

ROMANTIC OPERA

NO MORE RECITATIVE!

GIOACHINO ROSSINI

GOLDEN BOY OF EARLY ROMANTIC OPERA

SOME BIO TIDBITS

- ❖ 1792 - 1868
- ❖ Compositional career about 1810 - 1829.
- ❖ Went into retirement by 1830.



SOME BIO TIDBITS

- ❖ Fantastically successful commercially.
- ❖ Created 39 operas in a 19 years compositional career— just about 2 per year.
- ❖ Tended to “recycle” bits and pieces of failed shows into later ones. (Overtures, in particular, tended to wander around.)

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SOME BIO TIDBITS

- ❖ Decided to retire in 1829; he had enough money to live comfortably for the rest of his life.
- ❖ Established a *salon* in Paris, became a renowned host.



SOME BIO TIDBITS

- ❖ Legendary for his laziness as well as his compositional speed.
- ❖ Liked to compose in bed, and once wrote an entirely new aria because the one he was working on slipped out of his hand and fell on the floor.



ROSSINI QUOTES

- ❖ On Mozart: “the admiration of my youth, the desperation of my mature years, and the consolation of my old age.”

ROSSINI QUOTES

- ❖ “I have just received a Stilton and a cantata from Cipriani Potter. The cheese was very good.”

ROSSINI QUOTES

- ❖ On Richard Wagner: “Wagner has some fine moments but some bad quarters of an hour.”

ROSSINI QUOTES

- ❖ On Berlioz's *Fantastic Symphony*: "What a good thing it isn't music."

BEL CANTO OPERA

- ❖ Singing and singers were everything.
- ❖ They were meant to be entertaining, and had no message.
- ❖ The singing style descended from the castrati, with a modern twist in that females as well as male were now the stars.

BEL CANTO OPERA

- ❖ Arias consisted of two parts:
 - ❖ Cavatina
 - ❖ Slow and lyric; shows off the singer's ability to sustain a line.
 - ❖ Cabaletta
 - ❖ Showy and fast; shows off the singer's virtuosity.

BEL CANTO OPERA

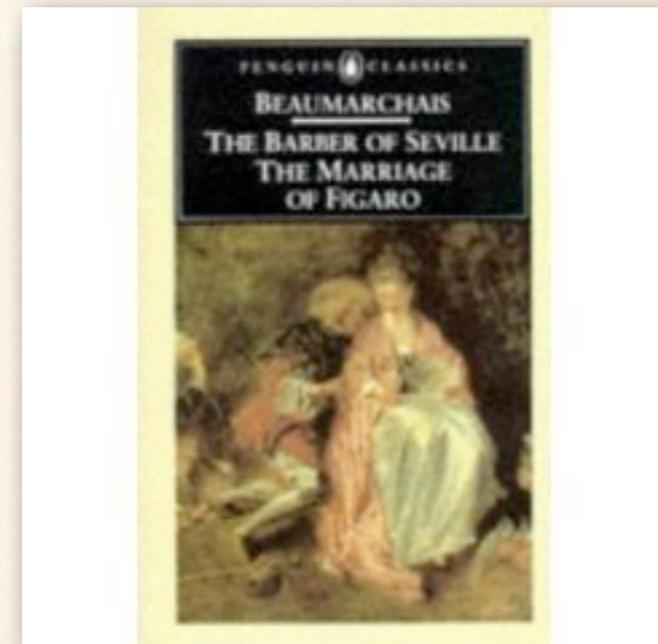
- ❖ The ideal was technique and taste combined.
- ❖ This ideal was seldom met; most singers (and composers) aimed for technique.
- ❖ Rossini spent most of his professional life fighting the tastelessness of his singers.

ROSSINI'S STYLE

- ❖ Melody, melody, and more melody.
- ❖ Brilliant orchestration—sometimes amazingly so given the less-than-ideal circumstances in which he worked.
- ❖ The “Rossini crescendo” is a feature found in many of his overtures. This example is from “La Cenerentola” (Cinderella).

THE BARBER OF SEVILLE

- ❖ The story (prequel to “The Marriage of Figaro”) had already been set by Paisiello.
- ❖ Rossini used more or less the same libretto.

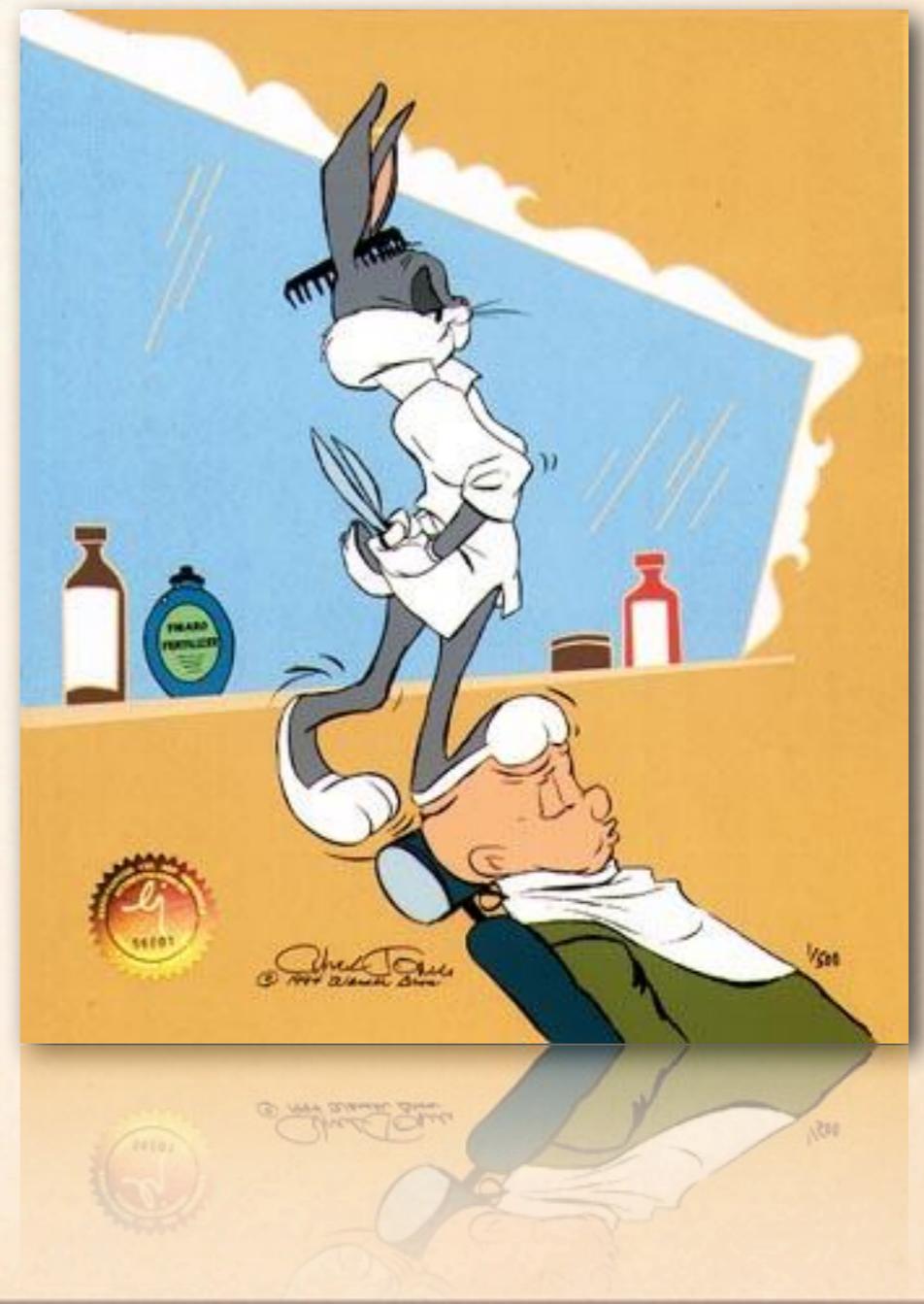


THE BARBER OF SEVILLE

- ❖ A colossal failure at its premiere (1816).
- ❖ Seems to have been the production, which was filled with mistakes.
- ❖ The story has it that Rossini wept only twice in his lifetime: once at the premiere of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, and the other at a picnic when the truffled chicken fell into the river.

THE BARBER OF SEVILLE

- ❖ Became a superb success very quickly.
- ❖ Certainly the worthy successor to Mozart's great works in the opera buffa genre.



ACT I FINALE

- ❖ Typical opera buffa finale, with massive confusion and everybody onstage.
- ❖ In this finale, the police have arrived because of the level of disturbance.
- ❖ Count Almaviva has been in “disguise” (wearing a false mustache) and as we join in, everybody is so stunned by the turn of events that they all become as still as statues—a favorite Rossini scenic setting.



I understand

GIUSEPPE VERDI

RIGOLETTO (1851)

ABOUT VERDI

- ❖ Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901) stands amongst the greatest opera composers.
- ❖ Like Rossini, he also retired from composing—but he went back to it later in life and produced two supreme masterpieces in his old age, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, both on Shakespearean plays.

ABOUT VERDI

- ❖ He's like a Rock of Gibraltar amidst the typical unprincipled brats who wrote most 19th century operas.
- ❖ He was a hard-driving businessman and tolerated absolutely no nonsense from singers.
- ❖ Among his operas: *Macbeth*, *Il trovatore*, *La traviata*, *Aida*
- ❖ He also wrote a magnificent Requiem that is a staple of concert halls worldwide.

THE STORY

- ❖ *Rigoletto* is the court jester to the Duke of Mantua.
- ❖ He's quite a cynical chap
- ❖ But he loves his daughter Gilda

THE STORY

- ❖ The *Duke of Mantua* is a rapacious womanizer, similar in many ways to Don Giovanni
- ❖ The Duke has decided that Gilda is to be a conquest, and he has succeeded by disguising himself as a student.

THE STORY

- ❖ Gilda and Rigoletto eavesdrop on the Duke as he meets up with a lady friend.
- ❖ Gilda realizes that the Duke is actually the “student.”
- ❖ Rigoletto has hired an assassin to bump off the Duke.

THE STORY

- ❖ The Duke sings an aria in which he expresses his contempt for women: *Women are fickle, feathers in the wind*, he says: *La donna è mobile, Qual pium' al vento*
- ❖ Following a quartet, Rigoletto tells Gilda to return home to Verona.
- ❖ Gilda sneaks back -- and winds up getting killed instead of the Duke.
- ❖ The opera ends with Rigoletto grieving over his daughter's dead body.

RIGOLETTO

- ❖ The humpbacked jester Rigoletto is one of the great tragic characters in all opera.
- ❖ The following shows various portrayals and images of Rigoletto down the years, interspersed with pictures of Verdi.
- ❖ The Duke sings *La donna è mobile*

Richard Wagner

Ego, Ego, and More Ego

Wagner on Himself

“I let myself be guided without fear by my instinct. I am being used as the instrument for something higher than my own being warrants...I am in the hands of the immortal genius that I serve for the span of my life and that intends me to complete only what I can achieve.”

Wagner Asking for Money

“It would be rather hard for you to provide me with this sum, but it will be possible if you wish it, and do not shrink from such a sacrifice! This, however, I desire...Now let me see whether you are the right sort of man!”

He continues...

“The assistance you give me will bring you into very close touch with me...”

Wagner When Rebuffed

“It probably will not happen again that a man like me will apply to you.”

Overall Character

- Egomaniacal
- Selfish
- Racist
- Amoral
- Hedonistic
- Arrogant

One Quote Sums it Up

“The world owes me what I need.”

Richard Wagner

Early Operas

- Rienzi
- Lohengrin
- Tannhäuser
- The Flying Dutchman

Later Operas

- Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg
- Tristan und Isolde
- Parsifal

The Ring Cycle

- Das Rheingold
- Die Walküre
- Siegfried
- Götterdämmerung

Leitmotiv

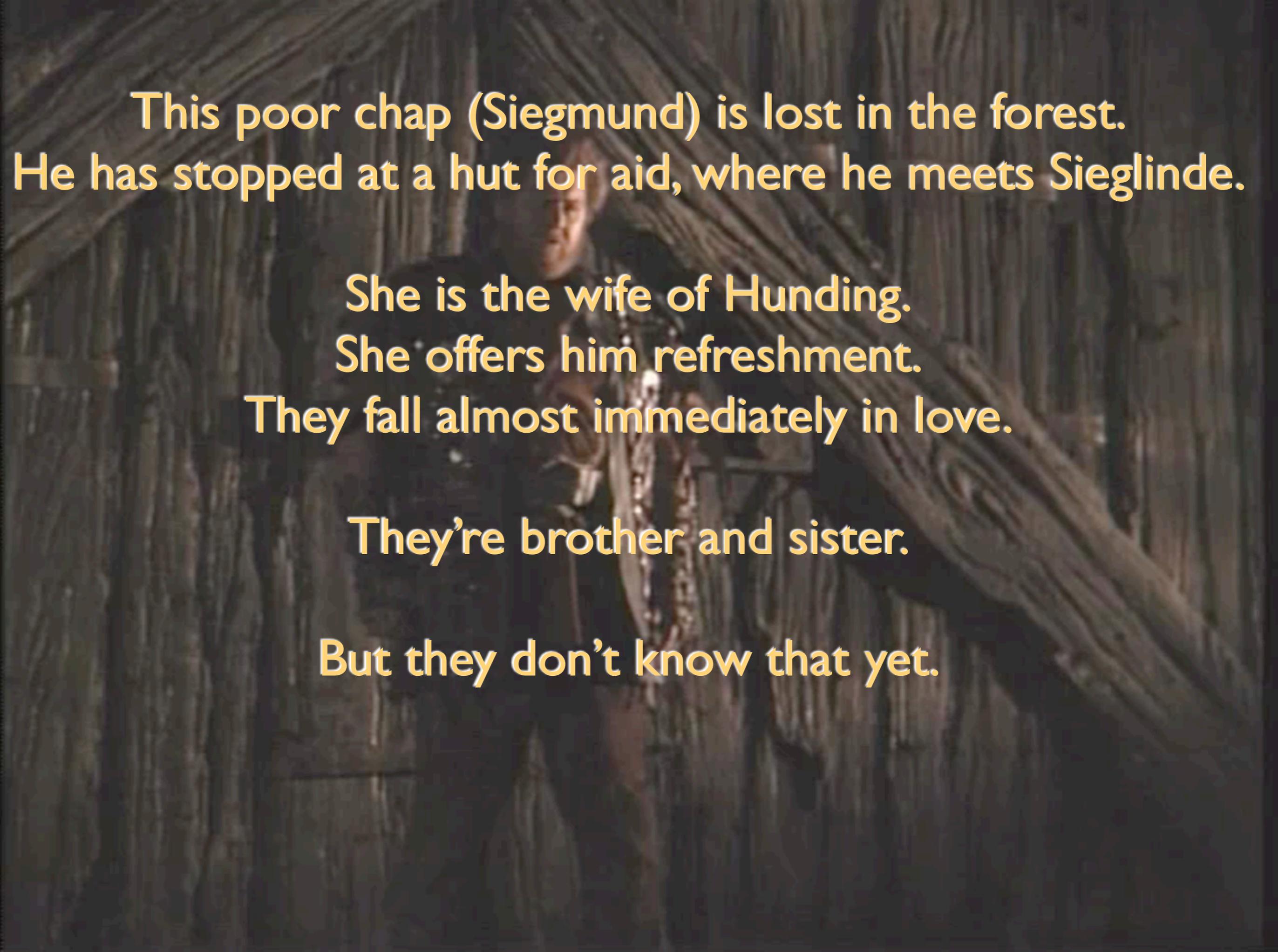
- A musical motive associated with some person, thing, idea, or symbol in the drama.
- The leitmotifs are presented as the opera progresses, guiding the listener through the story.
- Used a great deal in movie scoring, they can become silly if used mechanically.

Die Walküre

- Act I, Scene 1
 - Sieglinde and Siegmund are siblings who were separated in early childhood.
 - They meet again in adulthood, and are irresistably drawn to each other.
 - Their union will produce the hero Siegfried.

Die Walküre

- The orchestra is probably the most active performer in the opera—it presents the leitmotifs and also carries the drama forward.
- The characters sing in a quasi-recitative throughout, instead of singing melodies or arias as was more common in operas.

A man in a dark, ornate suit stands in a dark, textured environment, possibly a forest or a cave. The background is dark and textured, with vertical lines suggesting tree trunks or stone walls. The man is looking slightly to the right of the camera.

This poor chap (Siegmund) is lost in the forest.
He has stopped at a hut for aid, where he meets Sieglinde.

She is the wife of Hunding.
She offers him refreshment.
They fall almost immediately in love.

They're brother and sister.

But they don't know that yet.

Great Interpretations

- The 20th and 21st centuries have seen some extraordinary Wagner productions.
- This production, captured on film, is one of the great Wagner productions of all time—and it's short!

GIACOMO PUCCINI

MADAME BUTTERFLY (1904)

ABOUT PUCCINI

- ❖ One of the most popular opera composers of all time.
- ❖ *La Bohème, Turandot, Tosca, Manon Lescaut, Madama Butterfly* are all well-loved and frequently-performed operas.
- ❖ He wrote little other than opera, and had little interest in other musical genres.

PUCCINI AND BELASCO

- ❖ David Belasco was a native San Franciscan who became one of the giants of the Broadway stage.
- ❖ To this day there's still a Broadway theater bearing his name.
- ❖ He had an extraordinary ability to portray strong-willed but positive female characters—a trait he shared in common with Puccini.

PUCCINI AND BELASCO

- ❖ They wrote two operas together: *Madama Butterfly* and *The Girl of the Golden West*, a “Western” opera that was premiered by the Metropolitan Opera in 1910.



Left to Right:
Giulio Gatti-Cazzata, David Belasco, Arturo Toscanini, and Giacomo Puccini
1910 for the premiere of *The Girl of the Golden West*

MADAME BUTTERFLY

- ❖ Butterfly is a teenaged geisha, naïve and love-struck.
- ❖ An American officer, Lieutenant Pinkerton, has married her —but he was only in it for the sex, and after he sails away he has no intention of returning.
- ❖ Butterfly waits for him...

MADAME BUTTERFLY

- ❖ Belasco's original play was a big hit.
- ❖ But Puccini's opera is even better—except for one overriding problem that often crops up.

THE PROBLEM

- ❖ Butterfly is supposed to be an itty-bitty 15-year-old Japanese girl.
- ❖ The vocal part is requires a fully-matured female voice.
- ❖ So sometimes you wind up with Madame Butterball instead.
- ❖ That's opera for you...



UN BEL DI

- ❖ Butterfly's big number.
- ❖ She says that Pinkerton will return *one fine day* (un bel di) and he'll come walking up the hill and everything will be just peachy.
- ❖ Oh, he shows up all right...but with his "real" American wife.
- ❖ So what does Butterfly do? (Hint: she's the tragic heroine of an opera...)

