

Ensembles

Mary McNamara

The Guild of Mercury Opera Rochester

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Guild address
P.O. Box 92245
Rochester NY 14692

Mercury Opera Rochester Website
www.mercuryoperarochester.org

Guild contacts:
Dr. Agneta D. Borgstedt, President 585 334 2323
E-Mail: Agneta.Borgstedt@earthlink.net
Mary McNamara, Vice-President 585 473 5456
Helga Strasser, Trip coordinator 585 586 2274
E-mail: Helgas@rochester.rr.com
Arthur Axelrod, Guild lectures and technical adviser 585 377
6133
E-mail: artax@rochester.rr.com

Ensembles

- The singing personnel of an opera house
- An ensemble is part of an opera sung by a cast of singers together.
- Ensembles can be Duets, Terzets (Trios), Quartets, Quintets, Sextets and Septets
- The ensemble presents simultaneous expression of feelings and ideas of a number of contrasting Characters in such a way as to make each of them intelligible to the audience.

History of Ensembles

- Short ensembles were frequent in 17th Century Italian and French Opera
- Opera seria during early 18th Century and in post-Lullian tragedie en musique had only rarely ensembles.
- Comic operas of the 18th Century had more frequently ensembles as part of the drama of the story.
- The buffo finale reached early sophistication in Mozart's operas.
- The ensembles shape the drama of an event through simultaneous expression of conflicting emotions which allowed the offsetting of the contrasting characters.
- The development of the ensembles in the second half of the 18th century allowed the setting to music of events which were earlier entrusted to recitative or dialogue.
- The long opera ensembles as finales were developed at the beginning of the 19th century and are typical in comic operas by Rossini

Trios (Terzets)

- Trios go back in opera as far as Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (1643). They were also common in operas by Handel and Scarlatti.
- In the Baroque period followed the same form as arias. Each principal section tended to move from solos of each singer to short imitative comments, finally homophonic sections, broken with repeats back to the short comments and built up to florid sections for all three singers.
- In French Opera Comique in the last part of the 18th century trios account for a fifth of all ensembles.
- In Italian Opera Seria after 1770 it became usual for the second act to close with a trio.

Quartets

- Quartets became more frequent in Opera seria after 1750
- They also served as introductory ensembles such as in Mozart's *Idomeneo* in the third act.
- The act 1 quartet in *Don Giovanni* serves to draw together different threads of the evolving drama.
- In the early part of the 19th Century quartets remained rare outside of opera buffa and semi-seria. An example is Bellini's "A te, o cara" from *I Puritani*.
- One of the most beautiful and perfect quartets "Bella figlia dell'amore" from Verdi's *Rigoletto* expresses simultaneously different feelings of the four characters. You will hear this as part of this lecture.

Quintets

- Quintets are rare in the 17th Century except in finales.
- There are several quintets in Mozart's comic operas, notably in *Così fan Tutte* and you will hear examples of these.
- Quintets are rare in serious operas. They are frequently found in comic operas in the first three decades of the 19th Century like in Rossini's operas.
- In the later part of the 19th Century quintets can be found in Bizet's *Carmen*, Delibes' *Lakmé* and Wagner's *Meistersingers*.

Sextets

- Sextets are rare as separate numbers outside the context of a finale.
- Sextets are popular in opera comique
- The most famous sextet is in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* which you will hear today.
- I will also present sextets from *Così fan Tutte* and *Fidelio* today.

Septets

- Septets are rare as a separate number outside the context of an act finale
- There is a true septet (sometimes called the Duel septet) in Meyerbeer's *Le Huguenots* and some outstanding beauty in Berlioz's *Les Troyens*.

The Magic Flute

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart 1791

Synopsis

- Three ladies save Prince Tamino from a monster and give him a picture of Pamina, daughter of the Queen of the Night.
- He falls in love with her beauty and the Queen charges him to free her from the hands of Sarastro, the supposedly evil priest.
- With the enchanted flute and the magic bells used by Papageno the bird catcher, Tamino starts his quest.
- He undergoes many trials but at last discovers Pamina, who is also Sarastro's daughter and their marriage is celebrated.
- The underlying theme is the Masonic benevolent truth and wisdom

Play list 1, 2 and 3

Cosi fan Tutte

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart 1790

Synopsis

- In 18th Century Naples Don Alfonso wagers that the two girls Fiordiligi and Dorabella are fickle and not trustworthy in love, as are all women.
- Their lovers Guglielmo and Ferrando pretend to be called away to the army after both couples pledge faithfulness to each other.
- The men return disguised as Albanians and declare their affections each to the other girl.
- Despina, the maid to the girls, enters into the plot with Alfonso to have the girls marry the Albanians.
- The girls demur, but after a while are caught up in the ruse.
- The two men disclose their identity to the shock and horror of the girls; the plot is revealed and after this sobering experience all ends happily
- Play list: 4, 5 and 6

Fidelio

Ludwig van Beethoven 1805

Synopsis

- In 18th Century Seville the nobleman Florestan has been imprisoned by his political enemy Don Pizarro
- Leonore, his wife, disguised as a young man, has found work in the prison with Rocco the jailer.
- His daughter has fallen in love with Fidelio much to the displeasure of her admirer Jaquino, the gate keeper.
- Leonore (Fidelio) learns that Pizarro plans to kill the prisoner in the dungeon before the inspection of the prison by Don Fernando.
- She steps in front of him and tells Pizarro to first kill her as she is Florestan's wife.
- Play list 8 and 9 and 10

Lucia di Lammermoor

Gaetano Donizetti 1835

Synopsis

- In 17th Century Scotland Lucia loves Edgardo, the disposed master of the Ravenwood and an enemy of Enrico, her brother.
- The couple exchanges rings and vows before Edgardo leaves on a mission.
- Enrico is enraged when he learns about this because he wishes his sister to marry Arturo in order to bring political advantage and money to the family.
- He shows her a forged letter that seems to prove Edgardo's infidelity and insists that she marry Arturo. She agrees under pressure and consents only to discover the return of Edgardo just after the wedding.
- Her mind sinks into insanity and she kills Arturo and dies.
- Arturo kills himself while her funeral procession passes by.
- Play list 11, the famous sextet

Rigoletto

Giuseppe Verdi 1851

Synopsis

- In 16th Century Mantua the hunchbacked court jester Rigoletto laughs at the rage and grief of Count Monterone whose daughter has been seduced by the lecherous Duke. The Count lays a curse on Rigoletto.
- As the plot proceeds Gilda, Rigoletto's daughter falls in love with the Duke, disguised as a poor student, who seduces her.
- Rigoletto swears vengeance and tries to show his daughter the Duke's true character. He brings her to a brothel and lets her observe the Duke trying to seduce a prostitute.
- He has a contract with the prostitute's brother, who will kill the Duke once he is asleep.
- His sister is so charmed by the Duke that she persuades her brother to kill the next stranger who comes to the door instead. Rigoletto discovers too late that his daughter sacrificed her life for the Duke. The curse is fulfilled.
- Play list 12, the famous quartet.