

## HKDSE Music – Listening (Form 4)

### Week 3 – Baroque Music (Baroque Operas)

#### Baroque Opera

- a theater play that combines singing, instrument playing, poetry, acting, costume, and stage design
- originally started in Italy, hoping to revive the spirit of Greek dramas
- advocated a new style of singing that better follow the rhythms and pitch fluctuations of speech (from polyphony to homophony)
- the first public opera house opened in Venice in 1637

#### Elements of an Opera

**Act:** a section of an opera that are separated by an intermission (usually two to five acts)

**Scene:** a coherent section within an act; usually consists of a recitative followed by an aria

**Overture:** an orchestral composition at the start of an opera (before the curtain rises), anticipating and preparing the overall mood of the opera; the materials for the overture are often drawn from material heard later in the opera

**Recitative:** a half-singing, half-reciting vocal line that imitates the rhythms and pitch fluctuations of speech; used to present the story and drive the plot forward

1. **Recitativo semplice** or **Recitativo secco** (“simple recitative” or “dry recitative”)
  - a recitative that is accompanied only by basso continuo; set dialogue and monologue in speech-like manner
2. **Recitativo accompagnato** (“accompanied recitative”)
  - a recitative that is punctuated by orchestral outbursts, used to dramatize tense and emotive situations

**Aria:** a song for solo voice with orchestral accompaniment, used as a lyrical expression of the character’s emotions

**Ensemble:** two or more characters singing together: duet, trio, quartet, quintet, sextet

**Chorus:** a group of singers playing the roles of courtiers, sailors, peasants, prisoners, ballroom guests

**Libretto:** the text of an opera, written for the spoken dialogues, arias, and recitatives (the one who wrote libretto is called the **librettist**)

## Voice types

- Soprano (女高音)
- Mezzo Soprano (女中音)
- Alto (女低音)
- Contralto (女低音)
- Countertenor (仿女聲的男高音/假聲男高音)
- Tenor (男高音)
- Baritone (男中音)
- Bass (男低音)

## Castrato

- a male singer who had been castrated before puberty, who possesses the lung power of a man with the vocal range of a woman
- nowadays their roles are sung by **countertenor**

## Monody

- solo singing accompanied by one or more instruments
- (≠ **monophony**: musical texture consisting of a single unaccompanied melody)

## Text Setting

1. **Melismatic (melisma)**: a single syllable sung over several notes; commonly found in aria
2. **Syllabic**: one note per syllable; commonly found in recitative

## Da capo aria

- a type of aria that consists of three sections (A B A)
- the reprise of the A section is often embellished by the singer in performance with the addition of passing notes, appoggiatura, chordal leaps, and suspended notes

## Word painting / Tone painting

- the use of certain musical gestures to imitate the meaning of the words  
(for example, the use of ascending and descending melodic line to reflect the words “rising” and “falling”)

## Claudio Monteverdi, *L'Orfeo* (1607)

This opera was commissioned by Francesco Gonzaga, heir to the throne of Mantua.

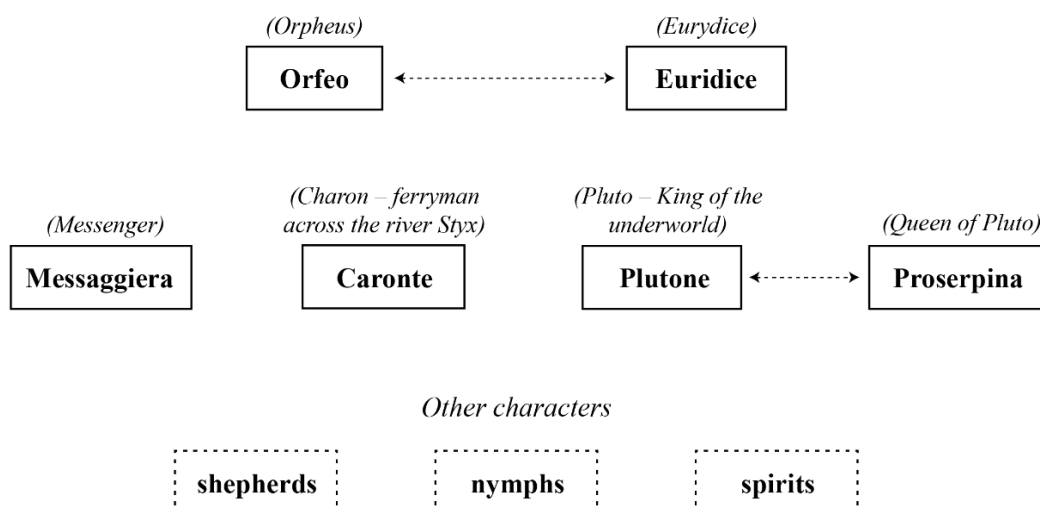
It consists of **five acts**, each centering around an aria by **Orfeo (Orpheus)** and ending with a vocal ensemble that comments on the situation.

The setting calls for a large orchestra for performance: recorders, cornetts, trumpets, trombones, strings, double harp, a regal (a buzzy-sounding reed organ) for the scenes in the underworld.

The text is sung through **recitatives**, a declamatory style of singing that imitates the rhythm and pitch inflection of speech.

Interspersed between the recitatives are **choruses** and **instrumental episodes**.

### Characters



### Prologue

La Musica greets the spectators, announces the subject matter of the drama and tells of the wonderful effect that the art of music has on the human spirit.

#### La Musica

(Versetto 1)

Dal mio Permesso amato a  
voi ne vegno,  
incliti Eroi, sangue gentil dei Regi  
di cui narra la Fama eccelsi pregi,

#### Music

(Verse 1)

To you I come from my beloved  
Permessus,  
illustrious heroes, noble race of kings,  
whose splendid virtues are sung by Fame,

né giunge al ver perch'è tropp'alto il segno.

though truth can never reach the mark too high.

### Ritornello

(Versetto 2)

Io la Musica son, ch'ai dolci accenti  
so far tranquillo ogni turbato core,  
et hor di nobil ira, ed hor d'amore  
poss'infiamar le più gelate menti.

### Ritornello

(Versetto 2)

I am Music, and with accents sweet  
can soothe each troubled heart,  
and now with noble wrath, now with love  
can kindle even the coldest mind.

### Ritornello

(Versetto 3)

Io su cetera d'or cantando soglio  
mortal orecchio lusingar tal'hora,  
e in questa guisa a l'armonia sonora  
de la lira del ciel più l'alme invoglio.

### Ritornello

(Versetto 3)

Singing to golden lyre I am wont  
to flatter mortal ears  
and in this guise with the harmonious sound  
of heaven's lyre do I entice souls.

### Ritornello

(Versetto 4)

Quinci a dirvi d'Orfeo desio mi sprona,  
d'Orfeo che trasse al suo cantar le fere  
e servo fe' l'Inferno a sue preghiere,  
gloria immortal di Pindo e d'Elicon.

### Ritornello

(Versetto 4)

And now spurred by desire to speak of  
Orpheus,  
Orpheus whose song drew wild beasts,  
and made Hell servant of his prayers,  
immortal glory of Pindus and Helicon.

### Ritornello

(Versetto 5)

Hor mentre i canti alterno, hor lieti, hor mesti,  
non si mova augellin fra queste piante,  
né s'oda in queste rive onda sonante,  
ed ogni aretta in suo cammin s'arresti.

### Ritornello

(Versetto 5)

Now as I alternate my songs, now gay now sad  
let no bird flutter in these trees,  
nor any foamy wave be heard on the shores,  
let every breeze stop in its path.

### Ritornello

### Ritornello

## Act 1

In the fields of Thrace. Orpheus is to marry Eurydice, and nymphs and shepherds are celebrating the happy day.

## Act 2

In the woods. Eurydice and her attendants leave, and Orpheus sings of his joy. His happiness is short-lived, for Sylvia, a messenger, arrives and announces that Eurydice has been bitten by a snake and has died. Orpheus is shattered and laments his bride, but then he resolves to descend into Hades and recover Eurydice.

### Part 1

|       |        |          |        |          |  |        |                |        |                |  |        |                |        |                |
|-------|--------|----------|--------|----------|--|--------|----------------|--------|----------------|--|--------|----------------|--------|----------------|
| Orfeo | Rit 1  | Shepherd | Rit 1  | Shepherd |  | Rit 2  | Shepherd<br>x2 | Rit 1  | Shepherd<br>x2 |  | Rit 3  | Shepherd<br>x2 | Rit 3  | Shepherd<br>x5 |
|       | 4<br>2 |          | 4<br>2 |          |  | 3<br>2 |                | 3<br>2 |                |  | 4<br>2 |                | 4<br>2 |                |

### Part 2

|                       |       |                       |       |                       |       |                       |       |          |
|-----------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|----------|
| Ritornello<br>(motto) | Orfeo | Ritornello<br>(motto) | Orfeo | Ritornello<br>(motto) | Orfeo | Ritornello<br>(motto) | Orfeo | Shepherd |
| 6<br>4                |       | 6<br>4                |       | 6<br>4                |       | 6<br>4                |       |          |

### Part 3

|           |                       |                              |            |         |                       |
|-----------|-----------------------|------------------------------|------------|---------|-----------------------|
| Messenger | (Orfeo +<br>shepherd) | Messenger                    | (shepherd) | (Orfeo) | Orfeo                 |
|           |                       | <i>"Tu un fiorito prato"</i> |            |         | <i>"Tu se' morta"</i> |

## Orfeo, "Tu se' morta" (You are dead)

### Orfeo

Tu se' morta, se' morta mia vita,  
ed io respiro?  
Tu se' da me partita, se' da me partita  
per mai più non tornare, ed io rimango?  
No, che se i versi alcuna cosa ponno,  
n'andrò sicuro a' più profondi abissi,  
e, intenerito il cor del Re de l'Ombre,  
meco trarrotti a riveder le stelle;  
o se ciò negherammi empio destino  
rimarrò teco in compagnia di morte.

### Orpheus

You are dead, my life,  
and I still breathe?  
You have gone from me,  
never to return, and I am still here?  
No, for if my verses can do anything,  
I shall surely go down to the deepest abysses  
and melt the heart of the king of shadows,  
and bring you back with me to see the stars again.  
Or, if evil fate denies me this,  
I shall stay with you in the company of death:

Addio terra, addio Cielo, e Sole addio.

farewell to earth, to sky, to sun, farewell.

### Word painting

- *stelle* (stars) and *sole* (sun) → high tones
- *abissi* (abysses) and *morte* (death) → low tones

### Act 3

In the underworld. Orpheus descends accompanied and comforted by Hope as far as the gates of Hades. He reaches the Styx, but the boatman, Charon, will not allow him to pass. Orpheus summons up all the florid and magical charms of music, but Charon remains unmoved. Spurred on by his need to find Eurydice, Orpheus devises a new plan and lulls Charon to sleep. He then rows himself across while the chorus sings of man's power to overcome obstacles.

### Act 4

In the underworld. Pluto, king of the underworld, and his wife Proserpine have heard Orpheus' lament. Proserpine is moved to plead on behalf of Orpheus, and Pluto agrees that Eurydice can return to earth. However, he stipulates that under no circumstances must Orpheus look back at Eurydice as he leads her from the underworld. The chorus sings that even in Hades there is such a thing as mercy. Orpheus joyfully sings in praise of his lyre while he leads Eurydice earthwards. But then he has his doubts, and turns to see if she is really following him. As he does so, she disappears before his eyes. Orpheus returns to earth alone, while the chorus remarks on the paradox of being able to conquer Hades but not one's own will.

### Act 5

In the fields of Thrace. Lamenting his loss of Eurydice for the second time, the distraught Orpheus responds by renouncing women. However, at this moment, Apollo, Orpheus' father, appears from the heavens in his chariot. He consoles his son with the promise of immortality and says he will forever see Eurydice in the stars. Apollo and his son then ascend to heaven while the chorus rejoices in Orpheus' apotheosis.

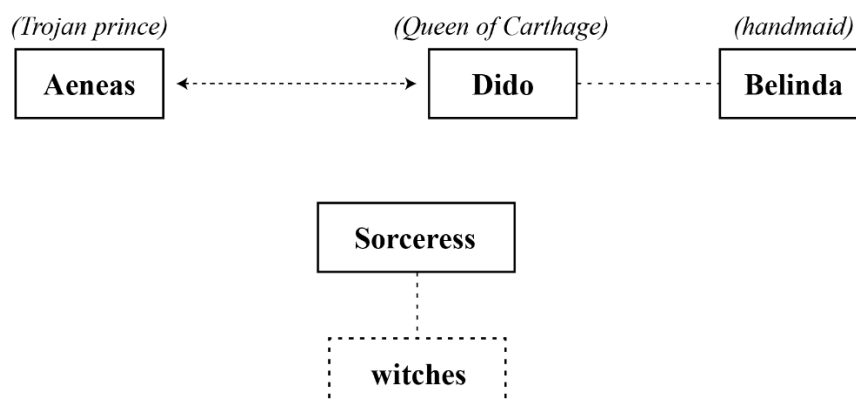
## Henry Purcell, *Dido and Aeneas* (1695)

The opera was first performed by students at a school for young ladies in Chelsea.

It consists of three acts, each with a different setting.

Instrumentation: violins, viola, cello, and basso continuo

### Characters



### Act 1

Belinda persuades Dido to express her feeling for Aeneas, and assures her that Aeneas also loves her. Aeneas approaches Dido and asks her to marry him

### Act 2

The Sorceress hates Dido and intends to cause harm. She orders two witches to isolate Aeneas during a hunting party, and a spirit (pretending to be the goddess Mercury) to urge Aeneas to leave Dido.

### Act 3

Aeneas is leaving by the Trojan ships; the witches rejoice. Aeneas makes excuses for leaving; Dido urges him to leave. Dido is in despair and laments on her coming death.

### “When I am laid” (Dido’s lament)

**Lament:** a song or poem that expresses sadness about someone’s death (輓歌、悼詩)

Recitative

Thy hand, Belinda, darkness shades me,  
 On thy bosom let me rest;  
 More I would but Death invades me;  
 Death is now a welcome guest.

Aria

When I am laid, am laid in earth, may my wrongs create  
 No trouble, no trouble in thy breast.  
 Remember me! But ah! forget my fate.

The musical score is for the Aria section of Handel's 'The Rapture' from 'The Messiah'. It features three staves: Soprano, Basso, and Piano. The Soprano part is marked 'DIDO.' and 'P'. The Basso part is marked 'pp'. The Piano part is marked 'Larghetto.' and 'pp'. The lyrics 'When I am laid, am' are written under the Soprano part. The score shows a chromatic descending bass line in the Piano part, which is a recurring motif throughout the lament.

**Ground bass (basso ostinato):** a recurring chromatically descending ground bass (ostinato bass) appears 11 times throughout the lament

- **chromatic descending bass line** → lament (grieve, sadness, despair)
- **dissonant chord tones / nonharmonic tones** → pain, agony, poignancy, distress

**Climax:** the emotional and registral high point of a musical section

- **repeated notes** on the words "Remember me"
- **sforzando** on the downbeat

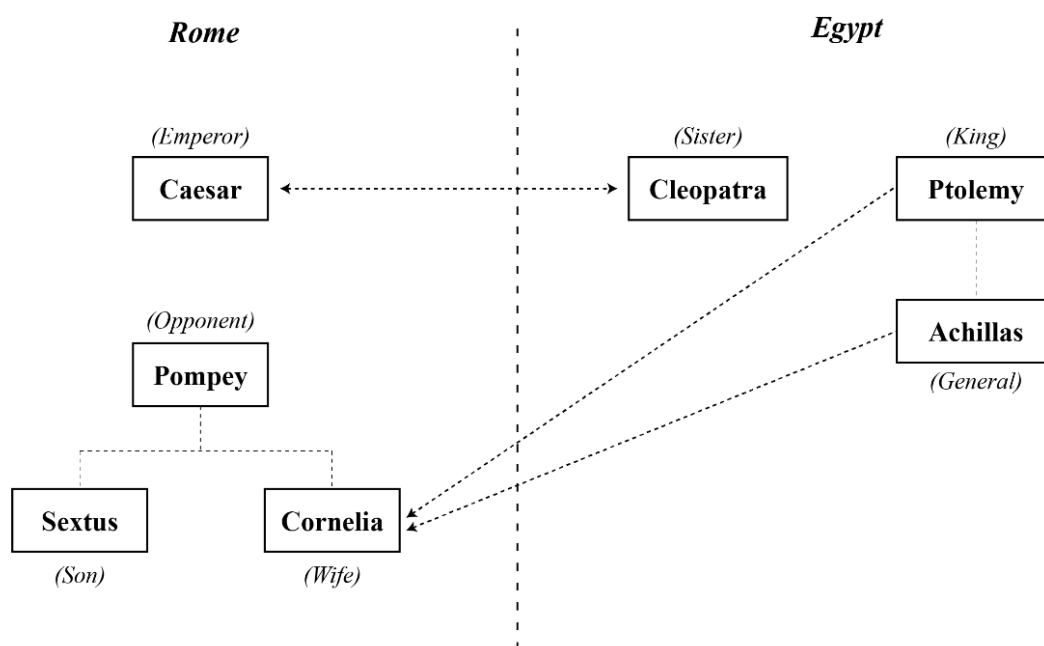
## George Frideric Handel, *Giulio Cesare* (1724)

The opera was composed for performance in the **Royal Academy of Music**, London.

It consists of three acts; each act is divided into several **scenes**, each of which consists of an opening **recitative** (unfold the story) followed by an **aria** (express the character's emotion).

*Instrumentation*: scored for flute, two recorders, two oboes, two bassoons, four horns, viola da gamba, harp, theorbo, strings and basso continuo

### Characters



### Act 1

King of Egypt (Ptolemy) presents the Roman general (Julius Caesar) the head of Pompey, Caesar's political opponent. Caesar was outraged. Cleopatra (sister of Ptolemy) wants to be the ruler of Egypt; she pretends to a servant and asks for Caesar's cooperation against Ptolemy. Cornelia (wife of Pompey) mourns the loss of her husband, and their son Sextus vows to avenge the death of his father.

### Act 2

Both Ptolemy and his general Achilles are attracted to Cornelia (wife of Pompey) and want to marry her, but she rejects. Cleopatra asks Caesar to come to her chamber; Caesar promised to marry Cleopatra.

Ptolemy orders an army to murder Caesar; Caesar leaves Cleopatra and fights the attackers.

### Act 3

Caesar and Cleopatra command an army against Ptolemy, but are defeated and Cleopatra is imprisoned. Caesar escapes drowning at sea. Achilles dies on the battlefield.

Caesar and Sextus try to free Cleopatra and Cornelia.

Ptolemy is killed by Sextus by a sword. Caesar declares Cleopatra the Queen of Egypt.

### Act 3, “Piangerò la sorte mia” (Cleopatra)

a **secco recitativo** (dry recitative), followed by an **aria** for soprano

**Da capo aria:** A–B–A form

- Part 1: a recurring descending line of a fourth
  - expanding phrase lengths: 6 + 8 + 15 + 4 (cad.) + 6 (codetta)
  - interactions between the singer and the orchestra
- Part 2: modulate to the relative minor (C# minor)
  - featuring several descending fifth (circle-of-fifth) sequences → forward momentum
- the reprise of Part 1 is embellished by the singer in performance

#### Recitative

##### **Cleopatra**

E pur così in un giorno  
perdo fasti e grandezze? Ah! fato rio!  
Cesare, il mio bel nume, è forse estinto;  
Cornelia e Sesto inermi son, né sanno  
darmi soccorso. Oh dio!  
Non resta alcuna speme al viver mio.

##### **Cleopatra**

Thus, in only one day,  
I must lose grandeur and riches? Ah, cruel fate!  
Caesar, my beloved treasure, is perhaps dead;  
Cornelia and Sextus are defenceless,  
and cannot aid me. Oh God!  
There is no hope left for my life.

#### Aria

##### **Cleopatra**

Piangerò la sorte mia,  
sì crudele e tanto ria,  
finché vita in petto avrò.  
Ma poi morta d'ogn'intorno  
il tiranno e notte e giorno  
fatta spettro agiterò.

##### **Cleopatra**

I will lament my destiny,  
so cruel and so unfortunate,  
as long as my heart beats.  
But when I am dead, from all sides  
my ghost will haunt the tyrant  
both night and day.

### Act 3, “Aure, deh, per pietà” (Caesar)

(Julius Caesar on one side, then Sextus on the other with Nireus, and Achilles lying on the quayside in the harbour, mortally wounded.)

#### Accompanied recitative

##### **Cesare**

Dall'ondoso periglio  
salvo mi porta al lido  
il mio propizio fato.  
Qui la celeste Parca  
non tronca ancor lo stame alla mia vita!  
Ma dove andrò? e chi mi porge aita?  
Ove son le mie schiere,  
ove son le legioni,  
che a tante mie vittorie il varco apriro?  
Solo in queste erme arene  
al monarca del mondo errar conviene?

##### **Caesar**

My kind fate  
brings me safely ashore  
from the dangerous waves.  
Not yet does celestial Fate  
cut the thread of my life!  
But where shall I go? Who will aid me?  
Where are my cohorts?  
Where are my legions,  
which opened the path to my many victories?  
Is it the destiny of the monarch of the world  
to wander alone on these solitary shores?

#### Aria

##### **Cesare**

Aure, deh, per pietà  
spirate al petto mio,  
per dar conforto, oh dio!  
al mio dolor.  
Dite, dov'è, che fa  
l'idol del mio sen,  
l'amato e dolce ben  
di questo cor.

##### **Caesar**

O breezes, for pity's sake,  
breathe into my breast  
to bring your comfort, oh God,  
to my pain.  
Tell me, where is  
the idol of my breast,  
the beloved treasure  
of this heart?

#### References:

- Monteverdi's *Orfeo*: liner notes 8.554094-95, 8.558174, & CDS598
- Handel's *Giulio Cesare*: liner notes 190296370601, B108090, & OP30536