

A Brief Opera History of France and the Holy Roman Empire in the Late 18th Century

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Received: 26 March 2022; **Accepted:** 10 April 2022; **Published:** 18 April 2022

Abstract:

Throughout the 18th century, the history of the opera has changed and the influence of opera on the audience was profound and frequent, especially in France and Holy Roman Empire. In the early 18th century, the content of operas became increasingly weak, and it was divorced from the meaning of drama since it became the carrier of national propaganda, most of which served the upper classes and nobles. This kind of opera that promoted autocracy slowly caused dissatisfaction in the audience, as a reaction, the content of opera began to promote independence, freedom, and love. In both countries, this had a more positive impact on the audience who began to desire independence, freedom, and equality. It also had an effect on political movements and historical events. This study will be divided into three main sections. It will first indicate the history of opera and the influence of opera on the audience in the 18th century in France. Secondly, it will examine the history of opera and the influence of opera on the audience in the late 18th century in Holy Roman Empire. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn, in the late 18th century, both the French and Italian operas changed and the influences on the audience changed.

Keywords:

Opera, France, Holy Roman Empire, The 18th century, Audience, Mozart

1. Introduction

In the 18th century, the influence of opera on the audience was not only an entertainment project but also a carrier of the propaganda of the national ruling class. Especially during the French Revolution, the Paris Opera played a pivotal role. According to Mark Darlow's research [4] about Paris Opéra in 2012, he translates Louis XVI's evaluation on Opéra that the Opéra has always been considered a political institution because it encouraged emulation in the arts, it contributed to the perfection of taste, and it attracted and retained a large number of foreigners in the capital. In of Tili Boon Cuillé's research [3], he pointed out that following Keith Beck's definition of political culture, Darlow believes that opera is a fusion point between competitive discourses: politics, economy, and aesthetics.

In France, Opera has had a profound impact on the audience, the most typical performance in the early 18th century is the use of tragic opera at funerals. The mourners on stage were divided into unequal groups on the basis of social status, with different expressions of grief. In the late 18th century, French opera gradually moved from the aristocracy to the common people, and Jean-Philippe Rameau's adaptations of tragic operas were so popular that they became the undisputed benchmark for traditional French opera. In Holy Roman Empire, Mozart is the most iconic figure. He satirized the feudal aristocracy in *Le Nozze di Figaro* in 1786; he added personal, love, and sexual expressions in *Così fan tutte* in 1790.

2. Opera in France in the 18th Century

According to Simon McVeigh's research [15], in the early 18th century, the opera had a very clear service target, serving the nobility and upper class, especially in the etiquette activities of various courts and in the social circle of each European social elite. The status and consumption ability and the exquisite and refined taste of music were defined. Jama Stilwell [8] argued in her research that during the decline of the rule of the Louis XIV, noble blood, divorce, sexual desire, political stability, and long-term inequality in gender and social status are the most widespread anxieties plaguing the audiences of early 18th century Paris. Opera in the early 18th century was an upper-class social entertainment activity, and musicians and journalists were all trying to adapt the opera to the upper class. Stilwell [8] further explained in her research that the recurring opéra-comiques of early comedies, such as exoticism, burlesque comedy, and vaudeville, seemed very appealing to early 18th-century Parisians for a number of reasons: as a means of sensual entertainment and escapism; as a secret call for social change; as a search for freedom; as a (hidden) criticism of the political and social structures of the old regime.

A typical type in France is tragic opera which is used in French funeral ceremonies. Olivia Bloechl [2], a scholar who interested in French opera, pointed out her discription on tragic opera in one of her research projects. Aristocratic discourse and public mourning etiquette were elaborated in tragic opera. In this way public mourning rituals and their performance in tragic drama, can be said to play a greater role in shaping a superior form of mourning etiquette. This is because the performance nature of funeral rituals encourages certain kinds of mourning behaviors and emotions more directly than through strictly discursive means. Well-designed architecture and decoration at State Funerals can also arouse the audience's strong feelings and moral reflections, such as in the theater or at the *Opéra*. The mourners on the stage in the performance of the State Funeral are divided into unequal groups, which also show different patterns of sadness, which are related to their social status. National mourning chorus music affects public mourning: it imitates life to create meaningful mourning through music. This inspires the audience's corresponding emotions and invites the audience to even internalize the mourning subjectiveness of the opera performance.

Therefore, it is not difficult to see the importance of opera to the nobility and the upper class in the early 18th century France. The ruling class propaganda controlled the masses through opera and more and more people began to feel the oppressive rule from feudal autocracy and the unfairness of the class gap. The impact on the audience can be said to be very obvious. Affecting the audience's attitudes towards opera and their ideological activities, the French people began to feel resentful and bored with this unfair society.

Since the operas of the early 18th century exposed the dissatisfaction of the society, the French opera began to have new changes at this time, and slowly the focus changed from the nobility to the civilians. The influence of opera on the audience is also more active. Composer Darrow focused his attention on festival works, promoting community and citizenship, and attracting audience emotions through music, pantomimes, and fables rather than rational speech acts. In particular, Darlow [4] analyzes the works of Pierre Beaumarchais and Antonio Salieri's *Tarare* from 1787. Slowly, the mix of speech and music is recognized by the audience and even exceeds the regular opera. For example, *opéra-comique* is a form of drama entertainment that evolved from the market and is consistent with the tastes of its customers, so it is considered a low-level form because of the crowd it attracts, as Robert Isherwood suggests, this kind of opera extends to all social classes. The other scholar Aubrey Garlington [12] also indicates in his research on *Tarare* that, the cycle begun by the Encyclopedists, and their reform movement of this period had come to an end. The "new" type of opera should be one in which the various genres were no longer separated but were to be fused together. Each opera should contain elements of tragedy and comedy, allegory, and realism.

According to Lois Rosow's research [17], by the mid-1760s, the French opera genre rooted in the 17th and early 18th centuries had come to an end. A radical change is underway. Jean-Philippe Rameau became the undisputed standard-setter of French traditional opera. His revised musical tragédie "Castor et Pollux" and his "ballet bouffon" *Platée* were both prevailed at the *Opéra* in 1754. Tragic texts are set to vivid Italian arias, while light texts are set to elegant and solemn French air. A scholar Michael Fend [16] pointed out in his research that the "old" opera's dramatic style focused on tragic plots, recitative vocal melodies countered by increasingly "noisy" orchestral music, stagnating motives and dissonant harmonies. Almost all composers who worked in France after 1797 abandoned this "old" opera style. One critic complained in 1979 that the composer who compose Tragic opera was making horror music.

In addition, the architecture of the *Opéra* also influenced the audience to a large extent. At the end of the 18th century, the architecture of the theatre became more and more concerned with the space inside and outside the theatre, focusing on the interior and exterior of the theatre, blending the upper class and ordinary citizenship. The architects tried to create an independent and interlinked cultural space. In this way the combination of class and national culture combined the identity of the upper class with the ordinary citizen and formed an ideal public space for moral and civic values. Downing Thomas [6] explained in his research that Jean Starobinsk commented on the moral theme of late 18th century architectures: "In this transformation that brings architecture back to its true essence and material, the choices people see are not only aesthetic but also moral....".

It is also worth mentioning that in the late 18th century, a special aspect of French opera was that there were many successful female operas. The main reason for the success of women's operas was the overall increasing demand for opera by the audience, and when the freedom of the *Opéra* was announced in 1771 many new theatres began to receive a variety of works, *Olympe de Gouges* is a very successful example. However, as Jacqueline Letzter argued in the research [5], on the one hand, opera was still both a typical entertainment activity of the old regime aristocracy and a means of propagating politics, so the *Opéra* was still a dangerous place for women.

Therefore, it can be seen that French opera moved from aristocrats to civilians. The influence of opera on the audience gradually changed from the irony aimed at feudal autocracy to the promotion of equality and freedom. The identity of citizens was getting more and more attention, which encouraged citizen participation more and more and clearly demonstrated the thinking of the Enlightenment.

3. Opera in Holy Roman Empire in the Late 18th Century

As pointed out by Davies [1], in the early 18th century Holy Roman Empire, the audience was also dissatisfied with the content of the opera's dull and backward content. The most famous composer in the late 18th century is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, born in Salzburg, in the Holy Roman Empire. Another research by Tim Carter [18] specifically mentioned the tedium of opera content in Mozart's "Le Nozze di Figaro": "Most of the arias from this opera have clear associations with operatic convention. 'Rage arias (Figaro's 'Aprite un po' quegl'occhi', No.26), 'love' arias (Cherubino's 'Non so piu cosa son, cosa faccio', No.6) and arias which point up a moral (Marcellina's 'Il capro e lacapretta', No.24), but they are all clichés of 18th century opera. Mozart's audience would have expected nothing less. However, Mozart through the Le Nozze di Figaro used irony to satirize the feudal aristocrats and exposed the social illusion, this received the attention of the audience. In Mozart's Le Nozze di Figaro, the hero is depicted as a civilian, in order to prevent the Count of Ama Viva from spending the first night with the fiancée Susanna of Figaro. Figaro, Countess, and Susanna collaborated to win. In the scene of "Susanna or via sortite", the countess is threatened by her husband's curse and exile because she lied to her husband. This is a typical passive role of being betrayed by a wife. Christopher Ballantine [10] explained that, more exciting is the process of masking and exposure in this opera which is more complicated and ironic, such as the Countess pretending that Susanna is in her locker room, Figaro pretending to have sex with the Countess, Susanna pretending to accept the count, and so on. These scenes explain the falsehood of society at the time. From these contents of the opera, we can easily see the reaction of the audience. The oppression of the class and the disclosure of endemic hypocrisy, these things affect the mood of the audience. Making the audience more and more intolerant of the rule of feudal backward thinking.

In this situation, the Holy Roman Empire opera made progress under the influence of the audience's previous dissatisfaction and has had some positive effects on the audience. As stated in Katharina Clausius's research [7], especially the Italian opera seria which theme based on Mythology and ancient heroic legends. Ford (2012) wrote that "Mozart enriched opera buffa by incorporating elements of the opera seria style, thus the genre title on the title page of the score: drama giocoso". Lior Barshack [11] pointed out in his research that, Mozart is full of confidence in the pursuit of human nature and happiness. In his opera, the description of subjective freedom shows personalization. Personalization depends on the affirmation of sensibility. He promotes personal enjoyment and exercise of moral freedom without being influenced by social structure and the ruling class. In addition to the increase in the promotion of individual independence, Lawrence Kramer [9] pointed out that there is also an expression of love and sex in the opera. Mozart's *Così fan tutte* is a typical work of Enlightenment.

Austin Glatthorn [13], a scholar interested in Europe around the year 1800 argues in his research that, Heinrich der Löwe, this two-act "allegorisches Singspiel" was written by the dramatist Heinrich Gottlieb Schmierer and with music by Carl David

Stegmann. Set in the Wendish Crusade (1147), it depicts some of the scenes during the war. Johann Friedrich Schink has given Carl David Stegmann's Singspiel very high commendation. Despite this praise and the best efforts of Schmieder and Stegmann, for the French war against Austria had rapidly escalated into an imperial war involving the entire empire, the opera was performed on only a few occasions. In fact, shortly after the performance in Hamburg, the director there, Friedrich Ludwig Schröder, considered the theatre to be "the most peaceful place in a country".

4. Conclusions

From the above, it can be seen that the history of opera in the 18th century changed both in France and Holy Roman Empire, the content of the opera had profound impacts on the audience. First, in the early 18th century, the audiences of France and the Holy Roman Empire realized that the content of the opera under the feudal ruling class was rigid, single, and dull, and more and more viewers expressed dissatisfaction with such music. People were tired of the oppression of the upper ruling class. Under such dissatisfaction, in the late 18th century, more and more composers and operas went from the nobility to the masses. The operas that promoted equality, freedom, and love appeared. Not only the opera content but also the architecture of the Opéra slowly changed for the audience. The issue of gender in the opera profession has also moved in a better direction, with female characters in the landscape featuring prominently. Also as stated in Lior Barshack's research [11], the opera in the late 18th century has more descriptions of gender and attempted to narrow the gender gap. His treatment of the love scene also dramatized an enlightenment subject - equality of the sexes and gender differences. Women are natural, not rational, and biological; they not only lack their own certain subjectivity but because of their lack, they are even unable to determine their objectivity. Therefore, the advancement of the opera's propaganda of individualism and the description of love affected the psychology of the audience, and the spread of enlightenment brought about by this became more and more widespread. The influence of the opera on the audience was also more and more positive in promoting the spread of Enlightenment.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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