

Lecture 1 - GREEK MYTHS in OPERA

Monday 20th October at 4 pm



Opera was invented in Florence around 1600 as a Renaissance project to recreate ancient Greek drama – the poetry of which, scholars had concluded, especially in the choral episodes, had probably been chanted or sung. Opera was to be a “dramma per musica”.

Not surprisingly, over the first 200 years of the art-form’s development, the stories of most early operas, were retellings of Greek myths.

Their obvious starting points were the stories of mythology’s first singer, **ORPHEUS**, and the Olympian God of Music, **APOLLO**.

But then composers moved on to the rich material of Mycenae’s hero **PERSEUS**, Thebes’ heroes **HERACLES**, **SEMELE** and **OEDIPUS**, Iolcos’ hero **JASON** (with **MEDEA** from Colchis) and Athens’ hero **THESEUS** (with **ARIADNE** from Crete), for example.

In the 19th century, Greek myths were mostly championed by French composers, and the 20th and current centuries have seen an impressive revival of operas based on Greek sources.