

LESSON PLAN

“THE BIRTH OF OPERA”

Subject: MUSIC AND HISTORY

Topic: THE BIRTH OF OPERA

Age of students: 16-18

Language level: B1

Time: 45-60 min

Content aims:

After completing the lesson, the student will be able to:

Understand how opera was born.

Analyze the context of the opera birth: renaissance.

Learn how “to listen” to the opera.

Analyze why nowadays audience prefers to see classic operas than new ones.

Language aims:

After completing the lesson, the student will be able to:

Express a personal feeling about opera

Describe how he imagine an opera audition

Pre-requisites:

- Be able to express feelings, emotions and to describe the imagination

Materials:

- Internet
- Projector with screen and audio

Procedures steps:

1. Introduction activity (10 min):

Purpose: To activate prior knowledge

Description: Check the opera level of the pupils

1.1. Teacher introduces the topic and shows an extract of a famous movie and ask if they know which opera sounds

a) Movie: "Apocalypse now"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqtehtSB0LI>

Opera: The beginning of act 3 of "Die Walküre", ride of the valkyries, the second of the four operas by Richard Wagner that constitute "Der Ring des Nibelungen"

b) Movie: "Tom & Jerry"

Opera: "The Marriage of Figaro", an opera buffa of Mozart

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFFOHqx520E&list=PLz_U-Tp_bnRy2CrxHPJ3uSR2vaaoh00JP&index=18

1.2. Teacher asks pupils:

- Do they know any opera?
- When does opera born?
- Have they ever seen an opera?

2. Reading activity (15 min)

Distribute a *handout 1* to each pupil with the article "The Birth of Opera In Renaissance Italy And Its Growth Over The Centuries"

2.1. Read the article aloud

2.2. Read it individually and circle the unknown words

2.3. Answer the questions about the text

a) Why was "camerata" important for the opera?

b) What was the main opera's aim originally?

c) Which were the main opera's topics originally?

d) Describe the differences between the opera from Italia, France and German

e) Mention and explain the different kind of opera that appears in the article

3. Audition activity. Describe music (15-20 min)

Listen a few shorts excerpts from important composers of opera's early years. And write down, individually, a short composition describing what they imagine from the music (only audio)

<http://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2012/02/22/147256237/talk-like-an-opera-geek-the-birth-of-opera%20-%20early>(go directly at point “*Hear The Earliest Operas*”)

4. Audiovisual activity. Watch and comment: (10-15 min)

Compare two stagings, short excerpts, a classic one and a modern one, of “*Orfeo*” of Monteverdi, and comment the evolution of opera from its birth to nowadays. Ask pupils if they think opera has to change or not.

Classic: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mD16EVxNOM>

Modern: a) Bob Wilson: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VyksYcGJGk>

b) Dance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jb2TURdBeEQ>

Attachment: Classroom handout 1

The Birth Of Opera In Renaissance Italy And Its Growth Over The Centuries

Link: http://www.blogiversity.org/blogs/the__horn/archive/2009/07/27/the-birth-of-opera-in-renaissance-italy-and-its-growth-over-the-centuries.aspx

Opera has been in existence for about four centuries now, and is performed all over the world. Audiences can attend performances of operas by Italian, French, German, Austrian, Russian, Czech, English and American composers, even Asians, today in a variety of languages.

But the birth of opera was almost accidental, beginning in Florence, Italy at the end of the 16th century, when a group of prominent Italian composers, poets, scholars and intellectuals called the Camerata was formed. This group, inspired by the ideals of the Renaissance, sought to revive ancient Greek drama, which they believed may have been partially sung.

So opera, that potent combination of drama and music, was born. The poets and composers created a kind of sung drama accompanied by musical instruments. Naturally, the new form of drama featured subjects based on Greek mythology, such as Orpheus and Euridice, Apollo and Daphne, and other ancient Greek myths.

The first known opera was *Dafne*, with music by a once famous composer named Jacopo Peri, but this work has been lost. The first surviving opera is by the great Italian composer Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643), *La Favola D'Orfeo*, or the myth of Orpheus and Euridice, later made into a famous opera by the 18th century composer Gluck.

Opera spread throughout Italy and was no longer an art form for the aristocracy; public opera houses opened in Florence, Venice, Naples and elsewhere, and French and German composers began to write operas in their own languages. In France, opera, mixed with ballet became a pastime of the French kings, and lavish court entertainments became the rage, and the Italian born Giovanni Battista Lully, whose name was Gallicized to Jean-Baptiste Lully, became the favorite composer of the French kings in the 17th century. His elaborate operas have been revived occasionally in our time.

There were different kinds of opera; the elaborate Opera Seria, or opera based on serious mythological or historical subjects, and the comic kind of opera, or Opera Buffa.

In the 18th century, the German born Christoph Willibald Gluck reformed opera, concentrating on pure drama and expressivity, rather than elaborate staging and vocal display. Mozart's operas, such as *Don Giovanni* and *The Marriage of Figaro* achieved great success and are still popular.

In the early 19th century, Italian composers such as Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini wrote operas of the so-called Bel Canto school, Bel Canto meaning beautiful singing, offering famous singers a chance to show off both their beauty of sound, expressivity and spectacular displays of agility, leading to the operas of Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901), which are still popular today, and the romantic operas of Puccini, including *La Boheme*.

In the late 19th century, the Italian Verismo, or realistic school of opera came about, avoiding mythology and the aristocracy for plots, and dealing with the gritty lives of common people.

German opera began to flourish in the 19th century, with Carl Maria von Weber and his opera *Der Freischuetz* (the freeshooter), and plots based on German history and folklore became popular,

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including elements of German fairy tales . The giant of German opera was Wagner, whose harmonically complex and lengthy operas dominated the age, and had great influence even into the 20th century.

Elsewhere, great Russian composers such as Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov created a Russian operatic tradition using Russian history and folklore , and the same was true in Bohemia, now the Czech republic, with Smetana and Dvorak .

In the 20th century, opera became even more diverse, with the first atonal operas by Alban Berg and his teacher Arnold Schoenberg, the creation of American opera with masterpieces such as Gershwin's Porgy and Bess .

And Opera is now more diverse than ever , with 400 years of repertoire available to us. This great art form has never been more alive.

ANNEX 1 (teacher): About the context:Renaissance humanism

Renaissance humanism is presented as a cultural and educational ideal, with an emphasis on "imitatio" in order to absorb the spirit of ancient culture. In a primary concern for ethics, abstract Aristotelian analysis is displaced by the teaching of morality through classical biography and history, that is, through literature and drama. Emergence of the music drama is traced to the CorsiCamerata in Florence, as an imitation of classical participatory Greek drama in the Polis. This initial inclination of opera is then viewed as the source of continuing debate over the primacy of text, music, or stagecraft, and the basis for familiar operatic "conventions" derived from the goal of moralization: the audience is to be educated and edified.

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