

OPERA ATELIER

timeless



Photo Credit: Bruce Zinger

Carl Maria von Weber
Der Freischütz (The Marksman)
October 27 - November 3, 2012

Study Guide

Making of an Opera
September 17-21, 2012

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.

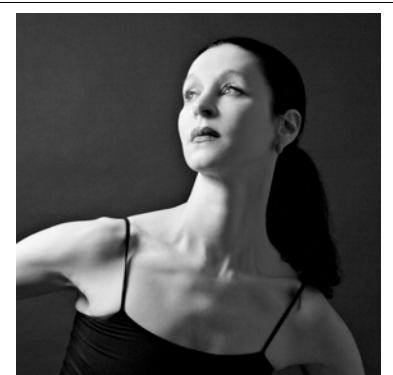
Founded by Marshall Pynkoski and Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg in 1985, Opera Atelier has been acclaimed throughout Canada, in Houston, Cleveland, New York, Stuttgart, Halle, Bremen, London (BBC Proms), Paris, Montreux, Citta di Castello, Singapore, throughout Japan and, most recently, in Seoul, Korea. 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....”

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.



Marshall Pynkoski



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.

The Romantic Era

After the opulence and embellishment of the Baroque period, Romantics sought a deeper connection with the earth and their fellow countrymen. Just like the hippie subculture of the 1960's and the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011, the instigators of Romantic ideals sought to rebel against the sociopolitical norms of the previous period, while focusing for the first time on an individual inner voice for a spiritual connection with Nature.

Romanticism had its beginnings in Germany as early as the mid-1700's and, fuelled by the French Revolution, quickly spread throughout Europe at the beginning of the 19th century. For the first time rationality was cast aside as constraining, and uninhibited emotions and individuality became the focus of art, literature, and music. Musical Romanticism is almost entirely a German creation, based upon folk music and local dances. Protagonists around this period are young, sensitive men with tortured souls and intense emotions. Often facing terrible magics and demonic traps, these characters sought the untamed wilderness of forests and caves – not unlike the backpackers and campers of today – to better commune with their inner selves. Escape – be it literal or imaginative – from the industrialization of the cities was deemed ideal for true Romantic expression. Like the ecofriendly, nature-loving culture today, Romantics believed in seeking the peace and simplicity of the rural countryside and remote wilderness to tap the spiritual vein inherent in themselves.

Folklore and local legends were brought from the bedside stories of young children to the forefront of artistic expression because of the focus on humble creatures and natural settings. Gone were the gods and noblemen, which had been presented as lofty ideals and untouchable models. The Romantics, seeking to connect with the simplest people, replaced these characters with milkmaids and shepherds, set against crude, often ruined, Gothic locales – much like you would see walking through the countryside. Previously, the monarchy ruled and defined a country, but the everyday lives of the common people were rarely affected. The Romantics created a cohesive artistic idea of the ordinary individual's place in the world and what it meant to be part of a continuing history. This connection with their local communities and a focus on local custom and lore helped to create nations out of a collection of borders. With its emotional intensity, integration of German folk legend, and depiction of nature as both sublime and untameable, *Der Freischütz (The Marksman)* is a quintessential work of the Romantic era.

Der Freischütz (The Marksman) Overview

Composed by Carl Maria von Weber in 1821, German libretto written by Friedrich Kind.

Weber's ***Der Freischütz (The Marksman)*** was performed for the first time on June 18, 1821 at the Schauspielhaus Berlin (now Konzerthaus Berlin), which is considered to have some of the best acoustics in the world. It contributed significantly to the development of German opera, due to its departure from the Italian style, its intense emotionality, and the integration of German folklore and folk music. For some historical context: *Grimm's Fairy Tales* by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm was published in 1812, *Frankenstein* by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley was published in 1818, and the harmonica was invented around 1820.

Opera Atelier's production of ***Der Freischütz (The Marksman)*** will run October 27 – November 3, 2012.

The Characters and Voice Types in Der Freischütz (The Marksman)

Max, <i>an assistant forester</i>	tenor
Kilian, <i>a wealthy peasant</i>	baritone
Kuno, <i>a hereditary forester</i>	bass
Kaspar, <i>an assistant forester</i>	bass
Ottokar, <i>a sovereign prince</i>	baritone
Agathe, <i>Kuno's daughter</i>	soprano
Änchen, <i>Agathe's relative</i>	soprano
Samiel, <i>the 'Black Huntsman'</i>	spoken
Four bridesmaids	soprano
Hermit	bass

Der Freischütz (The Marksman) Synopsis

Act I

A young peasant Killian has beaten our title marksman Max at target practice. Max is set to become the successor to the head forester Kuno and marry Kuno's daughter Agathe in the bargain. A test of marksmanship is required to prove his worth, but Max has experienced an extended patch of bad luck. Shaken, he easily falls prey to a strange villager, Kaspar, who tempts Max with the promise of magic bullets. Kaspar hopes to buy time from the Devil (known as Samiel) by tricking Max into bartering his soul for seven magic bullets to be cast at midnight in the cursed Wolf's Glen. Despite the encouragement and blessings of the townspeople, Max cannot stand the thought of losing Agathe and agrees to meet Kaspar.

Act II

Agathe and her companion Änchen are re-hanging a portrait, which has fallen. In German folklore this indicates that someone in the household will soon die. Änchen makes light of the omen, while discussing the next day's marksmanship contest and Agathe's marriage. Agathe tells Änchen of her meeting with the Hermit – a holy man living alone in the woods. He has had a premonition that Agathe is in danger and has given her a bouquet of roses to protect her from unknown forces. Änchen light-heartedly tries to brighten the atmosphere with jokes about boys and marriage. Agathe waits up to see Max one last time before the festivities of the next day. He arrives, but his preoccupied behaviour does nothing to lighten her mood. When they part, neither looks forward to the dark night ahead of them.

When Max arrives to meet Kaspar at the outskirts of the Wolf's Glen, he is warned away by a terrible vision of his late mother. The demon, Samiel – who Kaspar summons with a magic spell – lures Max into the Glen and the seven magic bullets are cast, accompanied by terrifying apparitions.

Act III

The next morning, Agathe prepares for her wedding, while telling Änchen of the troubling night she had due to a terrifying dream. Agathe has dreamt she was turned into a dove and shot by her fiancé. Änchen dismisses the dream but when the bridesmaids arrive with the bridal wreath, it is discovered – to everyone's horror – that a funeral wreath has been sent instead. Änchen suggests Agathe wear the Hermit's roses instead.

Prince Ottokar presides over the celebrations of singing and dancing which accompany the official shoot. He instructs Max to shoot a distant dove to prove his skill. Agathe cries out in terror, and Max appears to shoot her by mistake. The demon Samiel, however, has played a double deal and the final bullet has in fact shot Kaspar. Agathe revives from her faint, only to hear Prince Ottokar banish Max for his dealing in black magic. The Hermit appears as a Deus Ex Machina and denounces the trial of marksmanship, while urging forgiveness for Max. Prince Ottokar and the villagers embrace the Hermit's message of clemency and welcome the dawn of a new age.

Baroque Acting and Gesture

By Marshall Pynkoski, Opera Atelier Co-Artistic Director & Der Freischütz (The Marksman) 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. Baroque gesture and rhetorical speech patterns prevailed on the European stage throughout the nineteenth century

Opera Atelier's Set Design

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.

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-chants 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.

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.

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.

Der Freischütz (The Marksman) Choreographer's Notes

By Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg, Opera Atelier Co-Artistic Director & Der Freischütz (The Marksman) choreographer

Preparing dances for Weber's *Der Freischütz* (1821) has been a great pleasure. Weber's music for the dance sections is perfectly suited to the central European dance styles, which help to give the production its local colour so characteristic of Romantic opera and ballet. My main source for early Romantic Ballet is the work of the Danish choreographer Auguste Bournonville. Bournonville was training in Paris in the 1820's, with the great Vestris (fils). Vestris père had been a famous proponent of the Baroque "noble style," but later in his career began working with composers such as Gluck. Both Vestris and Gluck shared an interest in the new "ballet d'action," developed by Noverre, and were part of the transition from Baroque to Romantic Ballet. Vestris the son carried on his father's work, adding new steps and positions to the ever-developing canon of theatrical dancing. Bournonville took this French style to Denmark, where it has been preserved to this day. He, like his fellow Romantics, believed in the inner spiritual strength and harmony of man, and tried to avoid all "excess" of virtuosity and showing off in his dances. My choreography for *Der Freischütz* reflects this philosophy and uses many steps drawn from the Bournonville technique.

The Romantic interest in the national dances of central Europe is an important element in *Der Freischütz*. The opening dance is based on Slavonic character dances (the opera is set in Bohemia). Next the pas de quatre gives us a glimpse of the emergence of light pointe work for women, first seen in the late 18th century. Pas de deux at that time, included a great deal of parallel movement along with simple lifts and turns. The lively Waltz which follows is characteristic of German Lancers, far more athletic than the Waltz of the late 19th century. The Quadrille for Bridesmaids and Groomsman uses actual figures from an 1820's Quadrille. The playful Hunter's Dance reflects the joy of mankind when in harmony with nature and sets the scene for the climactic moment of the opera.

Jeannette Lajeunesse Zingg

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).