

**The Grand French Opera Part II
1830-1870**

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The Grand French Opera Part II 1830 to 1870

- **The first part of this lecture showcased the six French Operas of Giacomo Meyerbeer, a German Jewish composer who dominated the Opera scene in Paris with his phenomenal successful operas.**
- **This lecture will focus on the French composers and those other Continental composers who strived for success in Paris during the same period of time in the mid-nineteenth century.**
- **First I will summarize again the characteristics of these Operas.**

The Grand French Opera of Paris

- **Like the cinema in Hollywood's golden age, the Grand French Opera in the middle of the nineteenth century, made significant contributions to the artistic activity of its day.**
- **A fusion and union of spectacle, drama and music**
- **The Grand French Opera combined the French affection for theatrical splendor with the Italian love for beautiful singing.**
- **It reflects the romantic urge to unify everything and had the large voices who today sing Wagner.**

The Grand French Opera continued

- **It combined a large orchestra with innovative orchestration for example the voices having a duet with the orchestra or specific instruments.**
- **Elaborate scenic effects by Duponchel and Cecari.**
- **Most of the libretti were written by Eugene Scribe, a superb dramatist, who wrote the libretti of almost all the Grand French Operas.**
- **Characteristic also was a Grand Ballet in the second or third act, which was demanded by the patrons of the Opera.**

French Composers in Paris

- **Jaques Francois Elias Halevy 1799 – 1862**
(La Juive 1835)
- **Hector Berlioz 1803 – 1869**
(Les Troyens 1858)
- **Charles Francois Gounod 1818 – 1893**
(Faust 1859)

Continental Composers in Paris

- **Richard Wagner 1813 – 1883**
(Tannhaeuser 1845 Dresden, French version 1861 Paris)
- **Giuseppe Verdi 1813 – 1901**
(Don Carlos French version 1867)

Jaques Francois Elias Halevy 1799-1862

- **Born in Paris to a German Jewish father and a French Jewish mother he was able to succeed in liberal Paris and became one of the most successful French Opera Composers in Paris.**
- **His only serious rivals were Meyerbeer, Auber, who succeeded at his best in lighter works and at the end of his life Gounod. Berlioz, his contemporary sadly was not recognized for his greatness during his life time.**
- **Of all his operas *La Juive* 1835 is his master piece, an epitome of grand opera.**

Jaques Francois Elias Halevy continued

- **After his triumph with *La Juive* he became one of the leading figures of Parisian operatic life, producing new operas at a faster rate than Meyerbeer.**
- **He was a revered teacher at the Conservatoire and became the teacher of Bizet who eventually became his son-in-law.**

***La Juive* 1835**

Libretto by Eugene Scribe

- **This is the tragic story of Rachel, who was rescued from a fire by the Jewish goldsmith Eleazar in Rome and brought up as his daughter. The fire consumed the house of her father de Brogni, who believing his family was dead, takes religious vows and eventually becomes Cardinal de Brogni.**
- **Eleazar with Rachel fled Rome and at the beginning of the opera Eleazar is a successful goldsmith, albeit persecuted by the Christians in Constance, Switzerland in 1414.**
- **Leopold, Prince of the empire fell in love with Rachel and disguises himself as an apprentice to Eleazar. He leads a double life being married to Eudoxia, the niece to the Emperor, with whom he has children and pursues Rachel.**

La Juive continued

- **Marriage between a Christian and Jew was against the law and punished by death at the time.**
- **The illegal affair is discovered, Eleazar and Rachel are condemned to death. Eudoxia begs Rachel to retract her charge of adultery of Leopold and though at first refuses she relents. Cardinal de Brogni confronts Rachel and begs her to abjure her faith, to save herself, she refuses.**
- **Brogni asks Eleazar to renounce his faith to save Rachel. The old man refuses to deny his forefather's creed. He reminds de Brogni that a Jew saved his daughter but claims not to know her where about. He intends to take this secret with him to death.**

La Juive continued

- **One of the big tenor arias of opera is: Eleazar's lament : his anguish to condemn his daughter to death.**
- **At the end after refusing to abjure her faith Rachel is thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil, at the moment when Eleazar tells de Brogni that it was his daughter perishing in the flames.**
- **You will hear the love duet of Rachel and Leopold from the Act 1, followed by Eleazar's lament from Act 4.**

Hector Berlioz 1803-1869

- **One of the great French composers, sadly not appreciated during his life time in Paris.**
- **He was educated by his father and had a thorough classic education, reading Virgil in Latin and translating his works into French at 12 years under his father's tutelage.**
- **Despite his parent's disapproval he abandoned his medical studies, entered the Paris Conservatoire to study music, began to compose and won the Prix de Rome in 1830.**

Hector Berlioz continued

- **Berlioz was a true Romantic in his personal life and as a composer.**
- **Aside a large oeuvre of symphonic compositions, he composed four operas: Benvenuto Cellini 1836, La damnation of Faust 1845, Les Troyens with his own libretto after Virgil's Aeneid 1858 and Beatrice and Benedict (after Shakespeare) 1862.**
- **He supported himself as a music critic when his music was not well accepted in Paris and later in 1850 as the Head Librarian at the Conservatoire.**

Hector Berlioz continued

- He had several very successful concert tours to the Continent, England and Russia. Liszt was his great admirer and promoted his music.
- His orchestration was innovative, progressive and influenced the composers of his time including Wagner and the "Russian Five" who included Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Mussorgsky.
- His great epic opera *Les Troyens* was not performed during his life time. It is now often produced at the anniversaries of his birth year and appreciated for its greatness.

Les Troyens

Part I (The capture of Troy) Act 1 and 2

- At the beginning of the opera the Trojans celebrate what they believe is the deliverance from a 10 years siege by the Greeks and inspect the abandoned Greek camp and the huge wooden horse left behind.
- They are unwilling to listen to Cassandra's prophecy of doom.
- She tries to persuade Coroebus, her fiancée to flee and save his life, he dismisses her terror.
- From the inside of the horse the Greek army attacks and burns the city.
- Hector's ghost commands Aeneas to escape and to found a new Troy in Italy.

Les Troyens continued

- Cassandra and the Trojan women kill themselves to avoid capture by the Greek.

Part II (The Trojans at Carthage) Act 3, 4 and 5.

- Carthage was founded by Dido, after she fled from her brother who murdered her husband.
- Aeneas arrives shipwrecked by a storm, the Trojans ask for refuge. Aeneas offers to defend Dido when she was attacked by North African hordes.
- Dido and Aeneas fall in love and Aeneas' journey to Italy is delayed.
- The omens urge Aeneas to full fill his destiny and to sail to Italy. He reluctantly submits to his fate and in a heart rendering duet says goodbye to Dido and departs.

Les Troyens continued

- The heart broken Dido ascends the funeral pyre and prophesizes the coming of the great conqueror *Hannibal*.
- You will hear the Act 1 duet of Cassandra and Coroebus, followed by the parting duet of Dido and Aeneas in Act 5

Charles Gounod 1818-1893

- **Born in Paris ; his mother was a pianist and his first teacher.**
- **At the Paris conservatoire he studied with Halevy and won the Prix de Rome in 1839.**
- **He wrote 12 operas of these are still 3 in the repertoire: Faust 1859, occasional Mireille 1964 and Romeo et Juliette 1867.**
- **After 1870 when he became conductor of what is now known as the Royal Choral Society much of Gounod's music was Choral Music.**

Faust

Libretto by Jules Barbier and Michel Carre

- **Gounod used the love story of Faust and Marguerite of Goethe's play Faust I for his opera.**
- **The story is so well known that I will not retell it here.**
- **In Act 2 Mephistopheles retells the biblical story of the "Golden Calf" it is a beautiful ballad sung with the chorus and Faust's assistant Wagner, Marguerite's brother Valentin and Siebel who adores Marguerite.**
- **It is a typical use of the chorus and ensemble of the Grand French Opera.**

Faust
The Ballad of the golden Calf

Mephistopheles

I shall try my hardest not to bore anyone!
The golden calf is still standing, his might is celebrated
From one end of the world to the other!
Nations and kings mix together to hail the infamous idol
And to the sinister clink of coins
They whirl in a frenzied ring round and round his pedestal
And Satan leads the dance!

Students

And Satan leads the dance

Ballad of the golden Calf continued

Mephistopheles

The golden calf triumphs over the gods; basking in his
Preposterous glory the base monster insults Heaven!
He looks down – O strange madness!-
On a human race at his feet sallying forth, sword in hand,
Through blood and filth, where the burning metal is shining!

Mephistopheles and chorus

And Satan leads the dance!
And Satan leads the dance!
We thank you for your song!

The Ballad of the golden Calf continued

Valentin

What an odd fellow!

Wagner

Well?

Mephistopheles

An ill-boding sign! You will be killed in an attack!

(Wagner withdraws his hand)

Siebel

Are you a wizard, then?

The Ballad of the golden Calf continued

Mephistopheles (taking his hand)

Just enough of a wizard to read in your hand

That fate condemns you never to touch a flower again

But it withers.

Siebel (withdrawing his hand)

Me!

Mephistopheles

No more nose-gays for Marguerite!

Valentin

My sister! Who told you her name?

The Ballad of the golden Calf continued

Mephistopheles

Take heed, my fine fellow, you will be killed by someone I know!

(taking the glass from Wagner's hand)

Your health!

(he throws the wine away)

Pshaw! Your wine is revolting!

Allow me to offer you some from my cellar!

(He wraps on the barrel of the Inn-sign.)

The Ballad of the golden Calf continued

Ho there, Lord Bacchus, wine please!

(wine gushes from the barrel To the students)

Come nearer! Everyone to his taste!

Lets drink the health you mentioned but a moment ago ,
friends: to Marguerite!

Valentin (knocking the glass out of his hand)

Enough of that!

Upon my life I shall silence you here and now!

(The wine from the barrel bursts into flames. Valentin and
Wagner unsheathe their swords.)

The Ballad of the golden Calf (the end)

Wagner

Ho there!

Students

Ho there!

Mephistopheles

Why do you quake as you threaten me?

(He draws a circle around him with his sword. Valentin tries to attack him. His sword falls to pieces.)

Valentin

Amazing! My sword breaks in the air!

Tannhaeuser 1845/1861

Libretto by the composer

- Tannhaeuser is Richard Wagner's 6th opera and the 3rd from the Dresden period of the 1840ties.
- The libretto was finished in 1843 and the score in 1845.
- The opera is the fusion of 2 legends: Tannhaeuser and the singer's contest of the Wartburg.
- The story goes back to literary sources by H.Heine E.T.A Hoffman and L.Tieck and combines the mythological elements of German Opera and medieval history of French Grand Opera.

Tannhaeuser continued

- The plot brings together 14th Century Minnesinger's and the myth of Venus in the Venusberg.
- The instrumentation borrows from the French Opera style: on-stage brass but instead of using French brass instruments Wagner uses 12 German Waldhorns.
- Another instrument used is the harp, which was common place in French Opera.
- The Dresden version did not repeat *Rienzie's* success and Wagner made revisions in 1846/47.

Tannhaeuser Paris version 1861

- Ballet as bacchanale in the first act.
- Text translated into French.
- A solo from the minnesinger Walter removed from act 2.
- Orchestral introduction to 3rd act shortened.
- Brief reappearance of the Venus in the 3rd act.
- Due to the cat-calls of the aristocratic Jockey club the opera was withdrawn after the third performance, which ended Wagner's operatic ambitions in Paris

Tannhaeuser continued

- **The opera juxtapositions the sensual world of love in the Venusberg to the ascetic love of the Minnesingers of the Wartburg.**
- **Tannhaeuser's struggle with both realms ultimately is his downfall.**
- **Tannhaeuser's praise of the love of Venus leads to his banishment to Rome where the pope refuses to absolve him from his sin.**
- **The prayer and death of the virtuous Elisabeth saves his soul at the end.**

Tannhaeuser selections

You will hear the bacchanale of the Venus berg in the beginning of the 1st act of the Venusberg followed by the ode to the evening star (recitative and aria) sung by the minnesinger Wolfram who loves Elisabeth and senses her impending death.

The Bayreuth production is sung in German but uses the bacchanale.

Verdi's Don Carlos 1867 French Version
Libretto by Camille du Locle and Joseph Mery
based on a play by Friedrich von Schiller

- **The story is based on conflicts in the life of Carlos, Prince of Asturias (1545-68) after his betrothed Elisabeth of Valois was married instead to his father Phillip II of Spain, part of the peace treaty ending the Italian War 1551-59 between the houses of Habsburg and Valois.**
- **Premiere Paris Opera 1867.**
- **There were many cuts, additions and no other Verdi Opera exists in so many versions.**
- **It is the longest Verdi Opera with four hours of music.**

Don Carlos French Version

- **This version has been performed recently more often.**
- **The story starts in the forest of Fontainebleau , France, where Carlos and Elisabeth meet and declare their love and the people lament the hardship of war.**
- **A cannon shot signifies peace but the Spanish envoy announces that Elisabeth is claimed in marriage by King Phillip II and she accepts to assure the peace for the country.**

Don Carlos French Version

- **Carlos is devastated. His friend Don Rodrigue comforts him and asks him to help the suffering people of Flanders, which Spain had conquered, to freedom. They sing one of the inspiring friendship duets in opera.**
- **Princess Eboli, one of the lady's-in waiting, loves Carlos but is full of revenge when her love is unrequited.**
- **The King refuses to send Rodrigue and Carlos to Flanders; he muses about his own unrequited love for his young wife.**

Don Carlos French Version

- **The King seeks the friendship of Rodrigue.**
- **The Grand Inquisiteur and the King have a discussion about Carlos and Rodrigue. The Grand Inquisiteur demands Rodrigue's death.**
- **Rodrigue is killed in prison and Carlos is rescued by a monk emerging from the tomb of Charles V to safety in the monastery.**
- **You will here the friendship duet of Carlos and Rodrigue from Act 2 followed by the duet between the King and the Grand Inquisiteur from Act 4. This will end the presentations today.**