

Lecture #5 - KNIGHTS in SHINING ARMOUR

Monday 24th November at 4 pm

A wandering **KNIGHT ERRANT**,
by definition, errs.
He appears in many different forms
over the centuries.

Baroque operas often focussed on the
deeds of **CHARLEMAGNE's**
PALADINS, most famously
ROLAND (or **ORLANDO**) with
settings by Handel, Haydn and Vivaldi.
When **LUDOVICO ARIOSTO**
created his epic *Orlando Furioso* in
1516, he added the sorceress
ALCINA and this prompted a series
of several dozen operas on her
magical powers. Centuries later, Orlando's exploits in the Pyrenees are
further mirrored in the story of Massenet's **LE CID**.



A second set of legends used the context of the **FIRST CRUSADE**.
TORQUATO TASSO's *Gerusalemme Liberta* in 1581 introduced the
characters of **RINALDO** and **ARMIDA** whose stories are told in operas
by **HANDEL, LULLY, GLUCK, ROSSINI** and **DVORAK**. Giuseppe
Verdi also created his own story of the first Crusade with "**I LOMBARDI**
ALLA PRIMA CROCIATA".

The English cycle of medieval legends about the Romano-British **KING**
ARTHUR and his **KNIGHTS of the ROUND TABLE at CAMELOT**
abounds with names like Lancelot, Gawain, Galahad and Percival – all of
whom appear in operatic literature. The French created a parallel cycle,
THE MATTER OF FRANCE, which reinforced the notion of a
CHIVALRIC CODE in a series of **ROMANCES**, where the key themes

are courtly love, heroic quests, honor, loyalty, and the development of knightly behavior within medieval French society.

The concept of Chivalry was disturbingly turned on its head with Mascagni's Verismo opera **CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA**.

The later medieval **TROUBADORS** of Languedoc and the Rhineland **MINNESINGERS** inspired 19th century works by Verdi (**IL TROVATORE**) and Wagner (**TANNHAUSER** and the **SONG CONTEST** on the **WARTBURG**).

In 1605 Miguel de Cervantes satirised the genre of Knight Errant in his novel - **The INGENIUS GENTLEMAN DON QUIXOTE of La MANCHA**.