

Opera A to Z

An Alphabetical List of Opera, Composers, and Librettists

L'Africaine : opera in five acts by Meyerbeer; first performed in Paris in 1865; set in Portugal in the first years of the Inquisition.

Aïda : opera in four acts by Verdi; first performed in Cairo, Egypt in 1871; written to celebrate the opening of the Suez Canal.

Andrea Chénier : opera in four acts by Giordano; first performed 1896; story of a brilliant French aristocrat who died at the guillotine.

Ariadne auf Naxos : opera in prologue and one act by Richard Strauss; combines elements of opera seria and opera buffa; first performed in 1912.

ballo in maschera, Un : an opera in three acts by Verdi; first performed in 1859; deals with the assassination of the king of Sweden.

Bastien und Bastienne : light opera in one act by Mozart; first performed in 1768; story deals with a shepherdess in love with a shepherd.

Bellini, Vincenzo: (1801-1835); Italian composer of bel canto opera; his most famous works are Norma (1831) and I Puritani (1835).

Berlioz, Hector: (1803-69); one of the great French composers of the 19th century; composer of Les Troyens (1863), in some ways a counterpart to Wagner's Ring.

Bizet, George: (1838-75); French composer of Carmen and The Pearl Fishers.

Bohème, La : opera in four acts by Puccini; first performed in 1896; deals with jealousy and love among poor young artists in Paris.

Boïto, Arrigo: (1842-1918); Verdi's librettist for Otello and Falstaff; composer of the opera Mefistofele (1868).

Boris Godunov : Opera in prologue and four acts by Mussorgsky with a libretto based on Pushkin's play about the torments of Boris Godunov; first performed 1874.

Britten, Benjamin: (1913-1976); English composer best known for Peter Grimes (1945), Albert Herring (1947), and Billy Budd (1951).

Capriccio : Opera in one act by Richard Strauss; first performed in 1942; deals with the question of whether music or poetry is more important in opera.

Cavalleria rusticana: Opera in one act by Mascagni; first performed in 1890; one of the most successful examples of verismo opera; shows stark violence and passion.

Cenerentola, La : opera in two acts by Rossini; first performed in 1817; story of Cinderella

Charpentier, Gustave: (1860-1956) French composer of Louise (1900).

contes d'Hoffmann, Les: opera in prologue and three acts by Offenbach; first performed in 1881; deals with the creations of the poet Hoffmann.

coq d'or, Le: fantasy opera in three acts by Rimsky-Korsakov; first performed in 1909.

Così fan tutte: opera in two acts by Mozart with libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte; first performed in 1790; a comedy dealing with fidelity in love.

Da Ponte, Lorenzo: Mozart's librettist for The Marriage of Figaro and Don Giovanni spent the last years of his life in the U.S. where he taught Italian at Columbia.

Debussy, Claude: (1862-1918); most famous of the French impressionist composers; composed only one opera, Pelléas et Mélisande (1902), based on a play by the Symbolist poet Maeterlinck.

Delibes, Léo: (1836-91); French composer of the opera Lakme (1883) and the ballets Sylvia and Coppelia.

Dido and Aeneas : opera in three acts by Henry Purcell; based on Book IV of Virgil's Aeneid; first performed in 1689; first important English opera.

Don Giovanni : opera in two acts by Mozart; libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte; first performed in 1787; based on the legend of Don Juan.

Donizetti, Gaetano: (1797-1848); Italian composer of bel canto opera; best known for Lucia di Lammermoor.

L'elisir d'amore : opera in two acts by Donizetti; first performed in 1832; comic opera set in an Italian village.

Die Entführung aus dem Serail : singspiel in three acts by Mozart; first performed in 1782; set in a Turkish palace.

Eugene Onegin: opera in three acts by Tchaikovsky; story based on a play by Pushkin; first performed in 1879.

favola d'Orfeo, La: opera in prologue and five acts by Monteverdi; story based on the Orpheus legend; first performed in 1607.



Georges Bizet



Claude Debussy

Fidelio: rescue opera by Beethoven; first performed in 1805; deals with a wife's attempt to rescue of her husband who is a political prisoner.

Fledermaus, Die: operetta in three acts by Johann Strauss; first performed in 1874; frivolous plot; showcases waltzes.

fliegende Hollander, Der: opera in three acts by Wagner; first performed in 1843; deals with the ghost of a sea captain condemned to wander until he can find the love of a pure woman.

forza del destino, La : opera in four acts by Verdi; first performed in 1862 in St. Petersburg; deals with a Spanish nobleman and forbidden love.

Freischütz, Der: opera in three acts by Carl Maria von Weber; first performed in 1821; prototype for German Romantic opera.



Umberto
Giordano

Gianni Schicchi: most popular of the three one-act operas that make up Puccini's *Il Trittico*, the others being *Il tabarro* and *Suor Angelica*; first performed in 1918; deals with a humorous swindler in Florence in 1299.

Gioconda, La: opera in four acts by Ponchielli; first performed 1876; story by Victor Hugo; famous for "Cielo e mar", the *Suicidio*, and the *Dance of the Hours*.

Giordano, Umberto: (1867-1948); known primarily for one opera *Andrea Chenier* (1896.)

Giulio Cesare: opera in three acts by Handel; first performed in 1724; an example of opera seria; deals with the story of Julius Caesar and Cleopatra.

Glinka, Mikhail: (1804-1857); father of Russian nationalist opera; composed the prototypes for the historical drama (*A Life for the Tsar*) and the fantasy opera (*Ruslan and Ludmila*).

Götterdämmerung, Die: opera in prologue and three acts by Wagner; the last of the four works in his cycle of music dramas *Der Ring des Nibelungen*; in it the ring is finally returned to the

Rhinemaidens and Valhalla is consumed in flames; first performed in 1876.

Gounod, Charles: (1818-93); composer of French grand opera; his best known works are *Faust* and *Romeo et Juliette*.

Grétry, André Ernest: (1741-1813); Belgian composer who dominated French opera in the 1770s and 1780s; his best known work is *Richard Coeur-de-Lion* (1784).

Halévy, Fromental: (1799-1862); composer of French grand opera; his most famous work is *La Juive*.

L'heure espagnole: comic opera in one act by Maurice Ravel; first performed 1911; story of a Spanish clockmaker.

Juive, La: French grand opera in five acts by Halévy; first performed in 1844; deals with Jewish oppression in the 15th century.

Leoncavallo, Ruggiero: (1858-1919); Italian composer of verismo opera; his most famous work is *Pagliacci*. The subject is derived from the characters of the *commedia dell'arte*.

Lohengrin : opera in three acts by Wagner; based on a medieval legend; first performed in 1850; the story is set in 10th century Saxony; Act III contains the famous *Bridal Chorus*.

Lucia di Lammermoor: opera in three acts by Donizetti based on a story by Sir Walter Scott; set in Scotland in the 17th century; tells the story of the tragedy resulting from a forced marriage; most famous for the *Mad Scene* in the last act.

Manon : French opera in five acts by Massenet; based on the frequently used story of *Manon Lescaut*, a simple girl from the country who suffers from making bad decisions; first performed in 1884.

Manon Lescaut : Italian opera in four acts by Puccini; first performed in 1893; uses the same story by Prevost that Massenet used earlier in his *Manon*.

Mascagni, Pietro: (1863-1945); Italian composer; remembered chiefly for his early work *Cavalleria rusticana*; succeeded Toscani as director of *La Scala* in 1929.

Mefistofele : opera in prologue, four acts, and epilogue by Boito; based on the drama by Goethe; first performed in 1868.

Meistersinger von Nürnberg, Die : opera in three acts by Wagner; first performed in 1868; story centers around the medieval guilds of singers; Hans Sachs is the hero.

Menotti, Gian-Carlo (1911-); Italian composer who moved to America in his youth; follows in the tradition of Puccini in his approach to melody in opera; his most famous works are *The Medium*, *The Telephone*, *The Consul*, and *Amahl and the Night Visitors*.

Mignon : opera in three acts by Ambroise Thomas, based on a story by Goethe; first performed in Paris in 1866; contains the famous coloratura aria "Je suis Titania"; has received over 2000 performances at the *Opera Comique* since its premiere.

Monteverdi, Claudio (1567-1643): composer of the one of the first complete operas to survive *L'Orfeo* (1607). Also wrote *The Coronation of Poppea* and *The Return of Ulysses*.



Ruggiero Leoncavallo

Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus: (1756-1791); composer of operas in Italian and German; his most famous works are *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte*, *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, and *The Magic Flute*.

Mussorgsky, Modest: (1835-1881); Russian nationalist composer; one of the Mighty Five; composed two historical operas *Boris Godunov* and *Khovanshchina*.

nozze di Figaro, Le : opera in four acts by Mozart; libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte; based on a play by Beaumarchais dealing with class struggle in the late 18th century; first performed in Vienna in 1786.



Offenbach, Jacques : (1819-80); master of French comic opera; born in Germany but worked primarily in Paris. His most famous work is the serious opera *The Tales of Hoffman*.

Orfeo ed Eurydice : Greek myth used by many composers. One of the most famous treatments was by C.W. Gluck in a work that premiered in 1762; it was known as a reform opera because it eliminated some of the excesses of the Baroque style. Its most famous sections are the *Dance of the Blessed Spirits* and "*Che farò senza Eurydice*".

Otello : opera in four acts by Verdi; libretto by Boito after Shakespeare; first performed in 1887.

Pagliacci : opera in two acts by Leoncavallo, first performed in 1892; one of the most

famous examples of verismo opera; characters are derived from the *commedia dell'arte*.

Parsifal : festival play in three acts by Wagner; first performed at Bayreuth in 1882; the story centers around the legend of the Holy Grail, the cup from which Jesus drank at the last supper; Wagner thought of this as more of a religious ceremony than an entertainment.

Pelléas et Mélisande : opera in five acts by Debussy with the libretto in French by the Symbolist poet Maeterlinck; first performed in Paris in 1902; contains no set arias, duets, or ensembles; the music aims to reflect the mystical quality of the play; it was the only opera composed by Debussy.

Pergolesi, Giovanni Battista: (1710-1736); most famous for his intermezzo *La Serva Padrona*; he also composed five opera serie that were not successful.

Ponchielli, Amilcare: (1834-1886); Italian composer who is chiefly remembered for his opera *La Gioconda*.

Prokofiev, Sergei: (1891-1953); one of the most famous Russian composers of the 20th century; his operas include *The Love of Three Oranges*, *The Gambler*, *The Flaming Angel*, *War and Peace*, and *A Tale of the Real Man*.

Puccini, Giacomo: (1858-1924); one of the most famous of all opera composers; some of his works fall in the verismo style; among his works are *Manon Lescaut*, *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Girl of the Golden West*, *Il Trittico*, and *Turandot*.

Puritani, I : opera in three acts by Bellini; first performed in Paris in 1835; deals with the conflict between the Puritans and the Cavaliers in England; contains extremely difficult vocal roles.

Ravel, Maurice : (1875-1937) French composer; he wrote two one-act operas *L'heure Espagnole* (1911) and *L'enfant et les sortilèges* (1925).

Das Rheingold: the first of four music dramas by Richard Wagner in the *Ring of Nibelungen* cycle; it deals with the theft of the golden ring from the Rhinemaidens.

Rigoletto : opera in three acts by Verdi, libretto taken from Victor Hugo; first performed in 1851; story deals with the tragic life of a hunchback in service of a dissolute nobleman.

Ring des Nibelungen, Der : a collect of four music dramas by Wagner, written over many years and lasting over 21 hours in performance; the separate works are *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Die Gotterdammerung*.

Roméo et Juliette : French opera in five acts by Gounod; based on Shakespeare; first performed in Paris in 1867.

Rosenkavalier, Der: opera in three acts by Richard Strauss; first performed in 1911; reminiscent of the style of Mozart; deals with the poignancy of love in youth and in age.

Rossini, Gioacchino: (1792-1868); Italian composer who was a master of opera buffa; his most famous works are *The Barber of Seville*, *La Cenerentola*, and *William Tell*.

Ruslan and Ludmila: opera in five acts by Glinka; first performed in St. Petersburg in 1842; characters are taken from Russian folklore; this opera serves as a prototype for the fantasy operas of Rimsky-Korsakov and Stravinsky.

Saint-Saëns, Camille: (1835-1921); French composer who worked in almost every area of musical composition. His most famous opera is *Samson et Dalila* (1877).

Salome: opera in one act by Richard Strauss; libretto taken from a play by Oscar Wilde. first performed in Dresden in 1905; its degeneracy caused a widespread outcry when it first appeared.

Samson et Dalila : opera in three acts by Saint-Saëns; story taken from the Book of Judges; one of the best known works in the French repertory.

Scribe, Eugène: (1791-1861); French dramatist and librettist; wrote libretti for Auber, Bellini, Donizetti, Lahevy, Meyerbeer, Rossini, and Verdi.

serva padrona, La : intermezzo or opera buffa in two acts by Pergolesi; first performed, as was the custom, as intermission pieces between the acts of an opera seria. It contain only three roles: a bass, a soprano, and a non-singing part. It was very important in the history of comic opera.

Siegfried : music drama in three acts by Wagner; the third in his tetralogy Der Ring des Nibelungen. Story deals with the young Siegfried and his love for Brunnhilde.

Simon Boccanegra : opera in prologue and three acts by Verdi with libretto by Piave; first performed in Venice in 1857; story deals with the ruler of Genoa in the 14th century; one of Verdi's lesser known works.

Strauss, Richard: (1864-1949); German composer and conductor; equally well known for orchestral works and opera; most famous operas include Salome, Elektra, Der Rosenkavalier, Ariadne auf Naxos, Die Frau ohne Schatten, and Arabella.

Suor Angelica: one of three one-act works in Puccini's Il trittico ; its story concerns a nun who came to a convent after an unknown tragedy in her life; first performed in New York in 1918.

tabarro, Il: one of three one-act works in Puccini's Il trittico; the story depicts life on a barge on the Seine; a love triangle results in tragedy; first performed in New York in 1918.

Tannhäuser: opera in three acts by Wagner; based on a medieval German poem; first performed in Dresden in 1845; contains the famous Pilgrim's Chorus.

Tchaikovsky, Peter Ilyitch: (1840-93); Russian composer known primarily for orchestral works; composed operas including Eugen Onegin (1879) and The Queen of Spades (1890).

Thais: opera in three acts by Massenet; first performed in 1894; set in Egypt, deals with the conflict of sacred and profane love.

Thomas, Ambroise: (1811-96); French opera composer; known primarily for Mignon (1866).

Tosca: opera in three acts by Puccini; first performed in 1900; set in Rome during the Napoleonic Wars; one of the most famous of verismo operas.

traviata, La : opera in three acts by Verdi; libretto is by Piave after a story by the younger Alexandre Dumas usually known as Camille; the story is about a beautiful courtesan who sacrifices everything for the one true love of her life; first performed in Venice in 1853.

Tristan und Isolde : opera in three acts by Wagner; first performed in Munich 1865; based on a Celtic legend; one of the most progressive and influential operas in music history.

trovatore, Il : opera in four acts by Verdi; first performed in Rome in 1853; one of Verdi's most popular operas; the story is set in 15th century Spain and deals with gypsies, mistaken identity, mother's love, and other staples of opera lore.

Troyens, Les : opera in two parts and six acts by Berlioz based on Books I, II, and IV of Virgil's Aeneid; in some ways it is the French counterpart to Wagner's Der Ring des Nibelungen.

Turandot : last opera of Puccini; left unfinished at his death in 1924; first performed in 1926; deals with a Chinese princess and the power of love.

Verdi, Giuseppe: (1813-1901); greatest Italian opera composer of the 19th century; works include La traviata, Rigoletto, Aida, Otello, and many more.

Wagner, Richard: (1813-83); greatest German opera composer of the 19th century; created the idea of the music drama; works include The Flying Dutchman, Lohengrin, The Meistersinger von Nurnberg, Tristan und Isolde, The Ring of Nibelungen and others.

Walküre, Die: music drama in three acts by Wagner; first performed in Munich in 1870; it is the second of four music dramas in Wagner's Der Ring des Nibelungen; the story centers around the nine daughters of Wotan and Erda, the earth goddess.

Weber, Carl Maria von: (1786-1826); composer of Der Freischutz, the first important German Romantic opera.

Wozzeck: opera in three acts by Alban Berg; first performed in 1925; one of the most important of all 20th century operas; deals with the anguish and downfall of a poor soldier.

Zauberflöte, Die : opera in two acts by Mozart; first performed in Vienna in 1791; the last opera of Mozart's opera; more properly called a Singspiel because of its German text; the story is both a fairy tale and a story full of religious truths.



Camille Saint-Saens



Richard Wagner