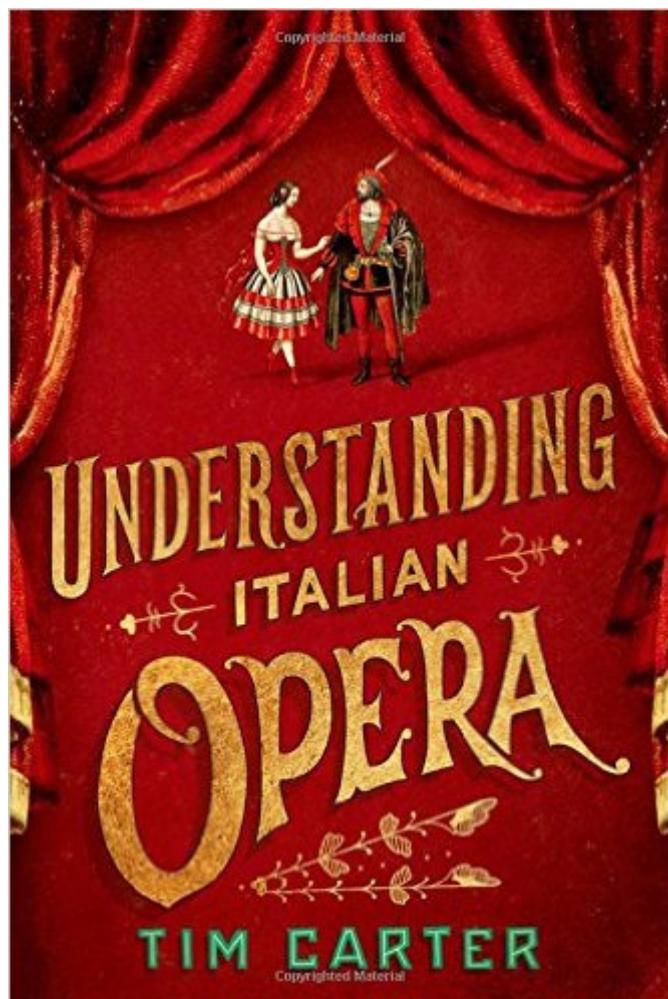


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Understanding Italian Opera



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

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 Boheme* (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.

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