

EXPLANATION 3.2: THE FLORENTINE CAMERATA. THE BIRTH OF OPERA. RECITATIVE STYLE

THE FLORENTINE CAMERATA

Girolamo Mei, a Florentine intellectual and scholar of Greek music, was convinced that in the theater of ancient Greece all the text was sung. These ideas he transmitted to a group of intellectuals with whom he held literary gatherings and who met together around Count Bardi in Florence. They were poets, musicians and humanists. This group, known as the Florentine Camerata, promoted the reevaluation of Greek music and tried to imitate what they believed was the music of the ancient Greek theater.

This type of music, according to them, should be monodic (a single melodic voice) and accompanied instrumentally, because only a melodic voice with its correct pitch and intonation could perfectly express the poetic line and the emotional message of the text. Polyphony, on the other hand, could not do it in the same way because it created an unintelligible chaos with their voices superimposed onto each other. Musicians such as Vincenzo Galilei (father of Galileo Galilei), Giulio Caccini, Jacopo Peri and the poet Ottavio Rinuccini, among others, belonged to the Camerata Fiorentina.

THE FIRSTS OPERAS

The opera is a drama (acting) that combines soliloquies, dialogues, music, scenes and action. The association between music and drama dates back to ancient Greece and in the Middle Ages, the liturgical dramas represented biblical scenes, and in the Renaissance the "intermedi," which were short interludes (fragments) of a pastoral or mythological type, were represented between acts of a play, weddings or celebrations. In the Baroque period, music and drama would be developed through opera. The opera is a musicalized drama.

Already in the Renaissance period some composers of madrigals had used dramatic motifs in their madrigals, trying to represent some feelings in the text (tears, laughter, etc). For the composers of the 1600s, such as Peri, Caccini and Monteverdi, the voice accompanied by instruments was the ideal medium to develop what later would be called opera.

The first operas, "Eurydice" by Peri and Caccini (they composed it together) and "Rappresentatione anima et di corpo" by Emilio de Cavalieri date back to 1600. Subsequently, both Peri and Caccini published their own versions of "Eurydice". Opera is born with these mythological based works.

In 1607, Claudio Monteverdi, who knew the work of Peri and Caccini, published in Mantua (Italy) an opera in five acts called "Orfeo". This opera which had many more instruments than the previous ones is considered the first important baroque opera, although the first ever opera, now lost for except a few music fragments and its text, was Daphne, by Peri.

RECITATIVE STYLE

The operas of this early period used a style of singing that was halfway between singing and recited. The style was called recitative and was chosen by Peri and Caccini to create their first operas. With this style, composers could express the emotions in the text. The text of both versions of the opera "Eurydice" is by the poet Ottavio Rinuccini.

COMPREHENSION TEXT QUESTIONS

1. What did Girolamo Mei transmit to his friends?
2. What professions had the intellectuals who met at Bardi's? Name 3 components of the Florentine Camerata.
3. With what name is the group of intellectuals friends of Bardi known?
4. What did the Florentine Camerata revalue?
5. What characteristics should opera music have in the days of the Florentine Camerata?
6. What elements mix the opera?
7. What is the furthest antecedent of the opera?
8. What were biblical "theatrical" performances called?
9. What were the "intermedi" and at what time were they palyed?
10. What elements of the Renaissance madrigal represent dramatic actions?
11. Name the first two operas, not the lost one.
12. Which one was the most important opera from the musical point of view at the beginning of the Baroque period? Name who composed it.
13. What is the peculiarity of the recitative style?
14. Why was this style chosen and not one sung entirely?
15. Who was Rinuccini? Who was Eurydice?