

# BEYOND THE SCORE

ISSUE FIVE

OPERA ORIGIN  
STORY

A LETTER FROM  
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A CLOSER LOOK AT MUSICAL THEATRE

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"A PLAY SET TO  
MUSIC, WITH  
ORCHESTRAL  
ACCOMPANIMENT.  
THEY ARE **THROUGH**  
**COMPOSED**,  
MEANING ALMOST  
EVERY WORD IS SET  
TO MUSIC."

*Blumenfeld's Dictionary of Musical Theater, pg. 245*

# OPERA

## ORIGIN STORY

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It all began in late sixteenth century Florence, Italy. A man named Count Giovanni Bardi di Vernio would gather Florentine artists, musicians, and scholars. Together they created a new music style, different from the complicated vocals of the time. It was called, *stile rappresentativo*, or dramatic style. The group was known as the Florentine Camerata. "Camerata" means chamber or salon, and that reflected the type of room this group gathered in. *Stile rappresentativo* had simpler accompaniment, reflected the rhythm of speech, and was used on shorter pieces like poems. When Camerata's style was utilized in dramas much longer than poems, opera was created.

## OPERETTAS

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In Italian, *operetta* means "little opera". Operettas, similar to any opera, have lots of music and a classical style. However, operettas can be considered a musical theater piece because of the spoken dialogue in them. Operettas are not only European-based works, but American works as well.

# LET'S TALK ABOUT OPERA

"Although musical theater might seem far removed from these early Baroque origins, [early opera] works laid an important foundation. Not only did opera demonstrate that it was possible for audiences to suspend disbelief and enjoy the phenomenon of actors singing instead of speaking their roles, but it proved that a musical setting could intensify and enhance the emotional reactions evoked by the story."

*Musical Theater: An Appreciation, pg. 4*

## OPERA VS. MUSICAL THEATRE

# OPERAS

VS

# MUSICALS

The music is the priority.

Opera singers typically don't use microphones.

Dancing takes the form of a ballet interlude, and is not performed by the actors/singers on stage.

Opera styles are mainly classical.

Most operas are sung in different languages.

Most musicals are done in English.

Musicals have just as much dialogue as music.

Musical theatre has a range of many different musical styles, but sounds much more contemporary to the styles heard in opera.

There is equal emphasis on music, acting, and dancing/movement for all the performers in a production.

Musical theatre performers often use body microphones.

Rigorous training and practice is required.

A form of theatre.

There is a story being told on stage.

Both are performed on a stage with an audience.

Production design such as costumes, lighting, makeup, and sets are main elements.

Music is an important aspect .

Some of these rules have definitely been broken! For example, the musical *Les Miserables* is completely sung through, while some operas have recitatives, or spoken passages, in their productions.

## OPERA DI SENTIMENTO

(Italian) An opera with sentimental passion and a love story with a happy ending.

## OPERA SERIA

(Italian) A serious opera with classical, heroic, or tragic themes.

## OPERA DI RIPIEGO

(Italian) An opera held in reserve that could be performed at any time due to an emergency such as illness of an actor, or unpreparedness of a production.



## OPERA DI OBBLIGO

(Italian) An opera that was scheduled, as an obligation, to be one of the principal operas of the season.

## OPERA BUFFA

(Italian) A comic opera with lively music, comedy, and happy endings.

## OPERA-FEERIE

(French) An opera or operetta with spectacle and fantasy themes. These operas had elaborate sets, costumes, and a large cast.

The La Scala Opera House (left) in Milan, Italy is the most famous opera house in the world. **CLICK** on the image to learn about more opera houses.

# OPERA TYPES



I hope you have enjoyed learning about the origins of musical theatre so far. For me, it has been a wonderful opportunity to research and write about these topics. As we continue taking a closer look at musical theatre, we will be focusing on specific individuals, productions, and musical theatre styles.

There is so much that can be discussed about musical theatre and we've only scratched the surface!

The knowledge you've gained from these past issues will give you a larger perspective to the world of theatre. Theatre is always evolving. We see that in the early origins of theatre: from ancient Greece, to Rome, to the middle ages, and so on. As theatre evolves, each new chapter gains inspiration from the previous, and influences the future. In addition, there are influences outside of theatre that affect it.

**Have suggestions for topics?**

[Click here to submit!](#)

Art, poetry, film, short stories, biographies - the list goes on!

Moving forward, I encourage you to reflect on what you have learned so far. Write it down! Share it with a friend! Keep your insights available to you as you continue to read more about musical theatre. Thank you for reading and I wish you all the best!

Sincerely,  
*Carlee Baldwin*

Editor & Creator, *Beyond the Score*

## **A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR: EVOLVING & INFLUENCING - THEATRE HISTORY**

## SOURCES

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