

The Birth of Opera



Objectives

- I. intellectual background of opera
 - people, aesthetic goals
- II. musical innovations
- III. the first operas

The Florentine Camerata, 1570s-80s

- Count Giovanni de' Bardi
 - patron, war hero, amateur musician, soccer hooligan
 - hosted the Camerata

Goal: Revive the power of ancient Greek music



Count Bardi

Girolamo Mei (1519-1594)

- studied ancient Greek theater/music
 - MONOphonic (one voice)
 - drama was sung throughout



Vincenzo Galilei (1520-1591)



- Lutenist/composer
- Polemicist
 - *Dialogue on Ancient and Modern Music* (1581)
 - attack on counterpoint
 - WT 43
 - teacher to the Camerata
- know his son?

Giulio Caccini, *Le nuove musiche*

- singer/composer
- W/T 44



W/T 44

- On the Camerata: "I can state that . . . I learned more from their savant speeches than I had in over 30 years study of counterpoint . . . (the mangler of poetry)."

and

- "They further urged me to aspire that it might penetrate the minds of others, working those wonders so admired by the ancient writers, which counterpoint, in modern composition, rendered impossible."

Giulio Caccini, *Le nuove musiche*

- singer/composer
- monody
- *Vedrò 'l mio sol*, NAWM 67
– madrigal: through composed



Vedrò 'l mio sol, NAWM 67

I'll see my sun; I'll see before I die
that wished for day
when your rays return to me.

O my light, O my joy,
much sweeter is my torment for you
than delight in others.

But without death I cannot suffer
such a long martyrdom.

And if I die, will die my hope
to see ever again the dawn of such a beautiful day.

Giulio Caccini, *Le nuove musiche*

- singer/composer
- monody
- *Vedrò 'l mio sol*, NAWM 67
 - madrigal: through composed
 - figured bass
 - dramatic
 - sensuous



J. Peri/ O. Rinuccini, *l'Euridice* (the second opera)

- Opera!
- The Orpheus myth
 - w/T 1
- Prologue: “Io, che d’alti sospir”



L'Euridice, prologue [sung by “Tragedy”]

I, who with deep sighs and tears am smitten, my face, covered now with grief, now with menace, once in ample theatres crowded with people, [!] made their faces turn pale with pity.

Not of blood spilled from innocent veins, nor of eyes put out by an insane tyrant but of a spectacle unhappy to human sight, do I sing on this sad and tearful stage.

Stay far from under this royal roof, dismal images, shadows of anguish. Behold, the gloomy buskins and the dark rags I transform, and awaken in the hearts sweeter affections.

J. Peri/ O. Rinuccini, *l'Euridice* (the second opera)

- Opera!
 - The Orpheus myth
 - w/τ1
 - Prologue: “Io, che d’alti sospir”
 - strophic aria
 - ritornello*****
- Purpose: address the audience/patron



J. Peri, *l'Euridice* (cont.)

- Aria: “Nel pur ardor,”
NAWM 68a
 - sinfonia (i.e., symphony)
 - pastoral music
 - for shepherds



J. Peri/ O. Rinuccini, *l'Euridice*

- Recitative: “Per quel vago boschetto,”
NAWM 68b
 - charged text
 - heroic style
 - dissonance
 - sharpness
 - flatness


