

## Opera in the Time of the Millennials

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My first encounter with opera opened with an orgy. Women's breasts were hanging out of their Victorian dresses like drooping flower petals as they traipsed around the room, hanging on the men and the men hanging on them, chasing after the men and the men chasing after them, laughing and screaming and obviously not very far from making love, from having sex right there on stage in front of thousands at the Royal Opera House in London. And indeed, that is what I eventually observe when a woman who throughout the scene had been clothed only in a blanket is stripped completely naked and raped on the stage. It looks like a scene out of one of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies when Jack Sparrow goes to recruit pirates for his ship from Tortuga—except with additional nudity and sexual implications that Disney would never have even considered.

But even the music, as this scene opens and the actors converge on the stage, could possibly be placed in a *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie. It bounces like something out of a carnival ride, all instruments until the Duke of Mantua arrives. His is the first voice we hear, and he begins the opera by proudly singing his indifference towards the women at the party, any of whom—all of whom—he would happily seduce. *Questa o quella?* “This one or that one?” As the rest of the play continues to expound, he doesn't care.

The opera is Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto*, though (as I learned only after I had already seen this version, directed by David McViar) most stagings of *Rigoletto* do not include the nudity that this production included. But it's one of many operas still produced and reproduced regularly across the world, as it has been since it was first performed in Venice in 1851. Now it's considered one of the classics of opera, including all that a good opera should: catchy music, misguided love, some sex and seduction, a dramatic death, characters that are psychologically complex. It's a perfect opera for those new to the genre, for those interested in seeing what opera is all about.

Or this, at least, was what one writer from *The Atlantic* said, and knowing nothing about opera myself, I took his word for it. I didn't, I felt, have too many other options. Because operas—though certainly at least similarly priced—are not like Broadway shows or other theater productions: I can't ask my friends or parents or other family members which opera is a good one to see first, which ones they've watched, which operas they like best. I know no one personally that I could talk to about opera. Not, of course, that this is unusual: in 2012 only 2.1% of Americans saw an opera; only 1.8% of people under 25 saw an opera. So the chances of me—or anybody—knowing someone who's seen an opera are slim.

Yet in the rare moments that opera comes up in popular novels or news articles, people mostly seem to rave about it: about its emotional power and musical beauty and dramatic strength. It's just that few people seem to be listening. Because when I would later hear opera ridiculed, it was mostly from those who had never actually seen it. I'd hear it ridiculed on TV shows or made fun of by teenagers: opera, they'd say, is only fat people and weird singing. This image, I knew, was a caricature, developed from other caricatures they had seen. But in today's world, there seem to

be fewer and fewer people standing up for opera and arguing against this caricature, as the people extolling the wonders of opera seem to be quietly but consistently dwindling.

And because of this, what I don't know—what I've wondered—is whether opera deserves to have people to stand up for it. Whether it's going to survive into my generation. Whether it *should* survive into my generation, especially when considering how much it costs to maintain. In 2011, for example, it was in large part due to the \$182 million in donations that the Metropolitan Opera was able to balance its budget. That's money that could be going elsewhere—that could be going to art shows and theater productions watched and enjoyed by more of the population, rather than to an art form that often seems to cater mostly to the elite, an art form whose supporters are dwindling.

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Though perhaps it is more accurate to say—not that supporters are dwindling—but that supporters are dying. Opera, though not nearly as old as most art forms, seems to have already reached its peak a little over a century or so ago, and since then its fans have gotten fewer and richer and older. In this way, at least, opera seems to be coming full circle, back to its beginning, as these kinds of fans are also the ones opera started with. At the end of the sixteenth century, when the idea of opera was born out a group of intellectuals in Italy hoping to create a new form of musical drama—something to become the ultimate art form—opera was a luxury for the few and the wealthy: the first was performed in 1598 at the marriage of King Henry IV of France, and opera remained, at its infancy, something enjoyed only by a small group of elites. While operas aren't quite at this stage yet, the price of their current productions (in some cases tickets are more than \$400 at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City) may be helping it get there.

So, perhaps, rather than reaching the end of an arc, opera's audiences today are more like operas' audiences during the mid-seventeenth century, when opera toddled into childhood as opera houses started opening in Venice, all owned by aristocrats who sold tickets pricey enough to keep out the masses a little longer. But even then—unlike today—opera was steadily getting bigger, taller, larger. Productions were becoming scaled back enough to be more commercialized, and it wasn't long before they were being exported around Europe.

By the eighteenth century, then, operas were almost the opposite of what they are today: a casual social event for almost everybody. They lasted upwards of three hours, but as actors and actresses performed on stage, audiences ambled around the aisles, talked, gossiped, ate and drank. The show would start but all the lights in the opera house would stay on, large candle-lit chandeliers illuminating the performers on the stage, the women playing cards, and the men walking down aisles as they flirted with the ladies and the spectators, who climbed onto the stage itself to better view the opera's action.

The nineteenth century did not lose this enthusiasm, but further cultivated it: the epoch brought increasingly large opera houses, an opera house in almost every Italian town, and—perhaps most importantly—two of the most well known opera composers. In 1813, Giuseppe Verdi and Wilhelm Richard Wagner were both born thousands of miles apart, Verdi in Italy and Wagner in Germany, but their achievements and corresponding legacies would often leave their names only inches or

minutes apart, commonly mentioned together as two of opera's greatest. The composers' legacies, however, came not only from the beauty or complexity of the operas they composed, but from what their operas inspired—the politics their operas shined a light on. Verdi's operas became national propaganda when Italians fought to unify their divided states into one country;; Wagner's operas were made national propaganda when used by the Nazis decades after Wagner died.

But we don't teach opera in most history classes, despite the role it played in European politics. I can remember, in high school, talking about the storming of the Bastille at the start of the French Revolution, but there was no mention of the event two days earlier when 3000 people stormed an opera house and forced it to close for nine days. We certainly didn't talk about Daniel Aubert's *La Muette de Portici*, an opera whose themes actually started a revolution when performed in Brussels in 1830, a revolution that eventually won the people their freedom. I don't even remember talking about the People's Opera, created by Roosevelt during the Great Depression in New York City to give musicians jobs and to give the people some art, some opera. I can remember a couple of days in my Western Civilizations class in high school that were devoted to art and art history, but there was no time given to the history of opera.

Instead of being discussed as history, opera, especially recently, has reenacted history. American operas did not really start gaining an audience until the twentieth century, and they are still not as well known as foreign operas, but the American operas that *have* become popular often deal with political events. One of the most popular is *Nixon in China*: an opera composed by John Adams in 1987 about President Nixon's visit to China and meeting with Chairman Mao in 1972. Another popular—and very controversial—opera of the twentieth century is *The Death of Klinghoffer*, an opera composed in 1991 (also by Adams), about the Palestinian hijacking of a cruise liner in 1985. Set on the ship, the walls behind the stage are clothed in a projection of blue waves like a waterfall, the opera following the Palestinian terrorists as they take over the ship along with the passengers on board as they lament our world: one failing to come to the rescue. “If a hundred people were murdered,” a woman sings, “and their blood flowed in the wake of this ship like oil, only then would the world intervene.” Her voice moves slowly, as though drawing the words out from the water. It is the end of the opera, and she has recently found out that her husband, Klinghoffer, has been shot by the hijackers, his body thrown over the boat.

This opera, not unlike some of those from the nineteenth century, created a ripple through one of the communities involved: whatever impression I may have about opera's insignificance in today's culture, *The Death of Klinghoffer* was deemed significant enough to yield multiple protests from the Jewish community. Klinghoffer was Jewish, and he was often verbally attacked and eventually killed for his religion by the hijackers. The Jewish community, when protesting, argued the Palestinians in the opera are too humanized, and the anti-Semitic remarks made are insulting. Not everyone who is Jewish agrees, and the opera continues to be staged, but the reaction it garnered indicates that opera maintains at least some kind of impact in our culture and country.

Indeed, today's operas often seem to be trying to garner some kind of impact or reaction from its viewers. I was frequently surprised when hearing the plots of some of the newest operas being composed, many of which deal with truly twentieth and twenty-first century problems and fears and ideas and settings. In October 2013, for example, the opera *Two Boys*, composed by Nico Muhly, premiered at the Metropolitan Opera. Another true story, *Two Boys* is about the Internet.

Or, more specifically, it's about two boys, aged 13 and 16, who met in England in 2003 in a chat room over the Internet, and it details the lies and mystery and murder that unfolded afterward. Before composing the opera, Muhly's work experience included playing keyboard with Arcade Fire and orchestrating songs for Grizzly Bear and Sigur Ros, some of today's most popular alternative bands. Now, his opera stands as a blatant lunge for the younger generations, its content making it obviously one more attempt to save opera and to keep it from dying with its current fans.

The difference, however, between my generation—the Millennial generation—and those that have come before us is that we have so many mediums of entertainment to pull from. Movies and musicals and plays make it seem like we don't need opera. We can get the drama and history of something like *The Death of Klinghoffer* from a movie like *Captain Phillips* or *Argo*. We can get musical scores to sing along to from productions like *Wicked* or *The Lion King*. We can find stories revolving around the Internet from many current movies or TV show. And we can watch dramatic romances and love stories like *Rigoletto* or most older operas from whichever romantic comedy or drama we pick out on Netflix. I wondered, then, what makes opera unique enough to keep it around—what about it makes the people who know it keep going back to it, even when other forms of entertainment may be easier to get to and cheaper to see.

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What is different about opera, opera-lovers explain, is the music; opera is about the music. Which may seem obvious. But that is to say opera is about emotion: language-less emotion that cannot be rendered into words because there aren't really words that could express it, and so music is used to express it, instead. In an opera, unlike a musical, the language and lyrics (*the libretto*, as the text of an opera is called) are second to sound.

But because music reigns supreme, the dramatic realism we're used to in today's television and movies is dropped perhaps even below language, further alienating would-be opera fans. When I first watched *Rigoletto*, it was, admittedly, somewhat difficult to get used to Gilda, one of the play's main characters, who's supposed to be a young girl but looks somewhat old. But opera often doesn't make the same kind of effort movies and TV shows do to dress or select actors that look like their roles, and performers in opera are often much better at singing than they are at acting. In an opera, that kind of traditional realism just isn't as important as the emotional realism the music achieves.

The emotional realism, however, is very real. Performers, for example, will sometimes sing different words with different moods simultaneously to convey the conflicting emotions of their characters. In spoken dramas—or even, often, in musicals—you would rarely hear two people speaking at the same time. If there are two characters each experiencing a different emotion, the two emotions would have to be conveyed either at the same time through actions and appearance, or at two separate times through language.

In opera, however, various emotions can be expressed vocally all at once, because it doesn't matter if the words becomes garbled or jumbled or lost or twisted and braided into one another. The words themselves may be meaningless, but their meaning is dissolved into the harmony of the music; the sounds of the words create an auditory image of the emotion. It contributes to the emotional

realism: people, after all, do not experience emotions in isolated snapshots. Rather, they experience emotions all at once, multiple people perhaps standing together but each feeling and experiencing something unique. In a movie, we'll often see these emotions separately, each character expressing his or her emotion in a different shot or scene. But with opera, the emotions can be expressed simultaneously just as they are experienced simultaneously, more accurately depicting the chaos and variation of human emotions.

I got to see this in the last scene of *Rigoletto*: Rigoletto, Gilda, the Duke and Maddalena, each voice adding to the other but each singing something different, *feeling* something different. Rigoletto's low baritone voice consoles his daughter Gilda as she leans despairingly against a door and sings about her anguish while listening to the Duke's tenor voice, the man she loves, seduce and sing to Maddalena who returns the Duke's "love" and sings about her own. The words melt into one another, but they also melt the barriers between the audience and the performers. Even as I write this, I've been listening to the short scene repeatedly, playing it and then playing it again, and in a way it takes me out of myself: into the rushed confusion of so many emotions, into the very human minds of all four of these characters. It's sung entirely in Italian and because it is without subtitles, I have little clue as to the specific words they sing, but there isn't really a need for the subtitles or the exact words. Everything seems quite clear without them.

In many ways, music allows for something that speech doesn't. Even outside of opera, it seems to affect people in a way simply speaking may not be able to. Personally, a song's effect can be extraordinary, sometimes taking me out of stupors or at other times putting me in them, often folding me into the mood of the soundtrack. Thomas Moser, an American opera singer, was attracted to music because he had always had a difficult time expressing thoughts and emotions, but with music he "found a craft with which [he] could express those things and [he] found within that craft a language and that was singing." Music, thus, provides a kind of forum for emotions. This, however, is particularly the case in opera; in opera, after all, music is everything.

There have been many studies, particularly recently, investigating this connection between emotion and music. Although the studies look at music in general, rather than opera, the same principles and neurological processes likely apply. Recently, studies have shown that, like with language, we are wired from birth with the ability to process music. And like with almost every mental process, multiple parts of the brain are involved. One of the most significant components involved, however—at least in the connection between music and emotion—is the nucleus accumbens: the component of the brain that releases dopamine, a chemical associated with pleasure that we release during meals and sex.

Dopamine is also released, studies have found, while listening to music. Neuroscientist Valorie Salimpoor is one of the leading scholars on the science of music, and while her and her co-researchers' findings are not entirely conclusive, this connection between dopamine and music is just one of their recent discoveries. Neuroscientists already discovered that dopamine is released when we expect a reward—when we make predictions that expect such a reward. Thus scholars such as Valimpoor have been led to theorize that music, similarly, is related to predictions and outcomes. As we listen to a song, we start making predictions as to what is going to happen next: we use what we know about a specific type of music genre to unconsciously envision future notes. This, then, leads to a sense of anticipation. Eventually, as the music unfolds and our expectations

are either confirmed or denied, we experience emotion (and the brain releases dopamine) based on that prediction: based on whether the music exceeded our expectations, or was worse than what we expected.

This also explains why people like certain types of music—and why people may not like opera. If Salimpoor's findings are correct, people's tastes in music are acquired as they're exposed to more songs in a particular genre or form. When you listen to a type of music you haven't heard before (or at least haven't heard often), you don't have the templates to make predictions regarding where the music will go, and thus can't fully appreciate it;; when you don't make any predictions, you can't have your predictions exceeded. I know, personally, the evolution of my taste in music adheres to this kind of thinking: as I started to listen to indie music, there were many songs I heard that left me bored and unengaged—that I didn't even think were very good. But as I continued listening to the genre, I began to find that the songs I'd found uninteresting before were suddenly some of my favorites. Even now, as I listen to and watch opera, I've realized that the more I listen, the more I like it. Beginning *Rigoletto*, I would get distracted easily, and I thought the music was okay but not particularly catchy. I'd turn the opera on and then I'd turn it off, watching it in parts on my computer. But by the time I had finished, I was humming the tune to one of the songs as I brushed my teeth in the bathroom, and now I turn the opera on occasionally just for background music.

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And yet, I continue to have a difficult time getting through a full opera, at least all at once. They're easy to stream on my computer off the Internet, but difficult to watch in a single run, without pausing or getting distracted. And it's even more difficult to get to an actual opera in an opera house. I've looked around, tried to find some, but have been constrained either by price or by timing; operas are not being performed everywhere, or often. The Washington National Opera in DC isn't performing another opera until early May—nearly two months from when I write this in March.

But for all the people who say opera is dying, there are those who say it's steady—albeit not strong. Indeed, in other parts of the world, opera is doing alright: while the Metropolitan Opera in New York filled 80% of their seats in 2014, the Vienna State Opera in Austria filled 98% of their seats; La Scala in Italy filled 95% of their seats; the Royal Opera House in London also filled 95% of their seats. Alex Beard, chief executive at the Royal Opera, even believes that “opera is on a roll.” Opera houses may not be as popular as movie theaters in these other countries, but opera at least has more of a following than it does in the U.S., demonstrating that opera is, indeed, not completely dead, and can still be relevant in the modern day. However, this is still not to say that opera in other countries are not at all worried about their following; even in Italy, the birthplace of opera, managers aren't often staging new works, and opera goers aren't often of the younger generation.

Thus, opera fans and managers of opera houses have been experimenting with ways to extend opera's audience and pick up newcomers—to introduce the genre to anyone who hasn't previously been introduced. In 2004, for instance, BBC produced an opera during rush hour at a train station in London, even broadcasting the performance on one of their stations. It was called *Flashmob the*

*Opera*, free to all in the train station at the time or anyone watching it on their television, and was very much a beginner's opera, comprising some of the most famous arias of opera.

To make sure people could continue listening and watching even as they moved away from the performers to catch a train, televisions throughout the station showed the performers live. And for those who did not have to rush out, people could watch feet in front of them as a middle-aged woman lugged around a suitcase and sang about her anger towards her husband for loving sports more than his wife; they could listen to another idler at the train station try to woo her; they could listen to her husband sing to his wife as he tried to win her back. All with the backdrop of the train station, the people milling and rushing about, the announcements in the background, the trains and the audience arriving, then departing, then arriving. It was a new kind of opera—a new kind of theater.

And it's not the only recent innovation producers have tried with opera. The Washington National Opera, for example, is playing their upcoming opera in May for free at the National's ballpark on the large television screens in the stadium. And the Met started a trend recently by streaming their operas in HD to movie theaters around the world. While tickets cost more than a regular movie, they're still much less than a ticket to the actual opera house itself, and often have the added convenience of being a bit closer to viewers' homes than the Met is.

But the people taking advantage of this are still often not the people the Met needs. Seventy five percent of their cinema audience is over age 65, and thirty percent is over age 75. And now the Metropolitan Opera, one of the largest operas in the world, was just last year on the verge of bankruptcy—just a year after the New York City Opera (also known as the People's Opera, created during the Great Depression) filed for bankruptcy and shut down. And with attendance at only 80%, incredibly expensive sets, and performers to pay, the Met is still in danger of becoming bankrupt; expenses are extensive but not often recouped through ticket sales. It's why such large outside donations as mentioned earlier are required. And it does not speak well of opera's future in the U.S.

Opera, of course, doesn't need to reach everybody, either to stay alive or to be worth its expense. It's an art form: like literature, like poetry, like musical theater, like Shakespeare, it's never going to have every American watching or enjoying or loving it, and that doesn't make it insubstantial. Opera doesn't need every American, or every teenager. It doesn't need me.

It does, however, need more than it currently has.

And opera *can*, I think, find those additional audience members. Shakespeare's plays, as just one example, are much older than most operas, even more difficult for the common American to understand, with characters just as outdated as many of operas' characters—but they're still performed regularly, seen regularly, read regularly, taught regularly in schools. Obviously, then, just because an art form is old or set in the past does not mean it isn't still worth something in the modern day and cannot have many modern fans. Thus, if opera doesn't maintain its audience like Shakespeare plays do, I have to believe it's more the fault of opera producers before it's the fault of opera. It's the fault of expensive opera tickets, of opera's limited availability, of our culture that

thinks of opera as antiquated and tedious—our culture whose view is not challenged as it needs to be for the perception to change.

It'll take more, however, than what opera houses have done already. What they've done is innovative and expansive, but it's not enough. It's hard, of course, to say what would be enough—or, rather, if there even *is* something that can be done that would be enough. They would need advertisements that reach the younger generations, my generation. They would need to shorten some of their productions to make them more appealing to the often busy public, who don't have time for a four hour opera. They would need to decrease the price of tickets—or, really, they would need to decrease the price of production, so they'd be able to afford decreasing the price of tickets. In 2014, the Met spent \$169,000 on a poppy field set for one of their operas; things like that aren't necessary, and are simply expenses further pushing modern, middle class Americans out of opera houses by forcing increases in ticket prices.

There's one other change that could (or should) be implemented, though it is possibly the most difficult—though also, possibly, the most rewarding. That is: the introduction of opera into schools, perhaps even into school curriculae. It was, in fact, my own quick introduction to it during an English class that sparked my initial interest in opera. Obviously, however, this wouldn't be an easy thing to do—possibly it's not even a realistic consideration. It would require finding classes to teach it in and instructors who understand it, and the lessons would likely have to extend past elementary music classes to have a real effect; it would have to make its way into high schools to find people old enough to appreciate and understand it. And teaching it would take away from time teaching other disciplines or skills. But increased exposure through something like a school may be a must to keep opera alive. As Salimpour observed, you need to listen to a style of music fairly often before you can appreciate it. Perhaps, then, if Americans are only exposed to the music more often—even if not the entire opera—they will come to like it and will want to save it. Play the music in schools, in elevators, in restaurants, or, if possible, convince people to actually watch an opera—even just one, in their home on their television—and they'll get to know the music and admire it;; perhaps they'll even realize they enjoy it.

And, perhaps, they'll come to realize that just because opera isn't what they're used to doesn't mean they can't get used to it, and doesn't mean it should be allowed to die with its current fans;; they'll come to realize opera provides a depth they don't otherwise often find in art and other forms of entertainment. Because in a culture where everything moves quickly, where attention spans last only a few minutes and relationships get lost behind screens and emotions get pushed to the side, opera forces us to stop and to recognize the complexity of relationships. It reveals to us the complexity and depth of human emotion.

Movies, these days, seem to offer us mostly happy endings, or they are fast-paced and fast-moving and jump over emotions and relationships to get to that action, that car chase, that shoot out. Opera, however, does not shy away from tragedy. It draws the emotions out. It spins out feelings in elaborate loops and lines and jagged spikes. It gives us productions like *Rigoletto*, with its ending that is not at all happy or quiet or understated but instead explosive in its tragedy, in its raw wretchedness like scraped bone. And opera allows, then, the audience to experience the emotions of the characters in full, and to recognize the intricacy of that emotion—an understanding that connects the audience to the characters in a way movies and TV shows and other theater



productions don't. It allows us, in fact, to connect to other humans in a way our lives often don't. Because what is inexpressible in words, opera expresses. What is private in our lives, opera shares. The emotional realism of opera connects, for a few hours, each individual watching, both to the other audience members and to the performers. And even Millennials—in this era where relationships are made and lost as easily as wifi connections—feel deeply and think deeply and need those kinds of deep connections with others to feel less lonely, and to understand that they are not on their own in what they feel.

Opera, after all, is art. It inspires, it upsets, it energizes, it excites, it depresses, it arouses its viewers' deepest emotions, its viewers' appreciation for beauty and sense of collective humanity. It expresses what could not otherwise be expressed. It deserves to be saved.

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In the last act of *Rigoletto*, Gilda sacrifices herself for the Duke: for this man she loves, for this man who raped her, who doesn't love her, who goes from one woman to the next and then the next, who she knows perfectly well doesn't love her and never has loved her, despite what lies he may have once told. But she knocks on the door of the assassin, knowing when she does she'll be stabbed, but also knowing if she doesn't the assassin will kill the Duke. So she sings: *Ah, s'egli al mio amore divenne rubello, io vo' per la sua gettar la mia vita*. "Ah, even if he betrayed my love I shall save his life with my own!" *Perdona tu, o padre, a quest'infelice! Sia l'uomo felice ch'or vado a salvar*. "Father, forgive your unhappy child! May the man I am saving be happy." The music, like her time left, runs quickly, and it crescendos as she commits to the decision to die.

So she knocks on the door; she is stabbed. Eventually, she dies in the arms of her father, the hunchbacked Rigoletto. He holds her, sitting on the ground beside her, clutching the fabric of her shirt around her stab wound, wiping his face with her blood that has gotten on his hands. He sings: *Se t'involi, qui sol rimarrei. Non morire, o ch'io teco morirò!* "If you go away, I shall be alone! Do not die, or I shall die beside you!" The music moves with his emotions: his singing is at one moment quick, loud, swallowing the opera house and the audience in its rage like a stage light. And then, very suddenly, it is slow and soft, something with a texture like moths, and he despairs: his singing weeps. Gilda, almost dead but not quite, sings but her voice even then is otherworldly, already not of this Earth: it is high and steady while she consoles—not her dying self—but the anguished father beside her.

Soon, however, Gilda's eyes close; her head droops back slowly towards the ground, as if falling into water. And one last time, Rigoletto sings: he cries out. He grabs his daughter's lifeless body and he pulls her into him, he shakes her, he weeps. The curtains close; the screen goes black.

## Notes

¶1, 2: *Rigoletto*. Dir. David McVicar. Opus Arte, 2002. DVD.

I checked this out from the Katzen music library, or (as I realized later) it can also be streamed on your computer through the library's search database, as can many other operas.

¶3, 4: Plotkin, Fred. “Learning to Love Opera: 'Rigoletto'.” *The Atlantic*. 22 Sep 2014. Web. 20 Feb. 2015.

“While I could never say what the best opera is, and seldom reveal what my favorite one is, I have no doubt the Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto* is the perfect work for someone sticking a toe in operatic waters. And yet it also never fails to move even the most experienced operagoer with the freshness of its music and a story that is both accessible and psychologically complex.”

¶ 4: Wisniewski, Mary. “Opera strives to strike a chord with U.S. youth.” *Reuters*. 28 Jan. 2015. Web. 17 Mar. 2015.

“Nationally just 2.1 percent of Americans saw an opera in 2012, down from 3.2 percent in 2002, according to the National Endowment for the Arts. The generational news is worse. Among those under the age of 25, just 1.8 percent saw an opera in 2012 compared to 3.3 percent for those aged 65-74.”

¶ 6: Walkin, Daniel and Kevin Flynn. “A Metropolitan Opera High Note, as Donations Hit \$182 Million.” *The New York Times*. 10 Oct. 2011. Web. 23 Mar. 2015.

“According to preliminary figures released for the first time, the Met hauled in \$182 million, an astonishing amount in a tough economic climate and 50 percent more than it raised just the year before.”

¶ 7: Wisniewski, Mary. “Opera strives to strike a chord with U.S. youth.” *Reuters*. 28 Jan. 2015. Web. 17 Mar. 2015.

““There's a concern that if we see a lot of senior citizens, what happens when they pass away and who will fill those seats?” said Cayenne Harris, manager of Chicago's ‘Lyric Unlimited’ outreach program at the city's 61-year-old Lyric Opera.”

¶ 7: Wilson, Alexandra. “A Brief History of Opera.” *Opera: Beginner’s Guide*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2010. Print.

For a more detailed history of opera, start here.

¶ 7: *The Birth and Life of Opera. Films On Demand*. Films Media Group, 1999. Web. 27 Feb. 2015.

Or start here, if you would rather watch something than read something.

¶ 7: “The 2014-15 Season.” *The Metropolitan Opera*. Web. 17 Mar. 2015.

Depending on where you choose to sit, tickets for an evening Saturday showing of *Manon* range from \$27 (in the family seating at the very top of the opera house) to \$460.

¶ 8: Wilson, Alexandra. "A Brief History of Opera." *Opera: Beginner's Guide*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2010. Print.

¶ 9: "18th Century Opera." *Victoria and Albert Museum*. Web. 17 Mar. 2015.

"Theatres were noisy, chaotic places and the aim was to see and be seen. The stage and the auditorium were lit from great chandeliers that hung from the ceiling and the audience was as visible as the performers. Audiences would chat, walk around and play games."

¶ 10: Wilson, Alexandra. "Opera and Politics." *Opera: Beginner's Guide*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2010. Print.

¶ 11: Rabb, Theodore. "Introduction: Opera, Musicology, and History." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36.3 (2006). 321-330. The MIT Press. Web. 27 Feb 2015.

¶ 11: Beha, Christopher. "Supernumerary: Onstage with the People's Opera." *Harper's Magazine*. March 2011. Web. 1 Mar. 2015.

"City Opera grew out of the Depression, when Roosevelt's WPA Music Project created orchestras, putting unemployed musicians to work throughout the country playing twenty-five-cent concerts."

¶ 12: "Synopsis of Nixon in China." *The Metropolitan Opera*. Web. 21 Mar. 2015.

¶ 12: Bayoumi, Moustafa, Kayla Epstein, Alan Yugas, and Eli Valley. "We took four New Yorkers to The Death of Klinghoffer: what was their verdict?" *The Guardian*. 21 Oct. 2014. Web. 18 Mar. 2015.

"If this opera has a purpose, it's to force its viewers to hear and experience perspectives that they wouldn't ordinarily listen to, and in fact may be determinedly avoiding." "And then Leon Klinghoffer is murdered, and the people in the audience, on the ship, silently gasp, because the tragedy on stage is as real as it is horrifying, heartbreaking history, and it is art."

¶ 13: Meyer, Robinson. "Finally, an Art Form That Gets the Internet: Opera." *The Atlantic*. 30 Oct. Web. 16 Mar. 2015.

"Nico Muhly, its composer, is 32, the youngest musician ever commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera. You have probably heard his music: He scored the film *The Reader*, played keyboards with the Arcade Fire on *Saturday Night Live*, orchestrated songs for albums by Grizzly Bear and Sigur Rós's Jónsi."

¶ 15: Tommasini, Anthony. "Opera? Musical? Please Respect the Difference." *The New York Times*. 7 July 2011. Web. 25 Feb 2015.

"But in opera, music is the driving force;; in musical theater, words come first."

¶ 16: Simon, Henry W. "It is Opera, But is it Grand? Beauty in Opera." *New York Times (1923-Current file)*: 137. Nov 17 1946. ProQuest. Web. 27 Feb. 2015.

"Liberal realism is a poor thing compared to an emotional realism so strong it carries the audience into articulate appreciation."

"Opera tells us best how people feel" while spoken drama "tells us best what people do."

¶ 20: Scherer, Klaus. "The Singer's Paradox: On Authenticity in Emotional Expression on the Opera Stage." *The Emotional Power of Music*. Oxford University Press, 2013. Print.

¶ 21: Zuccarini, Carlo. "Hearing Voices: Neuropsychanalysis And Opera." *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 35.2 (2010): 154-165. Academic Search Alumni Edition. Web. 27 Feb. 2015.

"Research indicates that we are born with the ability to process music, just as we are born with the ability to acquire language (Patel 2008a, 361). Language and music processing appear to involve closely-related cognitive and neural systems."

¶ 21, 22, 23: Salimpoor, Valorie N. "Predictions and the Brain: How Musical Sounds Become Rewarding." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 19.2 (2015). Web. 15 Mar. 2015.

An overview of Salimpoor's findings can also be found in a Time article by Michael Lemonick called "Why Your Brain Craves Music." Salimpoor has published many articles about her findings, though this is one of the most recent.

¶ 24: "Opera." *The Kennedy Center*. Web. 22 Mar. 2015.

From May 9 to May 21 they'll be staging *Cinderella*. After this, they won't be performing another opera until September, when they'll stage *Carmen*.

¶ 25: Service, Tom and Maev Kennedy. "New York's Met opera house on edge of precipice, says Peter Gelb." *The Guardian*. 6 Jun. 2014. Web. 22 Mar. 2015.

¶ 25: Kimmelman, Michael. "In Italy, a compact attempt to save a dying art." *The New York Times*. 13 Nov 2007. Web. 31 Mar 2015.

"Young Italians don't go to operas... and new productions are rare."

¶ 26: Wilson, Alexandra. "Opera On and Offstage." *Opera: Beginner's Guide*. Oxford: Oneworld, Print.

¶ 27: "Washington National Opera: M&M'S(r) Opera in the Outfield Simulcast: *Cinderella*." *The Kennedy Center*. Web. 22 Mar. 2015.

It's taking place on May 16 at 7:00 PM, open to the public, lasting about three hours. Activities and entertainment will be available beforehand; kids are encouraged to dress up, and can parade around the outfield in their costumes if they come.

¶ 27: Service, Tom and Maev Kennedy. "New York's Met opera house on edge of precipice, says Peter Gelb." *The Guardian*. 6 Jun. 2014. Web. 22 Mar. 2015.

"The HD cinema broadcasts, which beam to 2,000 cinemas in 66 countries 'in every continent apart from Antarctica', are Gelb's most famous innovation. It has inspired every opera company worth its salt to roll out similar schemes and on the surface could hardly be more successful, allowing more people simultaneously to be part of a live operatic experience than ever before – as well as, arguably, creating a new, hybrid art form of opera and cinema."

¶ 28: Service, Tom and Maev Kennedy. "New York's Met opera house on edge of precipice, says Peter Gelb." *The Guardian*. 6 Jun. 2014. Web. 22 Mar. 2015.

"The Met's much vaunted innovation of HD live broadcasts to cinemas... is merely entertaining an existing and dwindling audience, [Peter Gelb, general manager of the Met] says, rather than creating a new one."

¶ 32: Service, Tom and Maev Kennedy. "New York's Met opera house on edge of precipice, says Peter Gelb." *The Guardian*. 6 Jun. 2014. Web. 22 Mar. 2015.

"Box office receipts are flatlining, and seat occupancy was down to 80% in the most recent season, while costs are soaring: the opera recently spent \$169,000 (£100,000) on a spectacular poppy field set for a new production of Borodin's Prince Igor."

¶ 35, 36: "'Rigoletto' by Giuseppe Verdi libretto." *DM's Opera Site*. Web. 22 Mar. 2014 This website includes both the original Italian libretto and the translation into English for *Rigoletto*.