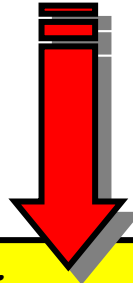




An Irreverent  
Guide© for  
**ENJOYING:**  
*Des Moines  
Metro Opera's  
2009 Summer  
Festival  
Season*



**Puccini: TOSCA \***  
**Weber: DER FREISCHÜTZ \***  
**Rossini: THE BARBER OF SEVILLE\***

**\*Involuntary musical targets coopted  
to demonstrate that "enjoying the opera" is NOT  
an oxymoronic phrase!**

## *Acknowledgements*

Greatly appreciated and effective in the development of this *Guide*, were the support, constructive comments and just plain, patient tolerance of:

- Dr. Robert Larsen, Founder and Artistic Director, DMMO;
- McB McManus, Director of Marketing and Public Relations, DMMO.
- Members of the DMMO audience who volunteered commentary on the 2008 Festival *Guide*.

**Constructive criticism of this  
*Irreverent Guide* will be accepted,  
(but probably not graciously).**

**With written permission of the authors,  
any part(s) of the *Irreverent Guides* series,  
may be reproduced without charge  
for fund-raising and/or educational purposes,  
by not-for-profit opera-related foundations.**

J.P Cooney  
and  
Sondra S. Cooney

***AN IRREVENRENT GUIDE***  
**FOR ENJOYING THE**  
**DES MOINES METRO**  
**OPERA'S**  
**2009 SUMMER**  
**FESTIVAL SEASON**



*Irreverent Guide* for DMMO 2009,  
copyright by Des Moines Metro Opera.  
Individual text copyrights by J.P. Cooney.

**IRREVERENT GUIDES #30 (*Tosca*),  
#31 (*Der Freischütz*) and  
#32 (*The Barber of Seville*)  
were developed by the Cooneys  
as a gift to  
the Des Moines Metro Opera Foundation.**

# Des Moines Metro Opera

106 West Boston Avenue Indianola, Iowa 50125-1836

phone 515-961-6221 fax 515-961-8175 w.desmoinesmetroopera.org

Greetings!

Des Moines Metro Opera is pleased to again partner with Dr. James Cooney in offering these offbeat, amusing and informative roadmaps to the operas of the 2009 Summer Festival Season! Dr. Cooney has captured the essence of these three great operas in a way that entertains, educates and enlightens.

Many people are involved with the creation of an opera production, from the conductor to the singers to the backstage technicians, all to create a magical experience for you in the theatre. A great deal of thought and consideration has gone into each of the elements you'll see and hear on the stage. It is our hope that this Guide will help you to appreciate and enjoy these works of art, and that it makes your experience with us this summer even more memorable.

Thank you for showing your interest in these Irreverent Guides to Opera, and as always, thank you for your continued support of Des Moines Metro Opera.

Sincerely yours,



Robert L. Larsen  
Founder and Artistic Director

## *Cautionary Caveats for our Consumers*

At the invitation of the Des Moines Metro Opera, an **Irreverent Guide to Enjoying Opera** was first created for the company's 2008 Summer Festival. That document incorporated all three productions into one volume. For the 2009 Festival, discussions of all three productions are again integrated into one document.

Background on the eccentric evolution of the **Irreverent Guides** series is found on pp. 141-142. For the unwary and/or uninitiated reader, there are several generic sections common to each of the 2009 opera discussions. A brief description of the general objectives of these sections follows. Therefore, you will know what you are getting into, or--- what to avoid!


- In response to long ago whiny whimpers, the section(s) *Tersely Telling A Tuneful Tale* was begrudgingly developed as a standard part in each **Irreverent Guide**. In all honesty, it is a seriously stripped-down synopsis of our operatic opus and its major musical moments.

These *Terse Tales* target two commonly impatient sub-classes of our ribald readership: 1. those who have short spans of attention AND/OR 2. those who spent their educational years (and probably beyond) insisting they only had sufficient time to scan synopses of assigned materials and only at the last moments before a critical confrontation with reality like "the final exam" OR later in life, the stockholders' meeting or perhaps, --- an operatic performance.

Occasionally, a *Terse Tale* is presented in alliteration. You ask, why use this ancient and somewhat arcane poetic style? Well, it is fun to manufacture and judging from its "rah, rah" readership reception, it must be fun to read; or maybe we are all a bit weird. Whatever!

Why only "occasional" alliteration you ask? Well it all depends on where I was the night before composing the copy. That stuff requires a reasonably clear head. Capisce?

- Integrated into the *Terse Tales* section(s) are materials highlighting and briefly discussing major musical sections of the opera. To distinguish these musical musings from the *Terse Tale* telling, the following format styles will be used:

- ✓ Musings on the opera's musical highlights will be in this font type style contained in a 
- ✓ Each selected musical highlight (aria, ensemble, etc.) will be titled with its opening words in the opera's original language. That will be followed by an approximate English translation.
- ✓ Musical (but wordless) interludes (e.g. an overture) will also be described in this font style type/grey box format.
- ✓ On-stage plot events will alliteratively appear in this font type style, but without the benefit of being boxed-in.

- Opera, as any art form is a product of its society and culture at a specific point in time. As that temporal point regresses into history, the on-stage and off-stage circumstances creating the opera frequently vanish into an archival dustbin.

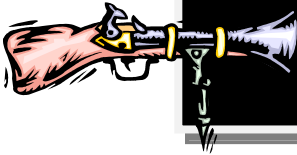
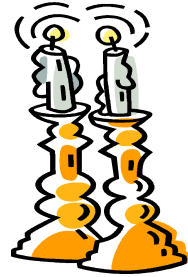
We argue that such absence is a loss to the understanding and enjoyment of an older piece when heard in contemporary times. Therefore, a *Background* piece has been developed for each of the three operas contained in this *Guide*. Each sets forth, albeit slightly, the sociology and perhaps, anthropology of the opera under the microscope.

The *Backgrounds* are designed to add to your opera viewing pleasure through enhancing understanding of how another time, place and circumstance probably influenced an artistic product. Enjoy!

# WHERE DO I FIND--- ?

Tosca

p. 11



DER FREISCHÜTZ

p. 42

THE BARBER  
OF SEVILLE

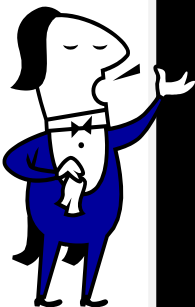
p. 86



EVERYTHING ELSE:

p. 135

- A Concluding Cogitation:  
19<sup>th</sup> Century Nights at the Opera:  
An Orgiastic Experience. P.135
- Reminiscing References.p.139
- About *Irreverent Guides*. p.143
- About the Authors.p.144



**A ROMANTIC OPERA IN THREE ACTS**

**CARL MARIA VON WEBER'S**



**DIE  
FREISCHÜTZ\***

\* For the truth about the translation trauma of this title,  
turn the page.

**LIBRETTO:  
FRIEDRICH KIND**

(based on Gothic legend and  
a story by Johann August and  
Friederich Laun.)

CARL MARIA VON WEBER

**ORIGINAL LANGUAGE: GERMAN**

**PREMIERE: <sup>42</sup>BERLIN, JUNE 18, 1821**

## Translation Trauma: DIE FREISCHÜTZ

*The authors appreciate the efforts of Holger Opderbeck, a good friend and neighbor, who counseled us on the intricacies of translating the *Der Freischütz* title into English. Vielen Dank!*

German is a remarkably economic language. As needs for new words “auf deutsch” develop, they are often built by compounding already existing words. Frequently, those compounded words do not make much literal sense in translation; so, you just learn what they mean in everyday usage. “Die Freischütz” is a case in point.

Literally translated, the phrase means the free<sup>43</sup> (frei) contactor<sup>44</sup> (schütz). Doesn't make much sense, unless you perhaps are looking for a really cheap electrician.<sup>45</sup>

In truth, the phrase does not translate into English, at least in terms of its true conversational meaning. It originated in a German legend about a poacher (Wieldieb) who used free bullets (Freikugelein) that could not miss their intended target because they were magical (Zauber). The magic had evolved from an evil source because the poacher had a pact with the devil: a blue ribbon for the poacher and in exchange, a soul for the devil.<sup>46</sup>

Most cultures have their folk tales and legends. As individuals grow up in those cultures, they internalize the tales. Their titles become shorthand for a whole story (e.g. Little Red Riding Hood). Such is the case of *Der Freischütz*. So, don't worry about its translation. Think of it as a proper noun, not a common one and know it represents a folk tale about huntsmen/foresters<sup>47</sup> who unfortunately supped with the devil while using short spoons.

---

<sup>43</sup> We will go into this “free” business a bit later when we get to the opera; it is a whole other story.

<sup>44</sup> Not a misspelling.

<sup>45</sup> The phrase is often erroneously (or, in desperation) translated as “the free shot.” Since the underlying English meaning does not refer to a carnival give away or an Irish golf gift, that translation proves to be a semantic dead-end.

<sup>46</sup> Let us think *Faust here*.

<sup>47</sup> Over the generations, the hero's occupation was sanitized.

## WHERE DO I FIND---?



**BACKGROUND.** A Devilishly, Rhythmic Romance to Rid the Schwartzenwald and Similar Surroundings of Italian Interdicted Song Sagas . . . . **46.**

**FINALLY, the Opera! . . . . 62.**

- **The Cast.** Who are These Deutsch Declaiming, Demure Dammen und Fusillade Firing Foresters, Feasting mit Friends, Foes and Fiends, while blozily belting Bier und savoring Schnitzel? . . **63.**
- **Tersely Telling a Tuneful Tale Mingled with Minute Memos Mentioning Memorable Musical Moments.** . . . **66.**

**Act I.** A bucolic, but bursting with business, Bohemian Gasthaus flourishing somehow in the middle of a fir forest. . . . **66.**

**Act II.**

- **Scene 1.** Our accident-prone heroine's haus, a perk of her papa's professional pursuits. . . . **71.**
- **Scene 2.** The Wolf's Glen. Every child's nightmare of a horribly haunted hollow hacked from foul flora and filled with

fearsome fauna--- truly, a devilish domicile. . . . 75.

**Act III.**

- **Scene 1.** A parcel of the fir forest not yet developed into tract housing. . . . 80.
- **Scene 2.** Our heroine's haus. . . . 81.
- **Scene 3.** In the fearsome fir forest, a romantic rendezvous sharing space with a rifle range, princely pavilion, and Bohemian boys' bivouac. . . . 83.



**Kilian (a poor sport peasant) and Max (our hero) messaging melodious but mean metaphors, with a caustic, kibitzing chorus. (Act I).**

**A Devilishly Rhythmic Romance  
to Rid the Schwartzwald and  
Similar Surroundings of  
Italian Interdicted Song Sagas.  
(a.k.a. Background.)**

**Out of A Holy Roman Hodgepodge, Our Tale to Tell.** Although now routinely relegated to the status of a New York Times crossword puzzle clue, once upon a time there was a powerful place that proclaimed itself the Holy Roman Empire (HRE). Viewing a map of the European continent at least up to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the HRE appears as a large, wide swath cutting through the center of the continent.<sup>48</sup>



Comparatively, the HRE appears as one of the largest homogeneous territories on the continent. Appearances however can be deceiving.

<sup>48</sup> A geo-political land mass area that is today, largely conterminous with Germany and Austria.

The HRE established in 962 A.D., lasted close to 900 years, but with highly fluid territorial borders and hundreds of geo-political sub-components throughout its political life span.<sup>49</sup> The Empire encompassed a smorgasbord of principalities, palatinates, protectorates, and most other medieval means of politically slicing and dicing the countryside.<sup>50</sup>

Obviously, the multitudinous numbers and variations of HRE geo-political sub-components had a significant impact on the political, economic and social-cultural homogeneity of the Empire. In brief, there was almost none! Therein hangs our tale: the creation of Germanic romantic opera, its premiere prototype, *Die Freischütz* and its paterfamilias, Carl Maria von Weber.

**European Opera, Quantitatively Evolving but Qualitatively Petrified.** European opera began its evolution in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and quickly became a major cultural industry in France and the territory that would eventually become Italy.

Opera's popularity quickly spread throughout the continent. However, contrary to France and the Italian to-be-territories, most other European entities did not develop their own national forms of opera, they primarily imported the Italian.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, opera seen in the HRE territories was of Italian (or French) origin, style, language and obviously reflective of those countries' cultures.

---

<sup>49</sup> In 1806 during the Napoleonic Wars, the HRE was dissolved strategically by its last Emperor to thwart Napoleon's imperial intentions.

<sup>50</sup> In modern times, think gerrymandering.

<sup>51</sup> Why, you ask? The answer, if it truly exists, is probably buried amid arcane hypotheses. While there is no lack of opinions (both informed and not), exploration here is well beyond our text space and your patience. So, let us just accept the fact and move on!

In this operatic growing period, it also must be recognized that the Italian form of opera did not just mean it was sung in Italian.<sup>52</sup> It also was required to follow a proscribed structure of musical options and a libretto format that was dictated by its subject matter.<sup>53</sup> Apart from words and music, opera was a bureaucratic business and largely intolerant of deviations inspired by artistic creativity. The formula ruled and woe to the composer and/or impresario that innovated!

**A Democratic Audience for a Proscribed Art Form.** As opera was disseminated throughout the European continent, it became a major entertainment event for almost all classes,<sup>54</sup> especially in more citified sites.

Why you ask, did opera, usually considered an “elitist” event<sup>55</sup> in modern society, seem democratically popular and accessible in those bygone halcyon days of high-notes? Well, it was the only entertainment game in town! Most non-lethal spectator sports were a ways into the future from being invented and popularized, as were movies, TV, rock concerts and political campaigns.<sup>56</sup> Despite memorable melodies and magnificent stage magic, one and all French or Italians-to-be attendees were subjected to another country’s language, history (or mythology) and cultural customs and artifacts.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> All this formalistic rigidity also applied to French opera “stuff.”

<sup>53</sup> Depending on the content of all the above, each opera was assigned one of several existing generic labels (e.g. opera buffa). See p. 92 for more, specifically a diluted diatribe about operatic labeling.

<sup>54</sup> As opera matured, it did begin to spin off forms and subjects that might be more appealing to the hoi polloi than the truly “pure” type of grand opera popular with the hoi oligoi . As example, the Viennese singspiel form used by Mozart in *Zauberflöte* and *Abduction from the Seraglio*.

<sup>55</sup> Erroneously we might argue, but that is another tasteless tact we do not have time to take.

<sup>56</sup> Things were not that democratic yet.

<sup>57</sup> For a more “learned” (and longer) lecture on social-cultural nights at the opera, see p. 135.

Then almost coterminous with the HRE's dissolution (1806), a *deus ex machina* appeared in the form of a frail young man whose "stage mother" of a father anointed him as the next Mozart. Why not? There was a family connection you know.

**Carl Maria, a wunderkind in chrysalis or just a wannabe?** Weber joined the world in 1786 as a subject in the largely Germanic speaking HRE. Shortly thereafter, the French Revolution (1789) and the subsequent Napoleonic era (and/or wars 1799-1814) changed the political and geographic face of Europe.<sup>58</sup> While these world-changing events including the dissolution of the HRE, intruded into the composer's adolescence, they appeared to have little effect on his family's lifestyle or Weber's view of the world.

What does appear to impact Weber's musical catalogue was his father's<sup>59</sup> peripatetic life-style; the family was constantly on the move throughout the major cities of central and eastern Europe. Weber's father was, to say the least, an interesting study. He had pretensions of nobility but evidently without credentials. The "von" in the family name and the father's habit of referring to himself as "Baron" were both bogus. Father Franz originally was a military officer in the service of the Duke of Holstein, probably for at least a portion of the Napoleonic Wars. Both he and his second wife (young Weber's mother) were accomplished musicians; he, a violinist and she, a singer and actress. Papa's military career shortly transformed into a series of musical directorships.<sup>60</sup> About the time of young Weber's birth, he established a theatrical company in Hamburg.

---

<sup>58</sup> Of course this whole "revolution" thing was started by those restive American colonists.

<sup>59</sup> Franz Anton von Weber.

<sup>60</sup> Don't ask! Probably any port in a storm.

Apart from his bogus nobility and position-hopping through the emerging German empire, Father Franz appeared to prefer plowing a pseudo-Ponzi pathway. He co-opted Carl Maria into that larcenous lifestyle. More of that shortly! <sup>61</sup>

Apart from papa's plentiful professional and personal performances, there was one essential element that appears to have structured Carl Maria's early musical life. By virtue of a fortuitous marriage of father Franz's brother's daughter Constanze, Father Franz became Mozart's<sup>62</sup> uncle. Although Carl Maria was barely out of his infancy when Mozart died, Papa decreed his son would be a musical genius a la his cousin, Amadeus. He touted and trained the child towards that objective. However, saying and doing though were very different things. Carl Maria did show early dimensions of a musical prodigy,<sup>63</sup> but never even close to Mozart's genius neighborhood.

**Que sera,sera.** The effects of papa's plans and style of family management on Carl Maria as a composer, were noted by no less an authority than Beethoven. Ludwig although an admirer of Weber's works and especially *Die Freischutz*,<sup>64</sup> stated that Weber's compositional

---

<sup>61</sup> Shades of Bernie Madoff!

<sup>62</sup> As in Wolfgang Amadeus---

<sup>63</sup> He composed his first opera at age fourteen, *Das Stumme Waldmadchen* (*The Silent Forest Maiden*). While not either a major or a lasting success, it was given public performances in several major cities including Vienna, Prague and St. Petersburg.

At the age of twelve, he composed and published a group of six condensed fugues for the piano.

At seventeen, he composed his second opera, *Peter Schmall und seine Nachbarn* (*Peter Schmall and his Neighbors*). There is ambiguity about this work, some sources indicate it was Weber's first successful opera in terms of public popularity. Others indicate it was unsuccessful. Take your pick, whatever!

<sup>64</sup> In specific reference to *Freischutz*, Beethoven is alleged to have stated that the quality of that opera was so great that Weber should compose nothing but operas in the future.

education was started too late and was too fractionated for the composer to allow his innate compositional genius to “blossom.” Whatever the cause and outcome, Weber was definitely no second rate composer. His instrumental music was acknowledged to have influenced among others, Chopin, Liszt and Mendelssohn. His orchestrations were cited as masterful by Berlioz and Debussy. His operas strongly influenced at least two of his fellow German composers: Meyerbeer and Wagner.<sup>65</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, his operas were paid homage by Stravinsky, Mahler<sup>66</sup> and Hindemith among others.

Weber also created a considerable body of critically praised Catholic vocal and choral music. Unfortunately, that portion of his catalogue earned him the enmity of German religious reformers of that period.

**A Son of the Singing Stage?** From the “get go” Carl Maria matured in an environment of musical theater. Father Franz’s multiple postings throughout German-speaking Europe usually involved music and/or the theater.<sup>67</sup> Since the apple does not fall too far from the tree, Weber’s professional pathway mimicked his father’s, in the beginning.

---

<sup>65</sup> Wagner was a great and vocal admirer of Weber and continually acknowledged a debt to him for the Wagnerian musical “style” as well as his operatic “music drama” structure. He credited Weber’s influence (and to some degree, Meyerbeer’s) that led Wagner to the development of a new concept of opera, *Gesamtkunstwerk* (A complete work of art). In it, he fused music, poetry and painting. In his works evolving from concepts of Weber, there was no distinction between recitative and ensembles, resulting in “a continuous flow of endless melody.”

<sup>66</sup> After Weber’s death, Mahler at the request of the Weber family, completed Carl Maria’s unfinished opera *Die Drie Pintos*.

<sup>67</sup> In many respects, the early musical career of Carl Maria was quite similar to that of ETA Hoffmann--- the source of the tales that Offenbach spun into his opera. Although slightly older than Carl Maria, ETA resided largely in the same emerging German territories. Both men were recognized music critics and composers. Hoffmann, however, far outstripped Carl Maria as a music critic, and was recognized as a masterful writer especially of supernatural tales. However, Carl Maria was a far superior composer of both instrumental music and opera. Both men shared successful

**Peripatetic Opera Overseer, but with a Felonious Flavor.** When Carl Maria was just leaving his teens (1806), one of his numerous but excellent compositional instructors, was so impressed by Weber's talent that he recommended him for the Director (a.k.a. Conductor) of Opera post in Breslau.<sup>68</sup> This was the first of several similar posts, each successively with increasing prestige. Weber demonstrated great ability in directorial positions and began to show signs of what would be eventually recognized as his superb mastery of stagecraft as well as the ability to run a very tight management "ship."<sup>69</sup> Unfortunately, that promise almost perished when Weber's work hit a serious speed-bump.

Weber left the Breslau position for a more favorable post (1807) as private secretary to the Duke of Wurtemberg.<sup>70, 71</sup> Part of Weber's job description was managing some of the Duke's financial dealings and caring for his cash. Unfortunately, papa who was now supported by Carl Maria, helped himself to the Duke's Deutschmarks that were stashed in

---

work as theater directors, for a considerable portion of their professional lives. For more on the ETA parallel track to Weber, see **Irreverent Guide #16**, April 2007.

<sup>68</sup> Such a position is frequently a.k.a. Kapellmeister. Originally having its root origins in chapel music, the term broadened and evolved over time, eventually coming to mean director of all music and usually for a member of the court or church hierarchy.

<sup>69</sup>It is frequently stated in critical texts that he ranks among the greatest master's of musical stage-craft. The changes in operatic performance tradition he introduced affected scenery, lighting, orchestral seating, rehearsal schedules and salaries. All these proved beneficial and became institutionalized. However, Weber incurred a great deal enmity from those mired in the "we've always done it this way" school of operatic performance and its management.

In the design of his Bayreuth opera haus, Wagner is thought to have used some of Weber concepts.

<sup>70</sup>While it sounds similar, this is not the same Deutsch stad where Luther and Hamlet separately, had some issues.

<sup>71</sup> As far afield as this position may seem for developing compositional skills, especially operatic, it provided a lot of free time for notating notes and the pay and position perks were outstanding.

his son's safe. Embezzlement will out! Both men were arrested and although Carl Maria was known to be innocent, at least in this instance, both men were asked to leave town and Duchy, permanently.<sup>72</sup>

**If at First---** While dad was dipping into the Deutschmarks, Carl Maria revisited and extensively revised his earlier unsuccessful opera about the silent forest maiden. It was now known as *Sylvana* and was to be produced at the Duke's theatre, when the composer was pinched by the polizei during a final rehearsal.

The two men<sup>73</sup> took refuge in Mannheim where *Sylvana* was finally publicly staged (1810) --- but still unsuccessfully so.<sup>74, 75</sup> Not easily discouraged by a perfect record of operatic failure, and with papa comfortably in a cozy cottage cordoned off from the cash, Weber began his third and one-half<sup>76</sup> operatic assault. This time a comic opera, *Abu Hassan*.

**Life gets better!** *Abu* was first produced at Munich (1811) and this time, among all accounts there seems to be no ambiguity, it was a success. Apart from the opera's public popularity outcome, its period of development was noteworthy in that it brought the composer into contact with the eventual textual source of *Der Freischütz*.

---

<sup>72</sup> Unfortunately, Carl Maria even in his first position, became known for somewhat shady habits of his own, especially the acquisition of debt. Apparently, there were a lot of apples on that family tree of his, some of them bad.

<sup>73</sup> Now known to some as the "Fagins of Freiburg."

<sup>74</sup> Although some more Pollyanna-ish musical historians oxymoronically label it "a doubtful success." Take your pick!

<sup>75</sup> One positive outcome of *Sylvana*, Weber eventually married (1817) the soprano who created the lead role in his revised opera.

<sup>76</sup> I give him only 1/2 point for *Sylvana*. After all, it was a revision of *Das Waldmädchen*, his opera composed at age fourteen.

Two Germans, Johann August Apel and Friedrich Laun, had collected and transcribed a large number of native tales dealing largely with the supernatural. Published under the title of *Gespensterbuch* (Ghost Stories), the first tale in the work was “*Der Freischütz*.” Weber was so excited about turning the tale into an opera, that work on *Abu* was abandoned for a short period. A lot of talk occurred, but no operatic-intended action. Weber shortly returned to work on *Abu*.<sup>77</sup>

Father Franz died shortly after *Abu*'s success and Weber began a musical performance grand tour of Europe sponsored largely by his friends and admirers.<sup>78</sup> In the middle of that lucrative adventure, he was offered the position of kappelmeister at Prague. One of his major functions was to remodel performances at the opera house!

**Balancing the Germanic-opera Deficit.** Most probably because Italian opera's form and language got there first, Italian opera largely dominated the Germanic territories of central Europe from its 16<sup>th</sup> century inception until the advent of Weber, his peers and successors, circa late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

An early break for national independence from Italian opera “style” did occur in the mid-seventeenth century when Sigmund Staden (1607-1655), a successful German composer, developed the singspiel form of opera.<sup>79</sup> His break-away work from the Italian opera, *Seelewig* alternated singing with spoken dialogue and its language was German.<sup>80</sup> In the

---

<sup>77</sup> Critics seem to agree that the eight-year delay between discovering *Die Freischütz* and beginning actual compositional work was fortuitous. It gave the composer an additional period of compositional maturity that was critical to the opera's success.

<sup>78</sup> Travels about Europe (circa 1809-1813) were not without their dangers during the years of Carl Maria's life as a performance artist. This was largely the period of Napoleonic Wars. He kept a low profile and the pay was great!

<sup>79</sup> The French shortly hit upon the same idea or “borrowed” it from the Germans. In France though, it was labeled “opera comique.” This for reasons too convoluted to communicate in our allotted time and space.

<sup>80</sup> Don't knock it! As things turn out, little things mean a lot.

Italian form, short stretches of dialogue were composed and presented in recitative style. That is, the lines were sung musically in imitation of human voice inflections and accompanied by harpsichord.

At the beginning, there were only a few German composers of opera; almost none of those opted into the Staden revolution.<sup>81</sup> However, three major exceptions reached beyond Germanic land boundaries and brought international acclaim and recognition for an emerging Germanic form of opera: Mozart's two singspiels' *Magic Flute* and *Abduction*, and Beethoven's *Fidelio*.

Then, Weber stepped up to the plate and with one opera, laid the foundation for a permanent place in the international operatic repertoire for German opera, and in a new form: romantic opera.

**Backstage Battling.** As Weber the kappelmeister, moved among German opera houses, he revolutionized their operatic status quo on-stage, back stage and in the audience. His innovations placed a distinct stamp on productions as well as enhancing the art of opera and its appreciation.

What evolved through his efforts was a Germanic operatic production style, which probably was his intent. That production style was disseminated over time throughout the opera houses he commanded and also those that simply replicated what they saw he had done successfully elsewhere.

Under duress, the Weber-introduced changes were democratically applied to all operas in the repertoire of the German houses, irrespective of the works' national origins. Therein lays a critical confrontation for both the composer and what would become, German opera.

---

<sup>81</sup> Handel and Telemann did occasionally follow the new pathway. But usually, they and other native composers went the Italian form and language route.

When compared to other events over the past two hundred years, Weber's struggle with the Italian clique seems petty and silly. However, if accounts of the combat are to be believed, it bordered on a blood sport. The Italian management constantly challenged, conspired against and subverted Weber's forward momentum for change. However, he was tenacious and persisted in eroding the Italian opera tradition as dripping water erodes stone.

**A New Kapell, Old Italian Intrigues, But A New Operatic Partner.** In 1816 Weber was appointed as co-kapellmeister of the Dresden opera by the King of Saxony. The King had lured the composer from his directorship of the Prague opera. In retrospect, it appears that the King had a sadistic sense of humor or just enjoyed really good opera house power struggles. The monarch partnered Weber in the kapell business with an imperialistic Italian impresario. This Milanese martinet had ruled the German opera scene for many moons, and, he was ready for this German upstart and his new, but non-Italian operatic rearrangements and related revolutions.

As fate fortuitously would have it, almost at the same point, the composer entered the Dresden backstage battlefield, he met a German dramatist, Friedrich Kind (1768-1848). Weber enlisted Kind's enthusiastic support in turning the *Frieschütz* story into an opera, a long held goal of the composer.

Kind produced an outstanding libretto in a remarkably short period of time.<sup>82</sup> The piece was renamed *Des Jägers Braut* (The Huntsman's Bride)<sup>83</sup> and Weber began work immediately on the music.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Some sources indicate it was accomplished in two weeks.

<sup>83</sup> Had they left this title in place, we would not have to worry about those *Freischütz* title translation speed bumps!

<sup>84</sup> The title change was alleged to be Kind's suggestion. It is thought he wanted to muddy his use of the original *Der Freischütz* story and a related play as sources for

Unfortunately, it took him almost three years for its completion; not because of composer's block but rather, Italian intrigues that continually dragged him from note notations.

The Italian intrigues continued, albeit abated even after the *Freischütz* premiere. However, in the end, that opera broke the foreign opera stranglehold once and for all. While Weber permanently opened the door for German opera, Wagner permanently solidified its international recognition.

**The Opera Opens.** Because of the Italian subterfuge at Dresden, *Freishutz* was scheduled for production in Berlin.<sup>85</sup> Its premiere took place on the anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo, June 18, 1821, and was auspiciously to celebrate the opening of Berlin's new Schauspielhaus.<sup>86</sup>

Even during the opera's rehearsal period and away from Dresden, the Italian imbrolios attempted to intrude. While they disconcerted Weber's staff, it was said that the composer seemed impervious. He was so confident in his new work's success, that he spent time away from rehearsal composing what would become one of his more critically acclaimed piano works, *Concertstück* in F Minor.

---

"his" libretto. It is semi-interesting to note that the related play severely amended the original story to a plot line that would later be reflected by Pushkin and subsequently, Tchaikovsky, in *The Queen of Spades*. In the interest of time, let us just let that coincidence ride.

<sup>85</sup> The opera's modified moniker had now been restored back to its original name, thus abandoning the *Bride*.

<sup>86</sup> One of those compounded German words again. Various translated as theatre, playhouse, and/or opera house. Take your pick!

Apart from that, the Schauspielhaus was not just any "new" building. For its time, it was the most advanced (a.k.a. radical) building in terms of theater design as well as architecture. It was said to have incorporated some of Weber's own theatrical design innovations. The building was severely damaged in WWII, but was restored and is still in use today as a concert hall.

The opera opened to instant acclaim. Almost immediately there were productions in Vienna and Dresden(!). Over the next 18 months there were more than thirty productions; a large number of these were international, London alone had three productions running simultaneously!

**Why the Acclaim?** The opera debuted not too many years after the end of the Napoleonic Wars that had consumed Europe. The spirit of nationalism was rising in most European countries incentivized by the eventual success of both the American and French Revolutions. *Freischütz*'s subject matter had a nationalistic message and an important implication of individual freedom.<sup>87</sup> These themes appealed to a growing middle class and apparently, a large number of opera aficionados.

The vibrations from the opera were not all socio-political. The work implicitly glorified the bucolic life, the countryside (a.k.a. the simpler things in life). The subject of the opera was built from a known story of German folklore and musically incorporated folk melodies. The German audience saw and felt that which was familiar to them and perhaps most importantly, was part of their cultural heritage. While German in substance and feeling, the operatic musical and plot themes were not that foreign to other nationalities. Many folk tales tend to have world-wide variations and hence, international audience resonance.

One of the most appealing and dramatic aspects of the opera to the 19<sup>th</sup> century audience, was the meshing of the supernatural with the natural. Weber had a knack for making other-worldly denizens (good and evil) quite real.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Similar to Verdi's nudge toward Italian unification in *Nabucco* a quarter of a century later.

<sup>88</sup> In our age of "slasher" movies, graphic blood and gore via the tube, internet etc. *Freischütz*'s Wolf's Glen scene is pretty tame. However, in its original time and place it

Apart from subject matter, the opera musically was a “masterpiece” as Beethoven proclaimed. It presented lyrical sounds not previously heard by its audiences; sounds that remained with them and quite enamored them. On a minor note (pun!), the opera was in the singspiel style and as a consequence, more familiar and “comfortable” to the audience.

All told, *Freischütz* was a revelation to its audiences. It staked a claim for the legitimacy of a Germanic opera form and the template for “romantic opera.”

**What is this “Romantic Opera” thing?** It definitely is not moonlight and roses, unless you think Brünnhilde is akin to Juliette! While it rose in Germany triggered largely by Weber and in opposition to the Italian form of bel canto (beautiful singing) opera, it rose in a time of European social upheaval and perhaps as a brief escape from it. The old regimes and ways were often being violently and bloodily overthrown and for a largely unknown new order.

Romantic opera generically glorified both the beauty and terror of nature. It could comfortably portray the natural and supernatural in juxtaposition. It also could graphically portray the power of supernatural evil and optimistically, the triumph of good over such negative forces. Rural life was “pure.” Freedom was a legitimate value for all individuals, and the tyranny of the aristocratic was to be banished; patriotism was an imperative; the goals of post-revolutionary Europe were legitimate and to be valued.

---

was a scary thriller. Name an audience that really doesn't like to be scared, albeit harmlessly?

It is said satirically, to release the London audience's “terror” generated by the Wolf Glen scene, a brigade of the London fire department would appear on stage to extinguish the devilish blazes occurring at the end of that scene.

On the more individual level, feelings of love and desire could be spoken (sung) openly. That led to a freedom to explore the illicit affair, forbidden love etc.

Initially, romantic opera tended to be set in a composer's home territory. Later, it became fashionable to write of more exotic places whose cultures were romantically pictured rather than constructed from actual experience.<sup>89</sup>

Viewed retrospectively, the romantic opera genre covers a multitude of sins, so to speak. The operas do not all follow one easily classifiable form; they tend to reflect a somewhat common theme, but with a large array of variations. Freedom in compositional form and subject had arrived! That operatic era is generally accepted to have lasted almost a century beginning with Weber and ending with Puccini.<sup>90</sup>

**Weber's Finale.** While Weber composed six or seven operas<sup>91</sup> and incidental music for several plays before and after *Freischütz*, none of them ever replicated that opera's success. Only three of Weber's operas usually appear in his catalogue listings: *Freischütz*, *Euryanthe* (1823) and *Oberon* (1826). The rest are perhaps most tactfully ignored. Critics seem to agree that the general problem with Weber's less than successful operas lay with their librettos, not the music. Weber did not seem to appreciate the importance of a good libretto<sup>92</sup> and tended to compromise for texts that were just adequate or worse. Pieces of music from most of his operas, especially the overtures, do survive and surface frequently in concert hall and recital performances.

---

<sup>89</sup> As for examples, Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs*, Puccini's *Butterfly*, Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine*.

<sup>90</sup> Puccini's *Turandot* is generally cited as the last of the romantic operas. Granted there was subsequently a compositional period that seemed to largely focus on the atonal, twelve tone scale, etc. However, certainly a large number of contemporary operas fit the romantic mold.

<sup>91</sup> Depending how you count.

<sup>92</sup> Shades of Strauss' *Capriccio*.

*Euryanthe* with musical recitatives in place of dialogue, was truly in the style of grand opera, as opposed to singspiel. Commissioned by a British nobleman, *Oberon*, Weber's last opera, was composed in English.<sup>93</sup> In it Weber returned to the singspiel model, which was the British preference.

From the time of his birth, Weber never enjoyed good health. He had a congenitally malformed hip and did not walk until the age of four. His physical health throughout his life was generally best described as "frail." Despite his continuous physical problems, he displayed significant and persistent strength in his compositional and theatrical managerial efforts.

While in his early thirties, he contracted tuberculosis, which in his era, was democratically in residence throughout Europe affecting all social classes and all countries.<sup>94</sup> Despite rapidly declining health, Weber went to England to compose and oversee the production of *Oberon*. Warned by friends and physicians that the effort was too dangerous for his health, he persisted. His tenaciousness in this matter was driven largely by a need to provide for his family in the event of his death. He died a matter of weeks after *Oberon*'s successful premiere.

---

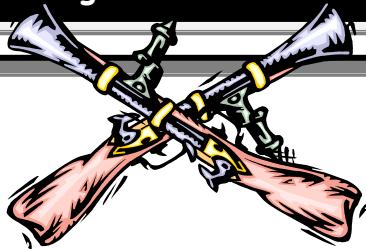
<sup>93</sup> Weber spoke no English up to the time of the British invitation, but learned the language in a very short period of time.

<sup>94</sup> As a result of the disease's omnipresence in everyday life, it frequently appeared in operatic subjects (e.g. *La Boheme*, *La Traviata*).

FINALLY, THE OPERA!



Who are These Deutsch Declaiming,  
Demure Dammen und Fusillade Firing Foresters,  
Feasting mit Freunde, Foes and Fiends,  
while Boozily Belting Bier und Savoring Schnitzel?



**Max (Tenor).** A fast failing, formerly fine forester and many-medaled marksman. His gunning groove and chain-saw charm are certainly chilling out. As his macho melts into a milquetoast mystique, his contractual<sup>95</sup> Shatzie (our heroine, see below) will soon say "Sayonara" if he doesn't deliver a bouquet of bull's-eye bullets. However, he is familiar with *Faust* and is figuring a fine finagle that will fabricate a favorable finale. Foolish fellow!

**Kilian (Bass).** This pushy peasant is "Bravo!" with a blunderbuss, but on the down side, he perfectly personifies a "poor sport" winner by taunting our troubled tenor (see above). That tumbles the tenor into a stein-sated seminar that soon summons satanic surroundings.

**Kaspar<sup>96</sup> (Bass).** Another forester fellow. Before our operatic opus opened, he bought into a Beelzebub bargain. That burnished his

---

<sup>95</sup> There's a bit of *Meistersingers* at work here. Both Wagner and Weber's heroines are the kewpie doll prizes for their somewhat inept heroes, if those guys can deliver a performance for which it seems they have no present talent.

<sup>96</sup> Those early 19<sup>th</sup> century copy editors were a careless crowd. Caspar is sometime crowned with a "C" and sometime a "K." Co-opt one, if you care!

bullets for bull's-eyes. It paid off so perfectly that he is now the sharpest of shooters. However, his painful pending payback is a permanent position in perdition. Satan says he will be satisfied, though, if a substitute sucker is secured by our sharpest-shooter. So, our forester's frantically making mumbo-jumbo to motivate Max to make a date with the devil.

**Cumo<sup>97</sup> (Bass).** The big boss of Bohemia's<sup>98</sup> warbling woodsmen, he is also the proud papa of our Max-marriageable maiden (see Agathe, below). As our opus acts out, he declaims grim ground rules gratuitously and not especially graciously, acts a lot with an axe, but when all is shot and skinned, he is a fine figure of a feudal, faffing father.

**Samiel<sup>99</sup> (Speaking Role).** Speak of the devil, this devil speaks while all others sing! No, he did not have an audacious audition, his dour declaiming dramatically dominates the doings much more than if he manufactured melody. Intriguingly, his function is more Greek chorus from Hell than plot pusher. Specifically, he seems to comment more than control.

**Agathe (Soprano).** Cumo's kid and our heroine, but not a lot of help for our hero. That's probably ok as his drooping demeanor seems to declare he is determined to go to the devil--- literally and figuratively. Agathe is lovely and loyal. We are sure she would swim to save her suitor if he sunk metaphorically, into a satanic swamp.

---

<sup>97</sup> This guy has the same copy editor problem as C/Kaspar. Cumo appears randomly as Kumo or Cumo. As a blow for freedom, I am opting to use "C" for them both!

<sup>98</sup> That's where this opus occurs. More of that later.

<sup>99</sup> Also known as the "Black Huntsman," he's the supreme sinister spirit that bears no blessings for Bohemians.

Despite her girlish grit and lover loyalty, she often demonstrates that "no good deed goes unpunished." However, at the end she seems headed to a happy home with her soul-saved suitor. Ain't love grand!


**Äennachen (Soprano).** In Opryland, it is almost obligatory for the prima donna to have a pal. In Weber's forest fable, that companion is a cousin, Äennachen. Trapped by "pal" performance traditions, this Bohmeian buddy is both perky and practical. Horrifically, she is also always happy, happy, happy! Think, Pollyanna off her prescription meds!

**Prince Ottokar (Tenor).** There is sort of a second class Shakespearean stance with this sovereign. For Bohemia's really big boss, he unfortunately shares some of Max's milkquetoasty mien. His pronouncements sometimes require serious spin. Remind you of anyone?

**Hermit (Bass).** An opus omni-present, though often off-stage, presence. When he finally leaves his den and gambols into the Glen, he readily reveals he is a down-to-earth "deus ex machina." He prunes the Prince's wimpy words with some Solomon sense and certainly saves the day. When all is sung, he surely is seen as a seedy, but smiley face sensation.

**Huntsmen, Peasants, Bridesmaids.** This cacophonous collection, while choraling correctly, reminds one of a rather shabby, Shubert Brothers' bus-based, touring operetta opus. There are dozens of dirndls and lots of lederhosen; also, much tuneful trilling, trinking and tanzing; and of course, they are all hyper-happy, happy, happy! Like the cousin, this bunch left their meds on the bus.

**Tersely Telling a Tuneful Tale,  
Mingled with Minute Memos Mentioning  
Memorable Musical Moments.\***  
\*(a.k.a. Pap for the Impatient.)



**Setting:** Bohemia, a historical kingdom of central Europe that today comprises about 2/3s of the Czech Republic.

**Time:** Shortly after the end of the Thirty Years War (1648).<sup>100</sup>

**Plot:**

- Before our operatic opus opens with an overture, two plot pushing deeds have been done. First, our fiend friendly forester (Caspar) dined with the devil and delivered his soul for some sure shots. Second, our hero (Max) lost his gunnery groove. Bluntly, he can no longer hit the broad side of a barn. This has cruel consequences as you will know anon.

**Overture.**

This piece is a beautifully constructed tone poem musically summarizing the opera's action. It includes several themes heard in the work including: Samiel's theme in Max's Act I aria, a portion of the Wolf Glen music, and music from Agatha's Act II aria (probably the Overture's most recognized melody). The Overture is well known publically, but more from it frequent appearances in concert halls, than the operatic stage. While *Freischütz* is frequently found in the German repertoire, today it is more of a rarity on the international scene.

**Act I.** A bucolic, Bohemian Gasthaus bursting with business, flourishingly found (somehow) in the middle of a fearsome, fir

---

<sup>100</sup> The War was noted infamously as Europe's bloodiest and most destructive at least until the 20<sup>th</sup> century's world wars. As a result, mention of the Thirty Years War would horribly resonate in family memories of a 19<sup>th</sup> century opera audience, even 75 years post-hostilities. That War implicitly and explicitly serves as a sub-text of the opera.

forest. It's late afternoon and a shooting contest between the locals and the foresters is just concluding.

- The Overture over, the curtain climbs to the ceiling as a shot surprises those of us already sleeping in their seats. When that shock settles, we see that an on-stage shooting match<sup>101</sup> is singing its swan song.
- Our poor sport peasant (Kilian) has prevailed. The prized Pilsner plaque is his! That makes Max (our hero) morose. He is the former champion, but now as been cashiered into chump change.
- The stage surfeited with singing supers, serenade their now new super-shot.

**Viktoria! Der meister soll leben. / Hurrah! Long live the champion!**

This full-voiced, happy, happy celebratory chorus would make Radames feel triumphant!

- To assure that insult is added to our hero's injury, a parade of 'plauding people promenade around the proscenium in praise of our perfect-pistol peasant.
- Pepped-up from parading, the 'plauding people proceed to perform a polka or perhaps a polonaise.<sup>102</sup> Then, in a curious country custom, the crowd lambasts and laughs at our heroic loser.

**Schau der Herr mich als König./ Look at me sir, I'm the champion!**

With some savage, sinister sounds plus some happy harmonies, all loudly voiced, Max is decidedly dumped derisively by the peasant population and their crowing, callous champion. \*

\*We may have some social class get-back here as Max is more middle class than peasant, or perhaps some occupational one-upsmanship since the peasant outshot the forester! .

<sup>101</sup> This rather bucolic match is actually a marksmen's fair. (Schützenfest) Its underlying motivation is quite pragmatic. It is the way the powers'-to-be identified the best marksmen in their kingdom. These marksmen, thus marked, were subsequently employed as the government's foresters. This foresters' force was in effect, the equivalent of our National Guard, a ready force to be called up in the case of one of the frequent intra-European free-for-all (e.g. Thirty Years' War).

<sup>102</sup> Don't ask me!

- Our hero has had it with all the hateful “hee, hee, hees.” So he hauls out a hatchet to hack the chortling champ. However, before harm happens, the peasants pinion him. Phew, peril put down!
- Just then, trooping onto the tavern’s tarmac is a phalanx of foresters. This naturalist National Guard group is commanded by Cuno (our heroine’s papa); he is companioned by C(K)aspar a really creepy chap. He is a false, friendly forester; in faith, he is a follower of the forest fiend. That makes him sort of a soulless servant of Satan.
- Now, dialogue dominates and music rests (pun!)
- Papa is really P.O.’d when he is told the tale of what was transpiring: Max has lost his gun groove and is far in arrears for fulfilling his fauna pledge for the foresters’ food pot.
- Caspar clues us customers, but not the cast, that his Mephistophelian-mentor has made Max miss the mark. Bet there is a fiendish finagle being facilitated by our foul forester!
- Caspar then counters Cuno’s harassment of our hero by declaring the devil made him do it--- that is, Max to miss. Further, our foul forester states the substance of a Satanic show that will gain our gun-gutted guy a positive pistol- packin’ performance.
- That causes Cuno to lose his cool and call Casper a cornucopia of discontent; if he doesn’t cease he will be quickly culled from Cuno’s corps. Caspar complies.
- Since Cuno is on a tempestuous tear, he turns on Max and meanly mentions, if our hero fails with his fusillade firing in the target test tomorrow, he will be toast with our heroine. Horrors!
- Now an aspiring, but “suck up” singer from the chorus suggests to Cuno that he recount the tale of the trial shot (a.k.a. target test). He does, but we are not going to repeat it here as it does go on a bit! Read the succinct supra-titles during the show or ask your seat neighbor during the Wine Bar break.
- After Papa’s performance, but still dealing in dialogue, the pushy peasant and the foul forester twin-tell a tale told tirelessly in local lore, setting forth scary stories of satanic sure-shots enabled by evil energy exchanged for shooters soul! Whoa!

- In these extended exposés, formulated for future plot pushing, there is one essential element to which the audience must alerted. In local legend and lore, the storied shooter shoots "seven satanic bullets." Six strike where the shooter suggests. The seventh, Satan controls; it will collide with what the devil determines and not what the shooter suggests. Therefore folks, keep a correct count or rue the results!
- Sated by scary stories, craving for cocktails and chow, Cuno's crowd prepares to promenade to their bucolic bivouac. As they part, Papa pauses to pump up our harried and hurt hero. "Pull yourself together, tomorrow's another day; we're palavering with the Prince and you're shooting to secure your sweetheart. Don't screw it up!" (Papa has a peculiar perspective on "pumping up.")
- Before all the people populating the performance have a parting promenade, they assemble to intone an ensemble.

**O diese Sonne / This coming dawn---**

Participating in the ensemble are Max dreading a disastrous day that will be dawning, Cuno counseling courage, Casper puling about power greater than fortune, the peasants playing a constant, commenting Greek chorus, and the foresters happy, happy, happy with forest frolicking.

The piece weaves these various forces powerfully and melodically. It all builds to a superb climax at the end of which Cuno, Casper and the foresters head off to chow down.

- Our pushy peasant who has been quietly humming during the ensemble, now suggests Max grab a girl and join a gavotte. Moody Max declines, but everyone else waltzes. When their whirling withers the sun has set, so everybody minus moody Max, frolics off into the forest for some Bohemian hanky-panky.
- Max muses moodily: his life is lousy, his gun is garbage, his girl could be gone "bye-bye" and other gratuitous grumbling.

**Nein! länger trag' ich nicht die Qualen /  
No, I can no longer bear this pain,**

The aria musically alternates among Max's reflections of happy memories, his agitated and angry mood, his fear and puzzlement about what has befallen him and why, and finally, the sinister implications of the devilry-doings of which he is only vaguely aware—so far.

- As Max's musical monologue of mounting misery is sung, silent Samiel is suddenly and sinisterly seen sideling slyly among the shrubs.
- (N.B. Throughout this show, Samiel will waft and wane as is the wont of wraiths. He seems to show up when satanic situations surface. He then pops off when purity again prevails, but seemingly seems to be seen by no one but the foul forester fellow.<sup>103</sup> Got all that?)
- Speaking of that devil-in-development (a.k.a. the foul forester, Caspar),<sup>104</sup> drops by to merry-up our musically miserable Max.
- "Max, let's consume some Bohemian bier oder vin ordinaire," he slyly suggests.

**Hird'schen Jammertal / In this sad tale of earthy life---**

Despite its morose title, this piece is a raucous, rousing drinking song to the power of wine and perhaps, other potent potables. In the pause among the multiple verses, Max inserts some brief, grumpy nonmusical dialogue. However, by the song's end, the glasses are clinking and they are deeply drinking.

- When the steins are served, our devious devil-to-be drugs the draught directed to our hero!
- Despite our hero's desire not to drink, must less get sloshed, he does, thanks to our foul forester's finagling.
- All this drinking and duping is done in dialogue. The music takes another rest!

<sup>103</sup> Could there be an opening for an outstanding optician in this Opryland?

<sup>104</sup> "What is Caspar's problem," you ask? Actually, that should be "problems" as there are several, all serious.

He has, as has been said, sold his soul for sure-shot scoring. His contractual shooting success is about to terminate and Samiel will collect his part of the devilish bargain unless--- Casper can find another Satan-seeking soul. Max was high on that prospective seller list until lately as he has been the big man among the foresters; also, our heroine and Caspar had a "thing", but she threw him over for Max. If Caspar can pitch Max into Perdition, he gets to keep his soul, gets the girl and the job of Big Kahuna in the forester National Guard when Papa passes on. How are those for incentives for incantation?

- Max, on a Heineken high or perhaps, a tokay toot, is soon sloppily susceptible to Caspar's co-opting counsel.
- With Caspar's coaching, our boy buys into the magic bullets' bit by blasting down a big bird. As a souvenir of that sure shot, our foul forester fixes the felled fauna's feather in our hero's hat.
- By playing on prospects of losing his lady through his luger luckless-ness, Caspar succeeds in seducing our hero to take a hike at midnight<sup>105</sup> to the horrid Wolf's Glen. Bad move, boy!
- With his fauna feather flying, our hero heads for a "whatever" at our heroine's haus. Caspar crows in evil triumph!

**Schweig, schweg, damit dich niemand warnt /  
Tell no one, that no one can warn you!**

Caspar's aria is a triumphant celebration of evil winning, at least this day. The music is bold and brassy, with intertwined themes of evil-doings and the bad guy's success. A powerful ending to Act I

- Drop the drape. We are directly off to the Wine Bar. All that on-stage "trinking" made us thirsty.

**Act II. Scene 1.** Our accident-prone heroine's haus, a perk of her Papa's professional pursuits. Same late afternoon as **Act I.**

- Just before this Act's action begins, a family portrait dropped and beamed our bride-to-be (Agathe). Therefore, when the damask drape divides, our wounded heroine is holding her hurt head and her cousinly companion (Ännachen) is pounding on the plaster to reposition the portrait.<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>105</sup> When else?

<sup>106</sup> The plunging portrait portrays the first Cuno, the guy that gained gut geld and great social standing by shooting a super shot for a past Palatine's prince and forming the first forester National Guard. Many moons of subsequent Cuno kin have basked in the benevolence of their beginner. Be that as it may, the symbolism of the painting's plunge to beleaguer our bride-to-be, is a bit too much of operatic overkill.

- Agathe is often reality-challenged, not to mention more morose than merry. The cousin, opposite-ly, is quick, clever and always annoyingly happy!
- The pair compares their differing demeanors--- musically con brio.

**Schelm! Halt fest! Ich will dich's lehren!  
Villain!\* Stay put! I'll teach you!**

In a delightful duet, the two girls spar and poke fun at each other. That shortly turns to romantic interests as Agathe muses about Max and the cousin calls forth the characteristics of her lover-yet-to-be.

\*To avoid confusion, the "villain" refers to the canvas Cumo, not the cursed Caspar.

- Done dueting, the musical mädchen's fanaticize about fellows they would like to fashion into fiancées. For our heroine, good old Max the moody; for the hyper-Ännachen, it's a hero she's yet to happen upon.

**Kommt ein schlanker Bursch gegangen /  
If a fine, slim-waisted fellow---**

In this brilliant and lively aria, Ännachen outlines her requirements for a Romeo, the circumstances of their first meeting and subsequent nuptials.

- Our heroine then confides in the cousin concerning Agathe's a.m. conference with the village Hermit, sort of a traditional holy man, guru and purveyor of fast foods.
- That slightly weird wonder of the woods, alerted Agathe to a grave danger, but—of unknown origin.<sup>107</sup> To protect, the hermetic guru gifts the girl with a wad of blessed roses--- to ward off bad vibes and guys!
- The gullible girls now know the picture's plunge was a near miss for our young missus. Without the roses, the result would have

---

<sup>107</sup> Isn't that always the rub in these funky folk tales!

been her burial in the barnyard. Those posies are now placed in a precious place in our heroine's haus.<sup>108</sup>

- Left alone in the now, darkness of the evening, Agathe does the usual operatic soprano thing, she sings a song to soothe her somewhat shaky psyche.

**Leise, leise fromme Weise / Waft softly, gentle air on high.**

It's our heroine's turn to show us her vocal stuff, and does she ever! This lovely (but lengthy) aria babbles about the beauty of the night, but also observes the promise of a storm from the mountains. Agathe prays for protection from the coming "storm." Then she sees Max approaching and the melody turns to the beautiful theme heard in the Overture. She hopes his aim has improved in anticipation of tomorrow's contest. She ends with a plea to heaven to accept her "hope."

- Max rushes into the room, his demeanor distraught. The constant cousin who is also a cheap chaperon, but constantly curious, comes too, to croon with the couple's cacophony.

- Dialogue takes over as the couple converse while the cousin kibitzes.

- Our hero hob-knobbing with our heroine, suddenly declaims he must directly depart. She is dumbfounded at his declaration. What is hyping his hurry? Has his luger-luck been lousy?

- "Au contraire! I've bagged a big buck and must bring him to the butcher," our boy brags. Then to avoid their probing of his problems, he slyly segues the subject to his sweetheart's hurt head.

- "The portrait plunged promptly at seven p.m.," the girls agree. Max is mystified, that time is truly tied with his fusillade firing and felling of that flying fauna whose feather is now in his fedora.

- An ominous omen? A curious conundrum?

---

<sup>108</sup> In addition to tracking of the number of "free" bullets, keep your eye on the roses!

- However, enough of this polite palaver, Max must move his dead deer so it can be dissected for dinner.
- “Where did your sure shooting slay the stag?” his sweetheart says. “Wolf’s Glen,” Max mutters to mask the scheduled session with the conniving Caspar, and excuse his early exit to visit to that vile valley.
- Well, that does it! Its been a bummer day at best, what with the bloody bump on the bean, Max morose, his gun grove gone and the cousin with her constant cheerfulness. The mention of the Glen pushes everyone over the edge, but--- into one terrific trio.

**Wie? Was? Entsetzen! / Where? What? How Dreadful!**

With powerful and agitated music, the two women when they realize that Max is going to the Glen, warn him of its dangers (physical and religious). His response is that the huntsman’s profession does not permit fear and, would they approve of him, if he avoided such challenges? Agathe switches the argument, pleading for him not to go because she is afraid of something unknown; her “heart is filled with fear.” The cousin adds musically a beautiful balance between the soprano and tenor throughout the trio. However, her words generally are banal and largely confined to statements of “listen to your sweetheart.”

The power of the ensemble is quite remarkable, but the participants are disappointed in the outcome: Max leaves with a plea to the women; “not to worry;” Agathe finally resolved to Max’s determination, pleads for him to “take care.” The cousin continues to counsel, “listen to your lady!” The trio reaches its dramatic climax; the principals depart, but in different directions as the scene ends.

**Act II. Scene 2.** The Wolf's Glen at almost midnight.<sup>109</sup> Every child's nightmare of a horribly haunted hollow hacked from foul flora and filled with fearsome fauna--- truly, a devilish domicile.

- This scene's setting is as sinister as its songs. Usually you will see mysterious mountains surrounding and imposing on a grim gorge. This severe slash in the earth is filled with funky flora and fauna. The former are largely, large sinuous trees with leaves more the exception than the rule. Roosting in their denuded branches are foul fowl fauna, satanically-spawned and usually found only on a really horrible Halloween. Most noteworthy among them is a large owl, with eyes that appear to be aflame. As the action opens, the entire stage is suffused with a sickly, leprous-like light and --- if all that was not enough evil environment, two thunderstorms are approaching from different directions!

- Apart from the scene seen, the. orchestral opening is not a walk in the park either. It is top of the line horror movie-like music, a really scary score. Then, unseen specters initiate the intoning of inane incantations. Their music is gloriously ghostly!

**Milch Des Mendes Fiel Auf Kraut. / Moon-milk falling on the grass.**

This piece is really a masterpiece of ghostly gibberish and malevolent melody. What its words and music do not do, its delivery does. Intoned from soft to loud and back again, it pictures a less than pleasant place of perfidy. Pass on by, people!

- Our creep Caspar is in the center of this hellish creation, making a circle of black stones with a skull as its centerpiece. A clock, also unseen<sup>110</sup> strikes midnight, as he completes his circular construction.

---

<sup>109</sup> Of course!

<sup>110</sup> I know! It's the middle of a forest, but this is opera--- it's not required to be logical, just musical!

- Then, our harried, haunted hunter takes a knife and stabs the head of the skull (overkill?). He then raises the knife to which the skull is now secured, turns three times and in a "fe-fie-fo-fum" voice demands the sinister Samiel to appear! By darn, he does! Let the baleful bargaining begin!

**Du Weissr, Dass Meine Frist/ Thou knowest my term---**

In this sequence, Caspar sings his supplications. However, Samiel speaks, sounding as seriously stentorian as a sergeant. The clash between the spoken and the sung, loudly and dictatorially delivered make this a very remarkable and memorable exchange. Our composer's theatrical instincts meshed creatively with his musical maturity

- Basically, Caspar wants an extension of the due date on his mortgaged soul. To sweeten the pot, our foul forester proposes as his present to the Perdition-person, his present patsy, the malleable Max. In addition, Samiel is informed that our hero who's being hyped to Hell, wants to secure Satan's sale special of the seven bullets. Six will be the designated dupe's. The seventh will be Samiel's which the conspiring Caspar suggests be aimed at Agathe, his former fiancé.<sup>111</sup> This Caspar is certainly a contemptible crumb, but give this devil in development his dues, cleverly conniving!
- However, Samiel has no scruples to whom he sells. He buys the bargain, but warns the contemptible Casper that tomorrow Hell will have a new inhabitant, Casper or Max--- makes no mind to Samiel! He disappears amid the usual tacky theatrical thunder-clap.
- During the just ended eerie escapade and bullet bargaining, the impaled skull appears to have imploded. It is now replaced with a fire pit complete with a caldron capable for casting the bargained

---

<sup>111</sup> That guy sure knows how to hold a grudge.

bullets. A miasma of music is mustered as the fire flames fiercely fanned by fearsome flying fauna. We wait--- warily.

- There is a problem. Max is missing! Caspar is concerned. Then our main man is seen sauntering into the scene. He is on a cliff above an abyss (a.k.a. the ghastly Glen) and does what any other self-respecting operatic tenor would do, he offers an aria.

**Ha! Furchtbar Gähnt der Düstre Argrund!/  
Ha! How fearsome yawns the dismal abyss!:**

**Ha! How fearsome yawns the dismal abyss!:**

Musically, the aria is appropriately agitated given Max's surrounding and circumstances. Its message though is rather prosaic: this is not a nice place but I must go in (down or whatever). I laugh at danger. Ha, ha!

- During the descent, menacing music materializes.
- The climb down is not performed promptly as our guy gets ghost-ridden. First his mother, moribund for many moons, motions him to "go back!" Casper coaxing our kid to come down into the canyon, sics Samiel to spook the spook. Done swiftly, the climb down continues. But wait---! Another apparition appears. Its Agathe!
- It appears to Max that his 'maybe" missus is going to fling herself into the fearsome falls flowing into the Glen. <sup>112</sup>For reasons not immediately apparent, she opts otherwise and vanishes as Max makes it to the gorge's ground level. Well, that was exciting!
- From here until the scene ceases, most of the plot is expressed in spoken words, with short intervals of singing, especially by Max. Casper largely speaks. Is he becoming similar to Samiel? Throughout it all, the orchestra in full voice is reflecting the substance of the largely evil events occurring.

---

<sup>112</sup> Did I mention the waterfall? Well, can't remember everything! It was called for in the original stage directions. However, it proved over the years, to sourly saturate the set; it also caused the loss of several stagehands and an occasional soprano and tenor-- swept offstage, you know. So, it's often cut. Be surprised!

- Casper counsels Max that during the bullet birthing about to begin, Max must remain mute UNLESS Caspar trembles terribly. Then Max must grab hold of the quivering Casper and echo what Casper is calling out OR--- they will be lost--- details to follow.
- Caspar begins by reciting the bullet-building recipe as he casts its contents into the cauldron.<sup>113</sup>
- He incants a Beelzebub blessing for the bullets soon-to-be.

**Schütz, de rim dunkeln wacht--- /  
Archer, watching in the dark---**

More sing-speech than operatic aria, this piece is usually delivered in a powerful rhythm. Its message is a call for the soundness of the bullets and the presence of Samiel.

- As Caspar calls for the correct creation of Satan's shots, supernatural special effects emerge: the cauldron boils and glows, the moon disappears, the owl's eyes light up the scene and a gaseous green glow begins to encase the environment.<sup>114</sup>
- The first bullet is cast: **Eins! (1)**. Caspar's count is echoed among the Glen's cliffs. Baleful birds swoop down and surround the caldron's fire.
- **Zweil! (2)**. A black boar crashes out of the forest and rushes across the Glen.
- **Dreil! (3)**. A stormy wind rises and begins to fell trees.
- **Vier! (4)**. Noises of an unseen carriage are heard and then, four wheels on fire roll through the Glen.
- **Funfl! (5)**. In the air, sounds of horses and hounds are heard. Spectral shapes of hunters and hunted deer appear in the sky.

---

<sup>113</sup> The recipe suspiciously sounds as if it were cribbed from some Shakespearean witches.

<sup>114</sup> There is a lot in this "casting of the bullets sequence" reminiscent of the "casting of the sword" in Wagner's *Siegfred*.

- That earlier chorus of invisible spirits makes an encore appearance.

**Durch Berg und Tal/O'er hill and valley.**

Somewhat the same idea as "Over the river and through the woods to Grandmother's house we go." Not quite the same message though!

They add vocal nonsense to the rising chaos in the *Glen*.<sup>115</sup>

- Caspar welcomes all this as prophetic signs that Sam (a.k.a. the wild huntsman) will soon be seen!. He counts **Sechs** as the sixth bullet is cast!
- Quite literally, all Hell breaks loose: the sky blackens, the storms that had been threatening explode with a full force of thunder and lightning, and flames rise from the floor of the *Glen* .
- Caspar wails wildly for Samiel to help him as the final bullet is cast and the count called out: **Sieben!**
- Max on the edge of this mess grabs hold of a tree blasted by lightning. The tree disappears and the Black Hunter<sup>116</sup> appears, grabbing at Max's hand.
- The storm begins to subside as the Hunter's voice booms out, "Heir bin ich!" (Here I am!.)
- Max makes the sign of the cross and falls to the ground. There is immediate calmness, Samiel (a.k.a. the Black Hunter) has disappeared. Caspar is comatose on the ground, but Max makes an eager escape as the Act ends.
- WOW! How's about them special effects and George Lucas ain't even been born yet!

---

<sup>115</sup> The invented words for this unseen choir are somewhat reminiscent of Wagner's similar technique for the Rhine maidens in *Das Rheingold*

<sup>116</sup> Also known as "Sam." It seems Sameil has more aliases than most persons do on post office posters.

**Entr'acte.** This brief musical introduction to Act III largely contains music of the familiar and rousing "Hunters' Chorus" that will be heard in this Act's Scene III.

**Act III. Scene 1.** A parcel of the fir forest not yet developed into tract housing, the morning after the Glen gambol.

- (Since this scene contains only dialogue and its plot pushing is redundant<sup>117</sup> of what will be related later, it is often cut in performance.)
- The guys (Max and Casper) are grateful they got through the Glen ghostliness, but now are having a "thieves fall out" tete-a-tete involving bullet inventory.
- The seven shots they cast, they subsequently shared, somewhat: Max got four and Caspar got three. However, they have been shooting like sloshed sailors, so Max now has only one left as does Caspar.
- Max paged to palaver with the Prince calls on Caspar to donate his dum-dum to our harried hero for a spare shot. Caspar crows cruelly, "Nein, nichts and no way Jose!"
- Max, maddened by Caspar's cavalier churlishness, casts at him a Carpathian childhood curse borne from mad Max's Bohemian upbringing. "Du mieses Schwein! Ich hasse dich! (You miserable pig! I hate you!) Then, he hies off to hail his highness.
- Chortling at that childish curse, Caspar, to maximize Max's madness, fires his final shell, the sixth. Now Max is stuck with shell seven, the one that is devil-directed! Being new to this netherland neighborhood, he does not know Satan will sight the shell. Uh oh!
- On that complication, the curtain closes.

---

<sup>117</sup> This business with the bullets does get complicated, so repeating the count and where they go, probably isn't a bad idea especially for those of us who may have been dozing.

**Act III. Scene 2.** Our heroine's haus, also the next morning.

- Agathe sets this scene by offering an aria.

**Und ob die wolke sie verhulle /**

**And even if clouds should veil the sky.**

Ever an optimist, our heroine is already in her bridal dress. In a lovely, quiet and languid aria, she asks Heaven's blessing on her wedding day in spite of all her fears--- so far, unfounded.

- Towards the aria's exit, hammering is heard off-stage. When the singing subsides, cousin Äennachen arrives armed as always with her "happy, happys," and a hammer.
- The bride is not blushing blissful. Her wedding eve's sleep was definitely disturbed with a dreadful dream. Wedding dreams are predictions, Äennachen announces. The bride blanches--- hers was a bummer!
- Äennachen always helpful, will interpret. Tell me the tale! Agathe divulges the doulful dream: she was a white dove, Max shot her, she turned back into herself and lived, but beside her on the ground was a great bird of prey in a pool of blood.
- Äennachen's analysis spins the story into something similarly sinister; her spun scenario seems senseless. Agathe is not soothed, so Äennachen opts for another option, an amusing aria about an aunt's dreadful dream.

**Einst traumte meiner sel'gen base. /**

**I had an aunt who dreamed one night.**

The aria has two distinct parts. The first is the cousin's vocal narrative of her aunt's dream, more correctly, a nightmare. However, the dream monster menacing the aunt, morphs into the family dog. Ha! Ha! Agathe is neither soothed nor amused. So, Äennachen tunes up a second stanza, a quite lovely and lyrically perfect picture of a wedding day and a happy bride. Better reception for this message.

- The bridesmaids arrive to serenade the bride; Äennachen leaves to get their floral headdresses.

**Wir winden dir den Jungfernkranz. /  
With silken bows of violet blue.**

Taking tuneful turns and dancing, the bridesmaids both solo and in ensemble, sing a lovely and fanciful tribute to a bride of legend who wove her veil and then waited seven years for her lover to return. He finally did and they lived happily ever-after. He had a lot of explaining to do though.

- Late in the bridesmaids' ballad, Äennachen ambles in with a box. Agathe anxiously opens it to see her bridal barrette of blossoms.
- Woops! Mix-up at the florist. She got a funeral wreath instead! No one is amused. Another omen.
- (Quickly passed over earlier was a "gypsy curse" moment. Agathe's ancestor's portrait had pummeled the parquet again, but before this scene started.<sup>118</sup> The ugly omens are piling up!)
- Everyone up to this point has tried to put a positive spin on the sour stuff spilling out. However, the funeral flowers filled these females with fear.
- Even the "never at a loss for laughs" lady cousin gives up grinning for grimacing. Agathe (ever the perky Pollyanna) thinks of a talisman that might take them through the trauma that maybe-yet-to-be: the hermit's blessed roses.<sup>119</sup> The cousin is conscripted to conjugate those blooms into a better bridal wreath than the burial bouquet.
- As she weaves the wreath, the clever cousin convinces the cowed crowd to sing! Since they had not practiced anything else, they encore their bridesmaids' song. Enervated, they exit the scene suspiciously, as the scene also exits the stage.

---

<sup>118</sup> Remember that off-stage hammering when this scene surfaced?

<sup>119</sup> Recall them, Act II?

**Act III. Scene 3.** Shortly after, that same day in the fearsome fir forest. We're at a romantic rendezvous that seems to be sharing space with a rifle range, princely pavilion, and Bohemian boys' bivouac.

- The stage is stuffed with supers set for a festive frolic. As often occurs in opera, the chorus communicates to themselves how happy and festive are their lives. The huntsmen in a real he-men's hymn, hype the fun of frolicking in the forest, culling an overabundant crop of four-footed creatures.

**Was gleicht wohl auf Erden? /**

**What joy can compare to the joy of the chase?**

This tune is truly a testimony to testosterone. One of the most familiar melodies from the opera, the piece is a brio blast of male voices and orchestral brass. Brace yourselves to enjoy!

- The Prince surrounded by sycophants, signals that the significant shoot should be started. Caspar signals for Samiel and shimmyes up a sycamore (or something similarly forestry) so's not to be seen, but to see the shoot and certainly the seventh shot.
- Max, already armed from the a.m. with major marks for his terrific targeting using Beelzebub's bullets, is prompted by the Prince to destroy a dozing dove with his final fusillade.
- As he aims, Agathe and her entourage enter. The bride bellows to her beau, "Don't blast that bird boy, it's me!" Too late, the bullet blasts forth; the dove dodges death, but both Agathe and Caspar fall to the ground--- fatally finished with the seventh shell directed by the Devil?
- The cacophonous crowd is both tearful and terrified; they think Max has downed his darling and some other dude. "Damn," they chorally cry out!

**Schaut, o Schaut./**

**Look, oh look, (he's shot he own bride!)**

In a concerted chorus of concern, the crowd articulates the obvious: two folks shot with one bullet, Caspar and Agathe! But are they deceased, is the crowd's question?

- Agathe stirs, still alive! She only fainted as operatic females are wont to do.<sup>120</sup> One and all in ensemble, save Caspar, exult elatedly that our bride is still breathing.

**Den Heil 'gen Preis and Dank! /  
Praise and thank the holy saints!**

- Caspar largely ignored, but blanketed with blood is definitely Hell-bent since Samiel slips in and sits next to him.
- Knowing he is checking out, Caspar curses the crowd and Heaven. Not nice!
- For that unacceptable exit and just because he was encyclopedically evil anyway, the Prince proclaims he should be pitched into the Glen. The huntsmen hasten to hurl him hence. Hurrah!
- The Prince is perplexed, "This tacky tableau is troubling. Max, what does it mean?"
- Max spills the beans about the bullets, etc. The Prince is really PO'd. He proclaims our boy better get out of the Princedom promptly, permanently and---- you do not get the girl on your way out the door!
- The people plead for a pardon, but the Prince is not in a mood to negotiate. His picnic has been pummeled, the potato salad was putrid; phooey on this pleading!
- However, the holy Hermit<sup>121</sup> elbows in and prayerfully pitches for a pardon.

---

<sup>120</sup> In some versions of the legend, Agathe's bridal headdress, made out of the blessed roses, diverted the bullet. Hence all that earlier business with the bouquet. Lost in translation?

**Leicht kann des Frommen Herz auch wanken. /  
Even the pious heart can waiver.**

With a melody and message resembling a Papal Proclamation, the Hermit lets the Prince know as a potentate, he is performing poorly. Mercy for Max, with a year of good behavior, he will get to acquire Agathe.

- Since the hermit is a bigger hero with the crowd than our highness, the Prince prudently seals the deal and the stipulation: Max has a year's probation. If he behaves by being wary of the ghastly Glen, he gets the girl, the big Kahuna's badge of office and an only slightly haunted haus!
- A very elaborate, ennobling (and extended) ensemble ensues.

**Heil unsern Furst! / Hail to our Prince!**

In this beautiful and powerful anthem-like finale, Weber brings us back home. The theme from Agathe's Act II aria heard in the Overture, is repeated in the concluding bars of this piece.

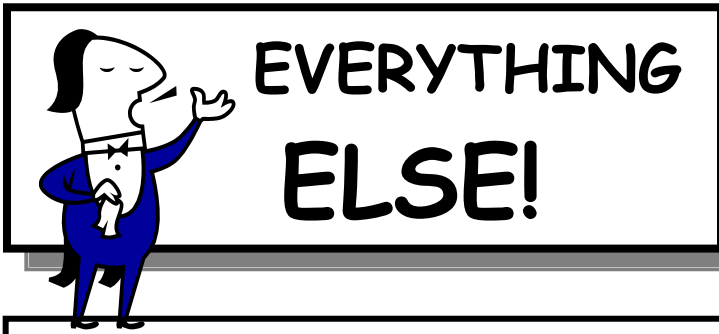
- Exult and exeunt all! We're done here folks!



**AUF  
WIEDERSEIN!**

---

<sup>121</sup> Think Charlton Heston in that Moses movie.



## A CONCLUDING COGITATION

### *19<sup>th</sup> Century Nights at the Opera: An Orgiastic Experience.*

"Opera once was an important social instrument -- especially in Italy. With Rossini and Verdi, people were listening to opera together and having the same catharsis with the same story, the same moral dilemmas. They were holding hands in the darkness. This has gone. Now perhaps they are holding hands and watching television?"

Luciano Berio, Italian composer, 1989.

**Good News, Bad News.** Once upon a time, opera was the only major entertainment<sup>164</sup> game in town. Today, a similar prospect could be considered really bad news and---scare the devil out of a lot of people!

History dictates that opera, in a primitive form,<sup>165</sup> began in Italy at the close of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It rapidly matured in form and spread quickly

---

<sup>164</sup> We know! In some circles opera is regarded as an almost religious experience. However, at its essence--- it is entertainment!

throughout Europe. It gained an early hold on the public's attention for the simple reason that any other big alternative "bread and circus" events readily accessible to us today, had yet to be invented. For at least another 300 years post-1600, there were not to be any football, baseball or other big sporting events (a.k.a. entertainment). Movies, TV or big rock concerts also would not be in evidence. Perhaps worst of all, there was no publicly participatory politics to pump up the polis. The ruling royals undemocratically kept a lid and monopoly on that lively art. Reduces revolutionary excesses, you know. The good news however is that opera despite being the only entertainment option for several hundred years, was also very democratic--- especially the Italian form.<sup>166</sup> The opera house was accessible (physically and financially) to the hoi polloi (a.k.a. us members of the great unwashed mob), not just the hoi oligio (a.k.a. the upper crust).<sup>167</sup>

**Noshing and Schmoozing.** In brief, what one could do (decently) between 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century dusks and dawns when the daily day jobs were done, was attend the opera!<sup>168</sup> However, in those long gone halcyon days, people did not especially come to opera only to listen to

---

<sup>165</sup> The first opera is credited to be *Dafne* composed in 1597 Florence by Jacopo Peri. It's music and libretto are lost somewhere in history's dustbin---maybe just as well.

<sup>166</sup> Other European countries especially France and what became Germany and Austria had their operatic entertainments also. However, they tended to be more formalistic and focused than those of the Italians. Therefore, we are going to stick singularly to the Italian style in deference at least Puccini and Rossini. Also pragmatically, we have limited space and time for dawdling digressions. Those are our rationales to cut out inter-cultural comparisons. OK?

<sup>167</sup> While almost all levels of society could see the show, through artful architecture the "hoi polloi" were allocated to alternative areas from the "hoi oligio." Such an architectural achievement did affect the opera house, its operas and their performances. More on those substantive affects shortly.

<sup>168</sup> The 300+ year life span of opera wherein it was a attraction for a major part of the population is said to have ended with the premiere of Puccini's *Turandot* (1926). That "end of the run" occurred in a large part due to the development of multiple other entertainment forms that captured the public's attendance. However, it was also said to result from a compositional hiatus of melodic, romantic operas. A large segment of the opera-going public rapidly lost interest post-Puccini, in newer 12 tone or atonal modernistic operatic forms.

fancy vocalizing. It can be convincingly argued that the music was strictly background. Noshing and schmoozing big time with your neighbors was the main event!

A night at the opera<sup>169</sup> was a social occasion encompassing not only the on-stage occurrences, but an opportunity to sumptuously and continuously dine and down potent potables in your box or from a basket, schmooze with friends during entr'actes and/or, gamble in the outer lobby.<sup>170</sup> In those times, the prudent composer spun out sufficient melodies to last well past midnight. Such length added bonus points to a critic's review and public perceptions.

**So What?** “All that sounds like fun,” you seem to say, “But what does it have to do with our operas?” Well, it has a great deal to do with the on-stage occurrences. The opera house's customary off-stage activities dictated what should be seen and heard on-stage. It was those long-ago dictates that have created many of what we today consider operatic eccentricities. Compositional creativity did not bring forth all that music and scale scaling. Much of it was imposed by 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century rules for the operatic road.<sup>171</sup> The following are offered as examples of those “road rules.”

- Overtures apart from artistic design, became de rigueur to quiet the considerable socializing and shut down the serpentine wandering throughout the auditorium. Overtures per se morphed into lengthy overtures to assure a leisurely finish to the current banquet course being

---

<sup>169</sup> Edith Wharton opened her Pulitzer-prize winning novel *The Age of Innocence* describing a 19<sup>th</sup> century New York City night at the opera.

<sup>170</sup> A considerable portion of Rossini's fortune came from his cut of the opera houses' outer-lobby gambling table action during performances of his works. His cut was always a negotiated part of his contract with the opera house.

<sup>171</sup> As discussed on p. 94, the Code Rossini was a strong compositional governing force for at least the first half and then some, of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

consumed--- do not want to rush the dinner guests into heartburn you know.<sup>172</sup>

- Many on-stage vocal customs and character movements were dictated by off-stage social or culinary requirements. One of the more intriguing is the so-called aria di sorbetto. The on-stage on set of this piece was the equivalent to the last call in a contemporary bar. Therefore, the music occurring during this on-stage point was considered disposable; no one would be listening as they were taking a last run at the buffet line or the champagne bucket.<sup>173</sup>

- Until Rossini and Verdi rose to compositional clout, singers ruled! The voice was all! Composers had little voice (pun!) in the performance as it spun out. Audience interest was in the performance of principals, usually not the rest of the on-stage “stuff.” Since each composer developed his opera for specific individual’s voices, arias were strategically placed in a performance to permit those stars to shine. It also explains some of the odd placement<sup>174</sup> of such moments throughout the piece.

- As a further variation on the “singers’ rule,” once an opera had premiered, what subsequently was performed on stage under the name of that opera, was anyone’s guess. There were no copyright laws, no licensing of productions, etc. Therefore anyone in the opera “business” vocal or managerial, with sharp elbows was free to abridge and/or insert what, where and however they wanted.

As curious as all this “frolicking” may seem to modern eyes, before we get too smug, let’s think of our modern sports arenas, their private boxes with high priced décor, booze, broads and chow. There are omni-present vendors for the great-unwashed crowd that is boxed out of the private boxes, but keeps in constant physical and verbal movement. Similar to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Italian opera house, no? Only the venue has changed,

---

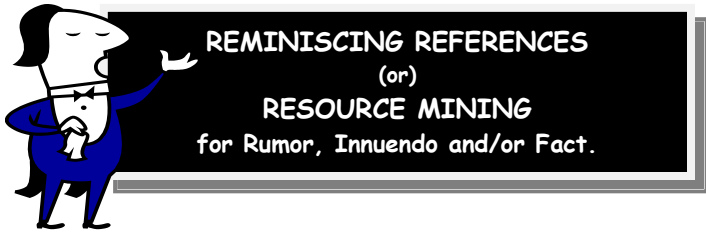
<sup>172</sup> For notations on the wandering *Barbiere* Overture and Rossini's compositional habits related thereto, see p.,95 and p. 105.

<sup>173</sup> For a discussion of this aria type and how it affects *Barbiere* see p. 129.

<sup>174</sup> Vis-à-vis libretto logic.

and there is no fat lady singing, unless “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” counts!

*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose!*



In this comparatively advanced technological age of information access, the persistent data digger can usually find more about a given subject, than the human brain can effectively process. That is both good news and bad. While such a surfeit permits a maximization of information for a minimum of effort, it also exposes the weak underbelly of archival information and the need to separate the chaff from the wheat in a field of conflicting “facts.”

It is continually amazing to discover through cross-referencing how assumedly simple rock solid facts can wildly vary among references. Due diligence on “factual” selection is therefore mandatory up to a point. Then, it becomes a matter of, “Oh, what the hell! This is my best guess.”

Individual **Irreverent Guides** are not designed to be exhaustively referenced academic treatises. However, they are semi-conscientiously constructed to optimistically demystify opera while entertainingly informing members of a potential audience. Consequently, they are built on the best basis of factual assessment among often-warring alternatives

For the reader, now having been warned about possible pot-holes in at best, a rocky narrative road, listed below are some reference resources used in construction of this current multi-opera **Irreverent Guide**:

## General references:

- David Hamilton (Ed.), The Metropolitan Opera Encyclopedia, Simon and Schuster; 1987. This is a smorgasbord of operatically and musically-related factoids. While the individual entries are brief, overall the reference is comprehensive, up-to-date and accurate.
- Roger Parker (Ed.), The Oxford Illustrated History of Opera, Oxford University Press, 1994. More in depth than the Met Encyclopedia, it provides excellent historical background, but was not designed as a handy-dandy reference, if that is what you are looking for.

## Composer/ opera specific references:

- Karl Kohrs (Ed.), The New Milton Cross'Complete Stories of the Great Operas; Doubleday and Company, 1955.
- Milton Cross and Karl Kohrs, The New Milton Cross More Stories of the Great Operas; Doubleday and Company, 1955.

These two basic texts of operatic plots and associated information originated with Milton Cross, the longtime host of the Saturday afternoon broadcasts of the Metropolitan Opera. They have been frequently revised and updated. Their telling of the plots is quite complete, but not excessive. Unfortunately, care needs to be exercised in using the newer editions, as some errors have randomly crept in that Mr. Cross would not have tolerated.

- Philip Gossett et.al. (Eds.), Masters of Italian Opera (Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Verdi, Puccini); WW Norton and Company, 1983. Good basic information on the lives and works of five major Italian composers. Quite useful and readable. Its style cuts to the chase and doesn't overburden the researcher with excessive peripheral detail.

- Susan Nicassio, Tosca's Rome, The Play and The Opera in Historical Perspective. University of Chicago Press, 1999. An always-intriguing discussion of the Puccini and Sardou works, with a scholarly lodging against the actual history of Rome and as it relates, Europe. The text largely encompasses the historical time period of the opera/play. A fascinating read, even if you are not researching.
- Charles Osborne, The Complete Operas of Puccini, DiCapo Press, 1981. Intriguing narratives of Puccini's operas and backgrounds on their creation. Succinct, but full of interesting and informational details.
- John Wood (Trans.) Beaumarchais's Barber of Seville and The Marriage of Figaro. Penguin Books, 1964. The original source plays for the Mozart, Rossini and Paisiello operas; also contains an excellent introduction by Dr. Wood detailing Beaumarchais's career, the creation of the plays and the history of their times.

**Recordings** (including their accompanying background essays and librettos):

- Tosca; Callas, DiStefano and Gobbi, Orchestra and Chorus of La Scala, Victor de Sabata, 1984.
- Der Freischütz, Behrens and Kolla; Bavarian Radio Chorus and Orchestra, Rafael Kubelik, 1980.
- Il Barbiere di Siviglia
  - Rossini version. Merrill and Peters, Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus, Eric Leinsdorf, 1958 (re-mastered 1986)
  - Paisiello version. Laki and Gulyas, Hungarian State orchestra, Adam Fisher, 1985.

**The Internet** (queried widely and wildly). Too many citations reviewed to list individually. WARNING for the careful researcher: cross-referencing, culling and correcting are musts! The web abounds with inaccuracies and informational conflicts.



## A Guide to Irreverent Guides

Encouraged by several probably misguided regional opera companies, the **Irreverent Guides to Enjoying the Opera** series was initiated over six years ago. To date **Guides** for thirty-two operas have been produced. The majority of these were done pro bono for the companies to use in their educational and/or fund-raising programs. The rest were done for unwary and slower running family, friends or just unfortunate strangers in the street.

Each **Irreverent Guide** is designed for those of us who enjoy the operatic sound and spectacle, but do not necessarily understand (or really, want to understand) the technical nuances underlying the musical, visual and/or vocal fireworks.

The **Guides** originated in an oral tradition. Individual operas selected for their slightly off-the-wall stories (but great music) were translated into jaundiced and irreverent narratives. The first audiences for these were younger family members being lured into quasi- voluntary operatic attendance.

As time passed, the narratives began to show some signs of success (e.g. the kicking and screaming stopped). The audience drawn into the narrative circle expanded to include spouses of the original but now "adult" children, grandchildren as they appeared, and non-related adults--- primarily our slowest running friends and/or (again) unwary strangers on the street.

As larger audiences came back of their own free wills for more than one narrative session, the original oral tradition proved impractical. It was replaced by a written writ about the operatic occasion. Over time, the number of targets grew and **voila (!)**, the **Irreverent Guides'** slightly dysfunctional family was born.

Each **Guide** targeting one opera includes the full flavor of the traditional bad puns and sophomoric observations of the original oral sessions. It is leavened though with

a lot more historical, social, musical, political and (ho boy!) hanky-panky background than was formerly the case. Retirement unfortunately promotes research--- especially given the present quality of the narrator/author's golf game.

Currently our operatic victims are selected more by whim than systematic design. However, past selective options have included annually changing repertoires of regional opera companies,<sup>175</sup> dyspeptic moods of the author and/or creative bribery.

**Our Operating Philosophy and Audience Personae.** Built with a clear eye on Rube Goldberg's *Principles of Design*,<sup>176</sup> each *Irreverent Guide* is dedicated to the premise that "enjoyable opera" is not an oxymoronic phrase. Honoring that premise, as an overall collective, individual *Guides* are designed to be "entertainingly educational" as well as "irreverently informational,"--- and those are not oxymoronic phrases either!

The *Guides* are jerry-built with thigh-slappingly arcane and convoluted knowledge that will resonate **only** with a special few potential opera-going folks. Specifically, those who have a highly developed sense of curiosity about circumstances that drive artistic creativity (apart from impending starvation); the capacity to suspend disbelief; a tolerance for the improbable; and finally, an antic sense of humor.



If we still have your attention,  
you obviously qualify for our  
select readership.  
So read, laugh and learn!

---

<sup>175</sup> They shall remain nameless. Legal action by them is always a potential.

<sup>176</sup> Primarily those entertainingly defying logic and common sense,

## About the Authors

So our indiscriminate readership is aware which member of the **Irreverent Guides** "creative" team (JP or Sondra Cooney) is responsible for which gaffs, the division of work between the pair is, he writes them, but she makes them readable.

**J.P. Cooney**, while holding a PhD, definitely was not educated as a musicologist. Also, not a native Iowan, he does claim default citizenship of the state by virtue of family genealogy, marriage and University of Iowa degrees. He is several years retired from a long, but probably questionable professorial career in graduate health care education and research. However, most important for current purposes, he is a long-standing opera enthusiast about that art form's wacky, but rewarding wonderments.

**S.S. Cooney** a native Iowan, does have a musical background by virtue of education and training. She holds a graduate degree from UCLA and though (semi-) retired, she has had a long successful career in teaching, educational research and policy-development. She is a knowledgeable and fanatic lover of a wide range of musical types. Opera does make that list--- somewhat. For their (to-date) fifty-three years of marriage, equipped with a flaming red, felt-tipped pen, she has diligently pursued and purified JP's errant and "gone missing" commas, grungy syntax and banally baroque sentence structures. She perpetually persists in her quixotic editorial quest, as he never learns.

The Cooneys currently are most happy residents of a small island off Hilton Head (SC), breachable only by boat or Michael Phelps. In this idyllic but eccentric existence, they are companioned by the grumpy ghost of their formerly long-lived liver-spotted Dalmatian.

Major additional enjoyment to the island's idyllic atmosphere is provided by frequent forays onto and most importantly, off the island by other immediate family members. That traveling road show now touts up nineteen second and third generational members--- most of whom are at least willing to tolerate the opera, and some actually love it.



## **The Irreverent Guides Series**

(Issues already released or scheduled to be shortly released,  
into a potential but skittish opera-going public. )

<b>COMPOSER</b>	<b>OPERA</b>	<b>ISSUE</b>	<b>DATE</b>
Bernstein*	Candide	#21	4.08
Bizet	Les Pêcheurs de Perles	# 7	10.05
Blitzstein***	Regina	#24	6.08
Britten*	Albert Herring	# 8	4.06
De Falla	La Vida Breve	# 13	1.07
Donizetti***	L'Elisir d'Amore	#22	6.08
Donizetti	Lucia di Lammermoor	# 2	5.04
Gilbert & Sullivan	The Pirates of Penzance	# 15	4.07
Gounod**	Faust	#25	9.08
Gounod**	Roméo et Juliette	#17	10.07
Leoncavallo	Pagliacci	# 12	1.07
Mozart**	Le Nozze di Figaro	#27	3.09
Mozart	Die Zauberflöte	# 6	5.05
Mozart**	Don Giovanni	#19	3.08
Offenbach*	Les Contes d' Hoffmann	# 16	4.07
Poulenc*	Dialogues des Carmélites	#28	4.09
Puccini	Madama Butterfly	# 11	7.06
Puccini	Tosca	# 5	3.05
Puccini***	Tosca (a déjà vu view)	#30	6.09
Puccini**	Turandot	#29	4.09
Rossini**	Il Barbiere di Siviglia	#26	1.09
Rossini***	Il Barbiere (once more with feeling)	#31	6.09
Rossini	La Cenerentola	# 10	3.06
Saint-Saëns	Samson et Dalila	# 4	2.05
Strauss**	Die Fledermaus	#20	4.07
Verdi**	Aida	#18	1.07
Verdi	La Traviata	# 9	1.06
Verdi	Macbeth	# 3	10.04
Verdi	Nabucco	# 1	10.03
Verdi	Rigoletto	# 14	3.07
Verdi***	Un Ballo in Maschera	#23	6.08
Weber***	Der Freischütz	#32	6.09

**Developed for:** \*Atlanta Opera Theater at Georgia State University  
 \*\*Opera Carolina  
 \*\*\*Des Moines Metro Opera.