

## **EXPLANATION 3.4: THE OPERA: ITALY, FRANCE AND ENGLAND**

### **ITALIAN OPERA**

After the period of operas in Florence and Mantua in which works were presented for a select and aristocratic audience, the opera centre goes to Rome and Venice, where the genre is popularized and performed in public theatres like the San Cassiano Theater in Venice.

#### **Rome**

The church did not oppose the opera as long as had some religious content, such as "Sant 'Alessio" by Stefano Landi. The main composer here, Luigi Rossi, composed "Orfeo" in which comic elements were present. Also the aria with the recitative are definitively separated from one another. The text, which was so important in the Florentine opera, now lost importance in favor of the music and the beautiful arias.

#### **Venice: till 1650**

Claudio Monteverdi, Francesco Cavalli and Antonio Cesti are the main authors. The first one still does not separate the recitative from the aria, as it was the style of Cavalli and Cesti. Cavalli, with more than 40 operas, composed "Giasone", in which that separation is noticed. With Cesti in the opera "Il pomo d'oro" (the golden apple) there is a great technical display on stage (battles, shipwrecks, storms, etc.).

#### **Venice: after 1650**

In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the opera in Italy had undergone several transformations in relation to the Florentine opera. The choir had practically disappeared, the recitatives that before had so much in mind the text now were of little musical interest, the orchestra was used to accompany the songs. The aria was at its full. Its victory can be considered as the triumph of popular taste over the aristocratic refinement of the Florentine recitative. Some authors were: Carlo Pallavicino, Agostino Steffani, Antonio Sartorio with another version of "Orfeo".

#### **Naples**

In this city a new style was created. It was called bel canto. It had a melodic line accompanied by pleasant harmonies, with simple textures. This style focused more on elegance and external effectiveness than on the force of the dramatic. It was characterized by several types of recitatives:

- Recitative "secco": made by the hapsichord, and accompanied by a bass.
- "Obligatto" recitative, later called "accompagnato": made by the orchestra. It was used for dramatic situations that reinforced the emotion changes of the dialogue.
- Recitative "arioso": sometimes used a type of melody that was not as free as the recitative nor as regular as the aria; it was called arioso recitative.

Alessandro Scarlatti (father of Domenico Scarlatti) was the main composer with more than 100 operas.

## FRENCH OPERA

In 1700 the Italian opera had been accepted in all countries except in France. However, in 1673, under Louis XIV, the first important French opera was created with "Cadmus et Hermione" by Jean Baptiste Lully.

In France the opera received the name lyrical tragedy. In it mixed elements of the French tragedy and court ballet. The main and first composer of operas was Jean Baptiste Lully who, through intrigues, managed to be at the service of King Louis XIV and monopolize the performances of operas.

The French operas combined mythological themes with dances and choral music, all of them cunningly mixing the adulation of the king, the glorification of the French nation, debates about the nature of love and episodes of fantastic adventures.

Lully was the creator of the "French Overture" which is an instrumental work that starts the opera and is characterized by having a dotted rhythm or double dotted. Later the overtures were used as independent works or as part of the suites. Campra, Charpentier and Rameau were other composers after Lully's death.

## ENGLISH OPERA

The opera in England, called "masque (masquerade)", whose use for fun of the court, included dances, poetry and music with an ornamental paper. The composers were John Blow, Matthew Locke and Henry Purcell whose masterpiece "Dido and Aeneas" (1682) is considered one of the best English operas of all time. On the other hand, the German composer Georg F. Handel composed 35 operas during his 30-year stay in London. He reached the top of the Italian Baroque opera. In his operas it is emphasized the variety of arias, the "solos" for the virtuoso castratis and the ability to embody moods in music through their characters. Some of his titles are: "Rinaldo", "Julio César", "Radamisto", "Ariana".

## COMPREHENSION TEXT QUESTIONS:

1. Which two cities are opera centres after the Florentine era?
2. What is separated in Roman operas as in "Orfeo" by Rossi?
3. What is less important in Roman operas compared to the previous ones?
4. Name three composers from the Venetian era?
5. What is shown in Cesti's "Il pomo d'oro"?
6. Why is it said that popular taste triumphs over the aristocratic one in Venice?
7. What three characteristics does the Neapolitan opera style have?
8. Why is the recitativo called "accompagnato"?
9. What is the arioso recitative?
10. Who was the father, Alessandro or Domenico Scarlatti?
11. Which opera composer stands out in France with Louis XIV?
12. Which three elements combines an opera like Lully's?
13. Name 2 French composers without counting Lully.
14. What three elements does English opera include?
15. What stands out in a Handel opera?
16. Name 2 operas by Handel.