

An
Opera Gala

Altrincham Choral Society

Steven Roberts

Conductor

Janet Fischer

Soprano

Christopher Turner

Tenor

Lydia Bryan

Accompanist

ALTRINCHAM CHORAL SOCIETY

Registered Charity No 50072

President: Roger Shelmerdine

Honorary Life Members: Steven Roberts, Roger Shelmerdine

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programmes and on the web-site.

Elisabeth Lawrence is our Patrons Secretary. She is looking forward to
hearing from you and can answer your enquiries about the
scheme. Contact her on 01925 861862 or ellaw@talktalk.net

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ALTRINCHAM CHORAL SOCIETY

Registered Charity No 500729

President: Roger Shelmerdine

Honorary Life Members: Steven Roberts, Roger Shelmerdine

Altrincham Choral Society prides itself in offering a diverse, innovative and challenging programme of concerts, including many choral favourites.

We are a forward thinking and progressive choir with a strong commitment to choral training and high standards, so providing members with the knowledge, skills and confidence to thoroughly enjoy their music-making.

Rehearsals are on Monday evenings at Altrincham Methodist Church,
Woodlands Road, Altrincham.

Car Park entrance off Barrington Road.

Satnavs please use WA14 1HF.

We are only a 5 minute walk from the train/metro/bus station. Rehearsals are
from 7.45 to 10.00 pm

For more information contact us

E-mail: info@altrincham-choral.co.uk

Tweet us @acs1945 Like us on Facebook

EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE AWARD

The Award for Exceptional Service may be conferred on any member who is deemed to have given exceptional service to the Society.

The award may be made to a member who has served for 25 or more years on the Committee or a Sub-Committee.

In recognition of their services to the society
The Exceptional Service Award has been awarded to

John Greenan Andrew Wragg Joyce Venables

The Chorus

Brenda Adams
Joy Anderson
Sara Apps
Pat Arnold #
Ann Ashby
Megan Auld
Kate Barlow
Matthew Barr
Janet Bedell *
Jan Bracegirdle
Stella Bracegirdle
Frances Broad #
Rachel Brougham
Patricia Brown
Toni Bruce
Anne Bullock *
Stephen Campbell
Anthony Champion
Michael Carter
Helen Cash
Valentina Casulli
John Charlton #
Barbara Clift *
Michael Cummings
Adrienne Davies
Jacqueline Davies
Marie Dixon *
Jean Drape *
Kathy Duffy
Liz Dunn ^
Michael Dunn ^
Richard Dyson
Rik Evans
Heather Falconer
Alison Farshi
Elizabeth Foy
Joyce Fuller *
Melanie Geldard ^
Trevor Gilmore
Robert Gledhill ^
Estelle Goodwin
Bryan Goude *

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Helen Greig
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Caroline Harris
Dudley Harrop *
Gill Hayes *
John Hayes
Bill Hetherington
Jane Hollinshead
Catherine Horrocks *
Valerie Hotter *
Gail Hunt *
Rosie Hurley
Tony Jackman
Karen Jarmany
Roy Jervis
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Arnold Jones
Clare Jones
Elizabeth Jones #
Gillian Jones
Hazel Jones ^
Melanie-Anne Jose *
George Kistruck *
Elisabeth Lawrence
Keith Lewis *
Annie Lloyd-Walker
Emma Loat
Timothy Lowe ^
Rosie Lucas *
Sarah Lucas
Gavin McBride
Helen McBride
Norma McRae
Andy McWilliam ^
Ann McWilliam ^
Alex Meakin ^
Hazel Meakin
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Heather Morrey
Jen Morris ^
Catherine Mottram

Pamela Moulton *
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Norma Nock
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Eleanor Reeves
Linley Roach *
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Yvette Willey #
Julia Williamson *
Brenda Wood
Andrew Wragg #
Cecilia Wright

* Denotes 20 year

Denotes 30 years

++ Denotes 40 years

^ Denotes joined

2015-16 season

Steven Roberts

Steven Roberts is Conductor and Musical Director of Altrincham Choral Society, Chesterfield Philharmonic Choir, Honley Male Voice Choir and UnLimited Voices. He has recently become Chairman of The British and International Federation of Festivals and regularly adjudicates throughout the United Kingdom. He will also act as musical director for 'Coal', a contemporary dance piece which will be touring in 2015/2016, choreographed by Gary Clarke.

Prior to 2006, Steven combined his musical activities with a full-time post at Barnsley College. During 17 years at the college, Steven held a number of posts including Head of Performing Arts and Music, Head of Quality and Director of External Relations.

He has also been conductor of the Dodworth and Skelmanthorpe Male Voice Choirs, the Allendale Chamber Orchestra, the Liverpool Welsh Choral Union, Sing Live UK and with The Huddersfield Choral Society, most notably for concerts with Dame Kiri Te Kanawa and José Carreras. He has also been chorus master for 'The Magic of Queen' and the Electric Light Orchestra (ELO), rock classics concerts with the Hallé Orchestra and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

He has conducted the Manchester Philharmonia, Derbyshire Sinfonia, and the National Festival Orchestra as well as the Yorkshire Wind Orchestra, Black Dyke Band and a variety of other bands and ensembles.

He became a Life Member of the Royal Philharmonic Society in November 2013 and is proud to be a member of The Lord's Taverners – the cricketing charity that raises money to give 'young people, particularly with special needs a sporting chance'.

Richard Tolson "Rich T" was Head of Music & Performing Arts at Barnsley College for a number of years and had an impact on many lives. The charity set up in his name, EnRich, aims to promote any and all specialisms in performing and creative arts, and Steven is proud to be a patron.

Janet Fischer

Canadian soprano Janet Fischer first explored her passion for music at the age of three, when, following in her older brother's footsteps, she studied the violin. She graduated from the RNCM with a MMus with Distinction in Performance in 2008 under the tutelage of the late Barbara Robotham.

Janet's previous appearances in opera include *Senta* (Der Fliegende Holländer), *Wild Woman* and *Carlotta* in The Phantom of the Opera at Her Majesty's Theatre (West End), *Ellen Orford* (Peter Grimes), *Dritte Norn* (Götterdämmerung), *Helmwige* (Die Walküre), Mother (Hansel & Gretel), Rhoda (The Withered Arm) for the Tête-a-Tête Opera festival, *Fiordiligi* (Cosi Fan Tutte), *Irene* (Tamerlano), *Clara & Olympia* (The Sandman) for ROH2 Development, *Roxana* (King Roger), *Female Chorus* (Rape of Lucretia), *Countess* (Le Nozze di Figaro), *Dog Fox* and *Cockerel* (Cunning Little Vixen), *Donna Anna* (Don Giovanni), *Susannah* (Susannah), and *Magda* (The Consul).

She is no stranger to the concert platform either, having sung Mahler *Magna Peccatrix - 8th Symphony* (Sage Gateshead), Mahler *4th Symphony*, Mahler *2nd Symphony*, Grüber *Frankenstein!* (Wigmore Hall), Lewis *Beyond the Heavens* (World Premiere), Berlioz *Les nuits d'été*, Beethoven *Ah, Perfido!* (LCSO) and Beethoven *9th Symphony* (LMO).

Janet enjoys working with others who share her enthusiasm for music and is an avid Oratorio singer. Performances have included Beethoven *Missa Solemnis* (Orchestra da Macao), Verdi *Requiem*, Poulenc *Gloria*, Orff *Carmina Burana*, Brahms *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, Mozart *Mass in C minor*, *Vesperae Solennes de Confessore & Requiem*, Bach *Magnificat*, *St. John's Passion* and *Cantata BWV.80*, Haydn *Creation*, Mendelssohn *Elijah & St. Paul*, Rossini *Petite Messe Solenne* and of course Handel's *Messiah!*

In her spare time Janet is an avid triathlete, scuba diver, volunteers regularly for Crisis UK, and holds an MBA!

Christopher Turner

Born in Birmingham, Christopher Turner read Music at the University of Hull, furthering his studies with the late Barbara Robotham at the Royal Northern College of Music, and at the National Opera Studio, where he was sponsored by the Scottish Endowment Trust and The Friends of Covent Garden. He has received many prizes, including The Michael and Joyce Kennedy Prize for Singing Strauss, The Frederic Cox Prize, the Elizabeth Harwood Prize, and, most recently, a Countess of Munster 'Young Star' Award and the Sybil Tutton Award from the Musicians Benevolent Fund. He was also a major scholar of the Sir Peter Moores Foundation.

Christopher Turner made his professional début as Dr Blind *Die Fledermaus* for Scottish Opera On Tour before joining the Young Singers Programme at English National Opera where roles included Robert Wilson *Doctor Atomic*, First Armed Man/First Priest *The Magic Flute*, Beppe *Pagliacci*, Simpleton *Boris Godunov*, Spoletta *Tosca*, Pong *Turandot* and Messenger *Aida*. Since then he has sung Don Ottavio (Opera North/Diva Opera in France), Roderigo *Otello* (Opera North), Janek *The Makropulos Case* and Esquire *Parsifal* (English National Opera) Borsa *Rigoletto* and Pong *Turandot* (Scottish Opera), Dr Caius *Falstaff* (Opera Holland Park), Damon *Acis and Galatea*, Prunier *La Rondine* and Iro *The Return of Ulisses* (Iford Arts), title role *Albert Herring* (Mid Wales Opera), Tebaldo *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* (Chelsea Opera Group), Ecclitico *Il Mondo della Luna* (English Touring Opera) and Artemidoro in Salieri's *La grotta di Trofonio* and Sempronio in Haydn's *The Apothecary* (Bampton Classical Opera). In summer 2015 he made his Italian debut singing Inquisitor/Sultan Achmet in *Candide* (Opera de Firenze).

Christopher Turner performs regularly in concert and his performances have taken him throughout the UK, and also to Europe and the Far East. Recent engagements include Beethoven *Ninth Symphony* with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at the Royal Albert Hall and with the Philharmonia at the Lichfield Festival, Mozart *Requiem* and *Messiah* with the Orchestra of St John's Smith Square, and *Messiah* at Cadogan Hall with the London Chamber Orchestra. He has recorded Aubrey *Maria di Rohan* and Keeper of the Tower *Pia dei Tolomei* for Opera Rara.

The current season includes Augusto in Leoncavallo's *Zazà* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican (also recorded by Opera Rara), Tibrino in Cesti's *Oronhea* with La Nuova Musica at the Wigmore Hall, Fabio in Handel's *Berenice* with La Nuova Musica in Göttingen and Macduff *Macbeth* for Iford Arts.

Plans include Dormont *La Scala di Seta* and Rodolfo *La Bohème* (Scottish Opera).

Lydia Bryan

Lydia Bryan is a graduate of the Royal Northern College of Music where she studied piano, harpsichord, violin and singing. She specialised in piano accompaniment at postgraduate level.

Her professional concert career started as a winner of the North West Arts Young Musicians' Platform and also with concerts awarded through the Live Music Now scheme, founded by Sir Yehudi Menuhin. She won a British Council Scholarship towards concerts and recording work in Hungary, where she gave performances at the University of Budapest, the residence of the British Ambassador and the Kodály Institute.

Lydia has accompanied regularly for master lessons with John Cameron and Peter Pears, and has performed in master classes for Bernard Roberts and Vlado Perlemuter at The Dartington International Summer School.

She has performed many times at the Royal Exchange Theatre for the Manchester Midday Concerts and also at the Purcell Room, and appeared as concerto Soloist at the RNCM as well as recording for BBC radio and television. Lydia has toured extensively as soloist and accompanist in Denmark, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, France, Italy and throughout the British Isles.

Her concert repertoire is wide-ranging; she has worked with many eminent contemporary composers and has performed works by Alexander Goehr and David Gow at the Society for the Promotion of New Music. She was also the accompanist for the 'Art of Song' courses at Higham Hall and has been official accompanist and adjudicator for music festivals in both the UK and abroad.

Lydia teaches at Manchester Grammar School and Loreto School in Altrincham and has been resident accompanist to Altrincham Choral Society since December 1996. She has many successful professional musicians amongst her past pupils.

ALTRINCHAM CHORAL SOCIETY

Come and Sing The Magic of Mozart

Steven Roberts

Musical Director

Lydia Bryan

Accompanist

Saturday 17th September 2016

Just six months before his tragically early death in 1791, Mozart wrote the *Ave verum Corpus* for his friend, Anton Stoll. 225 years later and the music of Mozart continues to thrill and excite both singers and audiences alike. Join us as we journey from the haunting simplicity of his earlier works through to the chorus work of his final masterpiece, the *Requiem*.

**Cost £15 (£10 ACS, £7 students)
(including music hire)**

**St Mary's Church,
Stamford Road, Bowdon, WA14 2TR.
Contact Kate Barlow 0161 980 4342**

katebarlow35@btinternet.com

Registration 10.00 Rehearsal 10.30

Free Performance 17.30

www.altrincham-choral.co.uk

Registered charity 500729

ACT 1

Carmen

Georges Bizet

Chorus & Janet Fischer

March of the Toreadors

Habanera

Macbeth

Giuseppe Verdi

Chorus & Christopher Turner

Witches' Chorus

O Sons, O my Children!

Lucia di Lammermoor

Gaetano Donizetti

Chorus, Christopher Turner & Janet Fischer

Silence Reigned

Chorus of Wedding Guests

They Will Come to You

Moïse

Gioachino Rossini

Chorus

Prayer

Eugene Onegin

Pyotr Tchaikovsky

Chorus & Christopher Turner

Chorus of Peasant Girls

Lensky's aria

Waltz Scene

Interval

ACT II

Mlada

Nikolai Rimsky Korsakov

Chorus

Procession of the Nobles

Idomeneo

Wolfgang Mozart

Chorus, Christopher Turner & Janet Fischer

Voyagers' Chorus

I shall see around me

Flying Dutchman

Richard Wagner

Janet Fischer

Senta's Ballad

Guillaume Tell

Gioachino Rossini

Chorus

Villagers' Chorus

Aida

Giuseppe Verdi

Janet Fischer

Return Victorious!

Nabucco

Giuseppe Verdi

Chorus

Chorus of Hebrew Slaves

Il trovatore

Giuseppe Verdi

Chorus

Anvil Chorus

Based on a novella of the same title by Prosper Mérimée, *Carmen* is an opera in four acts by the French composer Georges Bizet. The opera, first performed at the Opéra-Comique in Paris on 3 March 1875, was not well received, due largely to its breaking of convention and controversial main characters. The earliest critics were unaccustomed to seeing the lives of the common folk, much less the world of gypsies, smugglers, deserters, factory workers and various ne'er-do-wells being given centre stage. In the 19th century, opera was a refined art, not one to concern itself with low-life and scoundrels. Three months after the work's première, Bizet died suddenly from a heart condition and was therefore unaware of its outstanding success in Vienna later that year. Discerning musicians such as Saint Saëns and Tchaikovsky recognised its force and originality from the first and Tchaikovsky predicted that within ten years *Carmen* would be the most popular opera in the world.

Set in Seville about 1820, it tells the story of the downfall of Don José, a naïve soldier who is seduced by the wiles of the fiery gypsy Carmen. The *Habanera* from Act 1 is Carmen's first attempt to entice Don José. It is sung as the girls emerge from the cigarette factory where they work. Consumed with love for Carmen, José abandons his childhood sweetheart and deserts from his military duties, but loses Carmen's love to the glamorous toreador Escamillo.

The *March of the Toreadors* from Act 2 sets the scene for the bullfight, as outside the arena José attempts to win back the affections of Carmen. Scorned and finally rejected by Carmen, José flies into a jealous rage and stabs her.

These are among the best known of all operatic arias.

March of the Toreadors

Here they come! Here come the Torreros! Sunlight shining on their lances.

Now they're passing, raise your sombreros!

Hurrah! The parade advances. Here they come, here come the Torreros!

In a foursome march the Torreros!

Look who's making such a big deal, he's marching with his nose in the air.

The ugly-faced old Alguazil – be off! Down with the ugly Alguazil!

Here come men, so noble in bearing, raise a cheer for the bold Chulos!

Bravo! Viva! Here's to their daring!

O look! The banderilleros, such strutting airs you can't help staring!

O look! What haughty glares, so vain and proud, what shining costumes they are wearing, the jewels dazzle all the crowd!

See the espada, hero of the fight! He'll end it all: deadly his steel.

He'll appear when the end is almost in sight; swiftly the final blow he'll deal!

Hail Escamillo! Ah! Bravo!

Habanera

*Love's a bird that will not obey, a bird too wild for you to tame;
If her pleasure's to stay away, no use for you to call her name!
If you threaten her, she'll not stay; so try to charm her from her tree;
If you chase me, I'll fly away, but if you charm me, then we'll see! Ah, love! Sweet love!
Love knows no rules and has no home, a gypsy wandering as free as air;
And if my fancy starts to roam, then I'm warning you, young man, take care!
And if I want you, then ah, beware!
When you think love is in your hand she spreads her wings and flies away;
No use trying to understand, just let the bird return some day.
If she's there out of reach, just wait: she'll come and nestle in your lap;
Try to catch her, you'll be too late, but try to run and you're in her trap.*

Macbeth

Giuseppe Verdi (1813 - 1901)

Verdi's reputation as a composer was well established after the success of his opera *Nabucco* in 1842. With *Macbeth*, an opera in four acts with a libretto by Piave, Verdi strikes out in a new direction, and makes his first encounter with Shakespeare.

The first performance was on 14 March 1847, in the Teatro della Pergola, Florence. Verdi's frequently voiced perception of this first version was of an important work, ennobled by its Shakespearean theme, and one that he had successfully converted into dramatic substance. He had set himself a new standard with *Macbeth*, one that he rarely retreated from in subsequent works. For the Paris première in 1865 Verdi enriched the score and added several of the opera's most effective pieces.

The *Witches' chorus* makes an atmospheric opening to the first act of the opera set in a Scottish wood (Shakespeare's 'blasted heath'). The tenor solo, *O Figli – Ah la Paterna Mano*, is sung by Macduff, a Scottish nobleman who opposed Macbeth's accession to the throne. Macbeth cruelly orders Macduff's castle to be seized and most cruelly that Lady Macduff and her children be murdered. When news of his family's execution reaches Macduff in England, he is stricken with grief and vows revenge.

Witches' chorus

*Now, my sisters, what's to tell? I have slit the boar's throat, and thou?
I have cursed a sailor's wife; she will rue it all her life.
Slighting words she spat at me; she will rue it all her life.
Now her husband toss'd by tempest he will be and his vessel at the bottom of the sea.
Lo, the north wind I will send, raging torrents without end, on the rocks his ship I'll rend.
Hark, a drum sounds! Who is that? Now I see him: Hail now, Macbeth!
Round about the globe we wander, wayward sisters trav-ling yonder.
We can weave a girdle twining over land and over sea.*

O sons, o my children!

*O sons, o my children!
That tyrant has killed you all,
And together with you, your unfortunate mother!
Ah, in the claws of that tiger did I leave mother and sons?
Ah, the paternal hand didn't shield you,
O my dears, treacherous killers have mortally wounded you!
And as for me, I escaped.
While I hid you were calling in vain
With your last gasps, with your last breaths.
Ah! lead me to the tyrant,
Lord, if he should escape from me,
May he, in Your open arms, find forgiveness.*

Lucia di Lammermoor

Gaetano Donizetti (1779 -1848)

Gaetano Donizetti wrote *Lucia di Lammermoor* in 1835, a time when several factors led to his reputation as a composer of opera reaching a new height. Rossini had recently retired and Vincenzo Bellini had died shortly before the premier of *Lucia*, leaving Donizetti as 'the sole reigning genius of Italian opera'. Not only were conditions ripe for Donizetti's success as a composer, but there was also a European interest in the history and culture of Scotland. The perceived romance of its violent wars and feuds as well as its folklore and mythology intrigued 19th century readers and audiences. Sir Walter Scott made use of these stereotypes in his novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*, which inspired several musical works including Donizetti's opera.

Lucia di Lammermoor is set near Edinburgh around 1700. It is a story of love, jealousy and two feuding families. Lucia has been promised in marriage to the wealthy Arturo by her impoverished brother Enrico, but she is already in love with Edgardo. She enters the park of the Castle of Lammermoor with her companion Alisa, planning to meet Edgardo at a fountain near her mother's grave. In the aria *Regnavia nel Silenzio*, Lucia tells Alisa of the maiden's ghost that haunts the fountain that has recently appeared to her. Despite Alisa's pleas that Lucia's love for Edgardo is beset with difficulties and she should renounce him, the lovers meet. Edgardo tells Lucia that he has been called to the Stuart cause in France but wishes to extend the hand of friendship to her brother before he leaves. Lucia, afraid of her brother's furious temper begs Edgardo to keep their love a secret. The lovers exchange rings and seal their vows, bidding each other a fond farewell - *Verranno a te sull'aure*.

Lucia is pressed by all around her to marry Arturo for the good of the family. Enrico produces a forged letter implying that Edgardo has been unfaithful, so Lucia agrees reluctantly to the wedding.

Per te d'immenso giubilo - the Chorus of Wedding Guests, introduces the signing of the nuptial documents. Edgardo reappears just as the signing is completed and dramatic events ensue. Lucia kills her new husband Arturo, becoming the victim of a mental disorder. Edgardo is resolved to kill himself on Enrico's sword, but when he learns that Lucia has collapsed and died, he stabs himself with a dagger, hoping to be reunited with her in heaven.

Silence Reigned

*Enveloped in silence, deep and dark, reigned the night.
A pale ray of light from the watery moon shone on the fountain
When what seemed a low sigh borne by the breeze wafted towards me.
And there on the fountain's edge the spectre appeared to me! Ah!*

*I could see her lips moving as if speaking
And with her lifeless hand she seemed to call me.
For a moment she stood there motionless,
Then she vanished all at once, and the water earlier so limpid,
Had grown red, as if with blood.*

*He is the light of my day, the comfort of my sufferings.
When enraptured, ecstatic, with burning adoration,
And with the language of the heart, he swears to me eternal faith,
My troubles are forgotten, my sadness becomes joy.
When I am with him it is as if the heavens open for me.*

Chorus of wedding guests

*Fill every cup, come celebrate! Joy all around returning.
Now you have brought new life and hope, ending our days of yearning.
Here will our friendship guide you, love ever be your companion.
Love ever lead you aright, so bright that no clouds can hide you,
Star in our gloomy night, a star to cheer our night.
No darkness shall disguise again your star renowned;
Gladly I see it rise again to greater light and glory.
In token give your hand now, this heart of mine is true;
I vow beside you I'll stand now as brother and friend to you.*

They Will Come To You

Edgardo

*On the tomb that holds my betrayed father's remains
Against your blood I swore eternal wage in my rage.
But I saw you, and in my heart was born a different emotion, and my rage was silenced.
But that vow is not yet broken. I could fulfil it yet!*

Lucia

*Calm yourself. A single sound could betray us!
Is my grief not enough for you? Do you wish me to die of terror?
Let every other sentiment yield, and let love alone burn in your heart.
Ah, more noble, more holy than any vow is true love!
Yield to me, yield to love!*

Edgardo

*Here, as a bride, swear eternal faith to me before the face of heaven.
God hears us, God sees us; temple and altar is a loving heart.
Your destiny I now unite with mine. I am your husband.*

Lucia, Edgardo

Ah, the flames of our love can death alone extinguish. For my vows I invoke love's help.

Edgardo

And now we must part.

Lucia

*Ah, what fateful words!
My heart goes with you.*

Edgardo

And my heart stays with you.

Lucia

*Ah! From time to time write me a note, with your thoughts on the paper,
and this fugitive life I shall nourish with hope.*

Edgardo

I shall keep a living memory always, O beloved, of you with me.

Lucia, then Edgardo

*Ah! Borne by gentle breezes my ardent sighs will come to you.
Hear how in the murmuring seas my lamentations echo.
Think then that my nourishment comes from sighs
Then cry a bitter tear upon this pledge!
I depart.
Remember we are united by heaven.*

Gioachino Antonio Rossini was an Italian composer who wrote 39 operas as well as sacred music, chamber music, songs and some instrumental and piano pieces. A tendency for inspired, song-like melodies is evident throughout his scores, which led to him being nicknamed 'the Italian Mozart'.

Rossini's French opera on the story of Moses is based on his Italian sacred drama *Mosè in Egitto*, written to be performed at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples during Lent 1818. The Paris version of nine years later was considerably altered, though the *Prayer* differs only in its text. It is sung by the Children of Israel as they are trapped between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea.

Prayer

*From thy celestial dwelling beyond all earthly telling, great Lord, our fears dispelling,
Look down and hear our prayer.*

Lord through the desert lead us, with heavenly manna feed us:

We cry to thee O heed us, and guide us safely home.

The earth and heavens adore thee, all nations bow before thee;

Have mercy, we implore thee, and keep us safe from harm.

*From thy celestial dwelling, beyond all earthly telling, great Lord, our fears dispelling,
Look down and set us free.*

Great Lord, O hear our plea.

Eugene Onegin

Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840 -1893)

Tchaikovsky declared that to refrain from writing opera was a heroism he did not possess. From his youth, the stage fascinated him. A performance of *Don Giovanni*, seen at the age of ten, inspired Tchaikovsky to devote himself to music and throughout his life he returned to the writing of opera.

Eugene Onegin can be described as Tchaikovsky's operatic masterpiece. He himself did most of the work to adapt Pushkin's classic poem as a libretto, preserving much of the original text. The opening is set on a country estate in the 1820's. Tatyana falls in love with the wordly Onegin and writes him a passionate letter. The following scene, the *Chorus of Peasant Girls*, takes place in the garden; a group of girls sing while they gather berries. Tatyana and Onegin meet. He says he is not inclined for marriage.

Act 2 is set at a ball in honour of Tatyana's name-day. The guests are dancing a waltz, expressing their enjoyment and gossiping. After the waltz Onegin quarrels with his friend Lensky. Lensky challenges Onegin to a duel as he feels Onegin is showing too much attention to his fiancée Olga. On the morning of the duel, in his aria, *Kuda Kuda*, Lensky looks back on his happy youth while he waits for Onegin to arrive.

He realises that he will probably die in the duel and that he does not particularly care if he does. The only great loss in his death would be that he would never see Olga again. Lensky is killed and some years later Onegin returns from self-imposed exile and meets Tatyana, who is now married, in Petersburg. He falls in love with her; Tatyana says that she still loves him, but she is loyal to her husband.

A particular feature of this opera is the way the story develops against a background of dance and music.

Chorus of peasant girls

*Dear companions, come this way, join us in the games we play,
Choose a happy melody suited to our revelry.
Sing our favourite roundelay for the harvest holiday.
If a handsome lad comes near, let us try to lure him here.
When he's seen us from afar, he'll discover where we are.
If he follows in pursuit, throw a handful of your fruit;
All the berries you can find, summer fruit of every kind!
As the lad is chased away, see that he is teased and say,
"Never come again to spy on the girlish games we play"!*

Lensky's Aria

*Where have you gone, O golden days of my spring?
What does the day coming have in store for me?
It escapes my eyes, it is hidden!
Shall I fall to the deadly arrow, or will it pass by?
All for better, there is a pre-determined time for life and for sleep.
Blessed is a day of simple tasks, and blessed is the day of troubles.

Will the day beam shine in the morning and the bright day shall reign
And will I perhaps descend into the mysterious darkness of my fatal tomb?
And the memory of a strange poet will fall into Abyss
The world shall forget me, but you, you, Olga!
Tell me, will you, the maiden of beauty, come to shed a tear over the early urn
And think "he loved me, he devoted to me the gloomy dawn of a troubled life!"
Ah Olga, I did love you - to you alone I devoted the gloomy dawn of my troubled life
Yes Olga, I did love you! My wonderful friend, my dear friend, Come, for I am your husband.*

Waltz scene

*This is superb! We never had expected such splendid company and dancing to a band!
We seldom see parties such as this one. What glorious food! What glorious wine!
So tasteful, so well planned!
Yes, it's splendid; simply delightful! What a party, we have never been more surprised!*

*Here in the country we live in seclusion; festive occasions and dancing are rare.
Hunting is really our only diversion, makes a nice change from the hound and the hare.*

*That's all our men-folk consider amusing, just shooting and fishing and up with the sun.
And then in the evening, they're always exhausted yet we who've been working could do
with some fun. Yes, do with some fun!*

*Oh gentlemen soldiers we beg you to tell us the name of your regiment.
Certainly, but why aren't you dancing?
Well no one has asked us to.
In that case dear ladies, the pleasure is ours.*

*Look at them! Now what could be plainer! She must find a husband. That's him for sure!
How sad for Tatyana, for once they are married she'll find he's a tyrant.
He gambles what's more!
He's most discourteous and conceited; the things he says can't be repeated.
He's a freemason so they say and ends up drunk on wine each day.*

*Such a party! Such a surprise! What delightful dancing, the party's at its height!
How delightful!
Hail to music, hail to song! We'll dance and feast the whole night long!
Hail to pleasure, to feasting and dancing!
We'll dance and feast the whole night long! How delightful!*

Mlada

Nikolai Rimsky - Korsakov (1844 -1908)

With two exceptions, all of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas are on Russian themes. Mythology attracted him, as did fantastic subjects. His gift for harmonic and orchestral colour inspired work dealing with supernatural elements in a colourful folk setting.

Premièred on 1 November 1892, at the Mariinsky Theatre, St Petersburg, and described by its composer as a 'magic opera-ballet', *Mlada* is the fourth of Rimsky-Korsakov's fifteen operas. It is very much a pretext for displaying pageantry, ballet sequences and scenic effects. It is set in 9th – 10th century Slav lands. Mlada, herself, is one of the rare non-singing title roles in opera, for before the action begins, Voislava, daughter of Prince Mstivoi, who desires Yaromir, Mlada's husband, has murdered her.

In the fourth act the ghosts of Yaromir's ancestors inform him of Voislava's crime. She is condemned to death, and, in a flood and earthquake Yaromir dies, thus being united forever with his beloved Mlada. The *Procession of the Nobles* takes place at the beginning of Act 2 when the princes assemble at a national festival.

Procession of the nobles

*Princess! All hail! Hail to Yaromir, mighty ruler of Arkon!
Glory! Hail Mstivoj, Prince of Retra! Noble Polabians, all hail!
Glory! Sing in praise of all our nobles! Hail to all Slavonic people. Glory!*

Idomeneo

Wolfgang Mozart (1756 – 1792)

Idomeneo marks a clear landmark not only in Mozart's operatic output, but also in his whole career. Commissioned by the Elector of Bavaria, it was his first mature opera. With it he demonstrated a mastery of orchestral colour, accompanied recitatives and melodic line. It was first performed in Munich in January 1781, with the 25 year old Mozart himself conducting. The British première, by the amateur Glasgow Grand Opera Society did not take place until 1934 and the first performance in the USA was in 1947. Today it is part of standard operatic repertoire.

The opera is based on an ancient Greek story. Idomeneo is delayed by storms on his voyage back to Crete after the Trojan War and vows that, if Neptune grants a him safe passage home, he will sacrifice the first person he meets there. Shipwrecked on a deserted shore, Idomeneo recalls the vow he foolishly made to Neptune, singing the aria, *Vedrommi Intorno*. The first person he sees turns out to be his son Idamante. Idomeneo tries to escape from the consequences by sending him away, and *Placido è il mar*, the *Voyagers Chorus* is sung as Idamante is about to depart with the Greek princess Elettra (who loves him, although he prefers the Trojan princess Ilia). Another storm forces Idomeneo to carry out his vow, but he is reprieved by Neptune at the last moment, provided that he abdicates in favour of his son and his son's bride-to-be, Ilia.

Voyagers' Chorus

*Calm are the winds and waters, blessings attend our journey.
The fates foretell good fortune; quick, quick, make haste, set sail!
May gentle breezes softly caress you; no bitter tempest ever distress you;
Winds kindly wafting follow and bless you, spread among you far and wide the sweet breath of love.*

I Shall See About Me

*I shall see about me a lamenting shade which night and day will cry to me "I am innocent."
The blood spilt from his pierced breast, his pale corpse will point out to me my crime.
What horror, what grief! How many times this heart will die of torment!*

The Flying Dutchman

Richard Wagner (1813 -1883)

Partly inspired by legend and partly by a very prolonged and rough sea voyage which Wagner and his wife endured from Riga to London in 1839, the central theme of this opera is redemption by love. Wagner himself conducted the première in Dresden in 1843. He claimed that *The Dutchman* represented a new start for him, 'From here begins my career as a poet, and my farewell to the mere concoctor of opera-texts'.

Senta sings her *Ballad* in Act 2. For years she has read about the sailor cursed by Satan and doomed to sail the seas forever on a ghostly ship. Every seven years he is allowed on shore to seek a wife. Only the love of a faithful woman can redeem him, and Senta, day-dreaming at work, tells her friends that she longs to be that woman.

Senta's Ballad

*Have you encountered the ship on the sea, blood red the sails, black the mast?
On the top deck, the ship's pale captain watches without rest.
Whoosh! How the wind rushes! How it whistles in the ropes! Heigh ho!
Like an arrow he flies, without a goal, rest or peace.*

*Yet deliverance can still come for this man, should he find a woman who would be true to him unto death.
Oh when will you find her, pale sailor? Pray to heaven that soon a woman will hold true to him.*

*Through a wicked wind and raging storm he wished to sail around the Cape.
He cursed and swore with courage "I will not cease for all eternity"
Whoosh! And Satan heard him. Took him at his word. Heigh ho!
And damned, he stays the course at sea, without goal, rest or peace.*

Yet so that the pale man might find some release, God's angel points to salvation.

*He drops anchor every seven years, he goes ashore to marry a woman.
Every seven years he has married but has yet to find a true and loyal wife.*

*Whoosh! Raise the sails! Weigh anchor! False love, false pledge! Heigh ho!
Out to sea, without rest or peace.*

*I am she who will save you by my fidelity. May God's angel reveal me to you.
Through me you shall have your salvation!*

William Tell

Gioachino Rossini (1792 -1868)

Gioachino Rossini wrote the opera *Guillaume Tell* to a French libretto based on Schiller's play which drew on the William Tell legend. The opera was Rossini's last, although he lived for nearly forty more years.

Originally in four acts, William Tell was first performed by the Paris Opéra in August 1829, but within three performances cuts were being made and after a year only three acts were performed.

The scene is set in Switzerland in the thirteenth century. The Swiss are smarting under the rule of the Austrian governor, Gesler; eventually he is shot by William Tell with the second of two arrows (the first of which has shot the famous apple from his son's head) and the Swiss gain their freedom. The *Villagers' Chorus* opens the opera. Its length, roughly four hours of music, and casting requirements have contributed to the difficulty of producing the work. Today the opera is remembered mostly for its famous overture.

Villagers Chorus

Bright and serene the day is breaking; welcome in song this morn so fair.

Valley and hill, soft echoes making while joyful refrains fill the air.

We welcome in song this glad morning so fair.

All to their tasks now are awaking; let us give thanks safe in God's care.

Aida

Giuseppe Verdi (1813 -1901)

Aida, now one of the most famous operas in the world, was composed by Giuseppe Verdi for the opening of a new opera house in Cairo, Egypt. Verdi didn't finish it in time for the opening, but when it was finally completed and premièred in late 1871, it was an outstanding work. Sung in the first act by the Ethiopian King's daughter, *Ritorna Vincitor* is a moving aria that expresses Aida's conflicting feelings. Aida, a captured and captive prisoner of the Egyptians forced to serve the Egyptian princess Amneris, has fallen in love with an Egyptian warrior named Radamès. When the Egyptian High Priest commands him to fight against the approaching Ethiopian armies that are coming to her rescue, she is overwhelmed. How can she choose between her homeland, her family and Radamès, the man she loves?

Return Victorious!

Return victorious!

And from my lips came the impious word!

Victorious over my father and his troops wielding their weapons for me

To rescue me and take me back to my homeland,

My royal palace and my illustrious name that here I am forced to conceal!

*Victorious over my brothers I may see him, blood stained loved,
Triumph in the acclamation by Egypt's forces!
And behind his chariot, a King, my father in chains!*

*These insane words, oh gods, please forget!
Let the daughter return to her father's breast,
Destroy the squadrons of our oppressor!
Ah! Unfortunate! What did I say? And my love?*

*Can I then forget this ardent love
That, oppressed and enslaved, is like the blessed rays of the sun?
I curse the death of Radames to him whom I love so much though!
Ah! There has never been anything as cruel as this anguish of a broken heart!*

*The sacred names of my father and my lover, neither of which I can call upon.
I am confused for each one, I am trembling, I cry, I pray.
But my prayer changes to cursing - Crime is the fault of my tears and sighs
In the dark night, my mind is lost and I would die in this cruel world.*

*Gods, have pity on my suffering! There is no hope for my sorrow.
Fatal love, tremendous love. Break my heart and let me die!*

Nabucco

Giuseppe Verdi (1813 -1901)

Giuseppe Verdi came to dominate the Italian opera scene after the era of Bellini, Donizetti and Rossini, whose works significantly influenced him, becoming one of the pre-eminent opera composers in history. *Nabucco* was written early on in his career. Verdi's first two operas were not greatly successful and after the tragic deaths of his wife and two young children, he almost gave up composing altogether. But he was persuaded to look at the libretto for *Nabucco* and in 1842 Verdi wrote that when he looked at it, it fell open at *Va, pensiero*. The opera's triumphant success was due at least in part to the melody to which he set this paraphrase of Psalm 137. It is recounted that all the stage-hands, at the first run of performances in 1842 at La Scala, would gather every night in the wings to hear the great chorus. It is sung by the Israelites as they lament the loss of their homeland, and was soon widely interpreted as a political gesture, becoming an anthem of Italian patriotism. At Verdi's funeral the crowd spontaneously broke into it.

The narrative, which derives from a French play produced in Paris in 1836, is set around the biblical story of the Jews in Babylonian exile in 586 BC. For Verdi, *Nabucco* changed everything, permanently establishing his reputation as a composer and underpinning his success, until his retirement from the theatre twenty-nine operas later.

Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves

*Dearest homeland, my thoughts fly towards thee;
Wings of gold bear them on to your journey's ending,
Where the sweet scented breezes are blending in the green hills and vales of our land.
Ah, to stand by the banks of the Jordan and to see Sion's woeful desolation!
Oh dear land, once the joy of our nation now forever lost by fate's cruel hand.
Golden harps of the prophets and sears of old, why so silently hang on the willows?
Lift your voice, stir our hearts, let the story be told of the times now so long gone and past.
Oh Jerusalem, blessed city, when will grief and lamenting be over?
Let our song rise to thee, great Jehovah; hear the voice of thy people at last.*

Il Trovatore

Giuseppe Verdi (1813 -1901)

Il Trovatore (The Troubadour) was composed by Verdi in the middle of his composition career, between *Rigoletto* and *La Traviata*. The first performance was in 1853 at the Teatro Apollo in Rome. It is set in Spain in the early 15th century and is based on a play by Gutiérrez that had been an immediate success in 1836. Its plot is dark and complex, involving a curse, burning at the stake, jealousy and revenge. The superb tunes, bold characterisation, and strong dramatic confrontations made it instantly and enduringly popular.

The *Anvil Chorus* opens Act 2: gypsies (who earn their living as tinkers) are striking their anvils and singing in praise of the approaching dawn and the pleasures of work, wine and women.

Anvil Chorus

*See how the night mist is lifting it's veil and the great vault of heaven above is shining,
Seems like a widow whose mourning is done, casting off all the black of her sorrow and pining.*

*To work, to work then! Ready? Your hammers!
Who cheers the gipsy's days and raises up his spirits? You know the answer? A pretty woman!*

*Fill up our glasses! Our arms are strong and hearts are brave again when wine is flowing.
Look how the sunbeams shine in the glass where the wine that we drink is so brightly glowing.*

Programme notes: Elizabeth Jones. Sources: The Oxford Dictionary of Opera – John Warrack & Ewan West, The New Grove Book of Operas – Edited Stanley Sadie, the Internet.