



American Operetta

Dr. Alta Marie Boover Dantzler, Drake Dantzler, and Lois Kaarre

Lecture-Recital Transcript:

Good afternoon. My name is Alta Boover and I'm an Assistant Professor of Voice at Oakland University in Michigan in the United States. I'm here in Vienna, the home of Operetta to talk to you a bit about Operetta in my corner of the world. American operetta is a largely untapped wealth of repertoire for developing singers and their teachers. It gives us the opportunity to explore optimizing students' acoustic properties for unamplified singing using American vernacular language.

In the European musical tradition repertoire for unamplified singing with orchestra dates back 400 years. In the United States the tradition is, understandably— less deep. In order to offer singers an opportunity to train their unamplified instrument in English, we can look to the UK, of course, and to some American opera composers beginning with William Henry Fry's *Leonora* from 1845. Many of these early American operas, like *Leonora* have not been preserved in the canon.

In the US, the American Lyric theatre tradition centers around American Musical Theatre or Broadway. Broadway offers around 100 years of rich and extensive vocal repertoire which is useful for many applications in the studio but which is, by and large, intended for amplified voice. If we are looking for American music in lyric theatrical tradition in order to train unamplified singing technique-let's look more closely at what American operetta has to offer, including the many pros and one major con.

American operetta evolved from adaptations of European operetta and when they were, in time, created in original form stateside, the European - trained composers maintained the lush European orchestral style. The handout included here offers brief biological information about some of the major contributors to American Operetta including Rudolf Friml, Victor Herbert, Sigmund Romberg, and lyricists and book writers Dorothy Donnelly, Rida Johnson Young and Oscar Hammerstein. A point is gained here for repertoire which invites lyric unamplified vocal production intended for orchestral accompaniment! We also gain a point for the optimistic themes which pervade American Operetta, for the most part these are simple love songs with exquisitely textured settings.

Now for the con: the plots of American operetta are often overly simple, and have elements of exoticism which are reductive and at times outright racist, and so the preservation of operetta through performance is fraught with complications. It is unlikely that the plots will appeal to

21st-century audiences. However each show offers a wealth of American English solo repertoire for developing singers. We can use these songs in the studio to optimize American diction, increase coordination for orchestral or operatic singing styles. American Operetta also offers an opportunity for those who are studying musical theater or contemporary styles to explore legato and projected styles in vernacular American speech.

Along with my colleagues I will present a handful of songs representative of the repertoire with flexible ranges noted in the handout. We hope you will find American Operetta useful in your studio.

Lecture Recital Program with ranges notated

Only a Rose from *The Vagabond King*

(Vocal Range D3-G4)

Keep on Smiling from *Sometimes*

(Bb3-Eb5) low, (E4-G5) high

Neopolitan Love Song from *Princess Pat*

(F3-G4)

Sweethearts from *Sweethearts*

(G#3-F#5) low, (D4-Ab5) high

Sweetheart, I'm Waiting, from *El Capitan*

Duet

Oh Promise Me, from *Robin Hood*

(C4-F5) low, (D4-G5) medium

Serenade from *The Student Prince*

(Bb2-Bb4) high, (Bb2- Eb4) low alternative

When I Grow too Old to Dream from *The Night is Young*

(A3-E5) low, (C4-G5) high

Sweetheart, Will You Remember? from *Maytime*

Duet

Rudolf Friml

lyrics by Brian Hooker

Rudolf Friml

lyrics by Rida Johnson Young

Victor Herbert

lyrics by Henry Blossom

Victor Herbert

lyrics by Robert B Smith

John Phillip Sousa

lyrics by Charles Klein

Reginald De Koven

lyrics by Clement Scott

Sigmund Romberg

lyrics by Dorothy Donnelly

Sigmund Romberg

lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II

Sigmund Romberg

lyrics by Rida Johnson Young

American Operetta Biographies

The artists who created American Operetta set the stage for the sounds of nascent Broadway. Those born abroad are noted below. Brief backgrounds of the composers and some of the lyricists are provided to spark further inquiry into their biographies.

John Phillip Sousa (1854-1932)

Sousa is known primarily for his 130+ American military marches. He also was a critic of the emerging recording industry, promising that “These talking machines are going to ruin the artistic development of music in this country. When I was a boy...you would find young people together singing the songs of the day. Today you hear these infernal machines going night and

day. We will not have a vocal cord left. The vocal cord will be eliminated by a process of evolution.”

Reginald De Koven (1859-1920)

In De Koven’s obituary, it was stated that he “proved that the American stage was not dependent on foreign composers.” Though, it bears mentioning that he was educated at the Stuttgart Conservatory and went on to study further in Frankfort, Florence, Vienna and Paris.

Victor Herbert (Freiburg 1859- 1924)

Herbert is considered the “King of American Operetta” and was an activist for the legal rights of composers. He was the founder of the American Society for Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP)

Rida Johnson Young, lyricist and playwright (1875-1926)

Johnson Young was inducted posthumously in to the Songwriter’s Hall of Fame in 1970. During her lifetime she wrote over 30 plays and musicals and composed over 500 songs.

Dorothy Donnelly, lyricist and actress (1876-1928)

Donnelly began her career as an actress on Broadway and in silent films before turning her hand to playwriting. Her most famous collaborations were *Blossom Time* and *The Student Prince*- both with Sigmund Romberg.

Rudolf Friml (Prague 1879-1972)

Friml was a Czech born composer and classically trained pianist. He gained renown in the United States as an Operetta and Film composer.

Sigmund Romberg (Hungary 1887-1951)

Romberg’s musical style is very typical of Viennese operetta. He rose to prominence after adapting the work of Franz Schubert in the operetta *Blossom Time* in 1921.

Oscar Hammerstein II, lyricist and librettist (1895-1960)

Hammerstein is most well-known for his collaborations with Richard Rodgers. Together the pair won 34 Tony Awards, 15 Academy Awards and 2 Pulitzer Prizes.