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A B S T R A C T
This article provides an overview of the art of opera, its origins, development, and genres. Opera originated in Italy at the end of the 16th century and quickly spread to other European countries. The article discusses the main opera genres-opera seria, opera buffa, romantic opera, and verismo opera-along with their historical development and characteristics. It also explores how opera is linked to social and cultural processes, its role in theater and music, and addresses contemporary opera. The article emphasizes opera as an important art form that reflects humanity's aesthetic and spiritual values through the fusion of music and theater.

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Opera is a synthetic art form that combines theater, poetry, dance, and music. It is a musical dramatic genre. Opera is a mixed (synthetic) genre that encompasses several types of art; in it, dramaturgy, music, visual arts, and dance forms are organically connected in a unified theatrical process. However, music occupies the leading role among them. The literary basis of opera-events in the libretto-are expressed through the means of musical dramaturgy, primarily in vocal music forms. The emotional experiences of the characters are primarily expressed in complete musical passages, such as arias and cavatinas, performed by solo singers. The recitative in opera links the complete musical forms and plays an important role in the musical dramaturgy process. Various vocal ensembles reflect the relationships between the characters and dramatic events. The chorus serves as an explanatory tool for the unfolding events, helping to depict moments from everyday life. The orchestra also plays a significant role in opera: it accompanies the vocal forms, reveals the meaning of the situation in independent instrumental sections, and helps convey the emotional state of each scene. The structure of the opera depends on its ideological purpose, the features of the plot, the traditions and styles of the musical-creative schools, and the composer's artistic thinking.[1] Its artistic means of influence are limitless, which is why it occupies a leading position in the field of music. The influence of opera was felt in many areas of music during the 16th to 18th centuries. Thanks to opera, new genres of instrumental music emerged: overture, orchestral music, ballet suites, and others.

Italian opera originated in Italy. By the 17th century, Italy had suffered from political subjugation under Spain and Austria, and had become a fragmented state. Despite this, the art of opera, embodying vibrant and life-giving energy, flourished early on in the Renaissance period in the city of Florence, which was a center of creativity. Famous Renaissance artists like Dante Alighieri, Michelangelo Buonarroti, and Benvenuto Cellini began their creative journeys in Florence. The first operas were called "drama per musica," meaning "musical drama." In the 16th century, Giovanni Bardi, one of the prominent art patrons of the time, formed a group known as the "Florentine Camerata." The members of the Camerata included talented artists, poets, writers, actors, and scholars. Their main goal was to revive ancient Greek tragedies and dramas, and they worked on restoring the works of Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles. The initial

experiments of the Florentine Camerata reveal that they sought to awaken the medieval tradition of expressing the inner world and emotions of the characters. To achieve this, monody (a single-voiced melody or musical declamation) was found to be an alternative means of expressing the inner world of a person. The contributions of singer and composer Jacopo Peri and poet Ottavio Rinuccini were significant in the creation of the opera genre. Jacopo Peri (1561-1633) served as the "music and musicians' director" at the court of the great Medici dukes in Tuscany. Ottavio Rinuccini was one of the disciples of Torquato Tasso. The first opera created through their efforts, *Dafne*, has not survived, but *Euridice* has. Its premiere took place in 1600 in France, during the wedding ceremony of King Henry IV and Maria de' Medici. This opera, based on ancient Greek mythology, tells the story of Orpheus, who, with his singing talent and extraordinary voice, astonishes not only nature and mankind but also the gods. Orpheus's wife, Euridice, dies from a snake bite. In an attempt to bring her back to life, Orpheus descends into the underworld, the realm of the god Hades, and asks for her release. Impressed by Orpheus's voice, Hades agrees to let her go but sets one condition-Orpheus must not look at Euridice until they reach the light. However, Orpheus cannot resist and turns to look at her, losing her forever. Unable to bear the tragedy, and having lost his divine voice, Orpheus is torn apart by maenads and dies. Naturally, such a tragic ending could not be part of a wedding celebration, so in the final part of the opera, the main characters, Orpheus and Euridice, are taken into the heavens to join the gods. Another opera based on this libretto was composed by Giulio Caccini (1551-1618)[2]

The opera genre also gained great popularity in Rome, the center of the Catholic world. Church clergy saw opera as an effective tool to influence those coming to church services. Between 1620 and 1640, the Barberini brothers, who were nephews of the Pope ruling over Rome at the time, presented themselves as patrons and built a grand opera theater in their palace. However, even earlier, alongside the Florentine operas, another genre emerged in Rome-oratorio. The oratorio is a composition for choir, soloists, and orchestra, based on sacred Christian themes. These works were performed in special rooms next to churches called “oratories.” In turn, its performance and the unique setting led to the naming of the genre. The first oratorio is considered to be "Imagination of Body and Soul" by Emilio del Cavaliere. The contributions of composers Giacomo Carissimi and Alessandro Stradella were extremely significant in the development of this genre. These composers also created many cantatas (works involving singing in Latin and Italian). Cantatas were lyrical-dramatic works, typically short, which included arias, recitatives, ensembles, and choruses. Over time, secular cantatas emerged alongside religious oratorios. However, the popularity of oratorios and cantatas did not hinder the development of opera in Rome. In Rome, opera librettos were often written by prelates, which gave the operas a moral, clerical tone. For example, Stefano Landi, one of the singers in the papal chapel, wrote his opera "Saint Alexis" based on a text by Cardinal Rospigliosi, the future Pope Clement IX. Rospigliosi also authored a musical comedy based on the subject of Giovanni Boccaccio's "Decameron," which became controversial in religious circles. Among Roman operas, "Galatea," written by Loretto Vittori, a member of the papal chapel, holds a special place. The French writer Romain Rolland later acknowledged that this opera reflected the highest form of the union between poetry and music. After the death of Pope Urban VIII, Innocent X, the Barberini brothers' enemy, ascended the papal throne. As a result, they were forced to leave Rome, and the opera theater they had supported was closed. However, before this, in 1630, the “San Cassiano” opera theater opened on the Venetian islands in the Adriatic Sea. At the time, Venice had declared itself a Republic, making opera theaters popular art forms for the public. Anyone could buy a ticket and attend a performance. The growing popularity of opera encouraged the establishment of many theaters, especially during the 17th century, often built near churches and named after them[3]. The first major composition in this genre was written in 1600, based on the famous legend of the singer Orpheus and his beloved Eurydice. In general, the primary centers for the development of opera as an art form and the formation of its many types were Italy and France.

Serious opera is one of the main types of opera in music. It emerged in the late 17th century among composers of the Neapolitan school in Italy. The main themes of these works include mythological and historical-heroic subjects. "Serious" operas were distinguished by their distinctive pathos and elaborate, expressive costumes. Soloists' long arias were dominant, in which they skillfully expressed even the smallest emotions of the character. The roles of words and music were clearly and distinctly separated.

Comic opera, like other types of opera, also emerged in Italy in the 17th century. It is contrasted with the "boring" serious opera and has entirely different characteristics: smaller in scale, with a focus on dialogues, very few characters, and the use of comedic styles. This type of opera remained much more democratic and realistic compared to serious opera. Different countries gave comic opera their own names-hence, in Italy it was called *opera buffa*, in England *ballad opera*, in Germany *singspiel*, and in Spain *tonadilla*. Accordingly, each version had its own national flavor of humor. Italian composers such as Pergolesi and Rossini worked in the opera buffa genre, while in France, Monsigny and Grétry were prominent, and among the English, the most famous were Sullivan and Gilbert.

Semi-serious opera is a genre that lies between serious and comic opera (also known as opera seria). Its distinctive feature was a dramatic story with a happy ending. It emerged in Italy in the late 18th century. This type of opera did not develop as extensively.

Grand opera is a French genre that emerged in the first half of the 19th century. As the name suggests, grand opera is distinguished by its large scale (four or five acts, many performers, dancers, and a large choir), monumentality, the use of historical and heroic plots, and elaborate scenic effects. The presence of a dance act was mandatory. Notable composers of this genre include Spontini, Verdi, and Aubert. Romantic opera emerged in the 19th century in Germany. Its rise is connected to the general tendencies of Romanticism that swept Germany at the end of the previous century, although musical trends toward Romanticism took several decades to manifest. This trend is especially marked by the elevation of national spirit, which was also reflected in opera. The genre includes all works written with a sense of mysticism and fantasy, centered on romantic plots. Composers such as Weber, Spohr, and partially Wagner created works in this genre.

Opera ballet is a variety that originated in France in the early 18th century, known as French court ballet. As the name suggests, it was primarily created for various royal court celebrations. The works stood out for their grandeur and brilliance of scenery, consisting of several small, unrelated scenes. Here, opera, as a distinct theatrical form, was perhaps most vividly expressed. The greatest expressiveness and uniqueness of opera-ballet was brought by the French composer Jean-Philippe Rameau, who infused a bit of high drama into this lighter genre. This genre soon lost its utility as its functions were very specific and tied to the performance setting. Despite the appearance of some opera and ballet works up until the 20th century, opera and ballet remain distinct forms of music and theater.

Operetta is a much smaller genre of opera, consisting of light-hearted, entertaining works with simple plots, often involving love and satire, and memorable, catchy music. Small operas appeared in France at the end of the 19th century. The nature and content of operettas vary greatly, often having lyrical and comedic tones. Defining this genre presents certain challenges, as there are no clear-cut boundaries separating operetta from opera-buffa.

Opera's history began in Italy, where it emerged as part of mystical spectacles with episodic music introduced at a low level. Religious comedy: "The Transformation of Saint Pol" (1480) by Beverini was already a more serious work, where music accompanied the action from beginning to end. In the mid-16th century, pastoral or pastoral plays became very popular, with music limited to choral arrangements, and works of the motet or madrigal style. In *Amfiparnasso*, a work by Orazio Vecchi, the chorus sang behind the scenes in a five-part madrigal form to accompany the actors on stage. This "Commedia armonica" was first performed in 1597 at the court of Modena. In the late 16th century, attempts to incorporate monophonic singing (monody) into such compositions pushed opera forward at a rapid pace. The creators of these works referred to their musical and dramatic pieces as *drama per musica* (drama through music); the term "opera" began to be used for these works in the first half of the 17th century. Later, some opera composers, such as Richard Wagner, reverted to the term "musical drama."

The first public opera theater was opened in 1637 in Venice; previously, opera was reserved only for court performances. The first major opera could be considered Jacopo Peri's *Dafne*, which premiered in 1597. Soon after, opera spread throughout Italy and then to the rest of Europe. Within 65 years of the opening of public opera houses in Venice, 7 theaters were established, and 357 operas (around 40 of which were new works) were composed for them by various composers. The pioneers of opera include Heinrich Schütz in Germany (Dafne, 1627), Cambert in France (La Pastorale, 1647), Purcell in England,

and the first operas in Spain appeared in the early 18th century. In Russia, Araya composed the first independent Russian opera based on a Russian text, *Mullet and Procrida* (1755), while the first Russian opera written in Russian traditions was *Tanyusha or the Happy Meeting*, composed by F.G. Volkov in 1756.

Opera genres evolved over time, with several distinct forms developing historically. While the dramaturgy of opera maintained common laws, each genre presented its own interpretations of various components. These included *opera seria* (Italian) or *tragédie lyrique* (French), later known as *grand opera*, *semi-comic* (semi-seria), *comic opera* (opera buffa in Italian, *opéra comique* in French, *Singspiel* in German), and romantic opera with romantic plots. In comic opera, dialogue is allowed between musical numbers in German and French, and some serious operas, such as Beethoven's *Fidelio*, Cherubini's *Medea*, and Weber's *The Magic Shooter*, also include dialogue.

Children's operas, such as Benjamin Britten's *The Little Sweep*, *Noah's Flood*, and Lev Konov's *King Met the First*, *Asgard*, *The Ugly Duckling*, and *Cocoon*, are also part of this genre.

Opera is a synthetic genre that unites various art forms within a single theatrical act: drama, music, visual arts (sets, costumes), and choreography (ballet). The opera ensemble includes soloists, choruses, orchestras, military bands, and organs. The voices in opera include soprano, mezzo-soprano, contralto for women, and countertenor, tenor, baritone, bass for men. The parts of an opera include recitatives, ariosos, songs, arias, duets, trios, quartets, ensembles, and others. Symphonic forms in opera include overtures, introductions, interludes, pantomimes, melodramas, processions, and ballet music.

The characters in opera are fully revealed through solo numbers such as arias, ariosos, ariettas, cavatinas, monologues, ballads, and songs. The recitative in opera performs various functions, including musical intonation and the rhythmic repetition of human speech. It often connects separate full musical numbers and is frequently an effective dramatic device. In certain genres, especially comedic ones, recitatives are replaced by spoken dialogue[4].

Today, opera remains a vital art form, performed in theaters worldwide. It also embraces various technologies and new forms, such as symphonic and orchestral programs, new theatrical design methods, and interactive stages. Many opera theaters now create new works, and classic opera pieces are presented in innovative forms.

Conclusion

Opera art offers a fascinating experience for many art lovers and spectators with its rich history, captivating music, and dramatic elements. Each opera piece, as a harmonious blend of music and theater, unveils the delicate aspects of the human soul. This art form continues to evolve and grow today, and its excellence is appreciated worldwide.

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