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THE EARLY DAYS

1700–1849

The musical. That inventive person who first decided to turn a hard-working adjective into a nice new noun, thus leaving us with the nearly new word that nowadays describes—and not just in the English language—the world's most popular form of theatrical entertainment, did us all a favor.

The bastard but beautiful term that he fathered has various virtues but, to me, the most important among them is that it is so gloriously unspecific, so thoroughly and promiscuously all-embracing. Under the umbrella of that nice new noun there shelters an almost endless variety of theatrical entertainments: comical ones, dramatic ones, romantic ones, as well of course as those that opt for being all three at the same time. Shows with finely plotted libretti, others that have no real plotline to speak of, pieces with dropped trousers or dramatic death scenes (though only rarely both), with realistic, farcical, improbable, and/or happy beginnings and middles and endings, and with characters colorful, grotesque, swash-buckling, sighing, overwhelming, or side-splitting. There are those that tend to the historical, the biographical, the satirical, the hysterical, the sentimental, and/or the spectacular, to the fantastical and/or preachy, the extravagant, imaginative, parodic, pretentious, the strivingly relevant or gloriously irrelevant, shows light, dazzling, dark, or shadowy, shows with tales original, borrowed, or even sometimes stolen, but all of them—in their diversity—have in common that sine qua non: they all have music.

Like the subject matter and the style of this terrific rainbow of musical plays, that music, and the part it fulfills in the show, can vary hugely. It may consist of just a handful of little songs, new or even secondhand, sung to an accompaniment provided by a minimum of musicians as a mere and incidental decoration to a piece whose spoken text is its raison

d'être. Or it may be a full-blown score of richly written and expansively orchestrated music, designed to be sung by voices of range and powerful expression, and the element around which all the rest of the entertainment is constructed. But, whether a show belongs to one or the other of these two extreme categories, or whether it takes on any one of the many shades of musical coloring that go in between, the result of this combining of song, ensemble, dance, and/or incidental music and a story text is the same: it gives us that species of theater that recent decades have chosen to call "the musical."

In earlier theatrical decades, in earlier theatrical centuries, in the days before our unknown benefactor coined his useful bit of terminology, many or all of the kinds of show we revel in as "musicals" today did, of course, already exist and flourish. But they existed and flourished under different labels. For, in those earlier days, the description that followed a musical's title on the playbill was normally intended to give an audience a slightly specific idea of what they could expect from their evening's entertainment. So, a musical wasn't just "a musical," it was "a musical comedy," "a romantic musical play," "a burlesque," "a farcical comedy with songs and dances," an "operetta," or even occasionally something more individual and flavorful. A musical-theater bill or title page in nineteenth-century France might have carried the mention "opéra-bouffe" or "opéra-comique," "vaudeville" or "comédie mêlée d'ariettes," while the German-language theater of the same era proffered such categories as "komische Oper" (comic opera, i.e., music-based play with spoken text), "Lebensbild" ("picture-from-life") or "Posse" ("homely" musical play) "mit Gesang und Tanz" (as an alternative to those Possen and Lebensbilder which had no Gesang und Tanz), "Operette" (light or small-in-subject opera), "Zauberspiele" (magical or fairy-tale play, fantasy), "Volksmärchen" (folk-story), or "Singspiel" (musical play). Each and every one of these subtitles had its own specific shade of meaning, often bordering on and sometimes crossing one other, and their audiences had a pretty good idea what they signified.

But the fashion for the kind of more-or-less-precise labels that the writers and producers of past times chose to put on their shows, in a way our present generation has preferred not to, has had a dubious effect on those of us who like to look back at the wealth of musical theater produced in years gone by. It has led folk in the days of "the musical"—and at no time more so than here and now—to regard those shows, with their unfamiliar descriptions, as being somehow different, as belonging to another genre, another world, than the one inhabited by the "musicals" of the last decades. And that idea is—of course—quite wrong. They don't. They differ only as much as a person born in one decade,

a novel written in one era, a building built at some time in the past, differs from a person, a novel, or a building of nowadays. They are no less a person, a book, or a building just because of their date of birth. And the same goes for all those shows. No matter what description they sported in their young days, they are no less "musicals" than the ones which just happen to have been, thanks to that mid-twentieth-century turn in terminology, called "musical" from their birth.

Since this is so, how far back do we have to go to find the show that might be worthily deemed "the first musical," in the manner that Jacopo Peri's *Dafne* of 1597 is so neatly taped and ticketed as "the first opera"? The answer is undoubtedly "very much further than that." It may not be a very convincing or precise answer, but history is like that. It doesn't lay itself out in nice, straight, clearly defined lines, with little red rosettes glued on to "the first this" and "the first that" to point out a path that will lead us through the centuries like Hänsel and Gretel's crumbs. And theatrical history is no exception.

One thing that can safely be said is that there has been music in the theater for as long as the theater has existed. And not only our "theater" of the bricks-and-mortar era, but that of the days of setups and booths, and of performances of a very different kind from those which we enjoy today. There were certainly "musicals" of a kind to be seen and heard in the theaters of ancient Greece and Italy. Were they the first? Probably not. But who knows? We don't, and it is unlikely that we ever shall.

I am not going to attempt to delve into musical-theater archeology in this survey, in some kind of hopeless search for the archetypal musical. Neither am I going to enter into the special study that is the stage and music in classical antiquity, or that of the performances and plays of the sixteenth, seventeenth, or even much of the eighteenth centuries of this modern era. Rather than spread myself margarine-thinly through thousands or even hundreds of years, I am going to limit the body of this chronicling of the history of the entertainment we know as the musical to just the last one hundred and fifty.

I am not, however, proposing to come out of this particular set of historical starting blocks without good reason. The years around the middle of the nineteenth century saw a significant change come over the musical theater. In those years it blossomed forth with a new style and a new spirit, sweeping crazily round the world and its many-languaged stages in what, if it was not actually that very beginning of the career of "the musical," which lies buried somewhere in the sands of time, was at least something that can be argued to be the beginning of the era of the "modern musical" that has entertained the Western world so lavishly in the century and a half since.

THE MUSICAL STAGE BEFORE 1850

So, what was this new style and spirit? What was this new world-wowing direction that the musical took? To understand it, of course, we first have to look at what it was a direction away from, at what the musical-theater entertainments on view in the most theatrically active and creative parts of the world—Italy, France, Germany, Austria, and Britain and their colonial outposts—had been like during the previous decades.

By and large—as is the case in most subjects, the theater and its history turn up exceptions to each and any rule and every generalization, but by and large—those entertainments fell into two distinct categories. They don't have nice neat titles, so, for better or for worse, I'm going to call them the Popular and the Operatic. And what was it that divided these two categories the one from the other? Well, when all was totted up and tallied, it was very largely a question of emphasis.

The Popular entertainments—farcical plays shot through with musical numbers, rustic romances decorated with songs and dances, song-studded burlesques of the theater's more high-flown genres and mannerisms, merry musical tales of marital mix-ups, magical and mythological romps, or little (and even not so little) pieces called "burletta" or "comic opera" by their authors—were shows that were built soundly on their text, a text to which the variously sized musical part of the entertainment was simply a divertissement and a decoration. Very often, in fact more often than not, the music in question wasn't even new. The sung part of such an entertainment was made up of lyrics that suited or slipped easily into their story stuck on to arrangements of ancient folksongs, on to the melodies of the popular songs of the day, or even on to those of pieces pinched from other shows, from the loftiest to the most cheerfully lowbrow, from the oldest to the still running. The most favored of these melodies, indeed, quite simply went from show to show to show, and in some cases they ultimately came to signify a particular mood or a moment in the action, just as their equivalent "signatures" would do, many years later, in the scores to the silent movies.

The Operatic entertainments, as a contrast, made a proud feature of their musical part, a musical part that was not second- or tenth-hand, but which consisted of a score specially composed for the show in which it was displayed, just like the scores for the serious and tragic grand operas which were at the time considered the summit (if then, as now, not necessarily the most popular manifestation) of musical-theater art. Sometimes the libretti of the "operatic" shows told much the same kind of tale that the "popular" ones did. As in the nonmusical theater,

a very large percentage of musical play plots were set on the rutted road to marriage, in tales romantic, or comical, or both. Sometimes, too, the words to these operatic pieces were skillfully written, but—as was evidenced in the eighteenth century by the number of times the same libretti and stories were set and reset with fresh scores of original music by a series of musicians in a series of languages and countries—it was the musical score that was the heart of the matter. The book was there merely to serve as a setting for the songs and the ensembles provided by the composer.

In the first part of the eighteenth century, both sides of this dogmatic division produced some highly successful works, a number of which would even outlive their own times and go on to many decades of representations on the world's stages.

POPULAR ENTERTAINMENTS OF THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

On the popular side, the London theater notched up one of the musical theater's most memorable and enduring hits when it welcomed *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), a bitingly funny piece of lowlife comedy, spiked with all kinds of easily appreciable topical, social, and personal jibes, which—following the fashion of the booth entertainments of the French fairs—doubled its appeal by taking a musical side shot at the modish artificialities of the newly fashionable everything-stops-for-an-aria Italian opera. The score, selected by Gay and partly arranged by Dr. Johann Christoph Pepusch (1667–1752), was made up of songs and ensembles that were based on a whole array of common and popular melodies and secondhand song tunes, from the "anon" folksong to the polite arietta, and those tunes made up into a funsome series of altogether less pretentious set-piece musical moments than the florid and repetitive showpiece arias, with their emphasis on vocalization rather than on dramatic value, that made up the backbone of the Italian scores. As the years went on, *The Beggar's Opera*—which emphasized this parallel with the Italians both in its incongruous title and by taking on itself the novel and ludicrous appellation of "ballad opera"—naturally found all its topical and many of its burlesque points blunted, but this jaunty show, with its oversexed thug of an antihero and its merry mixture of musical styles, still stands up, a quarter of a millennium later, as a jolly, mudslinging bit of thoroughly musical comedy, and the text which John Gay (1685–1732) provided has served as the basis for a series of remakes all around Europe.

Figure 4. *The Beggar's Opera:* "Our Polly is a sad slut . . . How not? Lack of virtue runs in her family . . . Source: British Musical Theatre Collection.

The Beggar's Opera, a ballad opera (comic opera) in three acts by John Gay. Lyrics by Gay and others. Music selected by Gay and arranged by Johann Christoph Pepusch. Produced at Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, London, January 29, 1728.

Characters: Mr. Peachum, Mrs. Peachum, Polly Peachum, Captain Macheath, Filch, Lockit, Lucy Lockit, Matt o' the Mint, Jenny Diver, Suky Tawdry, &c.

Plot: Mr. Peachum, a prospering London thiefmaster and fence, and his helpmate wife are aghast when they hear that their daughter Polly has unadvisedly married one of their suppliers, the swaggering, womanizing road-thief known as Captain Macheath. The couple fear that their new son-in-law will now betray their operation to the law so that, as next of kin, he may inherit all of their soiled savings. So, with the help of a willing and jealous whore and a useful jail boss, the Peachums hastily get their son-in-law condemned himself, and although one of his many less official "wives," the jailer's daughter Lucy, helps him temporarily to escape, he has made it to the gallows tree before he is improbably reprieved to go home to his lawful wedded wench.

The piece that stands out as probably the most internationally successful example of a musical comedy to come out in this period also began its career in London. With an eye to the fashion created by its already famous predecessor, *The Devil to Pay* (1731), written by Irishman Charles Coffey (d. May 13, 1745), which saw stage light just three years after *The Beggar's Opera,* was called a "ballad farce." This piece was an adaptation of an even earlier comedy, illustrated by sixteen (later slimmed to eleven) musical numbers, and it told the story of a nagging aristocratic wife and a brutally macho cobbler who are, thanks to a bit of timely magic, temporarily and salutarily given to each other as partners. The libretto for the show was full-steam-ahead comedy, with just a little moral in its happy (for the protagonists' battered spouses) ending, for, unlike *The Beggar's Opera,* Coffey's musical did not strive to make any points, parodic or otherwise, in either its text or its music. It was simply a farcical musical comedy thoroughly worthy of the name. The musical part of the show consisted of the same kind of pasticcio or collage of not-so-new tunes that the earlier show had sported, but the "ballad" part of this "ballad farce" took a firm second place to the action and the fun of the farce. And that farce proved enormously successful, going out from London to make itself a hit, in a whole series of versions, all round the world.

In Germany it became *Der Teufel ist los* (1752) and, set with a replacement score of original music, a landmark in the German musical theater as its first major musical-comedy or Singspiel hit; in France, set with a fresh pasticcio of French music, it became *Le Diable à quatre* (1756); in Vienna, an Italian version called *Poche, ma buone* (1800), with an original score by Ferdinando Paër (1771—1839), became a thorough hit; and, more than a century on, after what the *Biographica Dramatica* of 1782 called "as many transformations as the Banjans of the East Indies fable their Deity Wistnon to have passed through," not to mention one of the first musequels in musical-theater history, Coffey's libretto made it all the way back to Britain to be set by the celebrated operatic composer Michael Balfe (1808–1870) as *The Devil's in It* (1852), and back to Vienna as a "komische Zauberposse," or magical musical comedy, adapted by top playwright Karl Costa (1832–1907) and freshly composed by Franz von Suppé (1819–1895), as *Die Frau Meisterin* (1868).

Burlesque—the extravagantly ridiculous parody of things overly serious, and in particular of the more dramatically pompous and pretentious parts of the theater—had been a popular pastime on European stages for many years, and *The Beggar's Opera* was only one (and far from the first or the most brutally direct) of many madcap attacks that were made on

The Devil to Pay, or The Wives Metamorphos'd, a ballad farce in three acts (later six scenes) by Charles Coffey, based on the farce *The Devil of a Wife* by Thomas Jevon. Music uncredited. Produced at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, London, August 17, 1731.

Characters: Sir John Loverule, Lady Loverule, Zekel Jobson, Nell Jobson, Doctor, Lucy, Lettice, Butler, Coachman, Cook, Footman, &c.

Plot: The uncouth cobbler Jobson is "a true English heart" who boozes with the boys and beats and bullies his dutiful wife, Nell. Lady Loverule is a haughty termagant who treats all—including her generous husband—with scalding rudeness. One day she turns away from her door a benighted Doctor, who finds hospitality instead with the bedrudged Nell, and in grateful return the Doctor—who is nothing of the kind—brews a little sorcery. Gentle Nell turns up in Sir John's home and bed, and on the receiving end of his kindnesses and his household's love, while Lady Loverule finds herself in the Jobsons' cot and on the receiving end of Zekel's strap. But only the two women are aware of the switch—everyone else just sees an amazing character change. When the magic is finally undone and the women return home, both the cobbler and the Lady have been thoroughly chastened by the experience.

the early eighteenth-century stages on the manners and mannerisms of the eminently attackable Italian opera, with its coloratura and castrati and its vastly exaggerated and melodramatic sentiments and action. Debunking the high-flown was a popular theatrical sport, and French producers, in particular, were liable to have direct parodies of the latest grand operas on the boards within a remarkably short time of their première. These parodies, of course, included a significant helping of music. In fact, they often used chunks of the score of the burlesqued opera itself, set to grotesque words and sung with very different emphases and style, but no one minded: after all, to get the most out of a burlesque you had first to buy a ticket to see the opera that was being burlesqued.

Among the most successful burlesque operas of the period on the English-language stage were two shows that were not one-to-one burlesques of specific grand operas but rather parodies of the whole idea of opera, its conventions, and its extravagant staging: a musicalized version of Henry Fielding's already popular parody of the fiorature of the melodramatic stage, *Tom Thumb,* "set to music after the Italian manner" as *The Opera of Operas* (1733), and a gloriously nonsensical piece, written by Henry Carey (1687–1743), "a musician by profession, and one of the lower order of poets," and composed by J. F. Lampe (1703–1751), which combined the tale of a ridiculous and raunchy old English ballad called *The Dragon of Wantley* (1737), full of common and even low or lewd language, with a score of the utmost operatic pomposity.

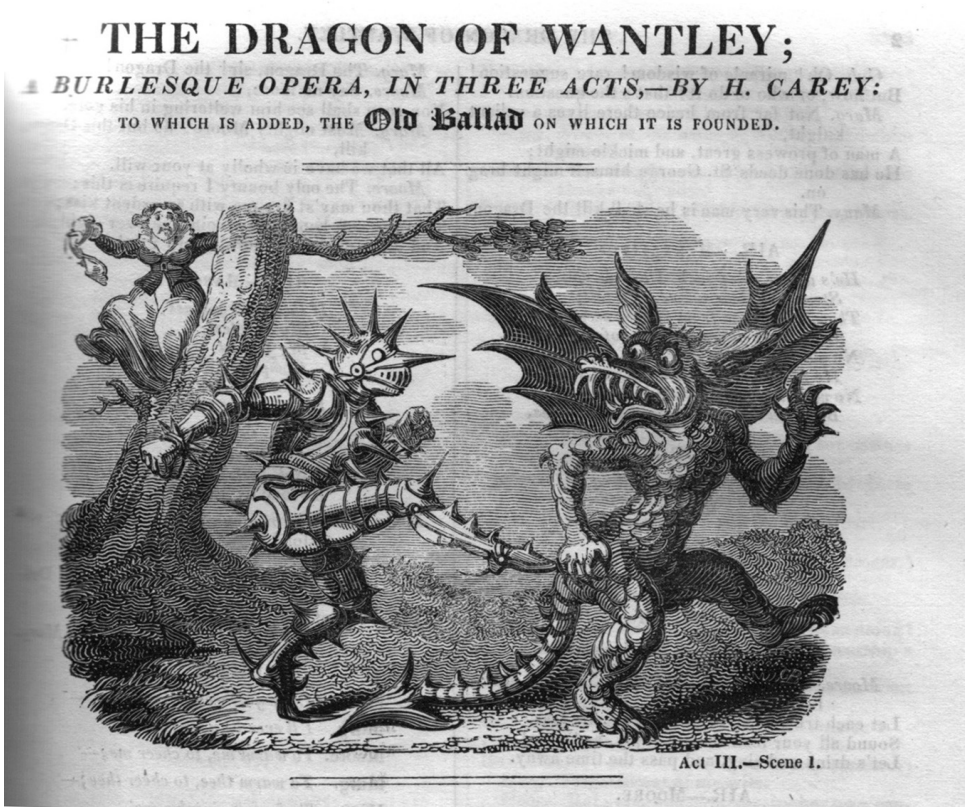

Figure 5. *The Dragon of Wantley:* "Oh! oh! oh! The devil take your toe." A mortal blow by an armored toe, in a place where a gentleman's toe oughtn't go. Source: British Musical Theatre Collection.

The Dragon of Wantley, a burlesque opera in three acts by Henry Carey. Music by John Frederick Lampe. Produced at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, London, November 6, 1737.

Characters: Moore, Margery, Mauxalinda, The Dragon, Gubbins, &c.

Plot: A dragon has been laying waste a chunk of rural Yorkshire, gobbling up the children's breakfast bread and butter before they can gobble it up themselves, so the incredibly valiant local knight, Moore of Moore Hall, is called in to dispose of the beast. He agrees to do so, for the love of pretty village Margery, which makes pretty village Mauxalinda, whom he'd wooed last Christmas, see scarlet. Having first put a stop to the jilted one's attempt at a pretty village murder, Moore dons his heroic armor, dispatches the dragon by means of a well-aimed pointed toe-piece up the beast's fatally vulnerable rectum, and returns home in splendid operatic triumph.

Raunchiness was also often a feature of what the eighteenth-century French enjoyed as their favorite kind of popular musical-theater entertainment, under the name of opéra-comique. "Opéra-comique" was an expression that would effectively change its meaning several times over

the years, as the genre—or at least its name—went steadily upmarket, but at this point in time the sort of show that was so described actually had more in common with the British ballad farce or its German equivalent, the Singspiel, than with anything approaching what we would today call opera. For the "opéra" here didn't mean "grand opera" and the "comique" didn't mean "funny": all that was signified in the expression was that the "opéra" or musical part of the show was attached to a "comédie," a play, instead of being written in the sung-through "opératique" style of the Italians. Not necessarily a comic play either, but any sort of play. However, as brought to its happiest heights in the 1730s and 1740s by the enormously successful author-actor Charles Favart (1710–1792), this brand of opéra-comique was most often a lively, sexy piece of humorously pointed theater, illustrated by a bevy of brief musical cuts—little lighthearted lyrics set to combinations of a whole list of popular tunes and familiar musical phrases. Favart's jolliest hit of these years was undoubtedly the typical tale of the dense but country-clever lass who is *La Chercheuse d'esprit* (1741). A saucy, rustic piece with a simple story of rural matchmaking and unmaking, set with a series of musical numbers that were made up from bits of no fewer than seventy tunes, it remained a feature on the French musical stage for well over a century.

La Chercheuse d'esprit, an opéra-comique in one act by Charles S. Favart. Music uncredited. Produced at the Théâtre de la Foire Saint-Germain, Paris, February 20, 1741.

Characters: Madame Madre, Monsieur Subtil, Monsieur Narquois, Nicette, Alain, L'Éveillé, Finette.

Plot: The widowed magistrate, Subtil, in search of a more amenable (than the first) second wife, asks her mother, Mme. Madre, for the hand of dopey, fourteen-year-old Nicette. Madame, in return, will marry his equally naive and moldable son, Alain. Mother frets that Nicette's lack of "esprit" (brains/personality/know-how) will lose her this fine match, and she orders the girl to go out and find herself some of this drastically missing quality. The learned Narquois tells her it can't be got if you haven't got it, the jolly L'Éveillé, who is about to wed the village chatterbox, Finette, gets caught trying to teach her his version of it, and Finette archly tells her to go and learn from silly Alain. So she does. The two youngsters quickly comprehend that it's each other they like, and Nicette turns out to have more than enough native wit and know-how to mow down her mother's plans and bring things to a happy youth-weds-youth ending.

OPERATIC ENTERTAINMENTS OF THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

La Chercheuse d'esprit came out in Paris less than a decade after a musical-theater conflict that had caused a considerable stir. At the heart of that conflict—a virtual contest for supremacy between the popular and operatic styles in musical theater which actually had members of the royal family aligned on one side or the other—was the same frantically fashionable Italian opera which had so stirred up English sensibilities, and most particularly a little Italian intermezzo called *La Serva padrona* (1733), the biggest hit of its kind—both in Italy and abroad—to date.

The intermezzo was a curious invention. Apparently, even at this early stage in its history, the mythologico-tragic, politico-tragic, romantico-tragic nature of the Italian opera seria had proven limited in its appeal: a little bit of a downer for that general public which the now increasing number of for-the-public theaters were trying to attract. So, in order to pick the audience's jowls up off the floor after an actful of gloomy sentiments and castrato trills, before it was time to launch into a second, third, or even fifth actful of the same fare, someone invented the intermezzo: a jolly little comic opera which was played as light relief between the acts of the gloomico-tragic one. Since it was still an opera it was, of course, all sung, with what would have been the dialogue given in recitativo secco, a curious sort of conversational sung-speech in which the vocalist didn't have to climb off the top of the stave or do anything ornamental as he did in the arias, and in which the words weren't repeated ad infinitum as in the set-piece numbers, but instead given in relatively normal speech patterns. But sung.

Pieces such as *II Marito giogatore* (1718) and *La Serva padrona*—their titles, the gambling husband, and the maid become mistress already show the classic comic strain that they followed—established this kind of entertainment to such good effect that it was eventually able to move out of its position as a supporting act, and into one as its own master: Italy's version of the comic opera. Comic opera of this kind, sometimes with recitative, sometimes with spoken dialogue, and, of course, lengthened to proportions that would fill a full evening in the theater, was duly copied in the other main centers, and this musically ambitious, "operatic" kind of musical play went on to have a memorable career during the next century or so, peaking in the production of an array of enduringly popular pieces with music by composers who were sufficiently skilled and "upmarket" to shine equally brightly in the world of the grand and tragic opera: Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782) and *Le Nozze di Figaro* (1786), his dramma giocoso *Don Giovanni* (1787) and

Così fan tutte (1790), Rossini's *II Barbiere di Siviglia* (1816) and *La Cenerentola* (1817), and so forth. In the twentieth century, the product of this era of Italianate comic opera has made its way firmly and finally into the world's opera houses, joining there not only the opera seria but such later and thoroughly composed soi-disants opéras-comiques of the French stage as the tragic, rather than humorous, but spoken-dialogued *Carmen* and *Faust* as an important part of the operatic repertoire. In the early decades of their existence, however, these pieces were firmly dubbed "comic operas," a genre apart from the serious opera, and they were often played by touring "operatic" companies in repertoire with burlesques, opéras-bouffes, and pasticcio entertainments.

THE RISE OF THE ORIGINAL MUSICAL PLAY

During the second half of the eighteenth century and the first years of the nineteenth, much of what was produced as musical-theater entertainment followed the lines that had been established in these early years. Little by little, however, the popular pieces began to undergo some important changes. Most importantly, they began regularly rather than exceptionally to take in original rather than recomposed music: music that was of a "popular" bent, in the same style as the favorite songs and tunes previously used as musical-theater song fodder, but freshly baked in a virtual imitation of the pasticcio songs. At first, as the expression "composed and arranged by . . ." became a regular one on musical comedy playbills, it was mostly a matter of only some new or specially written numbers being included in a score that was largely pasticcio, but as time went on the "composed" began sometimes to outweigh the "and arranged" and, in the long run, popular musical plays were produced that boasted a whole custom-made set of popularly musicked songs.

In Britain, during the later years of the eighteenth century, such men as playwright and popular-songwriter Charles Dibdin (1745–1814), librettist Isaac Bickerstaff (1733–?1812), and musicians Thomas Arne (1710–1778), Samuel Arnold (1740–1802), and William Shield (1748–1829) came to prominence in this kind of musical theater, and they were responsible for turning out a number of musicals which would have a long and healthy life. Bickerstaff and Arne combined on two merry English musical love stories, the freshly composed *Thomas and Sally* (1760) and the "composed and arranged" *Love in a Village* (1762), and the librettist worked with Dibdin on what was to turn out to be not only the most widely popular English musical comedy of the time, but the most successful such piece since the triumphant *The Devil to Pay: The Padlock* (1768), with its famous low comedy character of the drolly dialected West-Indian servant Mungo.

The Padlock, a comic opera in two acts by Isaac Bickerstaff, based on *El Celoso extremeño* by Cervantes. Music by Charles Dibdin. Produced at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, London, October 3, 1768.

Characters: Don Diego, Leonora, Ursula, Mungo, Leander, two scholars.

Plot: Wealthy, more-than-middle-aged Don Diego has brought the teenaged Leonora from her poor parents' home to pass three months in his lofty mansion on approval as a potential, if taken rather late in life, wife. Now, he has decided that she will do, so leaving the girl securely padlocked behind his mansion gates, watched over by the duenna Ursula and his negro servant Mungo, he sets off to finalize the betrothal. But while he is gone, a pretty young fellow called Leander clambers in past the padlock, woos his way around the susceptible spinster and the wine-sodden slave, and when the would-be groom comes home he finds a youthful love-scene that makes him come to his senses.

The intrigue *of The Padlock,* with its young lovers overcoming parental preferences and routing the older, richer, and generally objectionable bridegroom planned for the heroine, was one that was repeated over and over in varying disguises and dresses during this period. Pieces such as Sheridan and Linley's comical musical play about *The Duenna* (1775) who helps true love to triumph over a stern parent and a Portuguese Jew pretendant, and Dibdin's cautionary tale of a pair of overly self-centered country lovers who misjudge the good heart of *The Quaker* (1777) whom the young lady is supposed to wed, treated almost precisely the same plotline. However, a considerable range of other subjects also got a showing. The successful Stephen Storace/Prince Hoare "comic opera" *No Song, No Supper* (1790), with its homely story of a randy and rascally lawyer tricked out of cash, sex, and his leg-of-lamb dinner, and others of its kind may have concentrated humorously and similarly on other aspects of the marriage/sex and money that were central to the *Padlock* kind of story, but not all musicals of the period insisted on comic imbroglios as their text. Shows such as John O'Keeffe and Samuel Arnold's venture into comic-opera-banditland with the colorful *The Castle of Andalusia* (1782), or the aristocratic love-and-lucre tale of a usurped title, a lost heir, and a counterfeit Lady that comes to a climax in *The Haunted Tower* (1789) which was the setting for the full-blooded libretto concocted by James Cobb, took more romantically colorful backgrounds and more momentously romantic events as their raw material. However, in spite of the considerable popularity of musicals of this more extravagantly painted kind on English-language stages in these years, the most enduring comic opera to come out of Britain in the last part of the eighteenth century was not a romantic piece with aristocratic characters and lofty settings, but a humorous little musical on the marriage-and-mother theme that found

The Waterman, or The First of August, a ballad opera in two acts by Charles Dibdin. Music composed and arranged by Dibdin. Produced at the Little Haymarket Theatre, London, August 8, 1774.

Characters: Mr. Bundle, Mrs. Bundle, Tom Tug, Robin, Wilhelmina, &c.

Plot: Wilhelmina, the daughter of the peaceable, garden-loving Mr. Bundle and his overbearing, snobbish wife, is the object of the affections of two young men: the waterman, Tom Tug, and the dandified, prolix Robin. Mr. Bundle is all in favor of her wedding Tom, but the girl's pretentious mother is determined that Robin shall be her son-in-law. Wilhelmina wavers to and fro, but when Tom goes out and wins the Thames watermen's race and its coat and badge in her name, she finally sees clearly enough to prefer the man of action to the man of words. And Bundle revolts long enough to put his wife gaspingly in her place.

its people and its songs as near as could be to home. Dibdin's tiny tale of *The Waterman* took place alongside the River Thames, and the lively and long-loved numbers that he wrote for its musical part were supplemented in production by such eternal favorites as "The Bay of Biscay" and "Rule, Britannia!"

Alongside these original and semioriginal musical plays, pasticcio shows still throve thoroughly, and burlesque—which remained resolutely a pasticcio affair through the years—throve as well as any. In fact, the genre throve to such good effect that the success and longevity of *The Waterman* on English stages was at least equaled by that of its most successful eighteenth-century example, a happy Irish burletta called *Midas.* The events and plot of *Midas* might not have been that different from those used in the "real life" kind of musical comedy—rich old man chases young, pretty, and unenthusiastic lass—but the use of mythological characters and a fantasy setting, instead of here-and-now ones, allowed the author

Midas, a comic opera in two acts by Kane O'Hara. Music uncredited. Produced at the Crow Street Theatre, Dublin, January 22, 1762.

Characters: Jupiter, Apollo, Pan, Mercury, Momus, Juno, Midas, Damaetas, Sileno, Mysis, Nysa, Daphne, &c.

Plot: Banished to earth for spying on his Olympian Papa's amours, the god Apollo gets mixed up there in the attempts of squire Midas and his pimp Damaetas to lay a couple of local lassies. Both girls fall for the newcomer, and the irritated Midas, unable to make any headway in his lecheries, resolves to get rid of the attractive stranger by having him beaten in a singing contest by his crony, Pan. Since Midas is the judge for the contest, Pan is given as the winner, but then the angry God of Music reveals his real identity. The crooked Midas is changed to an ass and virtue is rewarded all round before, in a final tableau, Apollo ascends to Olympus.

all those extra latitudes that helped make burlesque and extravaganza so attractive and so popular. He could propel his nubile nymphs and satyrical immortals into much more grotesque situations than he could "real" people, he could allow them songs and rhyming-coupleted speeches of a much more extravagant nature, and he could let his imagination run rife much more merrily than was possible in the kind of true-to-real-life musical comedies turned out by Bickerstaff, Dibdin, or Sheridan, or in the romantic and dramatic shows of O'Keeffe and Cobb.

Alongside repeated performances of homegrown pieces such as *The Padlock, The Waterman,* and *Midas,* the London stage of the later eighteenth century also featured a very large number of musicals that were "taken from the French." This was in no way surprising, for during the second half of the eighteenth century the vast bulk of the most substantial musicals that were produced in Europe did indeed come out of the French theater. The Italian-style versus French-style battle that had raged in the comic-opera world in the Paris of the 1750s had resolved itself, and it had resolved itself not by one kind of show ousting the other from the stage, but by each type going its own way. And while the Italian-style comic opera ended up finding its apotheosis in the hallows of the world's opera houses and in the hands of musicians such as Mozart and Rossini, the French-style opéra-comique made itself a separate and barely less important existence in the hands of a group of solidly French musicians whose names would be pinned to a long series of musical-theater hits during the years up to the Revolution.

Ironically enough, the first of these musicians to make a mark was actually an Italian, Egidio Duni (1708–1775), whose *Le Caprice amoureux, ou Ninette à la cour,* a pasticcio burlesque, to a text by Favart, of a successful Italian comic opera by Ciampi and Goldoni, was a considerable hit in 1755 Paris. Duni went on to further successes, composing rather than collecting scores for such varied pieces as Favart's *Le Peintre amoureux de son modèle* (1757), his rustic story of a long-lost heroine rescued from among *Les Moissoneurs* (1768), and the remade Chaucerian fantasy *La Fée Urgèle* (1765), but more considerable works of this kind from more considerable musicians soon followed, and, as the years went on, the opéra-comique began effectively to establish itself as the most substantial and appreciable kind of musical play yet to have been seen on the world's stages.

The most prominent among the musicians whose work made this period of French opéra-comique so much more enterprising than the earlier scissors-and-paste one had been were [François] André Danican Philidor (1726–1795), Pierre Alexandre Monsigny (1729–1817), and André Ernest Grétry (1741–1813). They were musicians who worked in an altogether more classical idiom than that used by the likes of the cheerfully popular-songmaking Dibdin, and, as a result, even if the libretti

which they set often varied little in subject and in style from the British ones, their comic operas had an entirely more classically "operatic" ring to them than such lively little pieces as *The Waterman* or *Midas.*

Philidor, after making a gentle entry into the field with an arranged score for a version of *The Devil to Pay,* had his first notable success as a theater composer with the one-act opéra-comique *Blaise le savetier* in 1759, and he then went on to turn out such successful musicals as *Le Maréchal Ferrant* (1761), the fairy-tale about what happened to *Le Bûcheron* (1763) when he got his three wishes granted, and a particularly well-received version of Henry Fielding's picaresque English novel *Tom Jones* (1765). Monsigny made his début in the same year as Philidor, and in the next two decades he turned out the music for a long run of opéras-comiques, including the little rustic *Rose et Colas* (1764) and, his best-known work, the story of the soldier who thinks he's lost his girl, so admits almost fatally to being *Le Déserteur* (1769).

Grétry did not make his mark until nearly a decade later than the other two but, after the production of his noble-savage parody *Le Huron* in 1768, he more than made up for lost time, turning out during the rest of his career some fifty opéras-comiques of all styles and flavors, from the Beauty-and-the-Beastly comédie-ballet *Zémire et Azor* (1771) to the modern comedy of *Les Fausses apparences* (1778), the rustic *L'Épreuve villageoise* (1783), the horrid tale of the uxorious *Raoul Barbe-Bleue* (1789), and, above all, the romantic little history built around the episode of the rescue of *Richard Coeur-de-Lion* (1784) from the castle of Linz by the minstrel Blondel.

Richard Coeur-de-Lion, an opéra-comique in three acts by Michel Sedaine. Music by André Ernest Grétry. Produced at the Théâtre-Italien, Paris, October 21, 1784.

Characters: Richard king of England, Blondel, Le Sénéchal, Florestan, Guillot, Williams, Antonio, Marguerite Countess of Artois, Laurette Williams, Béatrix, &c.

Plot: Blondel has come to Austria disguised as a blind musician and discovered that King Richard is imprisoned in the castle of Linz. When Florestan, the governor of the castle, sends a love-letter to a Welsh lass who lives nearby, the minstrel—who, by his singing, has let his king know of his presence—concocts a plot. He lets himself be captured and, brought before the governor, he tells him that little Miss Williams will meet him at the rustic wedding party being held that night at her father's house. When the governor comes for what he hopes is an amorous rendezvous, he is taken prisoner, his castle is attacked by the bodyguard of the Countess of Anjou, and Richard is released and restored to that lady's fond embraces.

A good number of these new-style, new-weight opéras-comiques were seen outside France following their hometown successes, but they were seen only rarely in their original and unspoiled state. In the usual manner of these noncopyright times, they were grossly ill-treated by foreign managers and performers, arriving almost invariably on other stages and in other tongues in a well and truly botched state. Their libretti were localized and peppered with hometown jokes, their musical part was chopped up and about and stuck full of local songs—old and new—with a popular ring, and sometimes, indeed, the entire score of the French composer was simply turfed out and replaced by homemade numbers that were of quite a different level of ambition and musical quality. Britain, for example, clearly had no taste for musicals that mixed this kind of story with that kind of music, and the part they preferred to retain "from the French" was not the elegant music of Messieurs Philidor, Monsigny, and Grétry, but the more like-home-style texts. The German-language theater also helped itself to just as much of the French shows as it pleased, and some of the most popular Singspiele of the day, such as Weisse and Hiller's *Die Jagd* (1770), were, as the same team's hit version of *The Devil to Pay* had been, simply remusicked versions of the most popular shows from abroad. And so, in this way, the libretti of such writers as Favart or the most effective of his successors, *Richard Coeur-de-Lion* librettist Michel Sedaine (1719–1797), generally got a better showing beyond their home shores, in variously made-over versions, than did the work of their musicians. Except, of course, that the French composers' scores were heartily pillaged to provide numbers for the pasticcio musicals of those same other countries!

THE RISE OF THE ROMANTIC

In the decades after the Revolution, the character of the musical theater in France began to change once again, and the kind of show that the early part of the nineteenth century called opéra-comique was one that, reflecting the escapist needs and moods of those uncertain times, more and more renounced the jolly intrigues and ingenuous lovemaking that had been the subject matter for the musicals of the Favartian years, in favor of stories featuring the dramatic, the swashbuckling, the highly colored, the exotic, and the romantic. The music that accompanied these tales—music from the pens of musicians who were often equally adept at turning out scores for the grandiose serious operas of the day—was fitted to the temper of these libretti, and by the time the nineteenth century moved toward its third decade the opéra-comique could be seen to have

become a much more richly romantic and musically full-blooded affair. But this kind of opéra-comique proved to be internationally the most successful to have so far come out of France, and the works of such of its outstanding writers as librettist Eugène Scribe (1791–1861) and composers Adrien Boïeldieu (1775–1834), Daniel Auber (1782–1871), Adolphe Adam (1802–1856), and Ferdinand Hérold (1791–1833) spread themselves throughout the theatrical world as the modern opéra-comique established itself as one of the favorite musical theater entertainments of its time—and, this time, no one dumped their music in favor of the latest thing in popular ballads or sea shanties.

The biggest successes in this romantic opéra-comique style began to appear in the 1820s, and one of the earliest and the biggest was the chef d'oeuvre of Boïeldieu, who had already triumphed with such light-hearted works as the delightfully sparkling and wholly comical piece of royal teasing that is *Jean de Paris* (1812), and who, in 1825, turned out the thoroughly romantic history of *La Dame blanche.* This tale of a long-lost heir, a greedy steward, and an apparently haunted Scottish castle provoked memories of the early British hit *The Haunted Tower,* but Scribe's text was illustrated by the French composer with an original score rather than the earlier show's pasticcio selection, and the result was one of the classic romantic musicals of the opéra-comique stage.

Eugène Scribe also coprovided the text for another 1825 hit in *Le Maçon,* a rocambolesque, dramatic tale of a Parisian workman whisked away from his wedding night by mysterious Turks in order fatally to wall up an unhappy odalisque and the Frenchman who would carry her off from their embassy. The music for this piece was the work of Auber, and he would go on not only to turn out an important grand opera in *La Muette de Portici,* but to combine with Scribe on a series of the most successful opéras-comiques of the period: the swaggering tale of the bandit known as *Fra Diavolo* (1830), with its expert and even surprising mixture of the vicious and the farcical, the lavishly féerique story of *Le Cheval de bronze* (1835), the swirling, glamorous tale of the convent lady who hides herself behind *Le Domino noir* (1837), and the courtly history of *Les Diamants de la couronne* (1841).

Adolphe Adam, best known nowadays as the composer of the music to the ballet *Giselle* and the Christmas "Cantique de Noël," also scored in tandem with Scribe on the pretty, countrified *Le Châlet* (1834). However, he found his most far-flung success with the romantic tale and tenorious music of *Le Postilion de Lonjumeau* (1836), the story of a top-D singing coachman who abandons his country bride to go off to the big city and become a fashionable opera star. Ferdinand Hérold had two first-class hits with the dramatic tale of the horrid pirate called *Zampa* (1831),

whose lusts are curtailed by a statue no less vengeful than Don Giovanni's Commendatore, and the dungeons and duels piece *Le Pré aux clercs* (1832), and Donizetti followed his classic Italian *L'Elisir d'amore* with the triumphant French *La Fille du régiment* (1840), before the distinction between opéra-comique and opéra began taking on that shadowy substance that would, in years to come, end with the opéra-comique darkening into thoroughly operatic modes with the advent of such pieces as *Mignon, Faust,* and *Carmen.*

The English- and German-language stages took up the fashion for the romantic musical play enthusiastically, and in the mid-1800s Britain welcomed a small group of "romantic operas," by a small group of composers, which quickly became the most popular musical shows that that country had ever produced. Irishman Michael Balfe, who like Auber and others of the Continental composers of opéra-comique had proven himself in the field of grand opera, was responsible for two successful English remakes of French texts, *The Rose of Castille* (1857) and *Satanella* (1858), but he made easily his most memorable success of all with his score to the long-lost heiress tale of *The Bohemian Girl* (1843) and its megahit soprano song "I Dreamt I Dwelt in Marble Halls." A second Irishman, Vincent Wallace (1814–1865), was responsible for the other major hit show of the period when he turned out yet another variation on a French text, the celebrated drama of *Don César de Bazan,* with its plot based on a blindfold marriage of convenience, under the title *Maritana* (1845). *Maritana* had its hit numbers too—"Ah! Let Me Like a Soldier

Fra Diavolo, or L'Hôtellerie de Terracina, an opéra-comique in three acts by Eugène Scribe. Music by Daniel Auber. Produced at the Opéra-Comique, Paris, January 28, 1830.

Characters: Marquis de San Marco (otherwise Fra Diavolo), Lord Cokbourg, Lady Paméla Cokbourg, Lorenzo, Mathéo, Zerline, Giacomo, Beppo, &c.

Plot: The merciless bandit known as Fra Diavolo is tracking the wealthy English Lord and Lady Cokbourg through Italy with intent to rob, and if necessary kill, but his plans come unstuck at an inn in Terracina when lovesick Lorenzo, the local carabinier brigadier, slaughters his brigand band; when Fra Diavolo and his lieutenants get stuck in a cupboard while a pretty maidservant undresses in front of the door that leads to the travelers' room and their jewels; and when, after moments both farcical and fearsome, misunderstandings and mayhem, the highwayman is himself finally led into a trap, thanks to the incompetence of his newest recruit and the energies of Lorenzo.

Fall" and "Scenes That Are Brightest" rendered nothing to Balfe's best songs in enduring popularity—and, like Balfe, Wallace also succeeded in following up his biggest triumph with another popular piece: the romantic fantasy of the Rhinemaiden *Lurline* (1860) and her love for mortal man. Julius Benedict's musicalization of the famous Dion Boucicault play *The Colleen Bawn* as *The Lily of Killarney* (1862), John Barnett's fairy-tale *The Mountain Sylph* (1834), Edward Loder's retelling of the tale of *Giselle* as *The Night Dancers* (1846), and George Macfarren's version of the *Robin Hood* story (1860) were among other successes on an English opera stage where *The Bohemian Girl,* which went on to find more success in lands and languages further afield than any British musical to date, and *Maritana* would remain hardy annuals for many, many years.

In Central Europe, too, the fashion for the thoroughly composed romantic comic opera took over, and the hits of the late 1700s, such as the comically complex Romeo and Juliet–style tale of the children of a mutually mistrusting *Doktor und Apotheker* (1786), the dramma giocoso *Una Cosa rara* (1786), with a text by Mozart's librettist Da Ponte and music by the Spanish composer Martín y Soler (1754–1806), or the jolly Singspiel goings-on around *Der Dorfbarbier* (1796), were succeeded by the romantic works of such as Carl Maria von Weber, on the one hand, and, on the other, by komische Opern from Albert Lortzing (1801–1851)—*Zar und Zimmermann* (1839), with its story of Russian royalty disguised as a shipyard-worker and officialdom's clumsy failure to identify him, and *Der Wildschütz* (1842), a tale of a merry poacher mixed up in the amorous intrigues of the aristocracy—by Friedrich von Flotow's enduring marriage-market musical, *Martha* (1847), and by Otto Nicolai's musicalization of Shakespeare, *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* (1849).

The Bohemian Girl, an opera in four acts by Alfred Bunn, based on the ballet-pantomime *La Gipsy* by J. H. Vernoy de Saint-Georges. Music by Michael Balfe. Produced at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, London, November 27, 1843.

Characters: Thaddeus, Arline, Gipsy Queen, Arnheim, Florestein, Devilshoof, &c.

Plot: The child Arline, daughter of Arnheim, the Austrian governor of Pressburg, is stolen by gypsies in a revengeful raid on her father. Among those gypsies is Thaddeus, a noble Polish exile, who, as she grows to adulthood, falls in love with the "gypsy" girl. The jealous Queen of the Romany band contrives to have Arline arrested by the governor on a charge of theft, but he recognizes his long-lost child from an old scar and, returned to her rightful place, Arline is able to wed the reinstated Thaddeus.