

# Opera As Drama: A Comprehensive Exploration by Joseph Kerman

Opera, the captivating art form that seamlessly blends music, drama, and spectacle, has captivated audiences for centuries. With its rich tapestry of vocal performances, elaborate sets, and dramatic storylines, opera has the power to both entertain and profoundly move.

In his seminal work, "Opera As Drama," renowned musicologist Joseph Kerman delves deeply into the intricate relationship between music and drama in opera. Kerman argues that opera is fundamentally a dramatic form, with music serving as a powerful tool for expressing characters' emotions, advancing the plot, and creating a captivating theatrical experience.



## Opera As Drama by Joseph Kerman

★★★★☆ 4.8 out of 5

Language	: English
File size	: 5532 KB
Text-to-Speech	: Enabled
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
Word Wise	: Enabled
Screen Reader	: Supported
Print length	: 298 pages
X-Ray for textbooks	: Enabled
Paperback	: 24 pages
Item Weight	: 2.88 ounces
Dimensions	: 8.5 x 0.06 x 11 inches

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## The Birth of Opera: A Tale of Musical Excess



The origins of opera can be traced back to the late 16th century in Florence, Italy. At the time, a group of experimental musicians and intellectuals known as the Florentine Camerata sought to revive the ancient Greek concept of music as an integral part of drama. They believed that music could enhance the emotional impact of words and elevate the theatrical experience to new heights.

The Florentine Camerata's experiments resulted in the creation of the first operas, such as Claudio Monteverdi's "Orfeo" (1607). These early operas were characterized by their excessive use of vocal ornamentation and complex musical structures. However, Kerman argues that this musical complexity often overshadowed the dramatic elements and hindered the operas' effectiveness as theatrical works.

## The Rise of the Dramatic Opera: Gluck and Mozart



In the 18th century, opera underwent a significant transformation. Composers such as Christoph Willibald Gluck and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart recognized the need to strike a balance between musical complexity and dramatic effectiveness.

In his influential work "Orfeo ed Euridice" (1762), Gluck championed the idea that music should serve the drama, not overwhelm it. He simplified the musical texture, reduced the use of ornamentation, and focused on creating a more emotionally resonant and theatrically engaging experience.

Mozart, building upon Gluck's reforms, further refined the relationship between music and drama in operas such as "Don Giovanni" (1787) and "The Marriage of Figaro" (1786). Mozart's music deftly captures the

characters' emotions, advances the plot, and creates a seamless integration between the musical and dramatic elements.

## **The Bel Canto Era: Virtuosity and Sentiment**



The early 19th century witnessed the rise of the bel canto era, a period characterized by its emphasis on vocal virtuosity and emotional intensity. Composers such as Gioachino Rossini, Vincenzo Bellini, and Gaetano Donizetti created operas that showcased the extraordinary vocal talents of their singers.

While the bel canto operas were highly popular, Kerman argues that they often sacrificed dramatic coherence for vocal display. The elaborate vocal ornamentation and lengthy recitatives could sometimes overshadow the plot and hinder the emotional connection between the audience and the characters.

## Verdi and Wagner: The Revolutionaries





In the mid-19th century, two towering figures emerged in the operatic landscape: Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Wagner. Both composers sought to revolutionize opera and create works that were both musically compelling and dramatically powerful.

Verdi's operas, such as "Aida" (1871) and "Otello" (1887), are known for their thrilling dramatic narratives, soaring melodies, and unforgettable characters. Verdi's music is visceral and emotionally charged, perfectly capturing the passions and struggles of his characters.

Wagner, on the other hand, took a more radical approach to opera. He believed that opera should be a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or "total work of art," in which all elements of the production—music, drama, poetry, and visual design—were seamlessly integrated.

## The 20th Century: Opera in an Age of Innovation



The 20th century witnessed a proliferation of new and experimental approaches to opera. Composers such as Alban Berg, Igor Stravinsky, and Benjamin Britten pushed the boundaries of the genre, incorporating elements of atonality, serialism, and electronic music.

These avant-garde operas challenged traditional notions of beauty and accessibility. They explored complex psychological themes, employed unconventional musical structures, and often employed multimedia elements to create immersive and thought-provoking theatrical experiences.

Opera, as Joseph Kerman so eloquently argues, is a uniquely powerful art form that marries the expressive power of music with the dramatic intensity

of theater. Through its rich history, opera has evolved and transformed, reflecting the changing aesthetic sensibilities and cultural contexts of its time.

Whether it is the lavish spectacle of a Baroque opera, the emotional intensity of a bel canto masterpiece, or the innovative explorations of the 20th century, opera continues to captivate audiences around the world. It is a testament to the enduring power of art to move, inspire, and ignite the human imagination.



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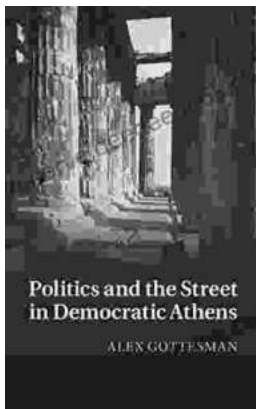






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