

Scintillating baroque..



.. Serious **fun**



Director from the Continuo

Andrew Lawrence-King

Early Harps & Research

Early Opera &
Historical Productions



“Action is Eloquence”

Fauola in Musica

Bacchus, Apollo & the Birth of Opera

What is the Spirit of Music? From where comes artistic inspiration? Around the year 1600, as poets and musicians experimented in the myriad genres that coalesced into what we now call opera, answers to these eternal questions were sought in ancient Greek myths and in Quintilian’s first-century advice for Roman orators. According to period medical science, spirits of passion were carried on the mystic breath or *pneuma* – a performer would draw in breath and be literally ‘inspired’ (Latin: *in*, into + *spirare*, breathe) with the spirit of a god.

In many European languages, ‘spirit’ also refers to strong alcohol. Intoxicating drinks and the frenzy of demonic possession were perilously close to artistic inspiration: in all these conditions, there was the danger that control might be irretrievably lost. Bacchus (the Roman name for Greek Dionysus) best known to us as the jolly god of wine, had also a terrible aspect associated with ritual ecstasy, uncontrolled violence and communication with the dead.

As *Eleutherios* the Liberator, Bacchus’ wine, music and dance freed his followers from cares, fear or self-restraint. This placed him in direct opposition to Apollo, *Alexikakos* the Defender against Evil. As sun-god, Apollo warded off Bacchus’ darkness, danger and chaos. As warrior, Apollo defeated Bacchus’ python. As patron of the Muses, associated with calm, moderation and order, Apollo ruled over the arts of music, poetry and dance, whereas Bacchus, riding on the back of a tiger, led a mob of unruly satyrs and crazed maenads. Thus Apollonian culture and Bacchic disorder were opposed at every point.

Almost three centuries before Nietzsche’s analysis of Apollonian and Dionysian influences in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Apollo and Bacchus were the opposing Spirits of Music that brought about the birth of opera. In the Florentine *intermedi* of 1589 and in Peri’s and Monteverdi’s settings of the myth of Orpheus & Euridice, even in Cavalieri’s religious opera of *Anima & Corpo* (Soul and Body), the power of music is manifested in the struggle for Apollonian serenity amidst Bacchic excess. Apollo slays the python, a snake kills Euridice. In the two surviving finales to Monteverdi’s opera, Orpheus’ lament is answered either by Apollo’s rescue or by ritual killing at the hands of Bacchus’ maenads. Arianna’s lament is answered by Bacchus, who marries her.

Early 'opera' abounds with such polar contrasts. The soul is inclined to Apollo, the body to Bacchus. Love can lead to either, War can bring forth the noble warrior or the chaos of battle. The Apollonian moderation of pastoral Arcadia is in sharp contrast with the excesses of Pan and other woodland gods: the dark forest was a locus for danger, chaos and encounters with death. Similarly the calm sea could be enraged by furious storms, and 17th-century sailors were often represented as drunk, their unsteady steps ruled by alcohol, by the motion of the waves, or by demonic possession. Sailors often oppose the Apollonian hero.

Formal religion accepted Apollo as a symbol for Christ, remembering how Moses lifted up the Serpent in the wilderness as a parallel to Apollo's defeat of the Python. But the first miracle at Cana turned clear water into Bacchus' wine, and the Mass itself ritualises a mystery of wine and death. Many dramatic oratorios contrast the cool serenity of Apollonian paradise with the chaos of the Inferno. In secular works, the lyre of Apollo, the mythical *cetra*, became a symbol for music itself, and an inspiration for the development of new instruments for the emerging style of *basso continuo*.

But however we might categorise them today, in their own time these music-dramas were not called 'opera'. And 'oratorio' referred to a building, not to the dramatic music that was sung there. Title pages refer to *rappresentatione* – a show, *rappresentatione cantata* – a sung play, or *favola in musica* – a story in music. Often the most exciting moments were narrated rather than acted out, emphasising the singer's skill as an orator in passionate story-telling.

In music, a ground bass presents composers with a challenge to escape the Apollonian structure of the ostinato with unexpectedly wild harmonies. Even the strict rules of early 17th-century counterpoint could be taken to Bacchic extremes, most dangerously by Carlo Gesualdo, in his madrigals of death and in his virtuosic and harmonically daring *canzona*.

In contrast to modern actors looking for their motivation, 17th-century performers were confident in the strength of their passions. But artistic inspiration was an uncontrollable force that threatened to run wild. Spirits of passion in the mind produced physical changes in the body, alterations in the balance of the four 'Humours', liquids that ruled the emotions: warm-blooded love and courage, hot anger, dark melancholy, cold phlegm. Unbalanced humours below could all-too-easily overwhelm the rational mind above. The elegant gestures of 17th-century Action were an outward and visible sign of the inward passions, part of the Apollonian technique of the theatre. But driven by Bacchic energy, those same gestures moved the passions of the performer himself and of his audience.

In modern-day Early Music, the cool, intellectual discipline of historical investigation should – at its best – serve to fuel the fire of artistic energy. In any performance, there should be an artistic tension between technical control and wild inspiration. And as our minds and passions respond today to this 17th-century music, Apollo and Bacchus are still amongst us!

Andrew Lawrence-King

Fauola in Musica

Bacchus, Apollo & the Birth of Opera

The Harp Consort

Marco Beasley – tenor

Xavier Diaz Latorre – theorbo, baroque guitar

Andrew Lawrence-King – baroque triple harp

Apollo's lyre plays the music of love. Orpheus invokes Apollo as the sun-god. But there is a dark side to Bacchus' way of wine, women and song. Who can give good counsel? Orpheus laments in Hell. Finally, Love triumphs in Paradise.

PROLOGO: The Lyre of Apollo

Tempo la cetra

Claudio Monteverdi



ATTO PRIMO Arcadia: Orpheus & the Sun

Ritornello: La cetra
Rosa del ciel

Monteverdi *Orfeo* (1607)

Capona
Canarios

Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger (1640)

Antri ch'a miei lament

Jacopo Peri *Euridice* (1600)

Ballo del Gran Duca

Emilio de' Cavalieri *Intermedi* (1589)



ATTO SECONDO La selva oscura: Bacchus & the Dark Side

Il Tempo

Cavalieri *Rappresentatione* (1600)

Tarantella

Improvised

Il Trionfo di Bacco

Lorenzo de' Medici/Giulio Caccini

Vi ricorda o boschi ombrosi

Monteverdi *Orfeo*

Damigella tutta bella

Vincenzo Caestani

Caronte: *Bevi, bevi*

Stefano Landi *La Morte d'Orfeo* (1619)

Passacaglia della vita

Landi



INTERVAL

Atto Terzo Purgatorio: Farewell to Earth

Passacaglio
Il Corpo

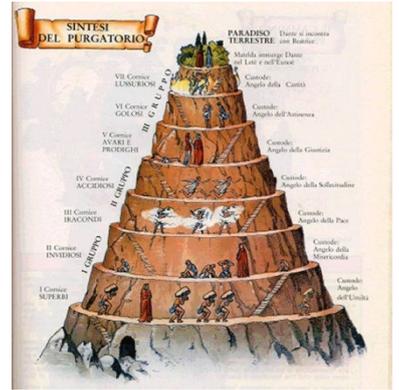
Biagio Marini (1655)
Cavalieri Rappresentazione

Canzon del Prencipe

Carlo Gesualdo (1617)

Tu sei morta

Monteverdi *Orfeo*



Atto Quarto Inferno: The Lament of Orpheus

Allemande
Signora mia
Lament

Henry Purcell (1696)
Severino Corneti (1530–1582)
Purcell *Dido & Aeneas* (1689)

Funeste piagge

Peri *Euridice*



Atto Quinto Paradiso: The Triumph of Love

Lamento per la morte

Johann Jakob Froberger (1657)

Kapsberger
Gioite al canto mio

Kapsberger
Peri *Euridice*

Qual honor de te fu degno, mia cetra
Ciaccona

Monteverdi *Orfeo*
Improvised

Tarantella del Gargano

Traditional Neapolitan

