

# OPERA

Composers • Works • Performers

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## Bartók, Béla

b. 25 March 1881 in Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary

d. 26 September 1945 in New York

After finishing secondary school in Bratislava, Bartók studied the piano at the Budapest Academy under István Thoman, a pupil of Liszt, and composition under Hans Koessler, a friend of Brahms. He had the ability to make a career as a concert pianist but not the personality, choosing instead the role of the performer-composer, whose aim was to give an adequate rendering of his own and others’ works. The key experience of his life was the discovery of authentic Hungarian folk music, which he studied in Hungarian villages from 1904. He became acquainted with Zoltán Kodály in 1905, and from this point the two dedicated themselves to the study of folk music, developing and publicizing their shared aesthetic aims for a new Hungarian music. In his own country Bartók’s breakthrough as a composer came only after the First World War, in the face of a musically very conservative public. In 1940, he left Hungary for the USA in order to escape fascism. Here he remained until his death in 1945, in poor health and straightened circumstances though still producing works of importance.

*Works:* Stage works: *A Kékszakállú herceg vára* (*Bluebeard’s Castle*) (1911/FP 1918), *A fából faragott királyfi* (*The Wooden Prince*) (ballet, 1917), *A csodálatos mandarin* (*The Miraculous Mandarin*) (pantomime, 1919/FP 1926); piano works, including the famous *Allegro barbaro* (1911); chamber music, including six string quartets; orchestral music, including three piano concertos (1926, 1931, 1945), *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* (1936), and the *Concerto for Orchestra* (1943); choral works, songs, settings of folk songs.



## Bluebeard’s Castle

*A Kékszakállú herceg vára*

Opera in one act

**Libretto:** Béla Balázs.

**Première:** 24 May 1918, Budapest (Royal Opera).

**Characters:** A Kékszakállú herceg/Duke Bluebeard (B), Judit/Judith (S), Prologue (spoken), Bluebeard’s Former Wives (silent).

**Setting:** Duke Bluebeard’s castle, yesterday and today.

### Synopsis

It is asked what the old songs mean; do they tell of external or internal events, do they refer to yesterday or to an everlasting today?

Judith has left her parents’ house and her fiancé to follow the gloomy Duke Bluebeard, whom she loves for his suffering. In his dark fortress she finds “seven silent, black doors.” In order to understand her beloved wholly and let light into the darkness of existence she presses him to open the doors. The first two doors conceal Bluebeard’s torture and armaments chambers, and the third and fourth the treasure vault and magic garden. Now Judith presses Bluebeard to open the fifth door. It grows bright, as the door opens onto the whole kingdom. Bluebeard goes happily to embrace Judith, but she has discovered blood everywhere and wants to know everything. Despite Bluebeard’s warning, she opens the sixth door and finds the pool of tears. Finally Judith sees Bluebeard’s previous wives behind the seventh door, living in his memory. Judith joins them in the realm of memory. Bluebeard’s castle falls dark once again.

S. N.

*Bluebeard’s Castle*, production photograph with Bluebeard and Judith, production Peter Konwitschny, Leipziger Oper 1991.

As woman and man, Judith and Bluebeard embody opposing principles that, in Bartók’s pessimistic view, could never be brought into harmony. Their parts also reflect this: in the dark, Bluebeard is passive and immobile, whereas Judith is dynamic and active. At the fifth door, however, she is blind and deaf to the glittering splendor of the male realm.

## Cavalli, Francesco

b. in Crema on 14 February 1602

d. in Venice 14 January 1676

Cavalli's birth name is Pietro Francesco Caletti-Bruni. His father was his first music teacher who worked as musical director and organist in Crema. The Venetian governor of the town noted his musical talent and took him to Venice. He joined the San Marco chapel in Venice as a boy soprano in 1616. In addition, he assumed the post of organist at SS. Giovanni e Paolo in 1620. He gained financial independence through his profitable marriage to the widowed niece of the bishop of Pula in 1630. From this time forward, he is known under the name of his first patron Cavalli, and completely devotes himself to the composition of religious music and, later, to the production of operas. The première of his first opera *Le nozze di Teti e Peleo*, which was staged at the Teatro S. Cassiano in Venice in 1639, was not an instant success, in fact, his company was dissolved. Yet, all the same, Cavalli became so tremendously popular that the world's first public opera house demanded one première of Cavalli's works annually. As early as in 1646, only three years after its première, Cavalli's *Egisto* (*Aegisthus*) was re-enacted in Paris. His reputation and the national and international demand for new works were unprecedented among his peers. Between 1639 and 1669 Cavalli composed 42 operas, 27 of which survive to this day. He thus became one of the best-documented opera composers of his time. His career reached its peak in 1660: Cavalli was asked to write an opera for the wedding of King Louis XIV and Maria Theresa of Spain. He traveled to Paris upon invitation by the French prime minister. The first performance of *Ercole amante* (after *The Metamorphoses* by Ovid) took place during the wedding ceremony. Cavalli continued to be held in high esteem by the French Court and remained an additional two years in Paris. Monteverdi and Cavalli came to be known as the great masters of Venetian opera. However, Cavalli's style still stands for development. More relaxed dialogues and dramatic situations are placed in the fore and replace the individual characterization of personal fates. Faster and spirited scenes that partially incorporate comical twists supersede the schematic separation of recitative and aria in the first operas.

**Works:** Operas: among others, *Didone* (1641), *Egisto* (*Aegisthus*) (1643), *L'Ormindo* (*Ormindo*) (1644), *Giasone* (*Jason*) (1649), *La Calisto* (1651), *Xerses* (*Serses*) (1655), *Ercole amante* (*Hercules in Love*) (1660) – masses, cantatas and other religious works.



*La Calisto*, production photograph with Sally Matthews as Calisto, music director: Ivor Bolton, production: David Alden, set design: Paul Steinberg, costume design: Buki Shiff, Bayerische Staatsoper Germany, 2005. David Alden staged many Baroque operas during the era of Peter Jonas. His colorful, yet still delicately subtle farcical interpretation of *La Calisto* is one of his masterpieces.

## *La Calisto*

Dramma per musica

**Libretto:** Giovanni Faustini

**Première:** 28 November 1651, Venice (Teatro Sant' Apollinaire)

**Characters:** Nature (A), Eternity (S), Destiny (S), Jupiter (B), Mercury (Bar), Calisto, a nymph in Diana's entourage (S), Endimione, a shepherd (ContraT), Diana (Ms), Linfea, nymph in Diana's entourage (T), Satirino, a small satyr (S), Pan, Lord of the shepherds (B), Sylvanus, Lord of the forests (B), Juno (S); satyrs, celestial spirits, furies (chorus)

**Setting:** Arcadia, mythical time period

### *Synopsis*

#### *Prologue*

Destiny, Nature and Eternity grant the nymph Calisto an eternal place in the starry skies.

#### *Act I*

Jupiter and Mercury have descended from the heavens to inspect the destruction caused by fire on earth. They encounter the nymph Calisto who is nearly dying of thirst and bewails that the springs have dried up. Jupiter, blinded by Calisto's beauty,



### The finest melodies

Juliet's waltz arietta stands in the line of descent from Marguerite's "Jewel Song" in →*Faust* and the arietta in →*Mireille*. <sup>M 12</sup> The second act contains a wonderful nocturne. <sup>M 13</sup>

Romeo's cavatina is a tenderly drawn portrait of a young man enraptured by his burgeoning emotions, and conducting himself with true heroism as he senses the danger to his happiness. The situation and the moving tone bring this little aria close to Faust's cavatina. <sup>M 14</sup>

The third act is much more dramatic than its predecessors. There is a fine finale in which the bitter hatred between the Montagues and Capulets flares up again, and Romeo expresses his despair. The sublime dignity of this arching melody shows how dramatically Gounod could write even when he was exercising restraint. <sup>M 15</sup>

Act IV is introduced by a great duet. The orchestra gives expression to the lovers' tender meeting. A passionate melody is heard when they unite in a silent kiss, illustrating the consummation of their happiness even without words. <sup>M 16</sup>

The text of their love duet is taken almost literally from Shakespeare, while the musical structure, a melody of extreme despair, is one of the most moving passages in Gounod's score. <sup>M 17</sup>

The closing duet expresses the lovers' suffering. As in the final scene of →*Faust*, memories come back to both

their minds. There are references to melodies from earlier duets, the love theme and the dialogue of the lark and the nightingale, and the bitter-sweet story of a doomed love affair appears as if in flashback. At the end of the opera, not only the lovers but also love itself is transfigured. <sup>P.H.</sup>

*Romeo and Juliet*, production photograph with Marcello Alvarez (Romeo) and Angela Maria Blasi (Julia), music director: Marcello Viotti, production: Andreas Homoki, scenery and costumes: Gideon Davey, Bayerische Staatsoper Munich 2004

Homoki playfully performed *Romeo and Juliet* as an adolescent love story in school. Marcello Alvarez and Angela Maria Blasi were once again a couple in the Munich Gounod opera, just like four years prior in *Faust*.



#### 12. Juliet's Arietta

Je veux viv - - re Dans ce rê - - - ve  
qui m'en - - iv - - re; Ce jour en - - cor,

#### 13. Nocturne

#### 14. Romeo's Cavatina

Ah! lè - ve - toi, so - leil! fais pâ - lir les é - toi - les Qui, dans l'azur sans voi - les, Bril - lent au fir - ma - ment.

#### 15. Finale

Ah! jour de deuil et d'horreur et d'a - lar - mes, Mon coeur se brise é - per - du de dou - leur!

#### 16. Love Theme

#### 17. Duet: Romeo and Juliet

Non! non, ce n'est pas le jour! Ce n'est pas l'a - lou - et - te! C'est le doux ros - si - gnol confident de l'a - mour!

## Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus

b. 27 January 1756 in Salzburg  
d. 5 December 1791 in Vienna

Mozart's musical genius was evident at an early age. His father Leopold was a violinist and composer, the author of an important book on violin technique of the 18th century, and he personally supervised his son's musical education. Concert tours of Europe over many years made Mozart familiar with the most important musical centers and styles: Vienna (1763), Paris, London, Holland, Switzerland (1766), Vienna (1767), Italy (1769–71, including studies in counterpoint with Padre Martini in Bologna, visits to other cities, such as Rome, Milan, Florence, and Naples, and an opera commission), a second journey to Italy (1771), a third journey to Italy (1773, including a further opera commission), Vienna (1773), Munich (1774–75), Mannheim, Paris (1777–79), and Munich (1781, the première of *Idomeneo*). Mozart resigned from his position as honorary orchestral director (since 1769) with the Archbishop of Salzburg and from 1781 lived in Vienna as a freelance composer and piano virtuoso, marrying Constanze Weber in 1782. He drew the attention of Emperor Joseph II, but it was not until after the death of Gluck (1787) that he was taken into the official service of the court as a *Kammermusikus* (chamber musician). Mozart achieved independent success with his operatic masterpieces and instrumental concertos, symphonic works and chamber music. The Prague audiences showed more interest in his art than those in Vienna (the première of *Don Giovanni* took place in Prague in 1787). Mozart adopted as his own both the reform plans of Joseph II and the ideas of the Freemasons (from 1784 he was a member of a Freemasons' lodge). After the death of Joseph II in 1790 he began to experience ever-increasing financial and personal difficulties. His last year was spent in feverish work and in a desperate attempt to establish himself with the new ruler, Leopold II.

**Works:** Operas, sacred works, symphonies, concertos (particularly piano concertos), string quartets, divertimenti and serenades, violin sonatas, piano trios and other works of chamber music, piano sonatas, songs. The Köchel catalogue records more than 626 works. His last great but incomplete composition is his Requiem. Complete operas: *La finta semplice* (*The Feigned Simpleton*) (1768, K.51 [46a]), *Bastien und Bastienne* (*Bastien and Bastienne*) (1768, K.50 [46b]), *Mitridate, Re di Ponto* (*Mithridates, King of Pontus*) (1770, K.87 [74a]), *Lucio Silla* (1772, K.135), *La finta giardiniera* (*The Feigned Gardener*) (1775, K.196), *Idomeneo* (1781, K.366), *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*) (1782, K.384), *Der Schauspieldirektor* (*The Impresario*) (1786, K.486), *Le nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*) (1786, K.492), *Don Giovanni* (1787, K.527), *Così fan tutte* (*All Women Do the Same*) (1790, K.588), *La clemenza di Tito* (*The Clemency of Titus*) (1791, K.621), *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*) (1791, K.620).



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, portrait by Barbara Krafft, née Steiner (1764–1825), Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna.

**M**ozart's genius had a decisive influence on Viennese classical music. His mastery of composition and his universality remain unsurpassed. In all genres Mozart perfected the art of classical composition.

### Dramatically naive, musically brilliant

*La finta semplice*, with its wealth of musical ideas, is typical of Mozart's precocious talent. If he shows "inexperience" here, then it is not as a musician but as a human being. Admittedly this early work as yet contains none of the great ensembles in which varying emotions are unfolded simultaneously, but Mozart already shows himself to be a master of the true depiction of emotions. Thus, for example, he writes an aria for the protagonist Rosina (no. 9) <sup>M1</sup> which is amazingly close to the "Rose Aria" in a later masterpiece, →*The*

## La finta semplice

### The Feigned Simpleton

*Opera buffa* in three acts – K.51 [46a]

**Libretto:** Marco Coltellini, after Carlo Goldoni's libretto to the *dramma giocoso* by Salvatore Perillo (Venice 1764).

**Première:** Presumed 1769, Salzburg (Hoftheater); first documented performance 1921, Karlsruhe.

**Characters:** Fracasso, captain of Hungarian troops stationed near Cremona (T), Rosina, Fracasso's sister, who pretends to be a simpleton (S), Don Cassandro, a rich landowner from Cremona, a vain and miserly man of honor (B), Don Polidoro, younger brother of Don Cassandro, a vain man of honour (T), Giacinta, sister of Don Cassandro and Don Polidoro (S), Ninetta, Giacinta's chambermaid (S), Simone (T), Sergeant (B).

**Setting:** A country house near Cremona, 18th century.

### Synopsis

#### Act I

Fracasso and Simone are quartered in the country house of Cassandro and Polidoro. Captain Fracasso is in love with their sister Giacinta, while his subordinate Simone is in love with the chambermaid, Ninetta. However, the two brothers are happy with the status quo, do not want to marry themselves, or to part with their sister. With the help of Fracasso's sister, Rosina, a plot is engineered. Rosina pretends to be a simpleton. Such a woman is not to be feared. The two brothers fall in love with her.

#### Act II

Giacinta fears a quarrel between the brothers, but Simone looks forward to a fight. The brothers realize that they are rivals, and it comes to a duel. Finally they are deceived by the report that Giacinta has disappeared with all their money.

#### Act III

The characters pair off: Ninetta and Simone, Giacinta and Fracasso. Rosina finally agrees to marry Cassandro. Only Polidoro is left out in the cold. S.N.

*Marriage of Figaro*, particularly in the striking dialogue between the oboe and the voice. The passionate aria of Giacinta (no. 24) <sup>M2</sup> goes far beyond the boundaries of *opera buffa*. This aria may be considered a variation on the third movement of the Symphony in G minor, K.550. <sup>M3</sup> Mozart was a genius from the very start.

## Reimann, Aribert

b. 4 March 1936 in Berlin

Exposed to music at an early age – his father was a university music professor and his mother a singer – Reimann studied piano with Otto Rausch and composition with Boris Blacher at the Berlin Music Academy between 1955 and 1960. By the age of 21 he had established a reputation as a pianist. His professional contact with singers, especially Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, made him aware of the expressive possibilities of the voice. Avoiding affiliations with any group and working independently as a composer, Reimann accepted a chair in song composition at the Berlin School of Arts in 1983.

*Works: Ein Traumspiel (A Dream Play) (1965, Kiel), Melusine (1971, Schwetzingen), Lear (1978, Munich), Die Gespenstersonate (The Ghost Sonata) (1984, Berlin), Troades (1986, Munich), Das Schloss (The Castle) (1992, Berlin);* orchestral music, concertos, chamber music, vocal music, ballets.



*Lear*, production photograph with Michael Rabsilber (Earl of Kent), Tomas Möwes (Lear), Zsuzsanna Bazsinka (Regan) and Jayne Casselmann (Goneril), music director: Stefan Soltesz, production: Michael Schulz, scenery and costumes: Johannes Leiacker, Aalto Musiktheater Essen 2001

*Lear* was performed in Essen in front of a unit set designed by Johannes Leiacker. The center thereof depicted children's drawings scribbled onto a large piece of wallpaper. In a world that no longer makes sense, these children's drawings remain the only honest unchanging element – especially because of their innocence.

*Reimann is inspired by Berg, Webern, and the music of India. His operas are conceptually rooted in the possibilities of vocal expression.*

## Lear

Opera in two parts

**Libretto:** Claus H. Henneberg after William Shakespeare

**Première:** 9 July 1978, Munich (Bavarian State Opera House)

**Characters:** King Lear (Bar), the King of France (B), the Duke of Albany (Bar), the Duke of Cornwall (T), the Earl of Kent (T), the Earl of Gloucester (Bar), Edgar, son of Gloucester (T), Edmund, Gloucester's illegitimate son (ContraT), Goneril, Lear's daughter (S), Regan, Lear's daughter (S), Cordelia, Lear's daughter (S), a fool (Spr), a servant (T), a knight (Spr); Lear's men, Gloucester's men (chorus)

**Setting** England, mythical time period

### Synopsis

#### Act I

The aging Lear plans to abdicate the throne and divides his kingdom among his three daughters. The eldest daughters Goneril and Regan verbosely cajole their father so as to be given as much as possible. Only the youngest and favorite daughter Cordelia, who cannot put her love for her father into words, is exiled and leaves the country together with the King of France. Kent, who recognizes Lear's blindness and disapproves of his decision, is ostracized. Goneril and her husband, the Duke of Albany, and Regan and her husband, the Duke of Cornwall, split Cordelia's inheritance among each other. The Earl of Gloucester, who regrets Lear's behavior, meets his illegitimate son Edmund. He shows his father a forged letter pretending that his legitimate son planned to commit murder. Edmund uses this letter to have his father disown his half-brother. Kent, disguised as a servant, enters into service with Lear. He sees Goneril and Regan chasing their father and his men from the court. Lear, accompanied by Kent and his fool, stumbles completely confused through the stormy heath. They encounter Edgar in a remote hut, who acts as if he were insane. Gloucester and his men follow Lear and lead him to Dover, where the King of France has assembled his troops against Goneril and Regan.

#### Act II

The Duke of Cornwall and Regan take Gloucester prisoner and blind him for supporting Lear. A servant kills the Duke of Cornwall disgusted by the cruelty inflicted upon the defenseless old man; Regan then stabs the lackey. Goneril offers Edmund the crown, because she believes her husband Albany to be a weakling, given that he calls for moderation. Unrecognized by his father, Edgar leads blind Gloucester to Dover, where he rejoins his master Lear. Soldiers take Lear into the French camp where he is finally united with Cordelia. She sets off to



## Schoenberg, Arnold

b. 13 September 1874 in Vienna

d. 13 July 1951 in Los Angeles

Schoenberg was born into a lower-middle-class Jewish family, but like many German-speaking Jews at the turn of the century he was more interested in becoming assimilated into the culture of his country than in pursuing the faith of his forebears. In 1898 he became a member of the Lutheran church. At the beginning of the 1920s, however, his Jewish identity once again became important to him. When as a Jew he was forced to abandon his position in Berlin in 1933 and flee to the USA, he stopped briefly in Paris, where he formally acknowledged his Jewish faith. In musical terms he was primarily an autodidact, and it is perhaps for this reason that he became one of the greatest teachers of the twentieth century. His teaching activities began in 1903 at a private school in Vienna, and from 1904 →Alban Berg and Anton von Webern attended his courses in composition. From 1911 to 1915 and again from 1926 to 1933 Schoenberg taught in Berlin. After emigrating to the USA he continued to teach, first in New York and later in Los Angeles. His first works (such as *Verklärte Nacht* for string sextet) are compositions in the late Romantic style. Soon, however, he began to regard the continuing use of traditional harmony as highly questionable. At the beginning of the 1910s he wrote his most important Expressionist pieces. After experimenting with atonal music he began to search for a new method of composition, and found it in the early 1920s in so-called dodecaphony, or the twelve-note technique. From this point on (with the exception of a few less important compositions) he was to compose only using this technique, which was also adopted by his most gifted pupils, such as Berg and Webern.

*Works:* Operas: *Erwartung* (*Expectation*) (1909/FP 1924), *Die glückliche Hand* (*The Fateful Hand*) (1913/FP 1924), *Von heute auf morgen* (*From One Day to the Next*) (1930), *Moses und Aron* (*Moses and Aaron*) (1932/FP 1954); the string sextet *Verklärte Nacht* (*Transfigured Night*) (1899), *Gurrelieder* for soloists, choir, and large orchestra (1900–11), *Pelléas und Mélisande* (symphonic poem, 1903), the song cycle *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), the oratorio *Die Jakobsleiter* (*Jacob's Ladder*) (1917–22), the melodrama *Ein Überlebender aus Warschau* (*A Survivor from Warsaw*) (1947), orchestral works, two chamber symphonies, string quartets, choral works, songs, piano pieces.



## Erwartung

### Expectation

Monodrama in one act

**Libretto:** Marie Pappenheim.

**Première:** 6 June 1924, Prague (Neues Deutsches Theater).

**Characters:** The Woman (S).

**Setting:** A forest, in the present.

### Synopsis

A woman is wandering through a dark forest. She has arranged to meet her lover but finds only his body. At the side of his corpse she experiences the full spectrum of her emotions of jealousy and desperation. Broken and helpless she remains alone.

S. K.

Above

*Erwartung*, photograph from the production by R. Hoffmann, Oper Frankfurt 1994.

According to Schoenberg *Erwartung* was an attempt to portray everything that happens in a single second of intense emotional anguish (an eruption of hate and love) "as seen in slow motion, so to speak, and stretched out to last half an hour."

*Erwartung*, set design by Arnold Schoenberg (date unknown) (Arnold Schoenberg Center, Vienna).

In 1910 there was the prospect of a performance of *Erwartung* at the Hofoper in Vienna, and Schoenberg asked the painter Max Oppenheim to prepare sketches for the set. He suggested Oskar Kokoschka do the same for a production in Mannheim; neither the production nor the designs came to fruition. Schoenberg himself created several set designs for a projected performance in Berlin in 1930.

## La traviata

*Melodramma* in three acts

**Libretto:** Francesco Maria Piave, after the play *La dame aux camélias* (*The Lady of the Camellias*) by Alexandre Dumas fils.

**Première:** 6 March 1853, Venice (Teatro La Fenice).

**Characters:** Violetta Valéry, a Parisian courtesan (S), Flora Bervoix, her friend (S), Annina, Violetta's maid (Ms), Alfredo Germont (T), Georgio Germont, his father (Bar), Gaston, Vicomte de Letorières, friend of Alfredo (T), Baron Douphol, Violetta's protector (Bar), Marquese d'Obigny, friend of Flora (B), Doctor Grenvil (B), Giuseppe, Violetta's servant (T), Flora's Servant (Bar), Commissioner (B); friends and servants of Violetta and Flora, masqueraders (chorus).

**Setting:** Paris and its surroundings, around 1700.



*La traviata*, production phot with Tiziana Fabbricini (Violetta) and Roberto Alagna (Alfredo), production Liliana Cavani, conductor Riccardo Muti, sets Dante Ferretti, costumes Gabriella Pescucci, Teatro alla Scala, Milan 1991

The only situation in which violence plays any role in *La traviata* is the finale of the second act. Alfred thinks that Violetta has betrayed him. In this scene the torments of the insulted, fatally ill heroine are intensified to the point of unbearability.

### Synopsis

A Parisian courtesan and a young man from the provinces discover that there is more to life than the pleasures of society. They rise above egotism when they fall deeply in love. Violetta and Alfredo leave the social life of Paris for the country, but convention catches up with them. Alfredo's father, speaking for his whole family, implores Violetta to give up her love. Violetta puts on an act of indifference for Alfredo's benefit, returns to Paris, and appears to resume her former life as a courtesan. Only on her deathbed does she tell her lover the truth, finding love and happiness in Alfredo's arms.

### Act I

A salon in Violetta's house. Violetta Valéry is giving a party to celebrate her return to society after a short but severe attack of tuberculosis. The guests include old acquaintances, and also a young man from the provinces who has fallen genuinely in love with the beautiful Violetta. She uses irony and coquetry in an attempt to suppress the tender emotions she is beginning to feel, but she has already fallen under the magic spell of love. When the guests have left, she thinks she still can hear Alfredo's declaration of his passion for her.

### Act II

**Scene 1:** A country house near Paris. Alfredo and Violetta have retired to the country, to give themselves up to their love for each other. But Alfredo, although a tender lover, is inexperienced in worldly affairs, and discovers only from the maidservant that Violetta is selling her possessions to cover their living expenses. Ashamed, he goes to Paris to raise money. His father, Germont, takes advantage of his absence to visit Violetta, and asks her to give up Alfredo to avoid bringing disgrace on his family. After her first desperate resistance, Violetta agrees to part from Alfredo, and makes the break herself in a farewell letter. Alfredo is shocked and in despair, and his self-esteem is injured. His father's hypocritical words of comfort are no help to him; all he wants is to avenge himself on Violetta.

**Scene 2:** In Flora's town house. The separation of Violetta and Alfredo is the latest subject of conversation at the masquerade given by Flora, who is delighted to welcome her friend. Violetta arrives with Baron Douphol, whom Alfredo takes to be her new lover. The two men play cards, gambling against each other, and Alfredo's sharp remarks anger the baron. In an attempt to avert a scandal, Violetta appeals to Alfredo. But since she cannot explain why she broke off their relationship, he throws the money he has won at her feet and accuses her of being a mercenary prostitute. The baron challenges him to a duel. The elder Germont finds the party in an uproar, and the innocent Violetta humiliated. He reproaches his son for breaking the rules of social etiquette.

### Act III

Violetta's bedroom. Her tuberculosis is now in its final stages, and she does not believe the doctor's assurances of a speedy recovery. Alfredo has wounded the baron in their duel, but was uninjured himself, and has fled abroad. Hearing from his remorseful father of Violetta's selfless sacrifice, Alfredo returns to Paris to ask her forgiveness. The lovers dream of a new life together. But it is too late, and Violetta dies in Alfredo's arms.

S. N.





**W**eber was a true master  
in all areas of music  
and a genius in the world  
of theater.

*The Free Shooter*, production photograph with Poul Elming as Max and Albert Dohmen as Kaspar, music director: Ingo Metzmacher, production: Peter Konwitschny, scenery and costumes: Gabriele Koebel, Staatsoper Hamburg 1999

Albert Dohmen sang Kaspar as a predecessor to the *Flying Dutchman*, by forgoing any demonic aspects and instead giving a dark performance of a boastful, small-time criminal.

## Weber, Carl Maria von

b. 18 November 1786 in Eutin

d. 5 June 1826 in London

As a boy Weber led an itinerant life with his father's small drama troupe. His teachers during this time included Michael Haydn in Salzburg and Abbé Vogler in Vienna. He was appointed conductor at the theater in Breslau in 1804, and then worked for a short time at Württemberg (1806) and Stuttgart (1807). He became opera director in Prague in 1813, and conductor of the Dresden court theater in 1817. As opera director he made changes to theatrical practice, demanding intensive rehearsals and the training of the chorus. He also sought to establish an operatic repertory. He became the champion of German national opera with the successful premiere of *Der Freischütz* (1821), which was immediately recognized as a viable alternative to French and Italian opera. With his two following operas – *Euryanthe* and *Oberon* – Weber opened up new horizons for later composers, especially →Richard Wagner.

*Works:* Stage works: *Peter Schmoll und seine Nachbarn* (*Peter Schmoll and his Neighbors*) (1802), *Silvana* (1810), *Abu Hassan* (1811), *Der Freischütz* (*The Freeshooter*) (1821), *Euryanthe* (1823), *Oberon, or The Elf King's Oath* (1826); orchestral works (symphonies, overtures, concertos), choral works, works for piano, chamber music, songs.

## *The Freeshooter*

### *Der Freischütz*

*Romantische Oper* in three acts

**Libretto:** Friedrich Kind.

**Première:** 18 June 1821, Berlin (Königliches Schauspielhaus).

**Characters:** Ottokar, a sovereign prince (Bar), Cuno, a hereditary forester (B), Agathe, his daughter (S), Aennchen, her relative (S), Caspar, an assistant forester (B), Max, an assistant forester (T), a Hermit (B), Kilian, a wealthy peasant (Bar), Four Bridesmaids (4 S), Samiel, the Black Huntsman (spoken); hunters, peasants, spirits, bridesmaids, attendants (chorus).

**Setting:** Bohemia, at the end of the Thirty Years War.

### *Synopsis*

“An old forester in the service of the prince wishes to see his best huntsman, Max, married to his daughter Agathe, and to pass on to him his position as chief forester. The prince agrees to the match, but an ancient law requires that Max must first pass a test of marksmanship. The hunter Caspar also has his eye on Agathe, but he is already in league with the devil. Max, usually an excellent shot, is unable to hit anything in the period leading up to his trial. In desperation, he allows himself to be persuaded by Caspar to cast what are said to be magic bullets. Six of these bullets will hit their targets, but the seventh belongs to the devil. Agathe is to be the target of this seventh shot ... Heaven decides otherwise, however, and at the marksmanship trial both Agathe and Caspar fall to the ground – the latter Satan's victim but the former only from fright. Why this happens is explained in the play, and the whole story ends happily.” (Weber in a letter to his fiancée.)

### *Act I*

**Scene 1:** Outside an inn in the Bohemian forest. Agathe, the forester's daughter, has chosen the huntsman Max for her husband, rejecting an older suitor, Caspar. But Max will only be able to win Agathe's hand – and her father's office – if he passes a test of marksmanship. The closer he gets to the day of his trial the less skillful he appears to become, until finally he seems incapable of hitting anything at all. The peasant Kilian beats Max in a competition, and Max is the object of ridicule. Why, the people ask, should this old custom even be necessary any more? Feigning friendship, Caspar offers to help his desperate colleague cast magic bullets. Six of them, he says, will hit their targets without fail, but the seventh belongs to the Evil One, the “Black Huntsman” Samiel. A human life will be the payment demanded by Samiel in

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