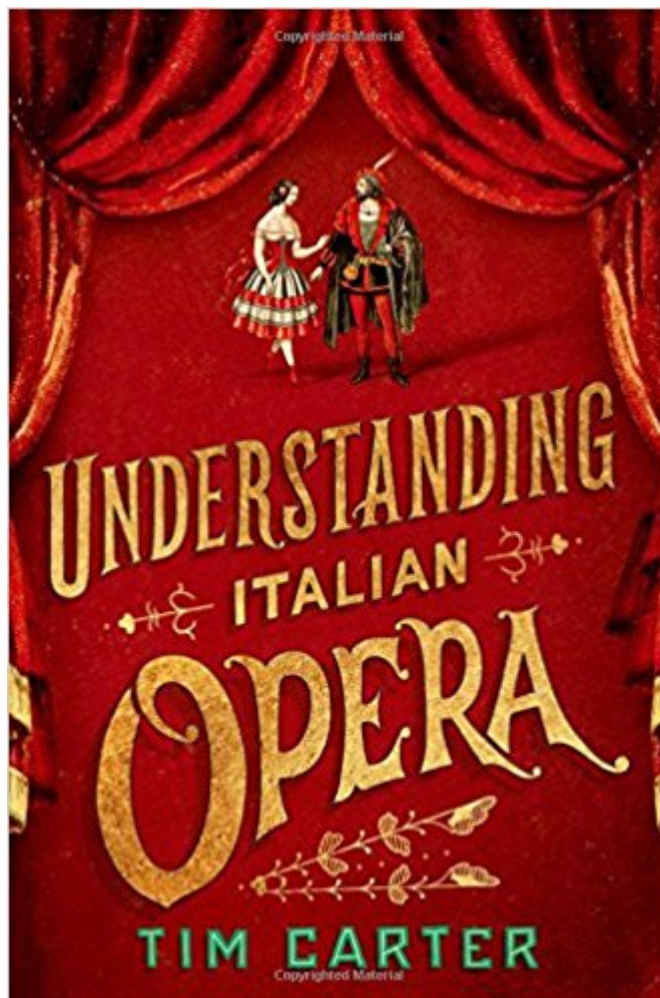


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# Understanding Italian Opera



## Synopsis

Opera is often regarded as the pinnacle of high art. A "Western" genre with global reach, it is where music and drama come together in unique ways, supported by stellar singers and spectacular scenic effects. Yet it is also patently absurd -- why should anyone break into song on the dramatic stage? -- and shrouded in mystique. In this engaging and entertaining guide, renowned music scholar Tim Carter unravels its many layers to offer a thorough introduction to Italian opera from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries. Eschewing the technical musical detail that all too often dominates writing on opera, Carter begins instead where the composers themselves did: with the text. Walking readers through the relationship between music and poetry that lies at the heart of any opera, Carter then offers explorations of five of the most enduring and emblematic Italian operas: Monteverdi's *The Coronation of Poppea*; Handel's *Julius Caesar in Egypt*; Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*; Verdi's *Rigoletto*; and Puccini's *La Bohème*. Shedding light on the creative collusions and collisions involved in bringing opera to the stage, the various, and varying, demands of the text and music, and the nature of its musical drama, Carter also shows how Italian opera has developed over the course of music history. Complete with synopses, cast lists, and suggested further reading for each work discussed, *Understanding Italian Opera* is a must-read for anyone with an interest in and love for this glorious art.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"We all know the composer had the last word but who had the first one? By shedding new light on

the alchemical fusion of words and music that lies at the heart of Italian Opera T.C brings librettists out of the shadows to challenge the overriding supremacy of the composer. A must for practitioners and enthusiasts alike." --Graham Vick, Artistic Director, Birmingham Opera Company"[F]or the opera goer or student of opera who wants to develop a deeper understanding of how Italian opera works--of the often complex relationship between text and music--or who wants a model on how to think about Italian opera, this will become required reading."--Choice

Tim Carter is David G. Frey Distinguished Professor of Music at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and a noted scholar of opera and musical theatre. He frequently gives pre-performance lectures and workshops on opera to a wide variety of audiences in both the US and the UK.

Very inspiring

Opera, "an exotic and irrational entertainment", was born in Italy, and grew up and died there. The author takes a microscope to Italian opera in this book, which is really for serious students of the art form. What is the art form? It is verse and music made by a team, a librettist and a composer, used to create either musical drama or musical comedy for the stage. All the arts of stage entertainment are used to create the emotion that is opera: music, staging, costumes, choreography, singers, lyrics. Fascinatingly, the author points out that early opera was an attempt to recreate the entertainments of Ancient Greece during a Humanist revival era in Florence, Italy. The Ancient Greeks combined recitation and music on stage, so the earliest operas were recited verse delivered by actors accompanied by music. The author covers a history that spans Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607) to Puccini's *La Bohème* (1896). These are the chapters of the book: 1 What is Opera 2 Giovanni Francesco Busenello and Claudio Monteverdi 3 Nicola Francesco Haym and George Frideric Handel 4 Lorenzo da Ponte and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart 5 Francesco maria Piave and Giuseppe Verdi 6 Giuseppe Giacosa, Luigi Illica and Giacomo Puccini Operatic love stories, with their seriously flawed characters and exotic settings were high poetical drama set to music. While the music changed over time from early Baroque declamation to late Romantic lyricism, the words were Italian poetry. The librettist was always a poet, using meter, rhyme and form, because the words in opera are poetical, not prose. The standard subjects were historical, mythological, pastoral, sacred lives of saints, buffa domestic comedy, or based on popular plays. The author offers a close reading of five operas. (The Italian texts are translated for the reader, but a fluency in the language of music would be helpful.) 2 Baroque operas: *Incoronazione di Poppea* by Busenello and Monteverdi 1643 Giulio

Cesare in Egitto 1724 by Haym and Handel1 Classical opera:Le Nozze di Figaro 1786 by da Ponte and Mozart2 Romantic operasRigoletto 1851 by Piave and VerdiLa Boheme 1896 by Giacosa and PucciniThe dissection of the operas are done to discover the basic workings of opera, such as the subjects, how to stage them, and to learn to look at opera as drama. The author looks at the cast, the history, a summary of the plot, early performances, and the lyrics for each. Meter, rhyme, and form are studied in detail for various examples from the operas, including folksongs, prayer songs, toasts, and intro songs (I-songs for the protagonist to introduce him/herself to the audience). There may be a bit more than most readers would want to know in this book. I found that the dissection of the operas destroyed something, as dissection always does. You come to understand the operas technically which can lessen the emotional impact of the beauty of the performance. This is a book for aficionados, and would-be librettist and composers, and for serious students of the art form. At times it reads like a talk to a university class or an opera club. There is an extensive Further Reading section for those who wish to continue their study of opera. For the full and illustrated review please visit Italophile Book Reviews. I received a review-copy of the book, and this is my honest review.

This book is a brilliant companion to any opera lover. It offers in-depth analysis of 5 works, each representative of a different era. The subjects, texts and lyrics are presented, as well as the history and early performances, which often helped shape the work. Examples from each opera are dissected, showing the reader how religious and folk songs were used in arias. These songs would have been instantly recognizable to the original audience, conveying meaning that is often lost on modern audiences. The meter, rhyme scheme and other formal structures are laid out and examined. This book will be much appreciated by opera lovers and music students. The lay-reader, however, may become overwhelmed. Musical notation and concepts are used throughout the book. It is not an introduction to the subject, but a deeper analysis. I received a review-copy of the book in exchange for an honest and unbiased opinion.

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