

Introduction to opera and luciano and pavarotti music essay



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In the 19th century, one of the most popular forms of entertainment for the elite and common person both was opera, particularly in Italy. Opera stars were the equivalent of modern television and movie stars; plots, intrigues, singers, and composers were the elite. As an art form, opera has been part of the musical lexicon since the 16th century, defined as an art form in which singers and musicians perform a dramatic or comedic work from a text (libretto) in a combination musical event. It is part of the Western classical music tradition, and is popular because it incorporates elements of the theater (acting, scenery, costumes, make-up, special effects, and sometimes dance). Because opera combines so many elements of grand theater and music, it is often considered to be representative of the contemporary cultural questions and expressions of the time (The Viking Opera Guide).

While opera developed throughout Europe from the 16th century on, it was the Italian operatic tradition, the lyrical compositions, quality and tonality of voices, and enthusiastic public reception, that seemed to lead the operatic world through the 19th century. Of course there were exceptions to this, one of the seminal grand operatic works was Richard Wagner's four-opera epic, *Der Ring Des Nibelungen*, but one will certainly find more people raving (and humming) tunes from the Italian repertoire of Verdi, Puccini, Donizetti, Mascagnit, and Leoncavallo – most especially since many of these same tunes were used in modern motion picture scoring and even popularized by Bugs Bunny in cartoons (Jones).

However, within the operatic world, two particular voice types, the soprano and the tenor, continue to stand out in the public's eye as the Diva or Divo musical stars. The public followed the antics of both with a fervor almost

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never seen until the the movie star mania popularized from 1930 on. Stories abound about famous singers, Enrico Causo, Eleanor Steber, Maria Callas, and more have made international headlines for decades. After the dawn of television, however, opera experienced a slight downturn with the cynicism of the 1960s and 1970s, younger listeners finding it more appropriate for the elite, a commentary on the aristocratic European culture, and simply too expensive to attend. Opera impresarios were not blind to this trend, realizing that in order to not lose their audience completely, they would need a new crop of “ movie-star” idols who not only were larger than life on stage, but larger than life on stage as well. One of the most successful and well-known and loved examples of this since the mid-1960s has been Italian tenor Luciano Pavarotti, who prior to his death in 2007 became one of the most commercially successful tenors of all times. He was part of the Three Tenor ensemble with Placido Domingo and Jose Carreras, made numerous cross-over recordings with pop artists (e. g. Sting, etc.), and was active in charity and humanitarian work. With his performance at the 1990 World Cup in Italy of Puccini’s powerful *Nessun Dorma*, he won the world’s admiration and interest for the remainder of his career (How the 1990 FIFA World Cup Made Pavarotti a Superstar; World Cup 1990 Italia). This turned out to be his signature aria, and in the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin, Pavarotti performed *Nessun Dorma* with the crowd serving as his chorus, after which the crowd went wild with ovation after ovation. He died at his home in Modena, Italy of Pancreatic cancer on September 6, 2007 (Luciano Pavarotti).

Luciano was larger than life in both physical and vocal performance. He topped 350 pounds at in the 1990s, but had a vocal range and passion that

made him one of the most envied modern singers on the modern stage. His life can be broken down into five major sections: early years and training, the 1960s and 1970s (early career), 1980s and 1990s (top of his game), the 21st century, and his legacy.

Early Life and Training – Luciano was born in 1935 in Modena, a town in northern Italy. He was fortunate that his father, a baker, was also an amateur tenor, although it appears that he had a loving family life, the privations of World War II forced the family from the city to the countryside. While in the countryside, Pavarotti became interested in farming, and of course, Italy's national passtime of soccer. Although he toyed with the idea of becoming a goalkeeper, his father's recordings of Caruso, Di Stefano, Gigli and Martinelli, as well as the popular Mario Lanza caused him to take vocal training seriously. He noted, " In my teens I used to go to Mario Lanza movies and then come home and imitate him in the mirror" (Luciano Pavarotti, *Greatest Singer of the 20th Century*).

Pavarotti's mother, however, was more practical, and convinced him to get the credentials to teach school; finally teaching for a few years prior to devoting himself to music. It was not until 1954 that Pavarotti began to study music in any serious manner, but at the age of 19, he began to work with Arrigo Pola, a professional teacher and tenor in Modena who taught him for free; also uncovering the fact that Pavarotti had perfect pitch (Eggenberger, 80).

When Pola moved to Japan, Pavarotti switched to Ettore Campogalliani, who coached a number of the 20th century's most famous Italian opera stars:

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Renata Tabaldi, Renata Schotto, Mirella Freni (childhood friend of Pavarotti), and Ruggero Raimondi. Ironically, Freni's mother and Pavarotti's mother worked together and besides their childhood friendship, they appeared numerous times on stage together. In 1955, for instance, Pavarotti and the Corale Rossini, a male voice choir based in his home town, one first prize at an International competition in Wales. Pavarotti later commented that this was the most important experience in his life, inspiring him to become a professional singer (Pavarotti Eisteddfod Career Start).

The 1950s, though, were not all that easy for Pavarotti. During his early years he held numerous part-time jobs; from teaching school to selling insurance. In fact, the first six years of intense study resulted in only a very few recitals, most without pay, and, as such, a very discouraging time for him. It was also during this time that a small nodule developed on one side of his vocal cords, and caused a disastrous performance and panic for Pavarotti and his family. Naturally, something like this at so early a part of his career was traumatic, and he decided to give up singing as a career and pursue something else. However, for whatever reason – and Pavarotti himself attributed it to a stress release from all the psychological pressure he was feeling about a career, the nodule disappeared and his voice, after resting a bit, came back far stronger and more robust than ever. He noted, “Everything I had learned came together with my natural voice to make the sound I had been struggling so hard to achieve” (Kesting, 112).

Early Career – 1960s and 1970s – By this time, in 1961, Pavarotti was married to Adua Veroni, who was supportive but not musically inclined. Also in the same year he won the Achille Peri Competition and the first prize of a <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-to-opera-and-luciano-and-pavarotti-music-essay/>

debut role as Puccini's Rodolfo in *La Bohème*. This was an ideal role for the young tenor, it is lyrical, but not excessively demanding; dramatic, but not boisterous; and well-known and loved by audiences. The debut was a success, and a well-known Italian agent, Alessandro Ziliani who was in the audience, decided to represent Pavarotti. Because he was such an unknown, though, Ziliani had to couch Pavarotti as part of a package with his some of his other singers; thus allowing Pavarotti to again sing Rodolfo in Lucca, Italy in 1962 (Luciano Pavarotti).

Rodolfo was almost a signature role for the early Pavarotti; singing it in February 1963 at the Vienna State Opera and then replacing Giuseppe di Stefano at the Royal Opera House (Arendt). Despite these successes, Pavarotti was not getting offers from opera houses until he had a fortunate singing connection with Dame Joan Sutherland and her conductor husband, Richard Bonynge. It seems Madam Sutherland was tired of short tenors, being a rather tall and robust woman herself. She wanted a tall and muscular tenor to take on her important Australian tour (her homeland) and found Pavarotti to be the ideal physical, and vocal partner. The two sang over 40 performances over two months, all successful, and Pavarotti said that this was a seminal point in his career because he learned Sutherland's breathing technique which helped him maintain his voice over such a long career (Sutherland in *Ibid*).

Pavarotti finally debuted in the United States in 1965 with Sutherland in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, again replacing an ailing tenor and upon the recommendation of Sutherland. In April of the same year he finally made it to Italy's La Scala in Franco Zeffirelli's *La Bohème*, singing with his
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childhood friend Mirella Freni and under the baton of Herbert Von Karajan. Karajan, always on the lookout for new talent, requested Pavarotti, and would recommend him numerous times from then on. In June, 1966 he first appeared in Covent Garden in another Donizetti role, Tonio in *la Fille du Regiment* and was so skilled at the difficult range of the role the press dubbed him the “ King of the High C’s” (Woodstra, Brennan and Schrott, iv; (Ah Mes Amis – Live at Covent Garden 1966).

He began recording and adding to his repertoire; 1969 opposite Renata Scotto in *I Lombardi*, the rarely performed *I Capuleti e I Montecchi*, and a complete *L’Elisir d’Amore* with his now famous friend, Sutherland. On February 17, 1972, Pavarotti made a stunning breakthrough at the Metropolitan Opera in *La Fille*, receiving 17 curtain calls and wild raves from both the crowd and critics; as well as doting praise from Mirella Freni (Remembering Pavarotti; Ah Mes Amis – Live at the Met 1972).

From then on, Pavarotti was in demand as a world-class tenor. He was brought into the living rooms of the public through Live From the Met Broadcasts. In fact, his role as Rodolfo in the 1977 broadcast of *La Boheme* attracted one of the largest television audiences ever for a televised opera; earning ratings in demographic groups that would traditionally never watch opera (Live from the Met Highlights). Many see this as the key to his being able to break the glass ceiling of opera and appeal to non-traditional music lovers who, perhaps had not yet been exposed to opera. During this period he won a number of platinum and gold records for his performances and had such an international following that he was able to command top booking fees even for smaller roles; the Italian Singer at the <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-to-opera-and-luciano-and-pavarotti-music-essay/>

1978 Salzburg Rosenkaviler and in 1983 in the lyrical but not often performed *Idomeneo* (Pavarotti). The rest of the 1970s were even better for Pavarotti, he was profiled in *Time* with a cover story, returned to the Vienna State Opera to join Karahan in *Il Trovatore*, and in 1978 sang a solo recital broadcast on Live from Lincoln Center (*Bravo Pavarotti- Opera's Golden Tenor*; Sutherland). With his popularity rising, the decade of the 1970s certainly catapulted him to fame and, as the article in *Time* noted, as ambassador of opera to the world.

The 1980s and 1990s – By all accounts, Pavarotti was a generous and gregarious person off stage as well as on. He was adamant about helping young singers, and set up the Pavarotti International Voice Competition, performing with the first winners in 1982; and in 1986 staged excerpts of *La Bohème* and *Un Ballo in Maschera*. In fact, to celebrate his 25th anniversary, he took the winners to Italy for a gala performance of *Bohème* in Modena and Genoa, and then onto China where they staged actual performances of the opera in Beijing. Always popular with Chinese audiences, Pavarotti concluded his visit to China with the first ever concert in the Great Hall of the People for an audience of 10, 000; receiving a standing ovation and numerous curtain calls after nine seemingly effortless high C's (*Luciano Pavarotti Concorso Internazionale di Canto*).

The 1980s found him jetting around the world; La Scala, Vienna State Opera, Staatsoper, and a moving reunion with Mirella Freni for the San Francisco Opera *Bohème* in 1988, also recorded in video (*La Bohème*). He worked with Zeffirelli on a new production of *Don Carlo*, but rather than a wonderful reception was criticized and actually booed (Fleming, 103).

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It was a non-operatic event, though, that helped solidify Pavarotti's reputation as a first-class tenor. In 1990 he sang the Act III opening aria of Puccini's *Turandot*, "Nessun Dorma," which was broadcast all over the world by the BBC, and, with the final words translated as "I will win," this became the theme song for the event. It was also during this time frame that he, and fellow tenors Placido Domingo and Jose Carreras, along with conductor Zubin Mehta, began the highly successful Three Tenors Concerts; the three clowning, amazing audiences, poking fun at each other, and showing their skill. Over the course of several years, these concerts, along with Pavarotti's live televised concerts in Hyde Park, the Eiffel Tower, New York's Central Park and more gleaned over 1,000,000 at the live performances, and countless millions in the television audience (Ross; Lewis).

A televised biography was released in 1995, called *The Best is Yet to Come*, in which Pavarotti's life and career, performances, musical and non-musical colleagues, and family were interviewed (L. Pavarotti). On December 12, 1998, Pavarotti became the first opera singer to perform on *Saturday Night Live* and also reached out to popular audiences with his performances in Buenos Aires with the band U2 (*Saturday Night Live with Pavarotti*; Miss Sarajevo).

Pavarotti in the 21st Century – Pavarotti remained active in the early part of the century, receiving a large number of distinguished awards: the Kennedy Center Honors (2001); two Guinness World Records for 165 curtain calls and the best-selling classical album ever (with the Three Tenors); and in late 2003 released his first and only "crossover" album entitled *Ti Adoro* as a wedding gift to his new bride, his assistant Nicoletta Mantovani (Block). He <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-to-opera-and-luciano-and-pavarotti-music-essay/>

began his farewell tour in 2004, at the age of 69, giving his last performance at the Met in New York as Puccini's lovestruck artist Mario Cavaradossi in *Tosca*, followed by a 40-city farewell tour culminating in Taiwan in 2005. In early 2006 he had a second round of back surgery and contracted an infection forcing him to cancel numerous concerts, but sang "Nessun Dorma" at the 2006 Opening Ceremony at the Winter Olympics in Turin, pre-recording it because of the impossibility of singing in bitter cold late at night (Kington). Tragically, it was also during this farewell tour that Pavarotti was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and although he valiantly fought with surgery and medication, died at age 71 in his Modena home. His manager at the time, Terri Robson, sent a notice to the world, "The Maestro fought a long, tough battle against the pancreatic cancer which eventually took his life. In fitting with the approach that characterized his life and work, he remained positive until finally succumbing to the last stages of his illness" (Pavarotti Dead at 71).

Pavarotti's Popularity- Clearly, one of the reasons for Pavarotti's popularity was his larger than life personality, his willingness to reach out to popular singers, his humanitarianism, and television. Television brought Pavarotti into the homes of millions who had never seen an opera, and many who had no access to opera. He gave numerous free outdoor concerts, his music was readily available through download, DVD, and recording, and despite a rather disastrous and relatively unbelievable performance in the Hollywood movie *Yes, Giorgio* (1982), idolized by millions.

While Pavarotti had a stellar career, he was critiqued at times. For instance, he frequently cancelled performances, or backed out at the last minute, <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-to-opera-and-luciano-and-pavarotti-music-essay/>

earning him a dual title besides “ King of the High C’s,” as “ King of Cancellations.” This was brought to the public’s attention in 1989 when Chicago’s Lyric Opera severed their relationship with him because of cancelling 26 out of 41 appearances over an 8 year period, an average cancellation rate of over 50 percent, and disastrous for the box-office (Walsh). In fact, Pavarotti’s former manager, Herbert Breslin, published an account of how difficult it was to deal with Pavarotti, and even accused him of not being able to properly read music, learn parts, and act. Pavarotti acknowledged that he cannot read orchestral scores, but denies (and it seems preposterous) that he cannot read music. Breslin, however, helped Pavarotti attain global star status, but the two egos seemed to clash as Pavarotti aged and began to pick and choose his performances more carefully (Breslin).

However some may have a negative feeling about Pavarotti, there is no denying he revitalized opera and brought classical music to far more than almost any other performer prior. He annual hosted the “ Pavarotti and Friends” charity concerts in which numerous other singers participated (Bon Jovi, Eric Clapton, Sting, Queen, Celine Dion, Andrea Borelli, and more) all to raise money for several humanitarian causes supported by the United Nations. He performed concerts for victims of natural disasters and tragedies; worked with Princess Diana to help rid the world of land mines, and in 1998 was appointed the United Nations Messenger of Peace (Luciano Pavarotti to Promote U. N. Causes). Because of his popularity, it is easy to see why people loved his persona. Because of his dedication to causes for the unfortunate, it is easy to understand why he became a musical

ambassador for so many, finally earning the 1998 MusiCares Person of the Year, an award given to those who go above and beyond the call of duty to provide heroic support to humanitarian causes (Freedom of London for Pavarotti).

Critique of Recording- In his career, Pavarotti made hundreds of recordings; some entire operas, some concerts, a cross-over album, numerous Holiday and special occasion albums, and even appeared on some with pop stars such as Sting and Bono. With such a wide range and volume of recordings, it is difficult to pick one album that is uniquely Pavarotti. He was a sublime Cavaradosi, and joyous Tonio, his Pagliacci was emotionally moving, his Pinkerton tinged with just the right arrogance, and his Andrea Chenier sublime. However, it is one of his early roles, repeated numerous times, that is possibly the best recording ever made of that role; that of Rodolfo in La Boheme, especially opposite his friend Mirella Freni. This Rodolfo is not extra serious, but it is not light comedy either. Instead, his lyricism and ability to maintain pitch when singing in the high range that is almost perfect for the young, impoverished poet; living vicariously in the Parisian slums. Of course everyone would focus on the famous arias at the end of Act I, but Pavarotti's touch of pathos comes out far more during Act III where, during a winter's snowfall, he and Mimi tearfully agree to remain together, at least until the Spring, when the world comes to life again. One can hear the tears in Pavarotti's voice as he realizes just how ill Mimi actually is; without wanting to alarm her. And the ease with which he and Freni dialog with one another makes what sometimes sounds like two people singing parts into a juxtaposition of pure lyrical delight (Pavarotti, Freni and Harwood).