

OPERAS FOR OCTOBER

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Stories of the operas

Wozzeck

Wozzeck is the first opera by the Austrian composer Alban Berg. It was composed between 1914 and 1922 and first performed in 1925. The opera is based on the drama *Woyzeck* left incomplete by the German playwright Georg Büchner at his death. Berg attended the first production in Vienna of Büchner's play on 5 May 1914, and knew at once that he wanted to base an opera on it. From the fragments of unordered scenes left by Büchner, Berg selected fifteen to form a compact structure of three acts with five scenes each. He adapted the libretto himself, retaining "the essential character of the play, with its many short scenes, its abrupt and sometimes brutal language, and its stark, if haunted, realism..."

Though its musical style is challenging, the quality of Berg's work (in particular, the characterization of the situation through clearly defined musical techniques) amply repays repeated listenings. Although a typical performance takes only slightly over an hour and a half, it is nevertheless an intense experience. The subject matter—the inevitability of hardship and exploitation for the poor—is brutal and uncompromisingly presented.

Though Berg began work on the opera in 1914, he was delayed by the start of World War I and it was not until he was on leave from his regiment in 1917 and 1918 that he was able to devote his attention to it. Completing Act 1 by the summer of 1919, Act 2 in August 1921, and the final act during the following two months (with orchestration finalized over the following six months), *Wozzeck* was completed in April 1922.

Erich Kleiber, "who programmed (the opera) on his own initiative" conducted the world premiere at the Berlin State Opera on 14 December 1925. Walsh claims that it was "a succès de scandale with disturbances during the performance and a mixed press afterwards, but it led to a stream of productions in Germany and Austria, before the Nazis consigned it to the dustbin of 'decadent art' after 1933"

Synopsis

Act 1: Scene 1 (Suite)

Wozzeck is shaving the Captain who taunts him for living an immoral life, in particular for having a child "without the blessing of the Church". Wozzeck protests that it is difficult to be virtuous when he is poor, but entreats the Captain to remember the lesson from the gospel, "Laßet die Kleinen zu mir kommen!" ("Suffer the little children to come unto me," Mark 10:14). The Captain greets this admonition with pointed dismay.

Scene 2 (Rhapsody and Hunting Song)

Wozzeck and Andres are cutting sticks as the sun is setting. Wozzeck has frightening visions and Andres tries unsuccessfully to calm him.

Scene 3 (March and Lullaby)

A military parade passes by outside Marie's room. Margret taunts Marie for flirting with the soldiers. Marie shuts the window and proceeds to sing a lullaby to her son. Wozzeck then comes by and tells Marie of the terrible visions he has had, promptly leaving without seeing their son, much to Marie's dismay. She laments about being poor.

Scene 4 (Passacaglia)

The Doctor scolds Wozzeck for not following his instructions regarding diet and behavior. However, when the Doctor hears of Wozzeck's mental aberrations, he is delighted and congratulates himself on the success of his experiment.

Scene 5 (Rondo)

Marie admires the Drum-major outside her room. He makes advances to her, which she first rejects but then accepts after a short struggle.

Act 2: Scene 1 (Sonata-Allegro)

Marie is telling her child to go to sleep while admiring earrings which the Drum-major gave her. She is startled when Wozzeck arrives and when he asks where she got the earrings, she says she found them. Though not convinced, Wozzeck gives her some money and leaves. Marie chastises herself for her behaviour.

Scene 2 (Fantasia and Fugue on 3 Themes)

The Doctor rushes by the Captain in the street, who urges him to slow down. The Doctor then proceeds to scare the Captain by speculating what afflictions may strike him. When Wozzeck comes by, they insinuate that Marie is being unfaithful to him.

Scene 3 (Largo)

Wozzeck confronts Marie, who does not deny his suspicions. Enraged, Wozzeck is about to hit her, when she stops him, saying even her father never dared lay a hand on her. Her statement "better a knife in my belly than your hands on me" plants in Wozzeck's mind the idea for his subsequent revenge.

Scene 4 (Scherzo)

Among a crowd, Wozzeck sees Marie dancing with the Drum-major. After a brief hunter's chorus, Andres asks Wozzeck why he is sitting by himself. An Apprentice delivers a drunken sermon, then an Idiot approaches Wozzeck and cries out that the scene is "Lustig, lustig...aber es riecht ...Ich riech, ich riech Blut!" ("joyful, joyful, but it reeks...I smell, I smell blood").

Scene 5 (Rondo)

In the barracks at night, Wozzeck, unable to sleep, is keeping Andres awake. The Drum-major comes in, intoxicated, and rouses Wozzeck out of bed to fight with him. This scene, beginning with a chorus of snoring soldiers, was inspired by Berg's experience in the barracks during the first World War.[citation needed]

Act 3: Scene 1 (Invention on a Theme)

In her room at night, Marie reads to herself from the Bible. She cries out that she wants forgiveness.

Scene 2 (Invention on a Single Note (B))

Wozzeck and Marie are walking in the woods by a pond. Marie is anxious to leave, but Wozzeck restrains her. As a blood-red moon rises, Wozzeck becomes determined that if he can't have Marie, no one else can, and he stabs her.

Scene 3 (Invention on a Rhythm)

People are dancing in a tavern. Wozzeck enters, and upon seeing Margret, dances with her and pulls her onto his lap. He insults her, and then asks her to sing him a song. She sings, but then notices blood on his hand and elbow; everyone begins shouting at him, and Wozzeck, now agitated and obsessed with his blood, rushes out of the tavern.

Scene 4 (Invention on a 6-Note Chord)

Having returned to the murder scene, Wozzeck becomes obsessed with the thought that the knife he killed Marie with will incriminate him, and throws it into the pond. When the blood-red moon appears again Wozzeck, fearing that he has not thrown the knife far enough from shore and also wanting to wash away the blood staining his clothing and hands, wades into the pond and drowns. The Captain and the Doctor, passing by, hear Wozzeck moaning and rush off in fright.

Interlude (Invention on a Key (D minor))

This interlude leads to the finale.

Scene 5 (Invention on an Eighth-Note *moto perpetuo*, *quasi toccata*)

Next morning, children are playing in the sunshine. The news spreads that Marie's body has been found, and they all run off to see, except for Marie's little boy, who after an oblivious moment, follows after the others.

A Streetcar named Desire

Music by André Previn, Libretto by Philip Littell, based on the play by Tennessee Williams

Act I, Scene 1

Blanche DuBois has suffered the loss of both her ancestral home and her job when she arrives in New Orleans to visit her sister Stella, who has married Stanley Kowalski, an ex-G.I. trucker.

Act I, Scene 2

A few days later

Stanley, infuriated by Blanche's artificial airs, her suggestive behaviour, and what he regards as her loss of his wife's birthright, is determined to expose Blanche's lies about her past—which is more tragic and sordid than he is able to imagine.

Act I, Scene 3

That night

During a poker game Blanche meets Harold Mitchell (Mitch), a workmate of Stanley's, very much tied to his mother's apron strings. Blanche sets her sights on him. Stanley, drunk, breaks up the evening and strikes Stella, whom he regards as siding against him with Blanche. After this violence, and against Blanche's advice, Stella returns to Stanley's bed. The next morning Stanley overhears Blanche entreating her sister to leave him.

Act II, Scene 1

Some weeks later

Stanley tells Stella that he has a friend who is making inquiries about Blanche in her hometown of Laurel. When he and his now-pregnant wife go out for the evening, Blanche attempts to seduce a young paper boy, pulling back at the last minute. She later goes out with Mitch on a date.

Act II, Scene 2

That night

An amorous Mitch unburdens his heart to Blanche, who in turn tells him of her brief marriage to a young homosexual and how she blames herself for his suicide.

Act III, Scene 1

Some weeks later, Blanche's birthday

Mitch is late for the party. Stanley, who feels that his home and marriage are both threatened by Blanche, breaks up the celebration when he reveals that his friend has discovered Blanche's unsavoury reputation in Laurel for seducing young men, and the fact that she had been told to leave town. He hands Blanche a one-way ticket back home and tells her that Mitch now knows everything and will not be coming around again. Thus begins the fragmentation of Blanche's mind.

Act III, Scene 2

Later that night

Stella has been taken to a hospital for a premature delivery. Mitch, drunk, invades the apartment and bitterly reproaches Blanche: just as her desperate hopes lie with him, his had lain with her. They have both lost their emotional refuge. His denunciation of her as someone too unclean to enter his mother's house and the appearance of a Mexican woman selling flowers for the dead are the triggers that start to unhinge Blanche's mind.

Act III, Scene 3

Later

Blanche's fragmentation is completed when Stanley rapes her.

Act III, Scene 4

Some days later

Blanche prepares to leave for a visit to a fictitious old admirer. In fact Stella, unable to believe in Blanche's accusations against Stanley, is packing Blanche's clothes for her to take to the asylum when the doctor arrives. Now she depends — in a new way — on "the kindness of strangers."

Die Lustigen Weib von Windsor -- The Merry Wives of Windsor

The Merry Wives of Windsor is a German Singspiel in three acts which premiered in Berlin in 1849. It was based on Shakespeare's play "The Merry Wives of Windsor" with music by Otto Nicolai. Apart from the overture, the opera today is played mostly in Germany.

For a detailed discussion see here:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Merry_Wives_of_Windsor_%28opera%29

Cast

Frau Fluth (Alice Ford)	soprano
Frau Reich (Meg Page)	mezzo-soprano
Sir John Falstaff	bass
Fenton	tenor
Herr Fluth (Ford)	baritone
Anna Reich (Anne Page)	soprano
Herr Reich (Page)	bass
Spärlich (Slender)	tenor

Dr. Cajus	bass
Robin	spoken role
The innkeeper	spoken role
A waiter	spoken
First citizen	tenor
Second, third, and fourth citizens	spoken
Two servants of Herr Fluth	silent
Chorus of men and women of Windsor, neighbours, elves, spooks, and insects	

Synopsis

Act 1: Scene 1: Two married ladies, Frau Fluth and Frau Reich, discover that they both received love letters from the impoverished nobleman Falstaff at the same time. They decide to teach him a lesson and withdraw to hatch a plan. Now the husbands of Frau Fluth and Frau Reich come in. Anna, Frau Reich's daughter, is of marriageable age and three gentlemen seek her hand in marriage: Dr. Cajus, a French beau, is her mother's favourite, and her father wants the shy nobleman Spärlich as his son-in-law, but Anna is in love with the penniless Fenton.

Scene 2: Frau Fluth has invited Falstaff to a supposed tryst, and he enters with grand romantic gestures and clumsily attempts to ensnare her. As Frau Reich reports the return of the distrustful Herr Fluth, which had been previously arranged, the old gentleman is hidden in a laundry basket, the contents of which are quickly emptied into a ditch. Herr Fluth has searched the whole house in the meantime without success and is forced to believe his wife, who protests her innocence.

Act 2: Scene 1: At the inn, Falstaff has recovered from his unwanted bath and sings bawdy drinking songs. A messenger brings him a letter, in which Frau Fluth proposes another rendezvous. Her husband appears in disguise and presents himself as Herr Bach to get Falstaff to talk about his trysts. He unsuspectingly brags about his affair with Frau Fluth, which provokes her husband's rage.

Scene 2: Spärlich and Cajus sneak around Anna's window, but before they attempt to go near, they hear Fenton's serenade and hide in the bushes. From there they observe a passionate love scene between the two lovers.

Scene 3: Falstaff is again with Frau Fluth, and Frau Reich again warns them both that Herr Fluth is on his way home. This time they dress the fat knight in women's clothes to try and pass him off as the maid. Herr Fluth enters and finds only the old maid, whom he angrily throws out of the house.

Act 3: Scene 1: Fluth and Reich are finally let in on the plan by their wives and the four of them decide to take Falstaff for a ride one last time. The knight is expected to show up at a grand masked ball in Windsor Forest. Additionally, Herr and Frau Reich each plan to take advantage of the confusion to marry Anna off to their preferred suitor. Instead, however, she has arranged a night-time meeting with Fenton in the forest.

Scene 2: After the moonrise, depicted by the chorus and orchestra, the masked ball in the forest begins. At first, Falstaff, disguised as Ritter Herne [Herne the Hunter], is lured by the two women, but then he is frightened by various other guests disguised as ghosts, elves, and insects. After the masks are removed and Falstaff is mocked by everyone, Anna and Fenton,

who got married in the forest chapel, appear. In a cheerful closing number all of the parties are reconciled.

Virginia

Virginia by Saverio Mercadante is based on a tale of ancient Rome. Written in 1850, it was banned by the Bourbon's and not premiered until 1866. It has never really entered the repertoire and the first modern recording [which will be played] did not appear until 2009. The story and the background to the opera are here [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia %28Mercadante%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_%28Mercadante%29)