

OPERA ATELIER

timeless



Photo Credit: Bruce Zinger

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Abduction from the Seraglio

Oct. 26 to Nov. 2, 2013

Study Guide

Making of an Opera
September 16 to 20, 2013

www.operaatelier.com

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About Opera Atelier

Opera Atelier holds a unique place in the North American theatre community, producing opera, ballet and drama from the 17th and 18th centuries. These productions draw upon the aesthetics and ideals of the period, featuring soloists of international acclaim, period ballet, original instruments, elaborate stage decor, exquisite costumes and an imaginative energy that sets Opera Atelier apart. Opera Atelier is not in the business of “reconstruction” - rather, each production is a new creative effort and takes its own place in history. We strive to create productions that would have been recognized and respected in their own time while providing a thrilling theatrical experience for modern audiences.

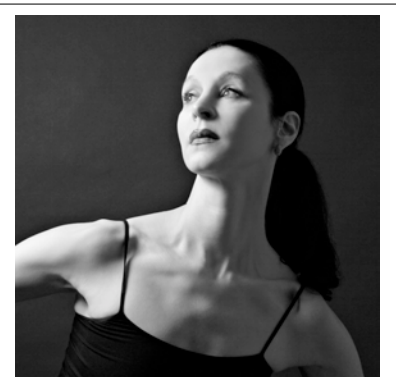
Founded by Marshall Pynkoski and Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg in 1985, Opera Atelier has been acclaimed throughout Canada, in Houston, Cleveland, New York, Stuttgart, Halle, Bremen, London (BBC Proms), Paris, Montreux, Citta di Castello, Singapore, throughout Japan and, most recently, in Seoul, Korea. We collaborate with some of early music’s most distinguished artists including Andrew Parrott, Trevor Pinnock, Hervé Niquet, Marc Minkowski and many others. Opera Atelier’s 2000 production of Lully’s *Persée* (performed for the first time since the 18th century) was hailed by William Littler of The Toronto Star as “the operatic event of the year, a triumph for director Marshall Pynkoski, choreographer Jeannette Zingg, their design team and their cast....”



Marshall Pynkoski

Mr. Pynkoski and Ms. Lajeunesse Zingg also direct the School of Atelier Ballet (SAB) which operates under the umbrella of Opera Atelier. Graduates of the SAB are performing professionally in companies throughout North America and Europe, including the National Ballet of Canada and Opera Atelier.

Opera Atelier’s commitment to education extends to our Making of an Opera Program, which has introduced thousands of children to all aspects of production and performance. Opera Atelier has received four Lieutenant-Governor Awards for Excellence in Arts Management.



Jeannette Lajeunesse
Zingg

Baroque Opera Explained

Baroque opera has its beginnings in the late Renaissance in Italy. It was originally conceived as an attempt to revive ancient Greek drama. Although no classical Greek music survived, Renaissance scholars were aware that Greek drama included declamation, and choral chanting. Consequently, early attempts at reviving this art form included these elements in addition to stories based on Classical themes and mythology.

As absolute monarchs throughout Europe identified themselves more and more strongly with Greek heroes and myth-makers, they appropriated these stories and frequently used them as a means of personal promotion.

By the 17th century, opera had become a highly respected and codified art form in its own right. The gorgeous and elaborate productions of the 17th and 18th centuries were expensive to mount and required exceptionally well-trained singers, instrumentalists, dancers, machinists and scenic artists.

The greatest composers of the world lent their talents to developing this art form that came to be seen as one of the sublime examples of human creativity. Opera encompasses all of the arts, and enjoyed unparalleled popularity from its conception right up to today.

Opera is the stylish, dazzling, often beautiful, often sad, warm-hearted, funny, serious and even sexy form of music that has enriched our lives for hundreds of years. Originally an art form for a privileged few, opera has evolved into an international multi-media crowd pleaser.

The word “opera” is Italian and comes from the plural for the word “opus” which means work.

Opera combines the best of all worlds: spectacular singing, rich orchestral sounds, drama, dance, beautiful sets, lavish costumes, elaborate lighting and special effects. These artistic qualities combine to make opera one of the most powerful and comprehensive art forms.

The word “Baroque” was originally used as an insult to describe art or music that was overly extravagant, even slightly bizarre. It comes from the Portuguese word *barroco*, a misshapen pearl. In the 20th century it has become the respectable name for music from about 1600, when opera was born in Italy, until about 1750, the year of Johann Sebastian Bach’s death.

A Glossary of Opera Terms

Aria: Italian for 'air', an aria is the major vocal piece where one singer expresses feelings and showcases the voice. Called a "static" moment in the scene, an aria freezes the action of the plot to focus on the emotion or thought.

Duet: An aria composed for two. Two singers express their feelings to each other or to the audience.

Libretto: Italian for 'little book,' a libretto refers to the script of an opera, written by the librettist. There is much debate over which is written for which: libretto for the music, or vice versa!

Recitative: Speech-singing, where the singer semi-chats the words in rhythm of free speech. Recitative is used to further the plot ("kinetic") or set up an aria and can be seen as a precursor to hip hop music and spoken word poetry.

Singspiel: A German term, a singspiel is a highly theatrical opera involving fantasy and has spoken dialogue between arias.

Chorus: A group of singers who perform the vital role of providing support to the principle singers. The chorus sets the scene and creates the mood for an opera, much like the way a Greek chorus furthers the plot and propels the action. It is composed of all voice ranges.

Voice Categories and Types

Bass: The lowest of the male voices.

Basso Buffo: Italian for "buffoon bass", who plays comic roles.

Baritone: A middle-range male voice.

Castrati: Castrati flourished during the period 1650-1750 singing both male and female roles in the soprano range. Their popularity was due to the strength and flexibility of their voices.

Coloratura Soprano: Singer with the highest range of notes.

Contralto: The lowest range of the female voice, rich voice quality. Mezzo and Contralto singers are almost interchangeable, and for this reason we almost never hear of contraltos.

Countertenor: A male alto who trains his falsetto voice rather than the lower range. Countertenors specialize in parts originally written for castrati.

Haute Contre: The "high tenor" usually sings higher than the other tenor roles.

Helden Tenor: Literally a "heroic tenor" with a strong voice and great stamina.

Mezzo-Soprano: A middle-range female voice.

Soprano: Singer with a high range of notes. Lyric sopranos are light in quality while dramatic sopranos have a full rich tone.

Tenor: Has the highest range of notes of the male voices.

Abduction from the Seraglio Synopsis

Overture

We witness the abduction of the noblewoman Konstanze, her English maid Blonde, and the latter's lover Pedrillo by the Pasha Selim.

Act 1

Belmonte arrives at the palace of the Pasha Selim. Osmin, the overseer of the Pasha's harem, arrives and Belmonte tries unsuccessfully to obtain news of his servant, Pedrillo, who has been captured with the women and is serving as a servant in the Pasha's palace. Belmonte is not aware that Osmin has been given Blonde, Pedrillo's lover, as a wife. Osmin leaves and Belmonte happily reunites with Pedrillo, who informs him that his fiancée Konstanze has been forced into the Pasha's harem. Together they resolve to rescue Konstanze and Blonde.

Amid his harem, the Pasha Selim appears with Konstanze, who refuses to join the wives and proclaims her love for Belmonte before she leaves. Pedrillo enters and introduces Belmonte as a travelling architect in order to get him inside the palace. The Pasha approves but Osmin is still wary and tries unsuccessfully to block their way.

Act 2

Blonde refutes the advances of Osmin, declaring that English girls do not enter into servitude. Rebuffed, Osmin departs. Konstanze greets Blonde, and the two commiserate over the repeated advances of the Pasha towards Konstanze, and her refusals. The Pasha enters and, frustrated, threatens to torture Konstanze if she does not submit to him.

Intermission

Pedrillo arrives to tell Blonde that Belmonte is here to rescue them. He reveals their plan – to abscond with the women at midnight after subduing Osmin with alcohol. Osmin appears and the plan is set in motion.

Act 3

Belmonte and Pedrillo enter the garden at midnight with a ladder to rescue the women. Belmonte is successful in retrieving Konstanze, but plans go awry when Osmin appears as Pedrillo is rescuing Blonde. The Pasha enters and condemns them all to death by torture. Belmonte pleads for their lives and tells the Pasha of his noble bloodline – he is the son of the Pasha's greatest enemy. To prove he is the greater man, the Pasha releases the four lovers and the opera concludes with celebrations of the clemency of the Pasha Selim.

Baroque Acting and Gesture

By Marshall Pynkoski, Opera Atelier Co-Artistic Director

Over the past 25 years Opera Atelier has developed an extremely detailed and recognizable performance style based on the gestural acting/oratorical technique of the 17th and 18th centuries. Essays in classical oratory by Quintillian and Cicero provided a model for Baroque actors, as did postures and gesture taken from both classical and contemporary paintings and sculpture. Rhetorical gesture was designed to accompany individual words of text, rather than to display the pervading emotions. Like the text, gestures were coherently and gracefully linked to provoke the maximum response from the spectator. Ideally, the use of gesture assists the actor in eliciting an emotional response from the audience, while he maintains control of his technique – a necessity when dealing with the sheer density of text of most Baroque opera and drama. The Baroque actor is a storyteller. It is his job to make the audience feel what he describes. The Baroque actor strives to ensure that audience members are not voyeurs, rather they are participants in the emotional journey of each player.

The gestures for both rhetoric and opera fall into the following categories:

- Emphatic gestures – in which the actor enforces the important words by gesture;
- Imitative gestures – in which the actor imitates, for example, the gentleness of a scene he talks about with a gentle gesture;
- Affective or expressive gestures – in which the actor expresses a particular passion such as fear or grief with specific gestures.

Some of the gestures can be combined to form a complex gesture expressing two or more meanings at once. Each of them can be performed in such a way as merely to suggest its meaning rather than to make it explicit. It was not important that the actors experience genuine emotions themselves, rather by taking the correct gesture and the ideal inflection of voice at the right moment the actor would elicit an emotional response from his or her audience, while staying in control of technique. The Baroque actor was not required to shed real tears, rather, to cause the audience to weep. By the last quarter of the 18th century, actors were experimenting with more “naturalistic” acting techniques as the delicate emotional restraint of the Rococo gave way to the intense self-examination of the Romantic era. Baroque gesture and rhetorical speech patterns prevailed on the European stage throughout the nineteenth century.

Baroque Acting and Gesture in *Abduction from the Seraglio*

By Marshall Pynkoski, Opera Atelier Co-Artistic Director & Abduction from the Seraglio Director

Baroque gesture in *The Abduction from the Seraglio* is incredibly important. The tradition of commedia dell'arte requires the actor to understand rhetorical gesture but also allows the actor to lampoon the noble or rhetorical style of acting. Looking at Pedrillo, Blondie and Osmin, the use of baroque gesture undermines a more serious, or noble style of acting and gives more freedom to the performer to take it to absurd extremes. Even Konstanze and Belmonte, the two archetypes of nobility in *Abduction*, float in and out of serious and comic moments. These characters become a wild card that may have a very serious scene or be as hyperbolic as their fellow characters. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the modern sense of dramatic through-line or plot was not as important. *Abduction* illustrates a focus on vignettes and scenes that move from one to the other rather than having one continuous plot line. The effect is also echoed in the orchestral interjections that occur at the top of or in the middle of arias. They create a challenge for the actor and the director to figure out what should take place during these segments since there is no indication left in historical documents.

Turkish Influence and Exoticism in *Abduction from the Seraglio*

By Marshall Pynkoski, Opera Atelier Co-Artistic Director & Abduction from the Seraglio Director

By the time Mozart wrote *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, the Turkish Empire already figured prominently in the imagination of the European world. By 1782 (which marked the opening of *Abduction*) there had been two major incidents by which Turkish armies presented a genuine threat to the security of the European world. In 1529, Turkish armies overran Hungary after which the famous siege of Vienna took place—a siege that was successfully repulsed by the Poles. From 1683 to 1699 Muslim armies again laid siege to Vienna thus further establishing themselves and their customs throughout European civilization.

The “Turks” were popular figures on the Viennese stage. Their remarkable clothes and unfamiliar habits caught the attention of all Europeans while the Ottoman’s piratical exploits often aroused caustic mockery if not an indulgent smile. Opera librettists were somewhat cavalier in their approach to geography: no distinction was drawn between Algeria, Turkey and Persia. Moreover, commedia dell’arte had introduced in its improvised repertoire the figure of the Grand Turk, while both France and Austria had become familiar with Ottoman ideas and habits as a result of diplomatic ties.

The proscenium stage that we know today was invented in the 17th century. Before this time theatrical events took place out of doors on movable carts and platforms or in the banqueting and reception halls of palaces and great homes. Opera as we know it was invented in this period as an entertainment for rich and powerful patrons wealthy enough to commission these spectacular and frequently allegorical dramas set to music. An increasing demand for these entertainments led to the creation of public theatres with seating arranged around a stage that very much resembled a picture in a frame. The scenic designer of these productions (who often worked as an architect, engineer and painter) treated the stage as his canvas and the carved and gilded proscenium as his frame.

Part of the challenge in designing the various locations specified in an opera was creating the illusion of depth on a frequently shallow stage. We need only to look at the painting of the period to discover the inspiration for theatrical designers of the day. Artists since the Renaissance had perfected the study of perspective drawing and painting. These principles were used by stage designers to create painted scenery that reduced in scale as it approached the back of the stage. This "forced perspective" was employed on painted backdrops, side panels that slid back and forth into the wings and borders that were raised or lowered from the ceiling. Using these elements the designer could create changeable scenes of pastoral landscapes, turbulent seas, cloudscares (often people with gods and goddesses) or virtually any desired location. Wooden clockwork machinery operated by stagehands was concealed below or above the stage and moved the scenery and provided the means for many special effects; hand-cranked waves could churn a painted sea, chariots flew through the air on ropes, and demons and dragons ascended from hell through trap doors. All theatres at the time were lit with candles or oil lamps and it is not surprising that most eventually burnt to the ground. A famous and perfectly preserved example with original machines and scenery is the Drottningholm Court Theatre in Sweden.

Opera Atelier is a company devoted to the production of period inspired opera, ballet and drama. As part of a creative team, the set designer's task is to understand and visually interpret the style and technology of the Baroque stage. While never recreating historical designs, Opera Atelier produces original sets and costumes inspired by these early sources.

Having researched the conventions of the early stage, the designer must then study the storyline of the opera by reading the libretto and determining the changes of location from scene to scene. At this point he or she must consult with the director about an overall visual concept for the piece.

Ultimately, a good design is one that is both beautiful and functional. To ensure that it works in conjunction with the movements on stage required that the designer work closely with the director from the start.

Drawings, painting, and scale models are employed to establish the mood of each scene and to determine entrances, exits, and special effects. Generally a complete miniature set is created in advance so that the designer, director, carpenters and scenic artists can consult on the practicality and cost of the design. The designer must work with a technical director who oversees the construction and installation of the set, a lighting designer who will help create the changing atmosphere on the stage and prop-makers who build furniture and objects handled by the singers or actors.

Designing *Abduction from the Seraglio*

By Gerard Gauci, Opera Atelier Set Designer

The designs for the scenery in this production of Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* were inspired by the gilded and highly detailed miniature paintings created in Persia and Turkey in the 18th century and reflect the opulent splendor of the Ottoman Empire. Turkish design in this period is noted for its use of complicated and repeated patterns of flowers, arabesques and interlocking geometric forms.

My designs for this opera incorporate all these elements in a setting that will require months of intense work by the highly skilled artists of Scenic Drop Studios. Audiences can expect to see more elaborate stage painting in this production than in any of our previous shows. What they won't see are the huge forced perspective canvases so typical of my designs for previous operas. The locations in *The Abduction from the Seraglio* shifts quickly from the real life world of a shipboard kidnapping in the overture, to the fantasy world of Pasha Selim's palace in act one and finally to a splendid palace garden in act two. In shifting from a European setting to an Islamic one I have also shifted from the western notion of fixed point perspective drawing and painting to an eastern one that relies more on isometric drawing (in which lines run parallel to each other instead of to a vanishing point) and the stylized decorative effect created by layering images and separating architecture from landscape by differences of colour, line and pattern rather than by diminishing the size of objects and colouring them atmospherically. Mozart's heroines will find themselves confined in an enticing palace that exemplifies everything that 18th century Europe found fascinating about the Middle East. Since this is an opera where visible entrances and exits are crucial to the action, I have built a set that incorporates two towers complete with balconies, doors and windows. Walls are paved with richly coloured tiles, elegant pierced grillwork hides the harem from prying eyes and beyond, a pleasure garden of cypresses, flowering trees and exotic blooms surround a sumptuous pavilion set for an alfresco meal. What intrigued me most about using miniatures as a take off point for these designs was anticipating the effect that will be achieved by taking something so tiny and minutely detailed and enlarging it to a life size scale on the stage. I expect that it will be like entering a page from one of those precious manuscripts and when completed with lights, performers and brilliant costumes I suspect that our heroines might have a few second thoughts about leaving this world where the all the senses are so lavishly indulged.

Dance Terms

Corps de ballet: A group of dancers in a ballet company separate from soloists and principals.

Renaissance Dance: Renaissance dance was the first dance style to be recorded. The High Renaissance dates from approximately 1400 to 1600 although none of these periods can be pinned down to exact dates. Renaissance social dancing varied from lively group dances such as the Branle, to stately court dances such as the Pavane. Theatrical dances were often versions of social dances with complex patterns. The dances of the Commedia dell'Arte were very acrobatic in contrast to the court ballets.

Baroque Dance: The Baroque period 17th and 18th centuries developed both theatrical and court choreographic styles greatly due to the Academy of Dancing established during the 1660's at the behest of Louis XIV. Many Baroque dances have come down to us through dance notation. The vocabulary of steps is huge and far more virtuosic than in earlier periods.

Early Ballet: Early ballet began to evolve out of Baroque toward the end of the 18th century. It shares many aesthetic principles with the Baroque but is also an attempt to reflect Greek and Roman antiquity due to the discoveries at Pompeii and Herculaneum.

Romantic Ballet: Romantic ballet (approximately 1830 - 1860) was a revolutionary change in aesthetic with story ballets and a change from Greek myths to European fairy tales as subject matter.

Classical Ballet: Classical ballet came after the Romantic and is characterized by brilliant virtuosic technique, the short tutu, and the predominance of the ballerina.

Pas de deux: A dance for two.

***Abduction from the Seraglio* Choreographer's Notes**

By Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg, Opera Atelier Co-Artistic Director & Abduction from the Seraglio choreographer

Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* (or *Belmonte and Konstanze*) premiered in Vienna on July 16, 1782. It was written for the Burgtheater, established by Emperor Joseph II as an avenue for German works of music theatre. *The Abduction from the Seraglio* had an immediate success and became Mozart's most popular opera during his lifetime. Ballet was part of any evening at the theatre in the 18th century and Mozart included wonderful dances in his operas. The idea of a Turkish theme had been in existence since the previous century (witness Lully's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, 1670) and indeed the Grand Turk had been adopted by the Commedia dell'Arte as a stock figure. Italy, France and Austria were familiar with Turkish customs due to diplomatic ties and various sieges and battles. In a letter dated August 11, 1781 Mozart writes with obvious relish that he is writing "Turkish" music that will give the piece an exotic flavour.

The opera libretto is clearly based on a stock Commedia dell'Arte scenario including a pair of lovers, conniving servants and the Grand Turk (Osmin) as the lecherous character pursuing the young Blondie (only Selim appears as an unusual addition to the cast). Mozart was very familiar with this form of theatre, as well as being an accomplished dancer himself. In 1783, he wrote to his father asking him to send him his Harlequin costume, which he wore in a masquerade-performance at the Redenthsaal in Vienna, "I composed the scenario and the music, the dancing master kindly controlled our steps, and I must tell you, we really played quite well". Commedia dell'Arte traditionally included dancing — and Mozart's score provides marvelous opportunities to present Turkish influenced costumes, weapons and percussive instruments in a series of dances, which have been choreographed in period style in the same lighthearted and energetic vein as the music.

The Orchestra

Excerpts from Tafelmusik's study guide, *Go for Baroque* by Allison Mackay.

How is a Baroque orchestra different from a modern orchestra?

1. Opera Atelier's orchestra, Tafelmusik, plays on so-called "original instruments" - the instruments which the composers of Baroque music played themselves. Orchestral instruments have changed over the years to reflect changing tastes in sound production. Modern violins have to be loud enough to be heard in the back row of a large concert hall; the violin of Bach's time was usually played in a small church or the salon of a palace and the warm sound of gut strings (made from sheep intestines) was loud enough to fill the intimate space.
2. One of the most striking features of a Baroque orchestra is the continuous presence of the harpsichord. It doubles the line played by the cello and bass in the left hand and makes the orchestra sound louder by filling out the harmonies with chords. The harpsichord's distinctive sound is created by quills made from bird feathers which pluck the strings, making the bass line sound clearer and the rhythms more driving.
3. Baroque orchestras were usually directed by one of the players instead of a separate conductor (although at Opera Atelier, we have a conductor because there are soloists and choristers who need direction).

The Orchestra - A Baroque Innovation

In Renaissance instrumental ensemble music, each part was played by one musician. Baroque composers continued to compose solo and chamber music but they also experimented with creating a fuller sound by putting several performers on one part to form an orchestra.

Baroque composers began to compose more extended instrumental pieces than in earlier times and they created forms in which several movements could be grouped together. Sometimes these movements were in contrasting but related keys. Our modern system of major and minor keys is an invention of the Baroque period; Baroque composers were the first to think of their music as a series of chords built above a bass line, each having a relationship with the main note of the key.

A Convincing Fight!

By Jennifer Parr, Fight Director

What is stage fighting? It is exactly that, fighting for the stage; but what does that mean?

Perhaps we should start with what it is not. It is not fencing. Although a stage fight should look as though it is being made up before your eyes, it is, in reality, a very carefully choreographed set of movements similar to a dance. Stage fighting is sometimes referred to as 'combat mime' because fighters must work together to create an illusion of spontaneity, an illusion of danger for the audience while doing their best to protect each other from any real danger of injury.

In the 17th and 18th centuries the 'Science of Arms' or 'Art of Self Defense' was an inescapable part of the life of every man of the upper classes. Not only was the ability to handle a sword necessary for war but it was also fashionable. Duels were constantly fought throughout this period although they were against the law, and boys would be taught from a young age 'the art of elegantly dispatching a neighbour to the next world.' Some girls managed to share their brothers' lessons, or otherwise learned the skills necessary to protect their own honour; some even fought duels, but they were the exception not the rule.

When a stage fight is choreographed for an Opera Atelier production it draws on this wealth of historical material and then goes beyond the reality. A fight is always a 'spectacle', a display of virtuoso skill with the apparent chance of danger similar to a trapeze or tightrope act. At the same time a stage fight must also be something more than spectacle; it must tell the audience something important about the characters involved, and must advance, or give a new twist to, the story.

The process of creating a stage fight always begins with the libretto and music of the opera and with research into the historical period. The next step involves in-depth discussions between the director and fight director to determine the role of the fight in the director's overall vision of the opera, followed by discussions of set and costume design and casting. The fight director then prepares the choreography of the fight and teaches the performers (singers and/or dancers) working constantly with the director.

Opera Atelier stage fights have sometimes featured the use of broadsword and spear but usually focus on the rapier, either single rapier, or in combination with a second rapier, dagger, buckler, or cape – typical weapon combinations of the period. The first Opera Atelier production to feature stage fights was the gala performance of *The Loves of Mars and Venus* in 1990. Since then many more fights have been featured in productions ranging from Mozart's ever popular *Don Giovanni* and *The Marriage of Figaro*, to the exciting 'new Baroque' performances of Charpentier's *Medée*, Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride* and Lully's *Persée* (on both stage and film).