

17th c. French Opera (called “*tragédie en musique*” or “*tragédie lyrique*”)

Distinguishing Characteristics

- I. Dominated by one composer: Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687)
State sponsored under monopolistic privilege, owned and operated by Lully
Institution is called *Académie Royale de Musique*
(later referred to simply as the *Opéra*)
Under royal sponsorship of King Louis XIV
- II. Influenced by earlier *ballets de cours* (court ballets), *comédies-lyriques* or *comédies-ballets* and *divertissements*

<i>ballets de cours:</i>	like Florentine <i>intermedi</i> , spectacles combining stagecraft, costumes, choral song, dance etc., but particularly emphasizing dance performed at court, often with central role for King, who was a skilled dancer
<i>comédies-lyriques/ comédies-ballets</i>	Shared many aspects of <i>ballets de cours</i> , but had plots and spoken drama; these were a hybrid of sorts between ballets de cours and opera influences
<i>divertissements</i>	choral song/dance numbers within above; the big budget musical extravaganza, but only loosely related, if at all, to a plot
- III. Accompanied by string orchestra, descendent of the *Vingt-quatre Violons du Roi* (Twenty-Four Violins of the King)
Different sizes of violin family, distributed in five parts, with a treble/bass dominated structure and three inner voices filling in the chords
- IV. Included an *ouverture* (overture), an instrumental introduction in two parts, each repeating, the first one stately and full of dotted rhythms, the second one faster and often imitative in performance, standard to play even eighth notes in uneven rhythm, like “swing” eighth notes, or even more unequal than that
standard term for this: “*notes inégales*”
- V. Introduced style of recitative particular to French opera
derived from stylized stage speech of French spoken drama

<i>récitatif simple:</i>	more tuneful, rhythmically steadier than Italian rec. to match stress patterns of French the time signature was considered flexible and could freely shift from duple to triple to quadruple
<i>récitatif mesuré:</i>	in stricter time
- VI. Always included lots of dance numbers! (*divertissements*)

English “opera” in the 17th century: distinguishing characteristics

Opera not cultivated as it was in Italy or France

1. Like French, the English resistant to sung drama; couldn't really understand dramatic motivation
2. The monarchy had politically limited power, a situation which developed throughout the 17th century, and thus did not have the power or cash to support big budget entertainment on the scale of the French monarchy
3. Unlike Italians, no development of public opera either; the Puritan government which governed England in the middle of the 17th century banned stage plays entirely

So what was there?

Masques, similar to French court ballets, were cultivated at court since 16th century included spoken dialogue, musical numbers, dance and costumes

Opera mainly existed as private entertainments

Only infrequently produced and never spawned a continuous tradition

Main examples of English opera in 17th century:

Venus and Adonis (1683) by John Blow (1649-1708)

Dido and Aeneas (1689) by Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

compared to Italian and French operas, *Dido* is on a very condensed, small scale:

only four roles

only three acts

French influences: included Lullian overture

Italian influences: inclusion of arias, including Italian touches like descending tetrachord for lament “When I am laid in earth”
text painting, although in English

English traits: use of “airs”; more singable, diatonic and simpler than French or Italian solo singing
prominent use of dramatic dance, as in masque