Chapter 13

Vocal Music in the Classical Era
The Rise of Opera Buffa

- 1720s a new style of opera emerged in Italy
- many elements not found in opera seria
- subject matter was humorous (not serious)
- libretto about everyday characters (not heroes, rulers, gods)
- singers included basses (not castrati)
- gave more emphasis to ensemble singing (duets, trios, quartets)
- avoided da capo arias
- periodic phrase structure
- origins lie in tradition of intermezzo
The Rise of Opera Buffa

- Pergolesi *La serva padrona* “The Maid made Mistress” (1733)
  - intermezzo
    (performed between the acts of a serious opera)
  - tells the story of a maid who becomes mistress of the house (everyday characters, not heroes)
  - orchestra made up of strings and continuo
    (continuo is a legacy of Baroque practice)
  - homophonic textures (Classical period trait)
  - periodic phrase structure (Classical period trait)
  - this duet ends the Act I (Serpina argues that she would be a perfect “padrona”. Uberto is not so sure.)
  - aria starts at 18’ 38” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsUeywPFEgQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsUeywPFEgQ)
Opera Wars

- opera buffa provoked controversy throughout Europe
- debate raged with particular virulence in France
- War of the Buffoons (Guerre des Bouffons) ignited by debut of Pergolesi’s *La serva padrona* in Paris 1752
- pitted partisans of King Louis XV against those of Queen Marie:
  - defenders of French culture against advocates of Italian Style
- traditionalists lost war and French composers incorporated elements of comic opera into works
Gluck and the Reform of Opera

- Growing number of poets, composers criticized opera seria’s showcasing of singers’ virtuosity as unnatural impediments to dramatic action.

- Several composers set out to reform opera seria making it more natural and dramatically coherent.
Gluck and the Reform of Opera

- preface to *Alceste* (1769), Gluck spelled out basic principles behind his efforts to eliminate “abuses” that “disfigured” Italian opera (See Bonds p. 341)

- no da capo arias
- little or no opportunity for vocal improvisation
- no long melismas
- predominantly syllabic setting of text
- less repetition of text within an aria
- less recitative
- accompanied rather than secco recitative
- simpler, more flowing melodic lines
Gluck and the Reform of Opera

- Gluck *Alceste* (1767; rev 1776) from Act II, Sc. 3
  - this excerpt shows the reforms in practice:
    - uses accompanied recitative
      (see m. 486 & 538)
    - greater role for the Chorus (see m. 525)
    - flows directly from recitative to aria
      (see m. 591)
    - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKIeckCpK_A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKIeckCpK_A)
Mozart and the synthesis of operatic styles

• operas are celebrated as his greatest achievements
• created psychologically complex characters
• synthesized and transcended boundaries of opera buffa, opera seria, and other operatic styles in:
  - *Le Nozze di Figaro* (The Marriage of Figaro)
  - *Don Giovanni*
  - *Cosi fan tutte* (All women are like that)
  - *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute)
Scene from Mozart’s Don Giovanni. The illustration shows Leporello beginning his “Catalogue Aria” singing to Donna Elvira from the long list of Don Giovanni’s prior loves.
Mozart and the synthesis of operatic styles

- *Don Giovanni* (1787) Act I Sc. 1-4
  - based on the legend of Don Juan
  - libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte is both comic and serious
  - overture and first three scenes make up 20 minutes of continuous music
  - Mozart integrates *buffa* and *seria* elements

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QagLNhmbAh0 (overture at 1’ 54”)
Mozart and the synthesis of operatic styles

- *Le nozze di Figaro* (The Marriage of Figaro)
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lW1_LJn6keY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lW1_LJn6keY)
    (overture starts at 0’ 54”)

- *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute)
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DvuKxL4LOqc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DvuKxL4LOqc)
    “Queen of the Night” aria is at 2’ 09”
  - [http://youtu.be/H_xfC9RXicU](http://youtu.be/H_xfC9RXicU) this is very good, too.
  - [http://youtu.be/cpKfF7TziOQ](http://youtu.be/cpKfF7TziOQ) so is this one.
Sacred Music

• Almost every major composer of the Classical era wrote music for the church

• court encouraged simpler, more chordal settings of liturgy

• Vatican tried to steer followers away from elaborate concert-style Masses on grounds they were overly secular

• sacred music preserved more strict counterpoint than was customary in theater or chamber music
Sacred Music

- Mozart "Introit and Kyrie" from Requiem (K. 626) written in 1791
  - Written after Joseph II died in 1790
  - Shows synthesis of older and contemporary styles.
    - Uses *basso continuo* and large sections use contrapuntal procedures.
    - Final cadence has roots and fifths (no 3rd).
  - Borrows from Handel's *Messiah*.
    - Kyrie fugue subject based on "And with His stripes we are healed"
    - [http://youtu.be/OgucdgX3e50](http://youtu.be/OgucdgX3e50)
Handel "And with His stripes we are healed"
from part II of Messiah
An 18th-century ballad singer.
The watercolor captures the ease and naturalness of public singing in an earlier age. The woman holds in her hands the words of the latest ballad. Onlookers stop to listen.
Song

- Song was essential domestic vocal genre
- Financially lucrative for composers and publishers
- Strophic songs used as operatic arias to suggest characterization
Song

• Johann Friedrich Reichardt "Italien" (Kennst du das Land)

• Good example of a Classical Period song

• Setting is: strophic, syllabic, technically undemanding, and the vocal range only slightly exceeds an octave

• The text (Do you know the land) is by Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (Wilhelm Meister's Years of Apprenticeship)
Song

- Mozart *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute)
  - Singspiel written on Masonic themes
  - the aria “Der Volgelfänger bin ich ja” (Yes, I am the bird-catcher)
  - shows folk-song traits
    - strophic, periodic phrase structure, simple harmonies, elegant simplicity
Song

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- largely self-taught
- Chester became an unofficial anthem of the American Revolution
- “Africa”
Song

- William Billings (1746-1800) was one of the first American-born composers to achieve international fame
- largely self-taught
- *Chester* became an unofficial anthem of the American Revolution
- Billings “Africa” hymn from *The New-England Psalm-Singer*
  - first printed without text; later text added by Isaac Watts when republished in *The Singing Master’s Assistant* (1778)