

GERMAN ROMANTIC OPERAS

The Development of the Leitmotif
From Carl Maria von Weber to early Richard Wagner

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The Beginning of the Romantic Period

- Symbol "The Blue Flower" after the novella by Novalis published at the turn of the 18th to the 19th century.
- Artists turning away from the cold reason of the Age of Enlightenment and the heroic Greek and Roman subjects of the Opera Sera of the Baroque Period.

German Composers turn to the themes of

- Nature, the Forest and Hunting as a profession
- Fairy Tales
- Medieval French, German, Nordic and Oriental Legends
- Mysticism and a new feeling of National Consciousness
- Mozart's dream of the great German Opera (The Abduction from the Seraglio and the Magic Flute) was pursued by the composers of the 19th Century.

GERMAN ROMANTIC COMPOSERS

- Carl Maria von Weber
- E.T.A. Hoffmann 1776-1822: Undine 1816
- Heinrich Marschner 1795-1861: Hans Heilig 1833
- Ludwig Spohr 1784-1859: Faust 1818
- Albert Lortzing
- Otto Nicolai
- Friedrich von Flotow

Carl Maria von Weber 1786-1826

- Cousin to Constanze Mozart, born into a musical family
- Notable teachers were Michael Haydn (brother of Joseph) and Abbot Vogler.
- Started Opera compositions at age 14 years. His career as conductor started at 18 years in Breslau and finally at age 30 years in 1816 led him to the Royal Saxon Court in Dresden as director of the new German Opera.
- Invented the modern orchestral seating and the baton for conducting.
- Died from Tuberculosis shortly after the premiere of Oberon in London

Carl Maria von Weber Operas

Three prominent Operas still in the repertoire

- Der Freischuetz 1821
- Euryanthe 1823
- Oberon 1826

Der Freischuetz (The free shooter) 1821

Libretto by J.F. Kind based on the ghost stories collected by J.A. Apel and F. Laun (1810-1817)

- The hunter Max is betrothed to the head rangers only daughter Agathe but must prove himself to win his bride by winning a shooting trial. In the pretrial he is nervous and misses and is frantic that he may loose his love.
- He turns to Kaspar, who has pledged his life to the devil Samiel and promises to help him cast a free bullet, hoping to bring Max to Samiel and save himself. In the romantic and haunted Wolfs Glenn they cast 7 bullets.
- During the shooting trial Kaspar arranges it that Max has the last bullet that belongs to Samiel.
- When Max shoots, Agathe falls (faints) and the bullet hits Cuno (Samiel gets his price)
- Max confesses and gets one year probation and the Prince abolishes the inhuman practice of the shooting trial

Der Freischuetz Selections

Overture

- Contains the motif of longing and anxiety for Max, Agathe's longing, the diminished 7 ominous motif for the Wolfs Glenn and Samiel, some dance like melodies.

Only part of the overture is played here

Sir Colin Davis conducts the Staatskapelle Dresden.

Der Freischuetz

Max (Francisco Araiza):

Through the forests, through the meadows

I once roamed with a light heart:

Everything that I espied fell price

To my unerring gun barrel.

At evening I brought in a rich bag, and Agathe's loving
gaze rejoiced as if over her own luck,

Threatening though that was for the killer.

Der Freischuetz

Agathe (Karita Mattila):

How could sleep come to me

Before I see him?

Yes, love and anxiety

Always go hand in hand!

Does the moon smile upon his path?

What a lovely night!

Soar softly, softly,

Gentle song of mine, into the sky's starry circle.

Resound my song!

Solemnly bear my prayer to the halls of heaven!

Der Freischuetz

Agathe continued:

Oh how bright are the golden stars,

With what pure radiance they gleam!

Only yonder in the distant mountains

Does a storm seem to be brewing.

There over the forest too hangs a bank

Of dark clouds, gloomy and heavy.

To Thee I turn my hands,

Lord without beginnings or end!

Send Thy angelic host to protect us

From all dangers.

Euryanthe 1823

Libretto by Helmina von Chezy based on a French Legend

- The first through composed opera
- A legend of a virtuous woman betrothed to the knight Adolar. The evil count Lysiart and the jealous Eglantine who loves Adolar, both forerunners of Lohengrin's Telramund and Ortrud, falsely frame Euryanthe that she was unfaithful. She is condemned by the king to die by Adolar's hand in a wild desolate mountain gorge. A snake approaches and Euryanthe throws herself in front of Adolar to save him. He kills the snake, spares her life but leaves her in the gorge.
- She is found by hunters. The hunting horn motif is very prominent. They bring her near death back to the king where the remorseful Eglantine confesses Lysiart's and her crime. She is killed by Lysiart in a rage. Euryanthe recovers and Adolar and the whole court rejoice in Euryanthe's innocence.

Euryanthe Selections

Orchestra e Coro Del Teatro Lirico Di Cagliari, Conductor
Gerard Korsten

Adolar (Yikum Chung):

Under the blossoming almond trees
On the green banks of the Loire,
Oh what bliss is to dream,
Of where I found my beloved.
She the pure one, my only love!
Pure as the snow, mild as roses,
Under blossoming almond trees
The images sweet of my love holds me.
In the golden starry light,
On the flowers banks of the Loire,
Did my heart's love offer me
Her purest vow's 'neath heaven's gaze.

Euryanthe

Adolar continued:

Holy, loving, pure and true.
Eye met eye, and lip met lip.
In the light of stars eternal
Words were said from heart to heart.
Fairest rose of holy honour,
On the Loire's flower bank
And though blossom, pledge of spring
Tender, pure, sweet! My own!
One with me, and mine alone!
Fairest rose of holy honour,
Blossoming in thy heart alone!

Euryanthe

Orchester der Deutschen Oper Berlin, conductor Christian
Thielemann

Lysiart (Thomas Quasthoff)

Where shall I hide? Where shall I regain my composure?
Ha! Insane and heinous folly, it was you
That saw her as an easy prey!
Crash down on me, rocks!
O Echo, do not repeat the anguished cry
Of hopeless yearning!
She will never be mine! O Hydra of eternal torments!
Be silent, ardent longing's wild desires,
Her eye seeks heaven alone.
In her dwells innocence, charm and love.

Euryanthe

Lysiart continued:

She is all truth, all nature.

What further use to me are wealth and lands?

The world is poor and desolate without her!

Could she grant me her favours? She will never be mine.

Forget her, wretch! Flee!

She loves him! And is he to remain alive?

Am I to tremble and pine away? Grant him victory

In the dust? Oh, no!

He shall not live! He die a thousand painful deaths!

But, Hell, you cannot give her back to me.

She loves him! I must perish!

Albert Lortzing 1801-1851

- Born in Berlin as the only surviving child to a merchant's family, who turned traveling actors with Albert playing child roles and finally comics and young lovers. He knew 200 roles and had a versatile singing voice ranging from bass to tenor.
- He married an actress and had a large family with 11 children, 6 survived.
- To support his family, he composed music.
- His operas were the most frequently produced operas after Mozart and Verdi in Germany until the 1960s.
- After many years of writing incidental music to plays among others his first real success was his
- Opera "Zar und Zimmermann" 1838 premiered in Leipzig. He developed the "Spiel Opera", opera based on plays he knew as an actor.
- There was no protection of intellectual property at the time. He was unmercifully exploited by the theater directors, who got rich on his operas and died impoverished in 1851.

Albert Lortzing

Most popular and important operas in his repertoire

- Zar und Zimmermann (Tsar and Carpenter) 1838
- Hans Sachs 1840. Forerunner of Wagner's Meistersinger
- Der Wildschuetz 1842
- Undine 1845. First serious opera
- Der Waffenschmied 1846
- Regina. Freedom opera composed during the 7 months censor free period of the revolution 1848. The only production true to the work was a performance in Gelsenkirchen 1998, director Peter Konwitschny, who earned the honor "Director of the Year" with this production.

Albert Lortzing Characteristics of his Operas

- First composer who wrote his own libretti.
- He wrote in verses; many of his arias and ensemble music show the pattern songs also found in Donizetti's and Gilbert and Sullivan's Operas.
- Lortzing was a total "Theatre Man", achieving dramatic theatrical effects in his operas, often by changing subtly the content or the emphasis on a character of the play.
- Lortzing's operas are famous for the Buffo Bass roles.
- His later operas have famous comic ensemble scenes that are forerunners in the orchestration of the ensemble singing to Wagner's operas. The characters of his operas are also presented in the orchestration with beginning leitmotifs.

Zar und Zimmermann

Libretto based on the French play "The Mayor of Saardam" by Boire, Roemer and Merle

- Play of comedy and disguise of TSar Peter of Russia and his fellow Russian Peter Ivanow working in a shipyard in Holland.
- The pompous Mayor van Bett (a buffo bass role) is befuddled by the intrigues of the English and French Diplomats who are trying to get into the Tsar's favor but mistakenly taking Peter Ivanow for the Tsar.
- The opera contains many wonderful melodies with van Bett taking the lion's share and the Tsar's cavatina gaining folksong status in Germany.
- The Tsar finally returns to Russia, leaving Peter Ivanow as his Imperial overseer with the permission to marry his love Marie.

Zar und Zimmermann Selections

Orchester der Deutschen Oper Berlin, conductor Christian Thielemann

- *Van Bett (Thomas Quasthoff)*

O sancta justitia! It's enough to drive me insane.

I'm on the go from dawn till dusk.

I'm overwhelmed with official duties,

The town's welfare will be the death of me.

Plerique hominum (Most men) on this earth

Occasionally rest from their torments and hardships,

But dawn has scarcely peeped into my bedroom

When my files demand my genius

And –o misery!- I am re vera (in truth)

Worked like an ox till evening!

Zar und Zimmermann

Van Bett continued

No carthorse suffers as much as I do
As chairman and councillor.
Fortunately I understand my duties
And can arrange things sapentissime (most sensibly)
So that, with my gifts, I can scribble down documents
And keep the council on a tight rein.
I know how to bombard people,
How to ration and express myself,
To inspect and complain,
To antagonize and ill-treat others.
I always have the rem publicam (public interest) at heart.
People know that I'm a statute book,

Zar und Zimmermann

Van Bett continued

Young and old praise me,
I'm Saardam's greatest luminary.
Oh, I'm clever and wise
And people don't take me in!
These expressive features,
These eyes, like beacons,
Proclaim my mind's victories.
I'm a latter-day Solomon,
Still in good shape,
In a word, very nice.

Zar und Zimmermann

Van Bett continued

Believe me, I'm never mistaken
Et eo ipso momento (and at this very moment)
I triumph over every crime.
I delve into court cases
And settle them shrewdly and subtly.
Oh, I'm clever and wise
And people don't take me in!
These expressive features,
These eyes like beacons,
Proclaim my mind's victories .
I'm a latter-day Solomon,
For I know how to bombard people, how to ration and express
myself,

Zar und Zimmermann

Van Bett continued

To slander , inspect,
Antagonize, complain, ill-treat
And seethe, adorn, affect,
Lead, scribble, ratify.
In a word, you can see ad speciem
(just by looking) that I'm a real man.

Zar und Zimmermann

Munich Radio Orchestra, conductor Heinz Fricke

Tsar Peter (Wolfgang Brendel)

I used to play with sceptre, crown and orb;
Even as a child, ah! I so loved to wave my sword!
My glance cowed playmates and servants;
Happy, I went back to my father's lap
And, dandling me, he'd say: "Dear boy, you're mine!"
What bliss, what bliss to be a child again!
Now the crown adorns me and I bear the orb,
I'd so like to bring happiness to my people, the Russians!
I lead them to greatness, I lead them to the light;
But they ignore my paternal ambitions.

Zar und Zimmermann

Tsar Peter continued

Shrouded in crimson, I stand all alone-
What bliss to be a child again!
When this thriving and anguish are over,
A stone monument will be raised to the Tsar.
But he'll scarcely win a place in people's hearts,
For earthly greatness fades away like a dream.
Yet when, all-bountiful God, you call "Pass away in peace!",
Then blessed, I shall be your child once again!

Undine

Libretto after a fairy tale by La Motte Fouque

- One of the 16 operas of the 19th Century based on this fairy tale which goes back to a description of mermaids by Paracelsus. First opera by E.T.A. Hoffmann 1816 ending with Dvorak's Rusalka at the end of the 19th century.
- Undines or water sprites have human appearance but no soul, therefore they can not be saved according to Christian's believes except when they marry a human who loves them.
- The water prince Kuehleborn sends his daughter Undine to a poor fisher pair and has their daughter brought up at the court as princess Berthalda.
- 15 years later the knight Hugo is sent by Berthalda, who loves him, to explore the mystic forest, where he meets Undine, falls in love with her and marries her before he returns to the court with her.

Undine

continued

- The true identity of Berthalda is discovered and she is disgraced. Undine kindly gives her shelter but Berthalda woes Hugo who is frightened when he learns about his wife's identity. He deserts her and marries Berthalda.
- Undine's father Kuehleborn swears revenge and Hugo's castle collapses. Undine begs mercy for Hugo and instead of killing Hugo he is allowed to live with Undine in the world of the water spirits.
- Hugo's squire Veit and his friend Hans ,in charge of the wine cellar at court, are the comic pair opposite the high born Characters like in a Shakespeare play.

Undine Selections

Radio Symphony Orchestra Berlin, conductor Robert Heger

Duet Hugo (Nicolai Gedda) and Undine (Anneliese Rothenberger)

Hugo: I once entered a grand tournament
In the free imperial city;
Many valiant knights took part,
But the victory was mine alone.
Berthalda offered me this gage of victory
And said, inflamed with ardor:
"You must hurry to the magic forest,
And if you bring me news
Of that wonderful power
You shall be sweetly rewarded."

Undine

continued

Undine (fearfully):
You didn't let yourself be led astray?
(tenderly) But otherwise I wouldn't have you.

Hugo:
To struggle boldly for a woman's beauty
Is required by honor and knightly duty.

Undine:
Will you see her again?

Hugo:
Should I not?

Undine:
Do you love her?

Undine

continued

Hugo:

What do you think?

She is lovely, but proud and severe;

In a word: a woman who can never make a man happy.

The only one who can live happily on earth (embracing her)

Is he has been granted such a wife.

Both:

O(!) hold fast to this belief,

Remain forever faithful to the vow.

Never lose the sweet illusion

That I am your happiness, your all.

Undine Selections

Veit's aria (Peter Schreier)

Father, mother, sisters, brothers-

I have none left in the world;

And even if I returned home again,

I would find everything empty and abandoned.

If only there were one still left alive.

What a joy that would be!

O how sweet and wonderful

Such a reunion would be!

In the imperial city, recently,

I met a fat innkeeper.

"Friend", he called out, "why the hurry?

Be so kind and come here to me.

Undine

continued

Veit continued:

You know what I am talking about,
So pay the bill you owe me!"
That was, I must admit,
Not a pleasant meeting!
I've often heard it said
That one will meet each other again up there,
But no one can prove this,
And no one knows what happens there.
If it were a sure and certain thing
That one meets one another again up there,
There would be in those high-up regions
The most wonderful reunions!

Der Wildschuetz (The Poacher)

Libretto based on a play "Der Rehbock" (The Deer) by
August von Kotzebue

- This is considered by many Lortzing's masterwork with famous comic ensemble singing.
- Comic opera of disguises leading to a married count pursuing romantically his sister, the baroness; the countess pursuing her brother, the baron. The baroness is disguised as Gretchen, the bride of the old schoolmaster Baculus, who poached a deer and lost his job on the count's estate. (Famous buffo bass role).
- Finally they all find out who they really are, the baron gets the baroness formerly disguised as Gretchen and the unhappy Baculus does not get his 5000 Thalers but keeps Gretchen and gets his job back since he really only shot his own donkey.

Der Wildschuetz Selections

Staatskapelle Berlin, conductor Bernhard Klee

Ensemble singing:

Baroness (Edith Mathis):

I am a simple child from the country

My palace is a green meadow with my hut at the edge.

My nanny is Mother nature and I love to see the herd in the mountains.

I want to stay in the country, where it is so beautiful.

I heard a lot of the city's glamour

Where you can live like a king

But I bet you find pure goodness and virtue only rarely there.

I heard often enough about it.

No I don't want to see the city

Der Wildschuetz

continued

Baroness continued:

I want to stay in the country, where

It is so beautiful.

Baron (Peter Schreier) and Count (Gottfried Hornick):

I never saw such an attractive girl before.

Gretchen (Georgine Resick) and Baculus (Hans Sotin):

He really knows how to go about it; it is fun to watch him.

Choir: In the country it is so beautiful

Der Wildschuetz Selections

Orchestra Deutsche Oper Berlin, conductor Christian Thielemann

Baculus (Thomas Quasthoff):

Five thousand Thalers!

Am I dreaming or am I awake? Why do I tremble and hesitate?

Am I laughing or crying? Ye gods, what shall I do?

Yet it remains a fact: fortune's wheel is round-

Only recently I was a regular tramp,

Little more than a man and a Christian,

But now I'm suddenly a capitalist.

It is you I must thank, eternal fate, for my present good fortune.

But what if Gretchen tearfully

Asks me in God's name to keep her?

Der Wildschuetz

Baculus continued:

What if she flatters and sweet-talks me-

Which she has not done before?

What if she wails and clasps me to her,

Dear God, what shall I do then?

If all else fails, I can bump her off,

For five thousand thalers is a lot of dough.

But now I need to think.

What shall I do with Gods blessing,

With my capital?

Shall I remain a scholar

Or go into commerce?

Shall I build a palace for myself

Or become a barkeeper?

Der Wildschuetz

Baculus continued:

Shall I buy government bonds
Or serve Bavarian Beer?
Shall I go into economics or build an amusement center?
But why waste time now
And torment myself with plans?
Once I have the dough, the rest will follow.
Five thousand thalers! Wonderful!
So voluminous, so numerous,
So pecunious, and so capital!
It's part of God's plan I'll be famous!
There's buzzing and ringing, a humming and throbbing

Der Wildschuetz

Baculus continued:

A flashing and flickering, an itching and twitching
In my body and before my eyes and ears.
It's part of God's plan,
I'll be famous!

Otto Nicolai 1810-1849

- Born in Koenigsberg East Prussia. A benefactor provided for his musical education which was rooted in German Romanticism and Church music.
- As the organist to the Prussian Ambassador in Rome he was exposed to Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini for whom he composed funeral music in 1835.
- After positions in Italy and Vienna he came to Berlin and after dismissal of Spontini and Meyerbeer from the Berlin Court Opera, the King of Prussia ordered the premiere of Nicolai's comic-fantastical opera *The Merry Wives of Windsor* based on Shakespeare in 1849.
- Unfortunately Nicolai died 2 months later.

Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor

The Merry Wives of Windsor

Libretto: Hermann Salomon Mosenthal after Shakespeare

- This is the familiar Falstaff story still in the repertoire of every German Opera House.
- It is eclipsed by Verdi's Falstaff composed almost 50 years later.
- Nicolai's Motto was: "that the best German Opera is a marriage of the German Singspiel to the Italian Opera" .
- This he achieved in this Opera.

The Merry Wives of Windsor selections

WDR Radio Orchester Cologne, conductor Helmuth Froschauer

Falstaff (Franz Hawlata)

As a tiny lad at my mother's breast,
With a hey and a ho by rain and wind,
Sack was already my passion,
For the rain it rains every day.
Come brown Hanna, here,
Fill my wineskin!
Quench the fire in my throat,
Drinking is no disgrace.
Bacchus drank too, yes
Be ready!

The Merry Wives of Windsor selections

Choir:

O sweet moon!
O lovely night!
When peace reigns,
Love alone keeps watch.
(a distant bell strikes twelve)
Falstaff enters disguised as Hunter Herne, antlers on his head,
wandering around.

The Merry Wives of Windsor selections

- Nicolai's version of the "Fugue"

Mr. Reich (Wolfgang Bankl)

He has not yet confessed.

Just wait, obdurate rascal!

O ghosts both great and small!

Attack him all!

Mask figures of the corps de ballet storm in and encircle *Falstaff*. They all torment him in their own fashion.

Freiherr Friedrich von Flotow 1812-1883

- Born to an aristocratic family in North Germany with roots to ancestors during the reign of the Staufen Kaisers.
- Studied in Paris with Anton Reicha (student of Haydn and Mozart)
- In Paris he had connections to the leading composers of Grand French Opera from Auber, Meyerbeer, Jaques Halevy, Charles Gounod to Jaques Offenbach. One of his librettists was Saint Georges.
- His most famous Opera is *Martha* premiered in 1847 at the Vienna Court Theatre.
- His operas were given in all European Cities in German, French, English and Italian translations.
- The Tenor role of Lionel in *Martha* was one of Caruso's favorite roles.
- He was a gentleman, beloved by friends and family. Died in 1883, one month before Wagner

Martha

Libretto by F.W. Riese based on Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint Georges

- The opera plays in England at the time of Queen Anne.
- Lady Harriett and her maid Nancy want to have some fun and sell themselves at the market in Richmond to 2 farmers Lionel and Plunket as maids.
- There after follows a hilarious confusion when the false maids want to go back to their lives at court. Lionel falls in love with Harriett and Plunket with Nancy.
- When the 2 farmers pursue the false maids, Lionel gets himself arrested. He sends a ring, his late father gave him, to Queen Anne and it is discovered that he is the son of the unjustly banished Earl of Derby.
- With the folk song "The last rose of summer" Harriett asks Lionel for forgiveness and offers her hand in marriage. After the mock re-enactment of the original fair Lionel gives in and the 2 couples embrace to the jubilation of the crowd.

Martha selection

Staatskapelle Berlin, conductor Johannes Schueler

Lady Harriett (Erna Berger) Lionel (Peter Anders)

'Tis the last rose of summer,
Left blooming alone,
All her lovely companions
Are faded and gone;
No flow'r of her kindred,
Or give sigh for sigh.
No rosebud is nigh
To reflect back her blushes,
I'll not leave thee, thou lone one,
To pine on the stem.

Martha selection

Lady Harriett continued:

Since the lovely are sleeping,
Go, sleep thou with them.
Thus kindly I scatter
Thy leaves o'er the bed,
Where thy mates of the garden
Lie scentless and dead.

Tannhaeuser selection

Librettist and composer Richard Wagner 1845
Orchester Deutsche Oper Berlin, conductor C. Thielemann

Wolfram von Eschenbach(Thomas Quasthoff)

Like a deathly portent darkness covers the land
And veils the valley in its sable robes.
The soul that yearns for heaven's heights
Is afraid of its flight through night and horror.
There you shine, O loveliest stars,
Shedding your gentle light on distant lands
And cleaving night's darkness with your lovely rays
While as a friend you show the way out of the valley.

Tannhaeuser selection

Wolfram von Eschenbach continued

O gracious evening star,
How gladly I have always greeted you.
From a heart that never betrayed her
Greet her as she passes by
And soars above this earthly vale
To become a blessed angel yonder.