



# The Birth of an Opera: Fifteen Masterpieces from Poppea to Wozzeck

*Michael Rose*

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*The Birth of an Opera* offers illuminating insight into how operas are written and the personalities, incidents, and musical circumstances that have shaped their composition.

Through a deft compilation of primary sources-letters, memoirs, and personal accounts from composers, librettists, and performers-Michael Rose re-creates for his readers the circumstances that gave rise to fifteen operatic milestones. From Monteverdi and Mozart to Puccini and Berg, each chapter focuses on a well-known opera and tells the story that lies behind its creation.

Rather than retreading familiar ground with pages of historical and musical analysis, Rose places each opera firmly in the context of the composer's life and provides an engaging text in which the varied and colorful personalities involved are seen to discuss, comment, and contribute in one way or another to the progress of its composition. The reader will find Mozart with a new and flamboyant librettist tackling the risky enterprise of *Le Nozze di Figaro*; Wagner confessing his hidden love for the woman who inspires him as he creates the passionate drama of *Tristan und Isolde*; Verdi deep in Shakespearian discussion with Boito as they remodel the tragedy of *Otello*; and Debussy coming almost literally to blows with Maeterlinck over the soprano to take the leading role in *Pellas et Mlisande*.

Throughout, Rose offers his readers the most direct possible link to events that have often become twisted or obscured by operatic myth, and in so doing he captures the bizarre interactions of chance, genius, practical necessity, and dogged determination that accompanied the making of some of opera's most enduring masterpieces.

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