



# 2020 Classical Music New Year's Resolutions: Opera

Written by Stephen J. Trygar  
Cover photo by Annie Spratt on Unsplash  
January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020



When I first began setting out on my journey as a professional musician, I had been playing trumpet for several years, but I had grown to love and appreciate singing and the vocal arts. Fast-forward nearly ten years later, and I find myself working with a Master of Music in Music History degree and working in administration at the Academy of Vocal Arts (a school in Philadelphia, PA that molds passionate vocalists into opera singers). Not only do I get the pleasure of working for this school, but I have the honor of being able to write for their blog and for various other projects that arise. Furthermore, I have had the tremendous opportunity to write and lecture for Philadelphia's preeminent opera company Opera Philadelphia. If you would like to read more of my operatic writings, feel free to visit the AVA Opera Blog and my personal website!

On Tuesday, January 7th, I posted a preliminary post to this New Year's Resolutions series! The blog is titled 2020 Classical Music New Year's Resolutions: Getting Started. I highly suggest giving that post a read through before this one, if you haven't done so already. In Getting Started, I give tips on how to get involved in classical music on a general scale and where to look to find recordings. On Saturday, January 11th (a little later than my proposed date), I published the first of the three genre-specific posts: 2020 Classical Music New Year's Resolutions: Symphonic Music. If symphonic music is something you are also interested in, check it out!

Today's post will include some arias, scenes, overtures/preludes, and other pieces in operatic music for you to listen to in getting started with this genre. My goal is to provide you with enough of an array for you to be able to delve deeper on your own. After that, I will give you some tips and tricks when attending live performances. So, without further delay, let's begin!

## Listen to the Music

Getting excited about opera starts with listening to some of the world's greatest works! If you are a Spotify user (such as myself), I have designed a playlist for you to follow. You can either click [here](#) or you can click on the Spotify icon at the top of this blog. For those of you who prefer a different service, I have a list typed below with links to YouTube videos for you to follow. All of the works are selections from operas. I have extracted these particular selections because they are either the most recognizable of the entire work or the most exciting. If you decide you'd like to listen to the whole work (which I highly suggest if you really like the selection), feel free to search for the works name full name without the movement listed (ex. Verdi *La traviata* or Tchaikovsky *Eugene Onegin*).

- Erich Wolfgang Korngold – *Das Wunder der Heliane*, Op. 20, Act I: Vorspiel. “Selig sind die Liebenden”
- Leonard Bernsein – *Trouble in Tahiti*: Prelude: “Mornin’ Sun”
- Walter Braunfels – *Die Vögel*: Prolog: “Ach, ach, ach! Liebwerte Freunde, begrüßt”
- Henry Purcell – *Dido and Aeneas*, Z. 626, Act III, Scene 2: “When I am laid in earth” (Dido’s Lament)
- Antonín Dvořák – *Rusalka*, Op. 114, Act I: “Měsíčku na nebi hlubokém”
- Jonathan Dove – *Flight*, Act I: “Look! Up there” (until 3:35)
- Francis Poulenc – *Dialogues des Carmélites*, FP 159, Act III, Tableau 4: “Salve Regina”
- Philip Glass – *Akhmaten*, Act II, Scene 4: Hymn
- Sergei Prokofiev – *War and Peace*, Op. 91, Act I, Scene 1: “The Radiance of the sky in spring”
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – *Don Giovanni, ossia Il dissoluto punito*, K. 527, Act I: “Madamina, il catalogo è questo”
- John Adams – *Doctor Atomic*, Act I, Scene 3: “Batter my heart”
- Ruggero Leoncavallo – *Pagliacci*, Prologue: “Si può?... Si può?... Signore! Signori!”
- Richard Wagner – *Lohengrin*, WWV 75, Act I: Prelude
- Benjamin Britten – *Peter Grimes*, Op. 33, Act II, Scene 1: “From the gutter”
- Gaetano Donizetti – *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Act III, Scene 2: Scena ed Aria “Oh giusto cielo!”

- Kaija Saariaho – *L'Amour de loin*, Act II, Tableau 2: “Rien ne vous oblige à l'aimer”
- Giacomo Puccini – *Turandot*, Act III: “Nessun dorma!”
- Camille Saint-Saëns – *Samson et Dalila*, Op. 47, R. 288, Act II, Scene 3: “Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix”
- Gioachino Rossini – *Il barbiere di Siviglia, ossia L'inutile precauzione*, Act I, Scene 1: “Largo al factotum”
- Alban Berg – *Wozzeck*, Act III, Scene 2: “Dort links geht's in die Stadt”
- Georges Bizet – *Carmen*, WD 31, Act I, Scene 4: “L'amour est un oiseau rebelle” (Habanera)
- Leoš Janáček – *Jenůfa*, Act II: “Co chvíla ... co chvíla”
- Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky – *Eugene Onegin*, Op. 24, TH. 5, Act I: “Puskai pogilabnu ya, no pryvezhde” (Letter scene)
- Einjuhani Rautavaara – *Thomas*, Act I: “Soma, Soma...”
- Léo Delibes – *Lakmé*, Act I: “Viens, Mallika, ... dôme épais” (Flower Duet)
- George Gershwin – *Porgy and Bess*, Act I: “Summertime”

## Attending a Live Performance

### Buying a Ticket

As opera is a theatrical art, listening to a recording and going to see an orchestra perform live are not the same, but sometimes going to see a live performance can be intimidating and expensive. You may ask yourself, “How am I supposed to dress?”, “When am I allowed to clap?”, or “How long is the opera?”. Furthermore, you may also ask how you could possibly afford to go to these performances when tickets say they cost no less than \$60. Let me answer some of those questions for you.

One of my various jobs while I was obtaining my masters degree was working for the incredible Opera Philadelphia. I learned a great deal about ticketing policies and programs involved with opera while working here. Often, professional opera companies have several options in place for you to be able to afford a ticket that's not the standard selling price.

Community rush, or a similar name, is a program offered by several opera companies on the day of the performance. Each participating box office will allot a specific amount of time dedicated to selling these tickets at a highly discounted rate to sell more seats. Not every performance is offered in these programs, so visit the company's website or contact the box office to see which performances have rush. If they don't have a rush program, ask to subscribe to their e-Club. It is free of charge and can often give you discounts on upcoming performances. Finally, I'd suggest following the opera company on any social media. By being on their email list and seeing their posts, you're more than likely to catch a promotion at least once a month for a performance you may want to see!

Occasionally students have extended options. Check with the box office to see if there is a student rush option which usually entails a separate time and price from the community rush option. If you are a student at a school in the city or area the company is in, check with your department to see if they have any programs or offers they have with the opera company. (Sometimes this route involves free tickets!) If nothing else, simply ask the box office if there are any student options for discounted tickets.

## **Etiquette and Attendance Practices**

If you've never been to a professional opera performance, certain practices and traditions can seem a little different than other performances you may have gone to. It's important to be aware of them before attending a performance for both your enjoyment and for the enjoyment of your fellow audience members.

*Dress and attire:* For starters, you are about to go to a performances where you will be sitting for the better part of two hours or more in seats, while padded, that don't often have the leg room you're looking for. To compensate, you will want to dress comfortably while still dressing appropriately. My suggestion as a base line is no less casual than a clean, unripped pair of jeans with a clean dress shirt or blouse. Don't feel under-dressed if you see men in tuxedos or suits and women in ornate dresses and jewelry. If they are comfortable wearing those outfits, then there is nothing wrong with your more casual attire. However, if you are attending a gala where part of the gala is a concert, dress how the invitation states (usually black tie).

*Finding your seat:* For some of the more professional opera houses, slight details on your ticket will notify you where to go. After looking for the floor your seats are on, look to see if a door number or letter is listed. Before extending your tickets to be scanned by the usher, ask them if they could point you in the right direction. Sometimes ushers are so busy scanning tickets, they miss seeing if you are in the right place. If they have a floating usher a little further away from the doors, see them first before getting in line just to find out you were at the wrong door. Once you're at the correct door, ushers are always around to show you where your seats are.

*Food and beverages:* Do not bring food or beverages with you into the house! This is a good habit to get in to since the majority of opera houses do not allow them in, but you can always check with an usher before bringing anything in. If the venue has a bar and/or concessions, do not assume you can bring anything back into the house. Once again, ask an usher or front-of-house staff member to see if they are allowed when entering or reentering the hall. Furthermore, food that is wrapped is incredibly distracting if you are trying to open it during the music. This also goes for cough drops or mints. Please have them unwrapped in some way or wait until a pause, intermission or applause happens to unwrap them. Cough drops, if you're sick, are okay to have, but be mindful of your fellow audience members if you must unwrap it.

*Clapping:* Clapping is one of the oldest forms of showing approval. There are certain times to clap while at an opera. The first is when the conductor appears to start up the orchestra. During the performance, there are several rules about when to clap. Generally, there is no clapping until the end of an act. On the rare occasion that a musical piece is performed spectacularly or something theatrically incredible happens, the audience may erupt into applause. If you really enjoyed the moment you just heard and nobody else is applauding, feel free to quietly tap your hand on your thigh to avoid calling attention to yourself.

*Phones and photography:* Turn off your phones and store them away! Phones are incredibly distracting for those around you if they're trying to enjoy the performance in a darkened house. Furthermore, there is nothing more disheartening when a phone rings during high-emotion moments or during the silence surrounding the music. Once you sit down, put your phone on vibrate at the very least. Being excited about attending these operas is perfectly natural and valid! Taking photos of the stage or you are acceptable until the lights are dimmed. Once the lights are dimmed, photography is no longer permitted as it becomes a violation against the policies of the organization.

*Leaving:* Unless it is an emergency, do not leave the performance during a half of the concert. If you have lost interest or need to be somewhere else, leave during the intermission so you are not distracting to your fellow audience members or the performers. Leave during the intermission, not the pauses. On occasion there will be multiple intermissions, but to combat time, some opera companies do a longer intermission with a pause between certain acts. Be courteous to your fellow audience members and allow them to enjoy the performance even if you lost interest.