian princess held captive in Egypt, in love with a General, Radames, and he with her. When he is chosen to lead a war with Ethiopia, we follow the conflict of Aida’s love for both Radames and for her country. *Aida* is an opera in four acts set to an Italian libretto by Antonio Ghislanzoni. Giovanni Bottesini conducted after Verdi himself withdrew. Today the work holds a central place in the operatic canon, receiving performances every year around the world; at New York’s Metropolitan Opera alone, *Aida* has been sung more than 1,100 times since 1886. Ghislanzoni’s scheme follows a scenario often attributed to the French Egyptologist Auguste Mariette, but Verdi biographer Mary Jane Phillips-Matz argues that the source is actually Temistocle Solera. An intensely private person, Verdi retired following the success of *Aida*, but then surprised the musical world by returning and composing three later masterpieces: *Requiem* (1874), and the operas *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1893). He died in Italy. He was 87 years old.

**February 8, 1874**

Modest Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov* premières at the Mariinsky Theatre, St. Petersburg, Russia.

Modest Mussorgsky (1839 – 1881) composed *Boris Godunov* between 1868 and 1873 in Saint Petersburg, Russia. It is Mussorgsky’s only completed opera and is considered his masterpiece. Its subjects are the Russian ruler Boris Godunov, who reigned as Tsar (1598 to 1605) during the *Time of Troubles*, and his nemesis, the False Dmitriy (reigned 1605 to 1606). The Russian-language libretto was written by the composer and is based on the drama *Boris Godunov* by Aleksandr Pushkin, and, in the Revised Version of 1872, on Nikolay Karamzin’s *History of the Russian State*. Among major operas *Boris Godunov* shares with Giuseppe Verdi’s *Don Carlos* (1867) is the distinction of having an extremely complex creative history, as well as a great wealth of alternative material. The composer created two versions—the Original Version of 1869, which was rejected for production by the Imperial Theatres, and the Revised Version of 1872, which received its first performance as noted above.
April 5, 1874

Johann Strauss II’s light opera, *Die Fledermaus* (*The Fittermouse or The Revenge of the Bat*) premieres at Theater an der Wien, Vienna, Austria.

Johann Strauss II’s operetta *Die Fledermaus* was composed to a German libretto by Karl Haffner (de) and Richard Genée. The original literary source for it was *Das Gefängnis* (*The Prison*), a farce by German playwright Julius Roderich Benedix[1] that premiered in Berlin in 1851. On 10 September 1872, a three-act French vaudeville play by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, *Le Réveillon*, loosely based on the Benedix farce, opened at the Théâtre du Palais-Royal. Meilhac and Halévy had provided several successful libretti for Offenbach and *Le Réveillon* later formed the basis for the 1926 silent film *So This Is Paris*, directed by Ernst Lubitsch. Strauss’ most famous operettas are *Die Fledermaus*, *Eine Nacht in Venedig*, and *Der Zigeunerbaron*. There are also many dance pieces drawn from themes of his operettas, such as "Cagliostro-Walzer" Op. 370 (from *Cagliostro in Wien*), "O Schöner Mai" Walzer Op. 375 (from *Prinz Methusalem*), "Rosen aus dem Süden" Walzer Op. 388 (from *Das Spitzentuch der Königin*), and "Kuss-Walzer" op. 400 (from *Der lustige Krieg*), that have survived obscurity and become well-known. Strauss also wrote an opera, *Ritter Pázmán*, and was in the middle of composing a ballet, *Aschenbrödel*, when he died in 1899.

March 3, 1875

Georges Bizet’s *Carmen* premières at the Opéra-Comique in Paris.

Georges Bizet (1838 - 1875) was a French composer of the romantic era. Best known for his operas in a career cut short by his early death, he achieved few successes before his final work, *Carmen*, which has become one of the most popular and frequently performed works in the entire opera repertoire. The production of *Carmen*, was delayed because of fears that its themes of betrayal and murder would offend audiences. After its premiere, with Bizet being convinced that the work was a failure, he died of a heart attack in June unaware that it would prove a spectacular and enduring success. Among the opera’s early champions were Tchaikovsky, Brahms, and particularly Wagner, who commented: "Here, thank God, at last for a change is somebody with ideas in his head." Another champion of the work was Friedrich Nietzsche, who claimed to know it by heart said, "It is music that makes no pretensions to depth, but it is delightful in its simplicity, so unaffected and sincere". By broad consent, *Carmen* represents the fulfillment of Bizet’s development as a master of music drama and the culmination of the genre of opéra comique.

August 13-17, 1876

First performance of Wagner’s complete *Ring* cycle premieres at the Bayreuth Festival.

*Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of the Nibelung*), WWV 86, is a cycle of four German-language epic music dramas composed by Richard Wagner. Wagner wrote the libretto and music over the course of about twenty-six years, from 1848 to 1874, and the four parts that constitute the *Ring* cycle are, in sequence: *Das Rheingold* (*The Rhinegold*); *Die Walküre* (*The Valkyrie*); *Siegfried*; and *Götterdämmerung* (*Twilight of the Gods*). The works are based loosely on characters from the Norse sagas and the *Nibelungenlied*. The composer termed the cycle a "Bühnenfesstspiel" (stage festival play), structured in three days preceded by a Vorabend ("preliminary evening"). The plot revolves around a magic ring that grants the power to rule the world, forged by the Nibelung dwarf Alberich from gold he stole from the Rhine maidens in the river Rhine. The Ring itself as described by Wagner is a Rune-magic taufr ("tine", or
Richard Wagner’s final opera, Parsifal, premieres at the second Bayreuth Festspielhaus.

Parsifal is an opera in three acts. It is loosely based on Parzival by Wolfram von Eschenbach, a 13th-century epic poem of the Arthurian knight Parzival (Percival) and his quest for the Holy Grail (12th century). Wagner conceived the work in April 1857, but did not finish it until 25 years later. In composing it, he took advantage of the particular acoustics of his Bayreuth Festspielhaus. Parsifal was his only work written especially for his Bayreuth Festspielhaus and is described in the score as a "Bühnenweihfestspiel" ("festival play for the consecration of the stage"). It is thought that elements of Buddhist renunciation in the opera were suggested by Wagner’s readings of Schopenhauer. He described it to his wife Cosima as his "last card", but, with Serov’s death, the libretto was opened to a competition with a guarantee that the winning entry would be premiered by the Imperial Mariinsky Theatre. Tchaikovsky, some of whose works are among the most popular music in the classical repertoire, was was the first Russian composer whose music made a lasting impression internationally.

Pyotr Il’ych Tchaikovsky

January 23, 1881

Pyotr Il’ych Tchaikovsky’s Yeugeny Onegin (Eugene Onegin) premieres at the Mali Theatre in Moscow.

An earlier performance had been given in 1879 by students at the Moscow Conservatory, and an earlier opera, The Voyevoda, based on a play by Alexander Ostrovsky, premiered in 1869. The composer became dissatisfied with it, however, and, having re-used parts of it in later works, destroyed the manuscript. Undina followed in 1870. Only excerpts were performed, and it, too, was destroyed. Between these projects, Tchaikovsky started to compose an opera called Mandragora, to a libretto by Sergei Rachinski; the only music he completed was a short chorus of Flowers and Insects. The first Tchaikovsky opera to survive intact, The Oprichnik, premiered in 1874. During its composition, he lost Ostrovsky’s part-finished libretto, and, too embarrassed to ask for another copy, decided to write the libretto himself, modelling his dramatic technique on that of Eugène Scribe. The Oprichnik continues to be performed from time to time in Russia. The last of the early operas, Vakula the Smith (Op.14), was composed in the second half of 1874. The libretto, based on Gogol’s Christmas Eve, was to have been set to music by Alexander Serov, but, with Serov’s death, the libretto was opened to a competition with a guarantee that the winning entry would be premiered by the Imperial Mariinsky Theatre. Tchaikovsky, some of whose works are among the most popular music in the classical repertoire, was was the first Russian composer whose music made a lasting impression internationally.
October 3, 1883

Johann Strauss II’s operetta, Eine Nacht in Venedig (A Night in Venice), premieres at the Neues Frederich Wilhelmsdäisches Theater in Berlin, Germany.

Johann Strauss II (1825-1899) like his father was an Austrian composer. Eine Nacht in Venedig (A Night in Venice) is an operetta in three acts. Its libretto was by F. Zell and Richard Genée based on Le Château Trompette by Eugène Cormon and Richard Genée. The farcical, romantic story involves several cases of mistaken identity. Although the press praised Strauss’s music, they criticized the libretto as banal and silly; for instance, references were made to roast beef made from the sole of a boot and, in the waltz scene, the character of Duke Urbino was singing passages of "meows", which was met with much embarrassment from the Berlin audience. [citation needed] Unperturbed, Strauss made several alterations to the work with his librettists and scored a triumph in his native Vienna at the Theater an der Wien, where it ran for 44 consecutive performances from 9 October 1883. [citation needed] The operetta became established as one of Strauss’s three most recognisable stage works alongside Die Fledermaus and Der Zigeunerbaron. [citation needed]

A 1923 production, starring Richard Tauber at the Theater an der Wien, used a score and libretto revised by composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold and writer Hubert Marischka, which was later used in other productions and recordings as well. It became one of Strauss’s three most famous stage works and has been seen in New York, London and elsewhere, and was adapted for film. Strauss was diagnosed with pleurpneumonia, and at the time of his death, he was still composing his ballet Aschenbrödel.

Jules Massenet

January 19, 1884

Jules Émile Frédéric Massenet’s Manon premières at the Paris Opéra-Comique in France.

Jules Massenet (1841-1912) was a French composer during the Romantic era. He is best known for his operas, of which he wrote more than thirty. The two most frequently staged are Manon (1884) and Werther (1892). Manon is Massenet’s most popular and enduring opera. Manon is an opéra comique in five acts by Jules Massenet to a French libretto by Henri Meilhac and Philippe Gille, based on the 1731 novel L’histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut by the Abbé Prévost with sets designed by Eugène Carpezat (Act I), Auguste-Alfred Rubé and Philippe Chaperon (Acts II and III), and Jean-Baptiste Lavastre (Act IV). The story is set in France and Louisiana in the early 18th century, and follows the hero, the Chevalier des Grieux, and his lover, Manon Lescaut: Des Grieux comes from a noble and landed family, but forfeits his hereditary wealth and incurs the disappointment of his father by running away with Manon. In Paris, the young lovers enjoy a blissful cohabitation, while Des Grieux struggles to satisfy Manon’s taste for luxury. He scrounges together money by borrowing from his unwaveringly loyal friend Tiberge and by cheating gamblers. On several occasions, his wealth evaporates (by theft, in a house fire, etc.), prompting Manon to leave him for a richer man because she cannot stand the thought of living in penury. The two lovers finally end up in New Orleans, to which Manon has been deported as a prostitute, where they pretend to be married and live in idyllic peace for a while. But when Des Grieux reveals their unmarried state to the Governor and asks to be wed with Manon. Then, the Governor’s nephew sets his sights on winning Manon’s hand. In despair, Des Grieux challenges the Governor’s nephew to a duel and knocks him unconscious. Thinking he had killed the man and fearing retribution, the couple flee New Orleans and venture into the wilderness of Louisiana, hoping to reach an English settlement. Manon dies of exposure and exhaustion the following morning, however, and, after burying his beloved, Des Grieux is eventually taken back to France by Tiberge. Manon, it is said, is the quintessential example of the charm and vitality of the music and culture of the Parisian Belle Époque.

Massenet also wrote a one-act sequel to Manon, Le portrait de Manon (1894), involving the Chevalier des Grieux as an older man. The composer worked at the score both at his country home outside Paris and also at a house at The Hague once occupied by Prévost himself. In 1893 an opera by Giacomo Puccini entitled Manon Lescaut, and based on the same novel also premiered and also became popular.

imagery and spiritual contents of Parsifal rest, is idiosyncratic and contradicts Christian dogma in many ways.” Musically the opera has been held to represent a continuing development of the composer’s style, and Barry Millington describes it as ”a diaphanous score of unearthly beauty and refinement”. The Bayreuth Festival maintained a 30-year monopoly on Parsifal productions until 1903, so it wasn’t until December 24, 1903 that the opera was finally able to be performed at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.
February 5, 1887

*Otello*, one of the most universally-respected of Verdi's operas, premieres at Teatre alla Scala in Milan.

Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Otello* was composed in four acts, set to an Italian libretto by Arrigo Boito, and based on Shakespeare's play *Othello*. The story is about Othello, who was a noble black warrior general in the Venetian army, his unfaithful ensign Iago, a prominent senator named Brabantio, and his beautiful daughter Desdemona, who has secretly wed Otello. In the last scene, Desdemona prepares for bed. She has just finished saying her evening prayers when Otello enters and wakes her with a kiss to tell her he is about to kill her. Paralyzed with fear, she again protests her innocence. Otello coldly strangles her. He then learns that Cassio (another soldier) has killed Roderigo, a dissolute Venetian lusting after Othello's wife Desdemona. In the end, lago's plot is finally revealed and Otello realizes what he has done. Reflecting on his past glory, he pulls out a dagger and stabs himself, dying with a final kiss for his wife.

*Otello* was Verdi's penultimate opera, and, given its varied and enduring themes of racism, love, jealousy, betrayal, revenge and repentance, it is still often performed in professional and community theatre alike, and has been the source for numerous operatic, film, and literary adaptations. With the composer's reluctance to write anything new following the success of *Aida* in 1871, it took his Milan publisher Giulio Ricordi ten years, to convince him to come out of retirement to compose *Otello*. Then, when it finally premiered, it proved to be such a resounding success that further stagings soon followed at leading theatres throughout Europe and America.

May 17, 1890


Pietro Mascagni (1863 - 1945) was an Italian composer most noted for his operas. His masterpiece *Cavalleria Rusticana* caused one of the greatest sensations in opera history and single-handedly ushered in the Verismo movement in Italian dramatic music. It is an opera in one act to an Italian libretto by Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti and Guido Menasci, adapted from an 1880 short story and subsequent play by Giovanni Verga. The story of *Cavalleria rusticana*, if local folklore is to be believed, really took place in Vizzini, Sicily before the time of Verga. In this simple yet revealing "fable", all the vices, hypocisies, prejudices and, yes, virtues of rural Sicily at the time of Verga are revealed. To be sure, Verga's story poses no great political or social question, but merely exposes raw human emotions and folly among a small group of ordinary people in the mountains of eastern Sicily. It is a drama that could be replayed countless times over the course of the centuries. Considered one of the classic verismo operas, since 1893, it has often been performed in a so-called Cav/Pag double-bill with *Pagliacci* by Ruggero Leoncavallo.

December 19, 1890

Pyotr Illyich Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades* premieres at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia.

*The Queen of Spades* is an opera in 3 acts (7 scenes) by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to a Russian libretto by the composer's brother Modest Tchaikovsky. It is based on a short story of the same name by Alexander Pushkin, but the plot was dramatically altered. In the opera, Hermann, an ethnic German, is an officer of the engineers in the Imperial Russian Army. He constantly watches the other officers gamble, but never plays himself. One night, Tomsky tells a story about his grandmother, an elderly countess, who, many years ago in France, lost a fortune at cards, and then won it back with the secret of the three winning cards, which she learned from the notorious Count of St. Germain. Hermann then becomes obsessed with obtaining the secret. While composing the music, Tchaikovsky actively edited the libretto, changing some of the text and adding his own lyrics to two arias. The composer himself took part in the preparation of the Saint Petersburg premiere. Critics gave the opera rave reviews, and Tchaikovsky later wrote, "Figner and the Saint Petersburg orchestra... have made true miracles." The opera was just as
successful at the Kiev premiere twelve days later. The Bolshoi Theatre premiere took place the following year. Tchaikovsky was extremely pleased with his effort.

Ruggiero Leoncavallo

May 21, 1892
Ruggiero Leoncavallo’s *I pagliacci* (Clowns) premieres at the Teatro Dal Verme, Milan, Italy

Ruggiero Leoncavallo (1859–1919) was an Italian composer. His composition, *Pagliacci*, is an Italian opera in a prologue and two acts, with music and he wrote the libretto as well. It is the only Leoncavallo opera that is still widely performed. The opera, a dramatic tale of love and betrayal, revolves around a commedia del arte troupe: Canio and Nedda are married, and the leads in the troupe along with Tonio and Beppe. However, Nedda is secretly having an affair with Silvio, and, fearing Canio’s anger, Nedda continues to hide the affair, and even goes as far to attempt to break it off with Silvio. Silvio and Nedda’s love is strong, however, and they plan to run away together. Tonio, also in love with Nedda, confesses his love for her, but she turns him away, shaming him. In an act of revenge, Tonio tells Canio that Nedda is having an affair as he suspected. During a performance, Canio confronts Nedda, and stabs her. Silvio attempts to save Nedda, running up on stage, but gets stabbed by Canio as well. The audience, not realizing it was real, claps until Canio screams at them, “the comedy is ended.” This premiere performance was conducted by Arturo Toscanini, with Adelina Stehle as Nedda, Fiorello Giraud as Canio, Victor Maurel as Tonio, and Mario Ancona as Silvio. Based, like *Cavalleria rusticana*, on a true story, *I pagliacci* was composed with the earlier opera in mind, and the two are linked in modern performance tradition. *Pagliacci* received mixed critical reviews upon its world premiere, but it was instantly successful with the public and has remained so ever since. The Metropolitan Opera first staged the work on 11 December as a double-bill with *Orfeo ed Euridice*, with Nellie Melba in the role of Nedda.

Giacomo Antonio Momenio Michele Secondo Maria Puccini

February 1, 1893
Giacomo Antonio Momenio Michele Secondo Maria Puccini’s *Manon Lescaut* premieres at La Scala, Milan, Italy.

Giacomo Puccini (1858 – 1924) was an Italian opera composer who has been called “the greatest composer of Italian opera after Verdi”. Puccini’s early work was rooted in traditional late-19th-century romantic Italian opera, and later, he successfully developed his work in the realistic verismo style, of which he became one of the leading exponents. When his publisher tried to dissuade him from composing an opera on a subject (*Manon*) that had already had great success in a treatment by Massenet (see 1884), Puccini is said to have replied, ‘Why shouldn’t there be two opera about her? A woman like Manon can have more than one lover,’ The opera’s success has borne him out. His most renowned works are *La bohème* (1896), *Tosca* (1900), *Madama Butterfly* (1904), and *Turandot* (1924), all of which are among the important operas played as standards.
February 9, 1893

Giuseppe Verdi’s great comic portrait, *Falstaff*, premieres at La Scala, Milan.

*Falstaff* is a comic opera in three acts. The libretto was adapted by Arrigo Boito from Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and scenes from Henry IV, parts 1 and 2. For the first night, official ticket prices were thirty times higher than usual. Royalty, aristocracy, critics and leading figures from the arts all over Europe were present. The performance was a huge success; numbers were encored, and, at the end, the applause for Verdi and the cast lasted an hour. That was followed by a tumultuous welcome when the composer, his wife, and Boito arrived at the Grand Hotel de Milan. Even more hectic scenes ensued when he went to Rome in May for the opera’s premiere at the Teatro Costanzi, when crowds of well-wishers at the railway station initially forced Verdi to take refuge in a tool-shed. He witnessed the performance from the Royal Box at the side of King Umberto and the Queen. Verdi wrote *Falstaff*, which was the last of his 28 operas, as he was approaching the age of 80. It was his second comedy, and his third work based on a Shakespeare play, following *Macbeth* and *Otello*. The plot revolves around the thwarted, sometimes farcical, efforts of the fat knight, Sir John Falstaff, to seduce two married women to gain access to their husbands’ wealth. While staying at the Grand Hotel, he suffered a stroke on 21 January 1901, gradually grew more feeble over the next week, and died on 27 January at the age of 87.

Englebert Humperdinck

**December 23, 1893**

Englebert Humperdinck’s opera *Hansel and Gretel*, conducted by Richard Strauss, is first performed at Hoftheater in Weimar, Germany.

Englebert Humperdinck (1854-1921) was a German composer. He described *Hansel and Gretel* as a Märchenoper (fairy-tale opera). The libretto was written by Humperdinck’s sister, Adelheid Wette, based on the Grimm brothers’ fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel". It is much admired for its folk music-inspired themes, one of the most famous being the "Abendsegen" ("Evening Benediction") from act 2. The idea for the opera was proposed to the composer by his sister, who approached him about writing music for songs that she had written for her children for Christmas loosely based on the fairy-tale. After several revisions, the musical sketches and the songs were turned into a full-scale opera. He composed it in Frankfurt in 1891 and 1892. Today it is still most often performed at Christmas time. On 5 January 1921 Humperdinck suffered a severe stroke. Although he recovered, his left hand remained permanently paralyzed. He continued to compose, completing *Gaudeamus* with the help of his son, Wolfram, in 1918. On 26 September 1921 Humperdinck attended a performance of Carl Maria von Weber’s *Der Freischütz* in Neustrelitz, Wolfram’s first effort as a stage director. He suffered a heart attack during the performance and died the next day from a second heart attack. The Berlin State Opera performed *Hansel and Gretel* in his memory a few weeks later. He was buried at the Südwestkirchhof (dc) in Stahnsdorf near Berlin.
**February 1, 1896**

Giacomo Puccini’s perennial favourite, *La bohème*, conducted by Arturo Toscanini, premières at the Teatro Regio, Turin, Italy.

According to its title page, the libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa is based on Henri Murger’s novel, *Scènes de la vie de bohème*, a collection of vignettes portraying young bohemians living in the Latin Quarter of Paris in the 1840s. Although usually called a novel, it has no unified plot. Like the 1849 play by Murger and Théodore Barrière, the opera’s libretto focuses on the relationship between Rodolfo and Mimi, ending with her death. Also like the play, the libretto combines two characters from the novel, Mimi and Francine, into the single character of Mimi. Early in the composition stage, Puccini was in dispute with the composer Leoncavallo, who said that he had offered Puccini a completed libretto and felt that Puccini should defer to him. Puccini responded that he had had no idea of Leoncavallo’s interest and that having been working on his own version for some time, he felt that he could not oblige him by discontinuing with the opera. Leoncavallo completed his own version in which Marcello was sung by a tenor and Rodolfo by a baritone. It was unsuccessful and is now rarely performed.

**November 27, 1896**

Franz Léhar’s first opera, *Kukuschka* (later reworked as *Tatjana*) premières at the Leipzig Stadttheater in Leipzig, Germany.

Franz Léhar (1870-1948) was an Austrian-Hungarian composer. *Kukuška*, is an opera in 3 acts. The libretto, by FelixFalzari, was from American journalist and explorer George Kennan’s writings about his six years in Siberia, including *Siberia and the Exile System* (1891). Léhar’s revised work, *Tatjana*, with changes to the libretto by Max Kalbeck was premiered on 10 February 1905 in Brno, at the German Brünn Stadttheater. Léhar is most famous for his operetta *The Merry Widow* (*Die lustige Witwe*) – but he also wrote sonatas, symphonic poems and marches. Individual songs from some of the operettas have become standards, notably “Vilja” from *The Merry Widow* and “You Are My Heart’s Delight” (“Dein ist mein ganzes Herz”) from *The Land of Smiles* (*Das Land des Lächelns*). His most ambitious work, *Giuditta* (1934) is closer to opera than to operetta, and it also contains the ever popular “Meine Lippen, sie küssen so heiß” (“On my lips every kiss is like wine”). Lehár was also associated with the operatic tenor Richard Tauber, who sang in several of his operettas, beginning with a revival of his 1910 operetta *Zigeunerliebe* (1920) and then *Frasquita* (de) in 1922, in which Lehár once again found a suitable post-war style.

**January 14, 1900**

Giacomo Puccini’s *Tosca* premières at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome, Italy.

*Tosca* is an opera in three acts by to an Italian libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa. The work, based on Victorien Sardou’s 1887 French-language dramatic play. *La Tosca* is a melodramatic piece set in Rome in June 1800, with the Kingdom of Naples’s control of Rome threatened by Napoleon’s invasion of Italy. It contains depictions of torture, murder and suicide, as well as some of Puccini’s best-known lyrical arias. Musically, Tosca is structured as a through-composed work, with arias, recitative, choruses and other elements musically woven into a seamless whole. Puccini used Wagnerian leitmotifs to identify characters, objects and ideas. While critics have often dismissed the opera as a facile melodrama with confusions of plot—musicologist Joseph Kerman called it a "shabby little shocker"—the power of its score and the inventiveness of its orchestration has been widely acknowledged. The dramatic force of *Tosca* and its characters continues to fascinate both performers and audiences, and the work remains one of the most frequently performed operas. Many recordings of the work have been issued, both of studio and live performances.
April 30, 1902

Achille-Claude Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande* premières at the Opéra-Comique, Paris, France.

Claude Debussy (1862 – 1918) was a French composer. He is sometimes seen as the first Impressionist composer, although he rejected the term. He was among the most influential composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The academic and journalist Stephen Walsh calls *Pelléas et Mélisande* (begun 1893, staged 1902) "a key work for the 20th century". The composer Olivier Messiaen was fascinated by its "extraordinary harmonic qualities and transparent instrumental texture". The opera is composed in what Alan Blyth describes as a sustained and heightened recitative style, with "sensuous, intimate" vocal lines. The story takes place in the imaginary kingdom of Allemonde, governed by the aged King Arkel. After meeting Mélisande, a fragile and mysterious creature, while hunting in the forest, Prince Golaud marries her without learning anything about her and then presents Mélisande to his half brother Pelléas. A secret bond forms between the two...is it love? Golaud starts to spy on Pelléas and Mélisande. First, he tells his half brother to stay away from his wife, but then becomes more threatening as he is devoured by fear and jealousy. Pelléas and Mélisande end up confessing their love for each other. As they kiss, Golaud surprises them and kills Pelléas with his sword as Mélisande escapes. In the presence of Arkel and Golaud, who is filled with remorse, the mysterious Mélisande gradually dies of an unidentified affliction. Golaud never finds out the truth about her relationship with Pelléas. This opera influenced composers as different as Stravinsky and Puccini. In 1890 Debussy had met Erik Satie, who proved a kindred spirit in his experimental approach to composition. Both were bohemians, enjoying the same café society and struggling to stay afloat financially. In the same year, he began a relationship with Gabrielle (Gaby) Dupont, a tailor’s daughter from Lisieux; in July 1893 they began living together. In February 1894, he completed the first draft of Act I of his *operatic version* of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and worked to complete the composition for most of the year. While still living with Dupont, he had an affair with the singer Thérèse Roger, and, in 1894, he announced their engagement. His behaviour was widely condemned; anonymous letters circulated denouncing his treatment of both women, as well as his financial irresponsibility and debts. The engagement was broken off, and several of Debussy’s friends and supporters disowned him, including Ernest Chausson, hitherto one of his strongest supporters. When the opera opened, and although the first-night audience was divided between admirers and sceptics, the work quickly became a success making Debussy a well-known name in France and abroad; *The Times* commented that the opera had "provoked more discussion than any work of modern times, excepting, of course, those of Richard Strauss". The Apaches, led by composer Maurice Ravel (who attended every one of the 14 performances in the first run), were loud in their support while the conservative faculty of the Conservatoire tried in vain to stop its students from seeing the opera.

February 17, 1904

Giacomo Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* premières at La Scala in Milan, Italy.

*Butterfly* is based on the short story "Madame Butterfly" (1898) by John Luther Long, which, in turn, was based on stories told to Long by his sister Jennie Correll and on the semi-autobiographical 1887 French novel *Madame Chrysanthème* by Pierre Loti. Long’s version was dramatized by David Belasco as the one-act play *Madame Butterfly: A Tragedy of Japan*, which, after premiering in New York in 1900, moved to London, where Puccini saw it in the summer of that year. The original version of the opera, in two acts, was poorly received, despite such notable singers as soprano Rosina Storchio, tenor Giovanni Zenatello and baritone Giuseppe De Luca being cast in lead roles but this was due in part to a late completion by Puccini, and thus inadequate time for rehearsals. Puccini revised the opera, splitting Act II into two (with the Humming Chorus as a bridge to what became Act III) and making other changes. Success ensued, starting with the first performance on 28 May 1904 in Brescia. Today, *Madama Butterfly* is a staple of the operatic repertoire around the world, ranked 6th by Operabase; Puccini’s *La bohème* and *Tosca* rank 3rd and 5th.
December 9, 1905
Richard Georg Strauss’s opera *Salome* premieres at the Dresden Hofoper in Germany.

**Richard Strauss (1864 - 1949)** was a leading German composer of the late Romantic and early modern eras. *Salome* is an opera in one act, was set to a German libretto by the composer, and was based on Hedwig Lachmann’s German translation of the French play *Salomé* by Oscar Wilde. The composer dedicated the opera to his friend Sir Edgar Speyer, and the final scene is frequently heard as a concert-piece for dramatic sopranos. *Salome* is set to the biblical story about Herodias, who was infuriated by John’s condemnation of her marriage, prompting her daughter Salome to dance and then, when Herod promises her anything, asks for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. The unwilling Herod is forced by his oath to Salome to have John beheaded, and then Salome takes the platter with John’s head and gives it to her mother. *Salome* is a somewhat dissonant modernist opera, with the combination of the Christian biblical theme, the erotic and the murderous, which so attracted Wilde to the tale, shocking opera audiences from its first appearance. Some of the original performers were very reluctant to handle the material as written: for example, the first Salome, Marie Wittich, ”refused to perform the 'Dance of the Seven Veils'”, thus creating a situation where a dancer stood in for her. This precedent has been largely followed, one early notable exception being that of Aino Ackté, whom Strauss himself dubbed ”the one and only Salome”. The premiere of *Salome* was a major success, with the artists taking more than 38 curtain calls, and, after its initial premiere, within two years, *Salome* had been performed in 50 other opera houses. Many later performances of the opera were also successful not only with the general public, but also with Strauss’s peers: Maurice Ravel said that Salome was “stupendous”, and Gustav Mahler describing it as ”a live volcano, a subterranean fire”. As with the later *Elektra*, *Salome* features an incredibly taxing lead soprano role. Strauss often remarked that he preferred writing for the female voice, which is apparent in these two sister operas—the male parts are almost entirely smaller roles, included only to supplement the soprano’s performance. Strauss's works have also always been popular with audiences in the concert hall and continue to be so. He has consistently been in the top 10 composers most performed by symphony orchestras in the US and Canada over the period 2002–10. He is also in the top 5 of 20th Century composers (born after 1860) in terms of the number of currently available recordings of his works.

March 6, 1906
Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari’s *I quatro rusteghi* (The Four Curmudgeons, The Four Ruffians, in Edward J. Dent’s translation *School for Fathers*) is first performed at the Hoftheater in Munich, Germany

Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari was an Italian composer. *I quattro rusteghi* is a comic opera in three acts, music by Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari to a libretto by Luigi Sugana (it) and Giuseppe Pizzolato based on Carlo Goldoni’s 18th-century play *I rusteghi*. The action takes place in 18th century Venice with four curmudgeonly husbands, who vainly attempt to keep their women in order. The women decide to teach their menfolk a lesson by allowing Lunado’s daughter Lucieta to see Filipeto, the son of Maurizio, before their pre-arranged marriage, even though the men have forbidden this. The opera is written in Venetian dialect, hence ”quatro” instead of “quattro”. Wolf-Ferrari’s most successful comic operas, *I quattro rusteghi* (The Four Cumnugedons, The Four Ruffians or School for Fathers) and *Il segreto di Susanna* (The Secret of Susanne) (1909), were all presented in 18th-century styles orchestrated in the manner of the 20th century. Today, his work is not performed very widely (with the exception of several of his overtures and his Jewels of the Madonna intermezzo), although he is generally thought of as probably the finest writer of Italian comic opera of his time. His works often recall the opera buffa of the 18th century, although he also wrote more ambitious works in the manner of Pietro Mascagni, which are thought of less well.
November 11, 1906

Dame Ethel Smyth's opera *The Wreckers* (in German, *Standrecht*) premieres at the Neues Theater, Leipzig, Germany.

Dame Ethel Smyth (1858-1944) was an English composer and a member of the women’s suffrage movement. Her father, John Hall Smyth, who was a major general in the Royal Artillery, was very much opposed to her making a career in music. Undeterred, she was determined to become a composer, and studied with a private tutor. She then attended the Leipzig Conservatory, where she met many composers of the day. Her compositions include songs, works for piano, chamber music, orchestral and concertante works, choral works, and operas. *The Wreckers* is considered by some critics to be the "most important English opera composed during the period between Purcell and Britten." *The Wreckers* is an opera in three acts, composed to a libretto in French by Henry Brewster. From quotes from Smyth’s memoirs about the pull of the subject matter, she wrote: ‘Ever since those days I had been haunted by impressions of that strange world of more than a hundred years ago; the plundering of ships lured on to the rocks by the falsification or extinction of the coast lights; the relentless murder of their crews; and with it all the ingrained religiosity of the Celtic population of that barren promontory.’ Initially, production of *The Wreckers* was impossible in England, until conductor Thomas Beecham championed the work: it finally premiered in England in 1909, with funding support from her friend Mary Dodge. Describing the opera in the New Grove Dictionary, Stephen Banfield notes "Its greatest strength is in its dramatic strategy, strikingly prophetic of (Britten’s) Peter Grimes in details such as the offstage church service set against the foreground confrontation in Act 1.” However, Amanda Holden makes the point that, musically, Smyth is “no Wagnerite: although she makes use of his motivic technique, while the texture, orchestration, and even some of the music’s dramatic density show knowledge of the works of Richard Strauss ... but it also slips too readily into operatic convention.” Another of her operas, *Der Wald*, mounted in 1903 was, for more than a century, the only opera by a woman composer ever produced at New York’s Metropolitan Opera (until Kaija Saariaho’s *L’Amour de loin*, was scheduled for the 2016–2017 season). It is said, “Smyth’s music was seldom evaluated as simply the work of a composer among composers, but as that of a "woman composer," which worked to keep her on the margins of the profession, and, coupled with the double standard of sexual aesthetics, also placed her in a double bind: On the one hand, when she composed powerful, rhythmically vital music, it was said that her work lacked feminine charm; on the other, when she produced delicate, melodious compositions, she was accused of not measuring up to the artistic standards of her male colleagues.” Smyth was the first woman composer to receive an an Order of the Empire. Smyth died in Woking, England at age 86.

January 25, 1909

Richard Strauss’s *Elektra* premieres at the Dresden Hofoper.

*Elektra* (1909), took Richard Strauss’s use of dissonance even further, in particular with the *Elektra chord*. *Elektra* was the first opera in which Strauss collaborated with the poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal. The two subsequently worked together on numerous occasions. For his later works with Hofmannsthal, Strauss moderated his harmonic language: he used a more lush, melodic late-Romantic style based on Wagnerian chromatic harmonies that he had used in his tone poems, with much less dissonance, and exhibiting immense virtuosity in orchestral writing and tone color. This resulted in operas such as *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911) having great public success. Strauss continued to produce operas at regular intervals until 1942. With Hofmannsthal he created *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1912), *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (1919), *Die ägyptische Helena* (1928), and *Arabella* (1933). For *Intermezzo* (1924) Strauss provided his own libretto. *Die schweigsame Frau* (1935), was composed with Stefan Zweig as librettist; *Friedenstag* (1935–36) and *Daphne* (1937) both had a libretto by Joseph Gregor and Stefan Zweig; and *Die
Liebe der Danae (1940) was with Joseph Gregor. Strauss’s final opera, Capriccio (1942), had a libretto by Clemens Krauss, although the genesis for it came from Stefan Zweig and Joseph Gregor. He was born in 1864 and was a leading German composer of the late Romantic and early modern eras. He is known for his operas, which include Der Rosenkavalier, Elektra, Die Frau ohne Schatten and Salome; his Lieder, especially his Four Last Songs; his tone poems, including Don Juan, Death and Transfiguration, Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks, Also sprach Zarathustra, Ein Heldenleben, Symphonia Domestica, and An Alpine Symphony; and other instrumental works such as Metamorphosen and his Oboe Concerto.

January 26, 1911
Richard Strauss’s Der Rosenkavalier premières at the Königliches Opernhaus, Dresden.

Der Rosenkavalier (The Knight of the Rose or The Rose-Bearer), Op. 59, is a comic opera in three acts by Richard Strauss to an original German libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal. It is loosely adapted from the novel Les amours du chevalier de Faublas by Louvet de Couvrai and Molière’s comedy Monsieur de Pourceaugnac. It was first performed under the direction of Max Reinhardt, with Ernst von Schuch conducting. Though a comic opera, the work incorporates some weighty themes (particularly through the Marschallin’s character arc), including infidelity, aging, sexual predation, and selflessness (or the lack of it) in love. Until the premiere the working title was Ochs auf Lerchenau. (The choice of the name Ochs is not accidental, for in German “Ochs” means “ox,” which describes the character of the Baron throughout the opera.) The opera has four main characters: the aristocratic Marschallin; her very young lover, Count Octavian Rofrano; her brutish cousin Baron Ochs; and Ochs’ prospective fiancée, Sophie von Faninal, the daughter of a rich bourgeois. In the story, at the Marschallin’s suggestion, Octavian acts as Ochs’ Rosenkavalier by presenting a ceremonial silver rose to Sophie. This causes the young people fall in love on the spot, and soon devise a comic intrigue to extricate Sophie from her engagement. They accomplish this with help from the Marschallin, who then yields Octavian to the younger woman. Today, there are many recordings of the opera, and it is regularly performed. This opera was a favourite of the composer, and its glorious final trio was performed at a memorial service after his death.

June 12, 1917
Hans Erich Pfitzner’s opera, Palestrina, a fictional account of the Council of Trent and the composition of Palestrina’s Missa Papae Marcelli, premières at the Prinzregententheater, Munich, Germany.

Hans Erich Pfitzner (1869 - 1949) was a German composer and self-described anti-modernist. His best known work is the post-Romantic opera Palestrina, loosely based on the life of the sixteenth-century composer Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, who saves the art of contrapuntal music (polyphony) for the Church in the sixteenth century, through his composition of the Missa Papae Marcelli. The wider context is that of the European Reformation and the role of music in relation to it. The character of Cardinal Borromeo is depicted, and a General Congress of the Council of Trent is the centrepiece of Act II. Palestrina was Pfitzner’s most successful opera and is still regularly performed in
German-speaking countries, though revivals abroad are rarer. From the mid-1920s, his music increasingly fell in the shadow of Richard Strauss, and his opera, *Das Herz* (1932) was unsuccessful. During World War II, Pfitzner remained a peripheral figure in the musical life of the Third Reich, and his music was performed less frequently than in the late days of the Weimar Republic. Following long neglect, Pfitzner’s music began to reappear in opera houses, concert halls and recording studios during the 1990s, including a controversial performance of the *Covent Garden* production in Manhattan’s Lincoln Center in 1997.

**Charles Wakefield Cadman**

March 23, 1918

Charles Wakefield Cadman’s opera *Shanewis (The Robin Woman)* premieres at the Metropolitan Opera, New York and is performed for two concurrent seasons.

Charles Wakefield Cadman (1881 - 1946) was an American composer. For 40 years he worked closely with Nelle Richmond Eberhart, who wrote most of the texts to his songs, including *Four American Indian Songs*, as well as the librettos for his five operas, two of which were based on Indian themes. *Shanewis* is loosely based on the life of the Cherokee/Creek mezzo-soprano Tsianina Redfeather Blackstone, who advised Cadman on the work. Music for another opera, *The Land of Misty Waters* or *Da O Ma* (1912), which was completed, but never produced or published, was rejected by the Boston Opera Company, the White-Smith Music Publishing Company, and the Metropolitan Opera. Blackstone also collaborated on the libretto based on contemporary Native American issues for which she received no official credit. *Shanewis* was performed in 1924 in Denver and the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles in 1926. Blackstone also provided much of the semi-autobiographical elements for *Shanewis*, and, at the Denver performance, she performed the title role in her operatic debut. *Shanewis* was very popular in the 1920s, and other Cadman opera compositions are: *Da O Ma (The Land of the Misty Waters)* (1912); *The Garden of Mystery* (1925), after *Rappaccini’s Daughter*; *The Ghost of Lollypop Bay* (1926); *Lelawala* (1926); *A Witch of Salem* (1926); *The Belle of Havana* (1928); *South of Sonora* (1932); *The Willow Tree*, Radio Opera (1932); *Ramala*, a revision of *The Land of the Misty Waters* (unperformed). His opera *The Sunset Trail* (1922) was part of the touring repertoire of Vladimir Rosing’s American Opera Company.

May 24, 1918

Béla Bartók’s opera *Bluebeard’s Castle* premieres at the Royal Hungarian Opera House in Budapest.

Béla Bartók (1881 - 1945) was a Hungarian composer. In 1911 Bartók wrote his only opera, *Duke Bluebeard’s Castle*, an allegorical treatment of the legendary wife murderer with a score permeated by characteristics of traditional Hungarian folk songs, especially in the speechlike rhythms of the text setting. The technique is comparable to that used by the French composer Claude Debussy in his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902), and Bartók’s opera has other impressionistic qualities as well. The Hungarian conductor István Kertész believed that we should not relate this to the fairy tale on which it was based, but that Bluebeard was Bartók himself, and that it portrays his personal suffering and his reluctance to reveal the inner secrets of his soul, which are progressively invaded by Judith. In this way he can be seen as Everyman, although the composer himself was an intensely private man. Here the blood that pervades the story is the symbol of his suffering. A ballet, *The Wooden Prince* (1914–16), and a pantomime, *The Miraculous Mandarin* (1918–19), followed; thereafter he wrote no more for the stage.
May 24-8 1928

Healey Willan’s ballet-opera *L’Ordre du bon temps* (*The Order of Good Cheer*) premières at the CPR Festivals in Quebec City, Quebec, Canada.

Healey Willan (1880 - 1968) was a prolific English/Canadian composer. This opera is based on the theme revolving around sailors travelling to the New World and the Order of Good Cheer, which was founded by Samuel de Champlain at Port-Royal, Nova Scotia on November 14, 1606. The Order was originally chartered under the Royal auspices of the Jean de Biencourt de Poutrincourt et de Saint-Just and Pierre Dugua, Sieur de Mons, and the Order’s Charles Wilam Jefferys practices were established by the first Chief Steward Marc Lescarbot. In 1606, it was recorded that there were less than 70 men at Port-Royal, and Lescarbot states that, in total, about 50 Frenchmen, joined by Indians, participated in a welcoming home celebration for Poutrincourt as well as the first gathering of the Order. The guests of the Order likely sat at other tables, probably getting equally good dinners as the rest, but without being recognized as official members of the organization. Because of the small size of the community, it is likely that everyone at the settlement took part in the staging of "Le Théâtre de Neptune en la Nouvelle-France," written by Lescarbot, and is now believed to be the first theatrical performance in North America. Other operatic works by Willan include: *Prince Charlie and Flora* (1929); *The Ayrshire Ploughman* (?) *Maureen* [lost]; *Indian Christmas Play* [lost]; *Transit through Fire* (1942); written for Canadian Radio); and *Deirdre* (1946), also written for Canadian Radio and revised for stage in 1965. During his lifetime, Willan composed more than 800 works. In 1967, he also received an Order of Canada, the year it was established.

**Reception**

*The Order of Good Cheer*

*by Charles Willam Jeffery*

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December 14, 1925

Alban Maria Johannes Berg’s first opera, *Wozzeck*, with Erich Kleiber conducting premières at the Staatsoper (Berlin State Opera) in Germany.

Alban Berg (1885 – 1935) was an Austrian composer of the Second Viennese School. *Wozzeck* was composed between 1914 and 1922 and first performed in 1925. The opera is based on the drama *Woyzeck*, which was left incomplete by the German playwright Georg Büchner at his death. The plot depicts the everyday life of soldiers and the townspeople of a rural German-speaking town, and after he attended the first production in Vienna of Büchner’s play on 5 May 1914, he knew at once that he wanted to base an opera on it. From the fragments of unordered scenes left by Büchner, he selected fifteen to form a compact structure of three acts with five scenes each. He adapted the libretto himself, retaining "the essential character of the play, with its many short scenes, its abrupt and sometimes brutal language, and its stark, if haunted, realism...."

His compositional style combined Romantic lyricism with twelve-tone technique, and *Wozzeck*—perhaps the most frequently performed theatrical work in the atonal idiom—represents Berg’s first attempt to deal with social problems within the framework of opera. From numerous statements he made, it is evident that he intended this opera to portray far more than the
tragic fate of the protagonist: He wanted, in fact, to make it symbolic of human existence. It was composed between 1914 and 1922 and after 137 rehearsals, the Berlin performance was its first. Musically, its unity stems from large overall symmetries within which are set traditional forms (such as the passacaglia and sonata), excerpts in popular music style, dense chromaticism (use of notes not belonging to the composition's key), extreme atonality, and passing approaches to traditional tonality, all of which function to create a work of notable psychological and dramatic impact. Although it antedates Schoenberg's early 12-tone compositions, the opera also includes a theme using the 12 notes of the chromatic scale. Berg died aged 50 in Vienna, on Christmas Eve 1935, from blood poisoning apparently caused by an insect-sting-induced carbuncle on his back that occurred in November.

April 25, 1926
Puccini's final opera, *Turandot*, left incomplete at the composer's death and completed by Franco Alfano, premieres at La Scala under the baton of Toscanini, who stops the opera at the death of the slave Liù, where Puccini's own completed score ends.

Though Puccini's first interest in the subject was based on his reading of Friedrich Schiller's 1801 adaptation of the play, his work is most nearly based on the earlier text *Turandot* (1762) by Count Carlo Gozzi. The original story is based on one of the seven stories in the epic Haft Peykar (*The Seven Beauties*), a work of 12th-century Persian poet Nizami where Nizami aligned the seven stories with the seven days of the week, the seven colors and the seven corresponding planets. This particular opera tells the story of Tuesday, as told to King Bahram by his companion of the red dome, associated with Mars. In the very first line of this story, the protagonist is identified as a Russian princess. The name of the opera is based on Turandokht (daughter of Turan), which is a common name used in Persian poetry for Central Asian princesses. This opera's version of the story is set in China and involves Prince Calaf, who falls in love with the cold Princess Turandot and, to obtain permission to marry her, a suitor has to solve three riddles; any wrong answer results in death.

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August 31, 1928
Bertolt Brecht's and Kurt Weill's *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*) opens to great success at Berlin's Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in Germany.

Eugen Berthold Friedrich Brecht (1898 – 1956), known professionally as Bertolt Brecht, was a German theatre practitioner, playwright, and poet. *Die Dreigroschenoper* is a "play with music" by Bertolt Brecht, and is adapted from a translation by Elisabeth Hauptmann of John Gay's 18th-century English ballad opera, *The Beggar's Opera*, and four ballads by François Villon, with music by Kurt Weill. Although there is debate as to how much, if any, Hauptmann might have contributed to the text, Brecht is usually listed as sole author. This work offers a Socialist critique of the capitalist world. The title *Die Dreigroschenoper* was determined only a week before the opening; it had been previously announced as simply *The Beggar's Opera* (in English), with the subtitle "Die Luden-Oper" ("The Pimp's Opera"). Writing in 1929, Weill made the political and artistic intents of the work clear: With the *Dreigroschenoper*, he said, "we reach a public which either did not know us at all or thought us incapable of captivating listeners [...] Opera was founded as an aristocratic form of art [...] If the framework of opera is unable to withstand the impact of the age, then this framework must be destroyed.... In the *Dreigroschenoper*, reconstruction was possible insofar as here we had a chance of starting from scratch." Songs from *The Threepenny Opera* have been widely covered and become standards, most notably "Die Moritat von Mackie Messer" ("The Ballad of Mack the Knife")
Despite an initially poor reception, *Die Dreigroschenoper* became a great success, playing 400 times in the next two years following its premiere. The performance was a springboard for one of the best known interpreters of Brecht and Weill’s work, Lotte Lenya, who was married to Weill. Ironically, the production became a great favourite of Berlin’s "smart set" – Count Harry Kessler recorded in his diary meeting at the performance an ambassador and a director of the Dresdner Bank (and their wives), and concluded "One simply has to have been there." Critics did not fail to notice that Brecht had included the four Villon songs translated by Ammer. Brecht responded by saying that he had "a fundamental laxity in questions of literary property." By 1933, when Weill and Brecht were forced to leave Germany by the Nazi seizure of power, the play had been translated into 18 languages and been performed more than 10,000 times on European stages. It also became one of the longest-running musical shows in Broadway history.

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**February 23, 1928**

*Oedipus Rex* has its first performance in an unstaged production at the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt, Paris, France.

*Oedipus rex* is an "Opera-oratorio" after Sophocles by Igor Stravinsky, scored for orchestra, speaker, soloists, and male chorus. The libretto, based on Sophocles’s tragedy, was written by Jean Cocteau in French and then translated by Abbé Jean Daniélou into Latin; the narration, however, is performed in the language of the audience. Prior to the start of the tale regarding *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus has become the king of Thebes while unwittingly fulfilling a prophecy that he would kill his father, Laius (the previous king), and marry his mother, Jocasta (whom Oedipus took as his queen after solving the riddle of the Sphinx). The action of Sophocles’ play concerns Oedipus’ search for the murderer of Laius in order to end a plague ravaging Thebes, unaware that the killer he is looking for is none other than himself. At the end of the play, after the truth finally comes to light, Jocasta hangs herself while Oedipus, horrified at his patricide and incest, proceeds to gouge out his own eyes in despair. *Oedipus rex* was written towards the beginning of Stravinsky’s neoclassical period, and is considered one of the finest works from this phase of the composer’s career. He had considered setting the work in Ancient Greek, but decided ultimately on Latin: in his words "a medium not dead but turned to stone."

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**February 8, 1934**

Virgil Thomson’s *opera to be sung,* *Four Saints in Three Acts,* premieres in Hartford, CT.

Virgil Thomson (1896 – 1989) was an American composer and critic. He was instrumental in the development of the "American Sound" in classical music. He has been described as a modernist, a neoromantic, a neoclassicist, and a composer of "an Olympian blend of humanity and detachment" whose "expressive voice was always carefully muted" until his late opera *Lord Byron,* which, in contrast to all his previous work, exhibited an emotional content that rises to "moments of real passion". In 1927 he journeyed to Spain from France to collaborate with Gertrude Stein on their opera, *Four Saints in Three Acts,* which they completed in 1928. The opera premiered with an all-black cast in an extraordinary visual production with choreography by Frederick Ashton. *Four Saints in Three Acts* was written in 1927-8, contains about 20 saints, and is in at least four acts. It was ground breaking for form, content, and its all-black cast, with singers directed by Eva Jessye, a prominent black choral director, and supported by her choir. Thomson suggested the topic, and the libretto, as delivered, can be read in Stein’s collected works. The opera features two 16th-century Spanish saints—the former mercenary Ignatius of Loyola and the mystic Teresa of Avila—as well as their colleagues, real and imagined: St. Plan, St. Settlement, St. Plot, St. Chavez, etc. Thomson
Bess died from a malignant brain tumor July 11, 1937, when he was only 38 years old. In the years following his death, always been outside category.

work per se, and it wasn't a drama per se – it elicited response from both music and drama critics. But the work has sort of ambitious Broadway musical? 'It crossed the barriers, per se,' theater historian Robert Kimball said. 'It wasn't a musical figure out how to evaluate it. Was it opera, or was it simply an ambitious Broadway musical? 'It crossed the barriers, per se,' theater historian Robert Kimball said. 'It wasn't a musical

Porgy and Bess

therefore I wrote my own spirituals and folksongs. But they are still folk music – and therefore, and being in operatic form, Gershwin explained why he called Porgy and Bess a folk opera: “Its people naturally would sing folk music. When I first began work in the music, I decided against the use of original folk material because I wanted the music to be all of one piece. Crown, her violent and possessive lover, and Sportin’ Life, her drug dealer. The opera plot generally follows the stage play. It was adapted from Dorothy Heyward and DuBose Heyward’s play Porgy, itself an adaptation of DuBose Heyward’s 1925 novel of the same name. It featured a cast of classically trained African-American singers—a daring artistic choice at the time. After suffering from an initially unpopular public reception due in part to its racially charged theme, a 1976 Houston Grand Opera production gained it new popularity, and it is now one of the best-known and most frequently performed operas. Gershwin had read Porgy in 1926 and proposed to Heyward to collaborate on an operatic version. In 1934, Gershwin and Heyward began work on the project by visiting the author’s native Charleston, South Carolina. In a 1935 New York Times article, Gershwin explained why he called Porgy and Bess a folk opera: “Its people naturally would sing folk music. When I first began work in the music, I decided against the use of original folk material because I wanted the music to be all of one piece. Therefore I wrote my own spirituals and folksongs. But they are still folk music – and therefore, and being in operatic form, Porgy and Bess becomes a folk opera.” From the very beginning, this composition was considered another American classic by the composer of ‘Rhapsody in Blue’ — even if critics couldn’t quite figure out how to evaluate it. Was it opera, or was it simply an ambitious Broadway musical? ‘It crossed the barriers, per se,’ theater historian Robert Kimball said. ‘It wasn’t a musical work per se, and it wasn’t a drama per se – it elicited response from both music and drama critics. But the work has sort of always been outside category.” After the commercial failure of Porgy and Bess, Gershwin moved to Hollywood, California. He died from a malignant brain tumor July 11, 1937, when he was only 38 years old. In the years following his death, Porgy and Bess was adapted for smaller-scale performances, and it was adapted as a film in 1959. Some of the songs in the opera, such as “Summertime” became popular, became frequently recorded songs, and live on in history.

Alban Maria Johannes Berg

June 2, 1937

Alban Maria Johannes Berg’s opera, Lulu, premiers at the Stadttheater in Zürich, Switzerland.

His three-act opera Lulu was composed from 1929 to 1935 and premiered incomplete in 1937. The German-language libretto was adapted by Berg himself from Frank Wedekind’s two Lulu plays, Erdgeist (Earth Spirit, 1895) and Die Büchse der Pandora (Pandora’s Box, 1904). Berg died before completing the third and final act, and, in the following decades, the opera was typically performed incomplete. Many people found Lulu very shocking because the story is very decadent. There is a lot of blood, murder, sex and violence in it. Also: Berg’s music was quite difficult to understand. He uses twelve tone music, which is not in any particular key, although he uses it to make a style of music which is often very Romantic and expressive.
March 1, 1950

Gian Carlo Menotti’s first full-length opera, *The Consul*, has its first performance at the Schubert Theatre in Philadelphia. A second premiere follows two weeks later at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre in New York City, USA.

Gian Carlo Menotti (1911 – 2007) was an Italian-American composer and librettist. Although he often referred to himself as an American composer, he kept his Italian citizenship. *The Consul* is an opera in three acts, with music and libretto by Menotti. Its plot is easily understood by many: John Sorel is a freedom fighter (or “hooligan” if you own shares in a State enterprise) who must flee his unnamed country in that he is wanted by the secret police. Before he makes a run for the border he tells his wife Magda that she must go to the consulate of an also unnamed country and speak to The Consul, who will not turn a deaf ear to her pleas. The secret police arrive and make less than delicate inquiries of Magda, John’s mother (or is it her mother? the libretto has it both ways) and much is made of the sickly nature of the Sorel infant (foreshadowing!). So Magda heads off to the consulate where, like the beginning of the movie “Casablanca,” she waits. And waits. And waits. “I must see the consul.” “You cannot see the consul, the consul is busy.” Needless to say, the child dies, Magda is driven to suicide. The mother disappears. John is captured by the secret police, and all the while the secretary stamps endless papers, the “Thunk!” of the stamp on the document doing a creditable imitation of the sound of the guillotine at the end of Andrea Chenier...or The Dialogues of the Carmelites. Menotti won both a Pulitzer Prize and the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for Musical Play of the Year (the latter in 1954) for *The Consul* (1950) and for *The Saint of Bleecker Street* (1955). He wrote the classic Christmas opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, along with over two dozen other operas intended to appeal to popular taste. He founded the noted *Festival dei Due Mondi* (Festival of the Two Worlds) in Spoleto in 1958 and its American counterpart, *Spoleto Festival USA*, in 1977. In 1986, he commenced a *Melbourne Spoleto Festival* in Australia, but he withdrew after three years. It was at Curtis in the US that Menotti wrote his first mature opera, *Amelia Goes to the Ball* (*Amelia al Ballo*), to his own Italian text. *The Island God* (which he suppressed, though its libretto was printed by the Metropolitan Opera and can be found in many libraries) and *The Last Savage* were the only other operas he wrote in Italian, the rest being in English. His most successful works were composed in the 1940s and 1950s. He wrote the libretti for two of Samuel Barber’s operas, *Vanessa* and *A Hand of Bridge*, as well as revising the libretto for *Antony and Cleopatra*. *Amelia al Ballo* is the only one of Menotti’s operas still to be published in its original or perhaps “complementary” Italian libretto (alongside the English) (see Ricordi editions 1937, 1976 and recent): it is an example of the traditional Italianate style (with a nod to, but not an imitation of, Puccini and notably Mascagni), who at the time (1936) had had his last opera (*Nerone*) performed. Its success prompted NBC to commission an opera specifically for radio, *The Old Maid and the Thief*, one of the first such works. Following this, he wrote a ballet, *Sebastian* (1944), and a piano concerto (1945) before returning to opera with *The Medium* and *The Telephone, or L’Amour à trois*. He died on February 1, 2007 at the age of 95 in a hospital in Monte Carlo, Monaco, where he had a home. He was buried in East Lothian, Scotland.

*By Hans Wild*

June 7, 1945

**Edward Benjamin Britten’s opera, Peter Grimes, conducted by Reginald Goodall**

Premieres at London’s Sadler’s Wells in England.

**Baron Britten of Aldeburgh** (1913 – 1976) was an English composer, conductor and pianist. He was a central figure of 20th-century British classical music, with a range of works including opera, other vocal music, orchestral and chamber pieces. His best-known works include the opera *Peter Grimes* (1945), the *War Requiem* (1962) and the orchestral showpiece *The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra* (1945). *Peter Grimes* is an opera with a libretto adapted by Montagu Slater from the narrative poem, ”Peter Grimes,” in George Crabbe’s book *The Borough*. The "borough" of the opera is a fictional village which shares some similarities with Crabbe’s, and later Britten’s, own home of Aldeburgh, a town on England’s east coast. The work has been called "a powerful allegory of homosexual oppression", and one of "the true operatic masterpieces of the 20th century". but the composer’s own contemporary (1948) summation of the
work was simpler: (Grimes) is a subject very close to my heart—the struggle of the individual against the masses. The more vicious the society, the more vicious the individual. The opera was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Music Foundations and was "dedicated to the memory of Natalie Koussevitzky", wife of the Russian-born American conductor Serge Koussevitzky. Britten's most frequent and important muse was his personal and professional partner, the tenor Peter Pears; others included Kathleen Ferrier, Jennifer Vyvyan, Janet Baker, Dennis Brain, Julian Bream, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Mstislav Rostropovich. Though, as the writing of the libretto progressed, certain versions showed Grimes' relations with his apprentice to be bordering on paederastic, Pears persuaded Slater to cut the questionable stanzas from the final version. Grimes was Britten's first critical and popular success and is still widely performed, both in the UK and internationally today. Other works are: Billy Budd (1951), Gloriana (1953), A Midsummer Night's Dream (1960) and Death in Venice (1973). Of the remaining operas, The Rape of Lucretia (1946), Albert Herring (1947), The Little Sweep (1949) and The Turn of the Screw (1954) were written for small opera companies. Noye's Fludde (1958), Curlew River (1964), The Burning Fiery Furnace (1966) and The Prodigal Son (1968) were for church performance, and had their premieres at St Bartholomew's Church, Oxford. The secular The Golden Vanity was intended to be performed in schools, and Owen Wingrave, written for television, was first presented live by the Royal Opera at Covent Garden in 1973, two years after its broadcast premiere.

April 20, 1946
Healey Willan's opera Deirdre is aired on CBC, Canada.

Deirdre is an opera in three acts, for nine soloists, chorus, and full orchestra. The music, was composed 1943-5, by Healey Willan, with the text by John Coulter. The first full-length opera commissioned by the CBC, and it was premiered on radio as Deirdre of the Sorrows, conducted by Ettore Mazzoleni and with Frances James as Deirdre. Drawn from an Irish saga of the Red Branch Knights of Ulster in the druidic era, the story tells of the doom of the ruthless Conochar, King of Ullah (Ulster), and the tragic death of Naisi and his brothers, the Princes of Ullah, as a result of the rivalry between Conochar and Naisi for the love of the foundling Deirdre. Since much of the original text was devoted to the description of action required by radio, revisions for stage trimmed the material extensively. Willan wrote in his customary late 19th-century harmonic idiom, creating a rich polyphonic texture that is effective on radio though problematic in the theatre, where it can overwhelm the singers. Dramatically and musically Deirdre is a Wagnerian opera, yet with a character distinctively its own. The libretto (Toronto 1944, revised 1965) and a vocal score (Berandol 1972) have been published, and this opera was produced by the Canadian Opera Company (COC), with Zarou as Deirdre. A preliminary version, Conochar’s Queen, had been written by Willan as incidental music for a radio play by Coulter in 1941. A shortened version of the opera was performed on CBC Radio by the CBC Opera Company in 1951, conducted by Geoffrey Waddington and with James as Deirdre. A revision for stage was given 2 Apr 1965 by the Royal Conservatory Opera School (University of Toronto Opera Division) at the MacMillan Theatre with Jeannette Zarou and Lillian Sukis alternating in the title role.

September 11, 1951
Igor Stravinsky’s The Rake’s Progress premieres at Teatro La Fenice, Venice.

The Rake’s Progress is an English-language opera in three acts and an epilogue by Igor Stravinsky. The libretto, written by W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman, is based loosely on the eight paintings and engravings A Rake’s Progress (1733–1735) of William Hogarth, which Stravinsky had seen on 2 May 1947, in a Chicago exhibition. The story concerns the decline and fall of one Tom Rakewell, who deserts Anne Trulove for the delights of London in the company of Nick Shadow, who turns out to be the Devil. After several misadventures, all initiated by the devious Shadow, Tom ends up in Bedlam, a hospital for the ‘insane’ at that time situated in the City of London. The moral of the tale is: "For idle hearts and hands and minds the Devil finds work to do."
**Benjamin Britten’s Gloriana, an opera about Elizabeth I of England, commissioned to celebrate the coronation of Elizabeth II, has its premiere at The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.**

Gloriana, Op. 53, is an opera in three acts to an English libretto by William Plomer, based on Lytton Strachey’s 1928 Elizabeth and Essex: A Tragic History. The first performance was presented during the celebrations of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, and ‘Gloriana’ was the name given by the 16th-century poet Edmund Spenser to his character representing Queen Elizabeth I in his poem *The Faerie Queene*. It became a popular name following Queen Elizabeth I’s birth, and it is also recorded that the troops at Tilbury hailed her with cries of “Gloriana, Gloriana, Gloriana”, after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Gloriana depicts the relationship between Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Essex, and, at its first premiere, several in the audience at its gala opening were disappointed by the opera: a representation of the first Elizabeth as being a sympathetic, but flawed, character motivated largely by vanity and desire. The premiere was one of Britten’s few critical failures, and the opera was not included in the series of complete Decca recordings conducted by the composer. However, a symphonic suite extracted from the opera by the composer (Opus 53a), which includes the Courtly Dances, is often performed as a concert piece. After the 1976 Aldeburgh Festival which he attended, he and long-time friend Peter Pears travelled to Norway, where Britten began writing *Praise We Great Men*, for voices and orchestra based on a poem by Edith Sitwell. In November, when he realised that he could no longer compose, he gave him what he had written for this composition to Russian composer Rostropovich. Britten died of congestive heart failure on 4 December 1976. His funeral service was held at Aldeburgh Parish Church three days later, and he was buried in its churchyard, with a gravestone carved by Reynolds Stone. The authorities at Westminster Abbey had offered burial there, but Britten had made it clear that he wished his grave to be side by side, in due course, with Pears’. A memorial service was held at the Abbey on 10 March 1977, however, with the congregation headed by Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother.

**Sergeyemyevich Prokofiev (April 1891 – 1953)** was a Russian Soviet composer, pianist and conductor. As the creator of acknowledged masterpieces across numerous musical genres, he is regarded as one of the major composers of the 20th century. The Fiery Angel was based on Valery Bryusov’s novel of the same name. The novel was inspired by Bryusov’s own experiences with one Nina Petrovskaya, and was considered one of the beginnings of the Russian Symbolist movement known as Vesy, or “The Scales.” Originally, the opera was in three acts and eleven scenes, but was eventually reorganized into five acts and seven scenes. The novel was first serialized in the Russian literary monthly Vesy in 1907–08, and then published in a book form (in two volumes) in 1908. Set in sixteenth-century Germany, the story depicts a love triangle between Renata, a passionate young woman, Ruprecht, a knight and Madiel, the fiery Angel. The novel tells the story of Ruprecht’s attempts to win the love of Renata whose spiritual integrity is seriously undermined by her participation in occult practices. This love triangle is now recognised to be that which existed between the author, Bryusov, the symbolist novelist Andrei Bely and their shared lover, the nineteen-year-old Nina Petrovskaya. The novel is a meticulous account of sixteenth-century Germany, notably Cologne and the world of the occult. Characters such as Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa and Faust appear alongside a description of a Black Mass. The novel was the prime source of inspiration for the work and was also the basis for the libretto of Prokofiev’s opera, which Prokofiev himself wrote with the help of Demchinsky. His other works include such widely-heard-of-works as the *The Love for Three Oranges*, the suite *Lieutenant Kijé*, the ballet *Romeo and Juliet*—from which
“Dance of the Knights” is taken—and *Peter and the Wolf*. Of the established forms and genres in which he worked, he created—excluding juvenilia—seven completed operas, seven symphonies, eight ballets, five piano concertos, two violin concertos, a cello concerto, a symphony-concerto for cello and orchestra, and nine completed piano sonatas. The Nazi invasion of the USSR spurred him to compose his most ambitious work, an operatic version of Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. In 1948, Prokofiev was attacked for producing “anti-democratic formalism,” nevertheless, he enjoyed personal and artistic support from a new generation of Russian performers, notably Sviatoslav Richter and Mstislav Rostropovich: he wrote his ninth piano sonata for the former and his Symphony-Concerto for the latter. Over time, it has been suggested that *The Fiery Angel* may have been one of Prokofiev's largest challenges, since the writing, production, and location were all factors in the piece's progress. He died at the age of 61 of what may have been a cerebral hemorrhage.

Michael Tippett

**May 29, 1962**

*Michael Tippett's opera King Priam premières at the Coventry Festival celebrating the consecration of the new Coventry Cathedral in England.*

*Sir Michael Kemp Tippett* (1905 – 1998) was an English composer who rose to prominence during and immediately after the Second World War. In his lifetime, he was sometimes ranked with his contemporary Benjamin Britten as one of the leading British composers of the 20th century. *King Priam* is based on Homer's *Iliad*, except for the birth and childhood of Paris, which are taken from the *Fabulae* of Hyginus, and Tippett also wrote the libretto. The opera was composed for the arts festival held in conjunction with the reconsecration of the rebuilt Coventry Cathedral, for which Benjamin Britten also wrote his *War Requiem*, which was first performed in the Cathedral the day after the premiere of *King Priam*. This opera next premiered in Germany at the *Badisches Staatstheater* in 1963, at the 1985 Athens Festival, in France at the *Opéra de Nancy et de Lorraine* in 1988, in Italy at *Batignano* in 1990, and in the United States San Francisco Opera Center Showcase in 1994. In 2014, the work was again revived by English Touring Opera, with a reduced orchestration by Iain Farrington, the first performance of this version being given at the Linbury Studio Theatre at the Royal Opera House on 13 February 2014. Among Tippett's best-known works are the oratorio *A Child of Our Time*, the orchestral *Fantasia Concertante on a Theme of Corelli*, and the opera *The Midsummer Marriage*. In 1933, Tippett also arranged the staging of a shortened version of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, with locals playing the main parts, and the following year he provided the music for a new folk opera, *Robin Hood*, with words by Ayerst, himself and Ruth Pennyman. Both works proved hugely popular with their audiences, and, although most of the music has disappeared, some of *Robin Hood* was revived by Tippett for use in his *Birthday Suite for Prince Charles of 1948*.

Harry Somers

**September 23, 1967**

*Harry Stewart Somers’ best known operatic work Louis Riel premières at the O’Keefe Centre in Toronto, Canada.*

*Harry Somers* (1925 – 1999) was one of the most influential and innovative contemporary Canadian composers of the past century. *Louis Riel* is an opera in three acts, and was written for the 1967 Canadian centennial. It concerns the controversial Métis leader *Louis Riel*, who was executed in 1885, and is one of Somers' biggest pieces. It is also arguably one of Canada's most famous operas. Somers set the music to an English and French libretto by *Mavor Moore* and Jacques Languirand. It was commissioned by the Floyd S. Chalmers Foundation and produced by the Canadian Opera Company with financial assistance from the Canadian Centennial Commission, the Canada Council, and the Province of Ontario Council for the Arts (Ontario Arts Council). His other operatic and vocal works include: *The Fool*, a one-act chamber opera (1953); *Twelve Miniatures* (1964); *Evocations* (1966); *Crucifixion* (1966);
Voiceplay (1971); and Kyrie (1971). He was also a founding member of the Canadian League of Composers (CLC), and, as such, was involved in the formation of other Canadian music organizations, including the Canada Council for the Arts and the Canadian Music Centre. By the time he reached the 1990s, Somers had indisputably cemented his reputation as one of the greatest composers Canada had ever produced. As such, he was permitted to be more selective of who he chose to compose for in his old age and showed preference for his favourite artists.

Raymond Pannell

1976

Raymond Pannell's The Luck of Ginger Coffee is performed.

Raymond Pannell (1935 - 2016) was a Canadian composer, pianist, writer who began playing the piano at age five. His first opera ‘Aria Da Capo’ was performed by the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto followed by The Luck of Ginger Coffey, which was commissioned and produced by the Canadian Opera Company for Canada’s centennial. This opera, which also became a movie, reflects the influence of US composers such as Bernstein, Copland, and Harris, and Pannell stated that, 'It came from a different musical culture, from the States, where my influences were and the piece reflected that, and that the deliberate juxtaposition in this work of jazz, serial and popular song elements brings together a number of sound environments to musically represent the different kinds of modalities in which people thought'. This juxtaposition of styles has been viewed by critics as 'eclecticism'. The Luck of Ginger Coffey is Pannell’s last traditional opera, and its plot sees James "Ginger" Coffey (Robert Shaw), an unemployed Irishman, whose nickname stems from his red hair and mustache, moving his family to Montreal in hopes of finding work. He has trouble getting a job, until a friend helps him land a lowly position at a newspaper. Because of his poor prospects, his wife (Mary Ure) leaves him, taking their daughter with her. Ginger works at becoming a reporter to win back his wife and impress his daughter, but booze and brawling distract him from his goal. But, in the end, she recognizes his love for her, and they reunite.

Charles Wilson

1972

Charles Mills Wilson's operas Héloïse and Abelard is commissioned by the Canadian Opera Company to mark its 25 anniversary.

Charles Mills Wilson (1931-) was born in Toronto, Canada. He began studying piano at age six with Wilfred Powell and later studied organ with Charles Peaker. He studied composition with Godfrey Ridout at the University of Toronto, earning a Bachelor of Music in 1952 and a Doctor of Music degree in Composition in 1956. As a composer, Wilson is known for employing a range of musical idioms while maintaining a strong emotional lyricism and sense of tonality. His early compositions were primarily instrumental chamber music, while his latter output has been more focused on vocal music including operas, choral works, and art songs. He has written one oratorio, The Angels of the Earth (1966) and several operas: Psycho Red (1977) a full-length opera with libretto by Eugene Benson commissioned for the 1978 Guelph Spring Festival; The Selfish Giant (1973), based on one of five stories in Oscar Wild’s collection, The Happy Prince and Other Tales.

Plate illustration: The Selfish Giant (1888)
By Walter Crane (1845-1915)
July 25, 1976
Philip Glass's first opera, *Einstein on the Beach*, premières at the Avignon Festival, in France.

Philip Glass (1937 - ) was born in Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A. He developed his appreciation of music from his father, discovering later his father’s side of the family had many musicians. His cousin Cevia was a classical pianist, while others had been in vaudeville. He also learned his family was related to Al Jolson. Philip Glass’s *Einstein on the Beach* is an opera in four acts (framed and connected by five “knee plays” or intermezzi), composed by Philip Glass and directed by theatrical producer Robert Wilson. The work became the first in Glass’s thematically-related Portrait Trilogy, along with *Satyagraha* (1979), and *Akhnaten* (1983). These three operas were described by Glass as ‘portraits of people whose personal vision transformed the thinking of their times through the power of ideas rather than by military force,’ and the opera eschews traditional narrative in favor of a formalist approach based on structured spaces laid out by Wilson in a series of storyboards. The music was written “in the spring, summer and fall of 1975”. Glass recounts the collaborative process: “I put [Wilson’s notebook of sketches] on the piano and composed each section like a portrait of the drawing before me. The score was begun in the spring of 1975 and completed by the following November, and those drawings were before me all the time.” The premiere took place on July 25, 1976, at the Avignon Festival in France. The opera contains writings by Christopher Knowles, Samuel M. Johnson and Lucinda Childs. It is Glass’s first and longest opera score, taking approximately five hours in full performance without intermission; given the length, the audience is permitted to enter and leave as desired. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Glass’s projects also included two highly prestigious opera commissions based on the life of explorers: *The Voyage* (1992), with a libretto by David Henry Hwang, was commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera for the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus; and *White Raven* (1991), about Vasco da Gama, a collaboration with Robert Wilson and composed for the closure of the 1998 World Fair in Lisbon. Especially in *The Voyage*, the composer "explore[d] new territory", with its "newly arching lyricism", "Sibelian starkness and sweep", and "dark, brooding tone (...) a reflection of its increasingly chromatic (and dissonant) palette", as one commentator put it: Glass’s prolific output in the 1990s continued to include operas with an opera triptych (1991–1996), which the composer described as an "homage" to writer and film director Jean Cocteau, based on his prose and cinematic work: *Orphée* (1949), *La Belle et la Bête* (1946), and the novel *Les Enfants Terribles* (1929, later made into a film by Cocteau and Jean-Pierre Melville, 1950). In the same way the triptych is also a musical homage to the work of the group of French composers associated with Cocteau, Les Six (and especially to Glass’s teacher Darius Milhaud), as well as to various 18th-century composers such as Gluck and Bach whose music featured as an essential part of the films by Cocteau. The inspiration of the first part of the trilogy, *Orphée* (composed in 1991, and premiered in 1993 at the American Repertory Theatre) can be conceptually and musically traced to Gluck’s opera *Orfeo ed Euridice* (*Orphée et Euridice, 1762/1774*), which had a prominent part in Cocteau’s 1949 film *Orphée*. One theme of the opera, the death of *Eurydice*, has some similarity to the composer’s personal life: the opera was composed after the unexpected death in 1991 of Glass’s wife, artist Candy Jernigan: “(...) One can only suspect that Orpheus’ grief must have resembled the composer’s own”, K. Robert Schwartz suggests. The opera’s "transparency of texture, a subtlety of instrumental color, (...) a newly expressive and unfettered vocal writing" was praised, and The Guardian’s critic remarked “Glass has a real affinity for the French text and sets the words eloquently, underpinning them with delicately patterned instrumental textures”. For the second opera, *La Belle et la Bête* (1994, scored for either the Philip Glass Ensemble or a more conventional chamber orchestra), Glass replaced the soundtrack (including Georges Auric’s film music) of Cocteau’s film, wrote "a new fully operatic score and synchronize[d] it with the film". The final part of the triptych returned again to a more traditional setting with the "Dance Opera" *Les Enfants Terribles* (1996), scored for voices, three pianos and dancers, with choreography by Susan Marshall. The characters are depicted by both singers and dancers. The scoring of the opera evokes Bach’s *Concerto for Four Harpsichords*, but in another way also “the snow, which falls relentlessly throughout the opera (...) bearing witness to the unfolding events. Here time stands still. There is only music, and the movement of children through space” (Glass). Besides writing for the concert hall, Glass continued his ongoing operatic series with adaptions from literary texts: *The Marriages of Zones 3, 4 and 5* ([1997] story-libretto by Doris Lessing), *In the Penal Colony* (2000), after the story by Franz Kafka), and the chamber opera *The Sound of a Voice* (2003), with David Henry Hwang, which features the *Pipa*, performed by Wu Man at its premiere. Glass also collaborated again with the co-author of *Einstein on the Beach*, Robert Wilson, on *Monsters of Grace* (1998), and created a biographic opera *on the life of astronomer Galileo Galilei* (2001).

Philip Glass, Florence (1963)
Author: Pasquale Salano
September 6, 1977
Thea Musgrave’s opera *Mary Queen of Scots* premieres at the King’s Theatre in Edinburgh, Scotland.
Thea Musgrave (1928 - ) is a Scottish composer of opera and classical music. She has lived in the United States since 1972. In the 1960s, she continued to compose chamber works and vocal pieces, but also turned to larger works, culminating in the three-act opera *The Decision* (first performed 1967), a drama on the ordeal of a trapped miner told in abstract instrumental terms. She has written more than a dozen operas and other music theatre works, many taking a historical figure as their central character, among them *Mary Queen of Scots* (1977), *Harriet Tubman* (Harriet, the Woman called Moses, (1984)), *Simón Bolívar* (1993) (premiere 1995 at the Virginia Opera), and *Pontalba* (2003). In 2008, her 80th birthday was marked by premieres of *Points of View*, *Green*, *Cantilena*, *Taking Turns* and other performances. In 2018, coinciding with Musgrave’s 90th birthday, her compositions were performed at the Edinburgh International Festival and the BBC Proms. Her opera, *Mary, Queen of Scots*, is an opera in three acts, and Musgrave also wrote the libretto based on Amalia Elguera’s play *Moray*. It focuses on events in the life of *Mary, Queen of Scots*, from her return to Scotland in 1561 until 1568 when she was forced to flee to England. The opera was first performed by the Scottish Opera, and subsequently has had multiple performances in the UK, US, and Germany. In response to a question once asked by Tom Service for the BBC about Musgrave’s view of being a ‘woman composer’ she replied, “Yes I am a woman, and I am a composer. But rarely at the same time”. To a later question, she admitted that pursuing music can be a difficult career, and then, when asked by the BBC to offer advice to young composers, she replied, "Don’t do it, unless you have to. And if you do, enjoy every minute of it.”

March 6, 1985
Judith Weir’s opera *The Black Spider* premieres in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral, UK.
Judith Weir (1954 - ) was born in Cambridge, England, to Scottish parents. Her first stage work, *The Black Spider*, was a three-act opera, loosely based on the 1842 novella *Die schwarze Spinne* by Jeremias Gotthelf, with Weir providing the libretto herself. The opera exploits the collision of two plots and switches back and forth between a Polish legend of the Middle Ages and a contemporary newspaper cutting about a curse on the opening of a tomb in Cracow Cathedral: Villagers oppressed by a wicked landlord are given the task of carrying an entire beech forest to the mountain-top where he lives. A strange green man appears and says he will undertake the task provided the village girl, Christina, weds him. Christina is planning to marry Carl, but believes that she can fix the matter later. The little green man fulfills his pledge as agreed, but Christina naturally breaks her word, wedding Carl. At the ceremony a spider crawls out from her hand, and this then proceeds to cause a plague in the village. Finally the disaster is stopped when Christina catches the spider and buries it in a grave outside the church. In the modern story, excavations are taking place at the tomb of Casimir IV, in Wawel Cathedral, Cracow. More and more archaeologists are affected by a deadly virus with no clue to why it is happening. The opera lasts around one hour and a quarter, and Weir, herself, described the opera’s tone as “somewhere between a video nasty and an Ealing comedy”. In 2014, Weir became the first woman master of Queen’s music, a position that has existed since 1625.
Sir Harrison Birtwistle's *Mask of Orpheus* premieres at the London Coliseum, UK.

Harrison Birtwistle (1934 - ) is a British composer. He was born in Accrington, a mill town in Lancashire some 20 miles north of Manchester. His interest in music was encouraged by his mother, who bought him a clarinet when he was seven, and arranged for him to have lessons with the local bandmaster. He became proficient enough to play in the local military-style band, and also played in the orchestra that accompanied Gilbert and Sullivan productions and the local choral society's performances of Messiah. Birtwistle composed from around this time, later describing his early pieces as "sub Vaughan Williams". *The Mask of Orpheus* is an opera with music by Harrison Birtwistle and a libretto by Peter Zinovieff. It was premiered in London at the English National Opera on 21 May 1986 to great critical acclaim. A recorded version conducted by Andrew Davis and Martyn Brabbins has also received good reviews. The work is around three hours long. The structure of the opera's plot is complex. Rather than telling a story by starting at A and going through B to C, *The Mask of Orpheus* explores the Orpheus myth in a number of directions at once, examining the various contradictions which are in the various versions of the myth. This is done by a very elaborate stage design, whereby the stage is divided into a number of different areas, each containing its own part of the action. In addition, each of the major characters – Orpheus, Euridice and Aristaeus – appear in three forms: as a singer who represents their human forms; as a mime, representing their heroic selves; and as a puppet, representing their myths. Also, individual events may occur within the opera on several occasions, as they are being predicted, as they happen, and as they are being remembered. An example of this process in action is the seduction of Euridice by Aristaeus. When first seen in Act I, this event is shown simultaneously in two different versions: in one, Euridice is raped by Aristaeus before dying; in the other she is not. Later, in Act II, Orpheus remembers this event, but now it is Orpheus, not Aristaeus, who is seducing Euridice before her death.

Andrew Davis and Martyn Brabbins has also received good reviews. The work is around three hours long. The structure of the opera's plot is complex. Rather than telling a story by starting at A and going through B to C, *The Mask of Orpheus* explores the Orpheus myth in a number of directions at once, examining the various contradictions which are in the various versions of the myth. This is done by a very elaborate stage design, whereby the stage is divided into a number of different areas, each containing its own part of the action. In addition, each of the major characters – Orpheus, Euridice and Aristaeus – appear in three forms: as a singer who represents their human forms; as a mime, representing their heroic selves; and as a puppet, representing their myths. Also, individual events may occur within the opera on several occasions, as they are being predicted, as they happen, and as they are being remembered. An example of this process in action is the seduction of Euridice by Aristaeus. When first seen in Act I, this event is shown simultaneously in two different versions: in one, Euridice is raped by Aristaeus before dying; in the other she is not. Later, in Act II, Orpheus remembers this event, but now it is Orpheus, not Aristaeus, who is seducing Euridice before her death.

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John Coolidge Adam

**October 22, 1987**

John Coolidge Adam's first opera *Nixon in China*, a treatment of the US President's 1972 meeting with Chairman Mao, premieres at the Houston Grand Opera in Houston, TX, USA.

John Adams (1947 - ) is an American composer, clarinetist, and conductor of classical music and opera, with strong roots in minimalism. *Nixon in China* is an opera in three acts, with a libretto by Alice Goodman, and inspired by U.S. President Richard Nixon's visit to China in 1972. As Adams worked on the opera, he came to see Nixon, whom he had once intensely disliked, as an "interesting character", a complicated individual who sometimes showed emotion in public. He also wanted Mao to be "the Mao of the huge posters and Great Leap Forward so he cast him as a heldentenor" (a powerful tenor voice suitable for heros in opera). Mao's wife, on the other hand, was to be "not just a shrieking coloratura, but also someone who in the opera's final act can reveal her private fantasies, her erotic desires, and even a certain tragic awareness. And Nixon, himself, he saw as a sort of Simon Boccanegra, a self-doubting, lyrical, at times self-pitying melancholy baritone." The most critically divisive pieces in Adams's collection are his historical operas, and, at first release, *Nixon in China* received mostly
Kaija Saariaho’s opera *L’Amour de loin* (Love from Afar) premieres at the Salzburg Festival in Austria.

Kaija Saariaho (1952 - ) was born in Helsinki, Finland. She studied at the Sibelius Academy under Paavo Heininen. After attending the Darmstadt Summer Courses, she moved to Germany to study at the Hochschule für Musik Freiburg under Brian Ferneyhough and Klaus Huber. She found her teachers’ emphasis on strict serialism and mathematical structures stifling, saying in an interview: “You were not allowed to have pulse, or tonally oriented harmonies, or melodies. I don’t want to write music through negations. Everything is permissible as long as it’s done in good taste.” *L’Amour de loin* is an opera in five acts with music by Kaija Saariaho and a French-language libretto by Amin Maalouf. Saariaho, living in Paris since 1982, had become familiar in 1993 with *La vida breve* by one of the first great 12th-century troubadours, Jaufré Rudel. She did not think she was capable of writing an opera until she saw Peter Sellars’s staging of Messiaen’s opera, *Saint-François d’Assise*, at the 1992 Salzburg Festival and thought: “If that is an opera, then I can write one”. Her idea for the opera evolved over the following seven or eight years. She first set a Jaufré poem to music in *Lonh* (1996) for soprano and electronic instruments. The sensibilities and backgrounds of both Maalouf, a Lebanese-French author and journalist also living in Paris, and Saariaho – both voluntary exiles – brought them together to turn “a seemingly simple story into a complex story very simply told...[and with] the straightforward trajectory of its plot, *L’Amour de loin* turns anxiously around deeper themes — obsession and devotion, reality and illusion, the loneliness of the artist, the need to belong”. Having secured an advance commitment from Salzburg Festival director Gerard Mortier to stage the opera, Saariaho began *L’Amour de loin* in 1999. The SWR Sinfonieorchester Baden-Baden-Freiburg, an ensemble well known for its excellence in contemporary music, was also on board. *L’Amour de loin* received the 2003 Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition. The Festival d’Opéra de Québec staged the opera, directed by Robert Lepage, during its Summer 2015 season. On 1 December 2016, the Metropolitan Opera gave its first performance of *L’Amour de loin*, the first opera by a female composer to be staged by the company since 1903, and the second opera by a female composer ever to be presented at the Metropolitan Opera. The subsequent transmission of the opera to cinema on 10 December 2016 as part of the Metropolitan Opera Live in HD series marked the first opera by a female composer, and the first opera conducted by a female conductor (Susanna Mälkki), in the series.
Andrew Paul MacDonald's opera *Mary's Wedding* premieres at Pacific Opera Victoria, Victoria, BC.

Andrew Paul MacDonald (1958 - ) is a Canadian classical composer, guitarist, conductor and music educator. His opera *Mary's Wedding*, with libretto by Stephen Massicotte based on Massicotte's play of the same name is set in Western Canada in the aftermath of World War I. Although the opera *Mary's Wedding* and the play on which it is based are fictional, the character of Sergeant (later Lieutenant) Gordon Flowerdew is historical, and the battle of Moreuil Wood, which is a pivotal event in the opera, actually took place. On March 30, 1918, Flowerdew carried out one of the last great cavalry assaults in history, leading a squadron of Lord Strathcona's Horse, armed with sabres, against German rifles and machine guns. The Canadians helped to stop the German offensive, but at enormous cost. Nearly three-quarters of the Canadian cavalry involved in this attack against German machine-gun positions at Moreuil Wood were killed or wounded. Flowerdew himself died from his wounds and was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. Following Flowerdew's death, Marshal Ferdinand Foch, supreme commander of all Allied armies in Europe during 1918, reportedly commented that Flowerdew's charge at Moreuil Wood possibly deflected the whole course of history. *Mary's Wedding* was commissioned by Pacific Opera Victoria in time for Remembrance Day and ongoing commemorations of the WWI centenary.

May 2016

Lori Laitman's opera *The Scarlet Letter* premieres at the Opera Colorado, Denver, CO, USA

Lori Laitman (1955 - ) is an American composer. She has composed multiple operas and choral works, and over 250 songs, setting texts by classical and contemporary poets (including those who perished in the Holocaust). Her music is widely performed, internationally and throughout the United States, and has generated substantial critical acclaim. *The Journal of Singing* wrote, “It is difficult to think of anyone before the public today who equals her exceptional gifts for embracing a poetic text and giving it new and deeper life through music.” *The Scarlet Letter* (2008) is set to a libretto by David Mason based on Hawthorne’s 1850 romance novel that takes place in 17th-century Puritan Massachusetts Bay Colony, during the years 1642 to 1649. It tells the story of Hester Prynne, who conceives a daughter through an affair and struggles to create a new life of repentance and dignity. Throughout the book, Hawthorne explores themes of legalism, sin, and guilt, love and hate, freedom, repression and redemption. Of the CD released by Naxos in August 2017, *Gramophone Magazine* wrote: “The first thing that leaps into one’s ears is the sheer beauty of the music. Laitman has devoted much of her career to the art song, and her ability to meld words with lyrical, often soaring lines is on abundant display in her... impressive and fervent opera.” It was also named a Critic’s Choice by Opera News, who wrote, “Lori Laitman’s score succeeds with a surging, sweeping, unapologetically tonal landscape that offers carefully etched character portraits, rapturous choral expostulations and lush orchestrations of insistently tuneful motifs.” Other works by Laitman include: *The Three Feathers*, a children's opera with librettist Dana Gioia, based on a Grimm's fairytale, and *Ludlow* (2009), based on Mason's award-winning verse novel about the 1914 Colorado mining town disaster, where scores of miners went on strike. The town was destroyed, and twelve people, mostly women and children, were slaughtered by Colorado's National Guard.

*Aftermath of Ludlow, Colorado*  
Coal-Mining Massacre (1914)
November 1, 2017
Brian Current’s opera *Missing* has its first performance in Vancouver, BC.

Brian Current (1972 - ) is a Canadian composer. *Missing*, was initially staged in the Russian Hall at the Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival before an invited audience of elders, families, friends and the DTES community of the missing BC aboriginal girls and women. The opera tells a story that many people can understand: about a woman no one remembers. Set in Vancouver and along the Highway of Tears, this music drama was created to give voice to the story of Canada’s missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls and to show that each and every one of these missing people is honoured. The libretto is by the distinguished First Nations playwright Marie Clements, and it was co-produced by City Opera Vancouver and Pacific Opera Victoria, where its world premiere was held. The event in which the opera was performed was guided by an advisory group of four DTES-involved aboriginal women and elders, and grief counselors were in attendance. Cedar brushing and smudging was also available, and a medicine bag was presented to every family at the opera’s end. Its first public performance was held at The York Theatre in Vancouver followed by performances at The Baumann Centre for Opera in Victoria, BC.

November 3, 2017
Tobin Stokes’ opera *Rattenbury*, in collaboration with The Other Guys Theatre Company, premieres at Pacific Opera’s Baumann Centre in Victoria, BC.

Tobin David Stokes (1966 - ) is a Canadian composer, notable for his work in opera, choral music and television. His works have been performed by New York City Opera, Long Beach Opera, City Opera of Vancouver, the Moscow Symphony Orchestra, and the Victoria Symphony. The opera *Rattenbury* is based on the tempestuous life and death of Victoria’s most notorious architect: Francis Rattenbury. Described as a self-promoter, adulterer, alcoholic, he was murdered by his young wife’s teenage lover, an act, which, in turn, led to one of the most sensational murder trials of the 1930s. For this premiere, the title role was performed by internationally-renowned tenor Richard Margison with the performance lasting approximately 75 minutes, with no intermission. Apart from his murder, Rattenbury was also famous for having designed Victoria’s Parliament Buildings, the Empress Hotel and several other major buildings. Regarding this particular production, Times Colonist Sarah Petrescu wrote: “Victoria composer and librettist Tobin Stokes reveals how Rattenbury’s ambition built him up and how his scoundrel tendencies tore him down. In fact, there is not a wholly sympathetic character in the opera — save for the maid — and that’s what makes it fun. Canadian tenor Richard Margison is Rattenbury and is best in his character’s older, broody, gin-fuelled moments. Soprano Kathleen Brett is brilliant as his second wife, Alma, the twice-married, coquetish songwriter and dope addict who he falls for at a party at the Empress. One of the greatest scenes in Stokes’ opera is when Ratz invites Alma to move into his family home while his first wife, Florrie, played by the strong mezzo-soprano Emma Parkinson (also the maid Irene), is still living in the attic. She interrupts the lovers’ drunken attempt to write a song together in an intense and cruel scene heightened by the ensemble singing over each other. The music is lush but slightly morose throughout the opera, making it thoroughly enjoyable. Tyler Fitzgerald is fantastic as the boy chauffeur-cum-murderous loverboy with a powerful baritone voice that carries some of the highest emotional moments. The centre’s hall was intended as a rehearsal space and has superb acoustics that work well as an intimate setting for a new opera.” This opera is seminal to BC’s history. It also played to sold-out audiences for several days running.

British Columbia Archives

Francis Rattenbury
Alma Rattenbury (nee Packenham)
George Percy Stoner