**(SHORTER) OPERA SYNOPSES**

**PERI, Jacopo (1561-1633)**

**Euridice, 1600**

Eurydice is happy at her approaching wedding; her bridegroom, Orpheus, is equally delighted until a messenger appears to tell him of the fatal snake-bite and consequent death of his beloved. Venus leads Orpheus to the gates of Hades. Orpheus’s music, Charon, and Proserpine persuade the King of the Underworld, Pluto, to allow Eurydice to return with Orpheus. All ends in rejoice.

**MONTEVERDI, Claudio (1567-1643)**

**Orfeo, 1607**

Orpheus and Eurydice are getting married. The second act continues the celebration of the happy Orpheus, but he is interrupted by the appearance of the messenger Sylvia, who informs him of Eurydice’s death. Orpheus sets for the Underworld with Hope, who leaves him as he approaches the Styx. He overpowers the boatman, Charon. Proserpina pleads with Pluto to release Eurydice. She is allowed to leave, following Orpheus, but he must not look back. Walking away, Orpheus doubts Pluto and turns. Eurydice returns to the Underworld and must remain there for eternity. Orpheus is alone in the fields of Thrace, where he Bacchantes attacks him. Apollo raises Orpheus to the stars, where he can see Eurydice forever, who has similarly been placed among the stars.

**L’incoronazione di Poppea, 1643**

Fortune, Virtue, and Cupid argue about their powers. Love sets out to demonstrate his supremacy. Otho, Poppaea’s former lover, complains about her infidelity—she is having an affair with the Emperor Nero. Poppaea reveals her ambition to become Empress, while Empress Octavia Augustus laments her husband’s desertion. Seneca tries to comfort her, then advises Nero to stay with Octavia. Nero insists that he will go his own way. Otho overhears Nero promising to make Poppaea empress and Poppaea urging the removal of Seneca, whom Nero orders dead. Otho promises fidelity to Drusilla, who loves him. Octavia tells Otho he must kill Poppaea; to do so, Otho borrows Drusilla’s clothes as disguise. Cupid intervenes in the assassination attempt, and Poppaea wakes to see the false Drusilla escaping. The old nurse Arnalta raises the alarm, and Drusilla is arrested. She shields Otho, but he confesses and blames Octavia, now sent into exile. Nero and Poppaea celebrate their love and the coronation of the latter as Empress.

**MOZART, Wolfgang (1756-1791)**

**Le Nozze di Figaro, 1786**

Figaro and Susanna are going to be married, but the Count wishes to have Susanna for himself. Bartolo wants revenge on Figaro for helping the Count marry his ward, Rosina. Figaro is indebted to his housekeeper, Marcellina, and offers to marry her if unable to repay his loans. Bartolo and Marcellina work together to prevent Figaro’s marriage to Susanna. Figaro devises a plan to marry Susanna without the Count, in which Cherubino will pose as Susanna to distract the Count. The Count hears Bartolo’s and Marcellina’s case against Figaro and decides Figaro must marry Marcellina. We discover Figaro is their son, and Bartolo and Marcellina become engaged. Susanna and the Count plan to rendezvous in the garden. The Countess and Susanna, in fact, have switched clothes to play a trick on the Count, to reveal his infidelity. The Count woos the disguised Countess, while Figaro recognizes his disguised wife and plays along. The Count enters, angered to find his servant working on his wife. All is revealed, the Count asks for forgiveness, and everyone has a grand time.

**Don Giovannni, 1787**

Don Giovanni tries to rape Donna Anna. Her cries for help summon her father, the Commendatore—the chief of police, town mayor, military governor—who challenges Giovanni to a duel. He is killed near immediately. Don Ottavio and Donna Anna vow revenge on the unknown assailant as Giovanni and his servant, Leporello, escape. Donna Elvira enters, complaining about her faithless lover—Giovanni. In the country, Giovanni comes across wedding festivities and offers the couple, Masetto and Zerlina, a party at his home. Elvira saves Zerlina from Giovanni’s attempt to engage her. Ottavio, Anna, and Elvira get into the party disguised. Giovanni attempts to bed Zerlina, again, but frames Leporello when the others find him with Zerlina. Giovanni escapes Ottavio’s gun at the end of the act. Leporello and Giovanni switch clothes outside Elvira’s home, so Giovanni can bed her maid. Masetto enters with a mob, not recognizing the disguised Giovanni. Giovanni assaults Masetto. Meanwhile, Leporello tries to stave Elvira’s advances before everyone finds him. Giovanni and Leporello meet at a cemetery, near the statue of the Commendatore. It awakens to their surprise, and Giovanni invites it to dinner. The statue accepts. At Giovanni’s place, there is a feast. Elvira enters to plead him to change his ways, which Giovanni refuses. The statue enters, demanding Giovanni repent. When he continuously refuses penitence, Giovanni is dragged down to Hell. An epilogue follows, where everyone explains what happens after Giovanni’s death.

**Cosi fan tutte, 1789**

Don Alfonso offers a wager with Guglielmo and Ferrando, that their fiancées—Fiordiligi and Dorabella—are no more trustworthy than any other women. They pretend to leave for war and the couple part. Alfonso bribes Despina, their maidservant, to convince them to find new lovers. The two men return disguised, but the girls remain devoted. The men pretend to commit suicide by poison, and Despina pretends to be a doctor to revive them. The girls agree to Despina’s suggestion of harmless flirtation, falling for the man not their fiancés. They are married by a disguised Despina and act shocked before revealing the plot. Depending on the production, the men marry their original fiancées, their newfound loves, or all are left in despair. Alfonso reminds the audience of the moral: that *così fan tutte* (“thus do they all”).

**ROSSINI, Gioachino (1792-1868)**

**La Cenerentola, 1817**

Cenerentola shows kindness to Alidoro, who calls at Don Magnifico’s castle in the guise of a beggar, and he advises Don Ramiro that here is a girl worthy of his hand. The ugly sisters and Don Magnifico are ready to attend the ball at the palace, while it is Alidoro who comes to the aid of Cenerentola and takes her there, after a scene in which Dandini and the Prince have changed places. Continuing the same imposture, Dandini, as the Prince, greets Don Magnifico at Don Ramiro’s country-house, and appoints him court vintner, while the Prince and his valet cannot understand Alidoro ’s praise of Don Magnifico’s daughter, seeing only the two ugly sisters. Cenerentola admits that she prefers the Prince’s servant, the real Prince, who now reveals to her his true identity. She gives him a bracelet that matches her own and tells him to find her, once she has gone. Forced by a storm to seek shelter in Don Magnifico’s castle, the Prince recognizes Cenerentola, who seeks forgiveness for her stepfather and stepsisters. The opera ends in Don Ramiro’s palace, where Cenerentola is finally enthroned, as she deserves.

**Il Barbiere di Siviglia, 1815**

Count Almaviva wishes to woo Rosina and win her hand in marriage. With the help of the barber and general factotum, Figaro, he carries out his plan to outwit her guardian, Dr. Bartolo, who wishes to marry Rosina himself for her fortune. The Count woos Rosina, while disguised as a student, Lindoro, exchanging notes. He gains entry into Dr. Bartolo’s house, disguised as a drunken officer. He is escorted out by the police, but no charges are placed upon learning his identity. He acts as the music-master Don Basilio, giving Rosina singing lessons, until Don Basilio enters. Dr. Bartolo is thwarted in his plans to marry Rosina, and she marries the Count.

**BELLINI, Vincenzo (1801-1835)**

**Norma, 1831**

Oroveso wants to rebel against the Romans. Pollione, military commander of the Roman legion stationed in Gaul, confides in Flavio that he no longer loves Norma, even though she—the virgin priestess—has borne him two children. Norma tries to prevent the rebellion, prophesying the fall of Rome through its own internal weaknesses(!). Pollione persuades Adalgisa to run away to Rome with him. Norma knows Pollione wants to leave but does not know the name of his new fancy. Adalgisa admits her infidelity to her people to Norma, who learns that she is the new object of Pollione’s affections. Adalgisa rejects Pollione. Norma considers killing her children but asks Adalgisa to take them and run to Rome to raise them. She refuses to be disloyal to Norma and goes to Pollione to recall him to his duty. He will not hear her, and Norma calls for revolt. Pollione tries to abduct Adalgisa but is taken prisoner and sentenced to death. Norma offers in his place one who has broken faith with her people: herself. A funeral pyre is erected, and she is immolated with Pollione.

**DONIZETTI, Gaetano (1797-1848)**

**Lucia di Lammermoor, 1835**

The Ashtons need Lucia to marry well, to save the family fortunes. Normanno reveals to Enrico that Lucia has long been in love with the latter’s mortal enemy Edgardo, laird of Ravenswood. On the Lammermoor Castle grounds Lucia recalls the enmity between the two families, thinking she has seen the ghost of a Lammermoor girl killed by a Ravenswood. Edgardo, who is to leave for France to support the Stuarts, wants to heal the long-standing breach with the Ashtons. The couple exchange rings. Enrico arranges a marriage for Lucia with Arturo Bucklaw, forging a letter in proof of Edgardo’s infidelity. Raimondo adds his persuasion. At the wedding Edgardo returns, bursting in after Lucia has signed the marriage contract with Arturo. While Enrico demands his withdrawal, Edgardo expresses his anger and despair in forcible terms, to the increased agitation of Lucia. By a ruined tower of Ravenswood Edgardo and Enrico meet, the latter challenging Edgardo to a duel. At Lammermoor Castle the wedding is celebrated. Raimondo enters with the news that Lucia has killed Arturo and is asking for her bridegroom. She comes in, now in madness, exciting the contrition of her brother, as he returns from his meeting with Edgardo. In the Ravenswood graveyard Edgardo is to meet Enrico’s challenge. Learning that Lucia is dead, he stabs himself.

**VERDI, Giuseppe (1813-1901)**

**Nabucco, 1842**

The first part of the opera, Jerusalem, is set in the Temple of Solomon, where the Israelites are encouraged by the High Priest to resist the armies of Babylon. Fenena, daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, had helped Ismaele to escape from Babylon and is now with him, but Abigaille, also in love with him, leads in a band of Assyrians, disguised as Israelites, capturing the Temple, which Nebuchadnezzar orders to be destroyed. The second part, The Ungodly One, opens in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar where Abigaille thirsts for revenge on Ismaele. The High Priest of Baal urges her to seize power in Babylon as regent, since Fenena has set the Israelites free. Elsewhere in the palace Zaccaria prays, with Ismaele shunned by the Levites, until it is clear that he has converted Fenena. She is now proclaimed queen, after rumours of her father’s death. Abigaille intervenes, acclaimed as queen, but interrupted by the return of Nebuchadnezzar to seize the crown and declare himself both king and god. At this blasphemy he is struck down by a thunderbolt and loses his wits, leaving Abigaille to triumph. The third part, The Prophecy, in the hanging gardens of Babylon, finds Abigaille inducing her father to sign Fenena’s death warrant. By the banks of the Euphrates the Hebrews lament their exile, but Zaccaria prophesies the destruction of Babylon. The fourth part, The Broken Idol, finds Nebuchadnezzar distracted, but anxious to save Fenena, who is being taken to execution. He prays to the God of Israel and his sanity and powers return, enabling him to rescue Fenena, and, converted, to resume his reign. Abigaille takes poison, begging for forgiveness as she dies.

**Rigoletto, 1851**

Rigoletto helps the Duke seduce women; this and his wit earn him the hatred of the men of the Duke’s court. Monterone, a father of one of the Duke’s conquests, curses Rigoletto. The courtiers suspect Rigoletto has a mistress and plot their revenge. Sparafucile is an assassin, and he offers his services to Rigoletto. Rigoletto keeps Gilda in the house, only letting her leave for church. She has been wooed by a man she believes to be a student, whom she has seen at the church—it’s actually the Duke! The courtiers abduct Gilda, with a blindfolded Rigoletto’s unknowing assistance, for the Duke. Rigoletto then plans his own revenge but must disillusion his daughter of her romance for the Duke. He will show her the Duke’s infidelity, as he has an affair with Maddalena—Sparafucile’s sister. Rigoletto arranges for Sparafucile to murder the Duke, but her pleas turn his heart. Sparafucile agrees to kill the first man to enter the home in the Duke’s place. Gilda, still in love with the Duke, decides to sacrifice herself and enters the home, while dressed as a man. Rigoletto receives a dead body from Sparafucile, but soon learns it is not the Duke’s corpse but his daughter’s!

**La Traviata, 1853**

Violetta, a courtesan, learns the young Alfredo Germont loves her. (She shows signs of tuberculosis.) They go away and build a home in the countryside. Violetta sells her possessions to finance their new life, however; Alfredo’s father learns of their poor lifestyle and goes to Paris to raise money. He also tries to persuade Violetta to leave his son, since their affair is ruining his daughter’s marriage prospects. No one wants a sister-in-law with Violetta’s job. She sacrifices her feelings and returns to her old life. She leaves Alfredo a note; he reads it, as his father tries to console him, and storms off to the party where Violetta is currently courting men. His father did not tell him the whole story, however. Alfredo bursts into the party and insults Violetta, to which she faints. His father castigates him for this ungentlemanly behavior—not having told him of the role he played in their separation—and disowns him. Violetta is at home, near death, when Alfredo returns having learned from his father the entire story. They embrace, and she dies in his arms from tuberculosis.

**Aida, 1871**

In the Egypt of the Pharaohs, there is war with Ethiopia. The Ethiopian King’s daughter, Aida, has been captured and is a slave in the service of the Pharaoh’s daughter, Amneris. Radames loves Aida, but Amneris loves Radames. He is appointed general of the Egyptian army and returns in triumph, but he is offered Amneris’ hand in marriage. Aida’s father, Amonasro, is taken prisoner, his life spared by Radames. Amonasro induces Aida to help him learn the Egyptians’ plans, which she does in a meeting with Radames. Aida and her father flee, but Radames’ treachery is revealed, and he is sentenced to death. He is immured in a stone tomb, joined by Aida. As they die, Amneris prays for peace for Radames.

**Falstaff, 1892**

Falstaff quarrels with Dr. Caius over an earlier drunken episode. He sends love letters to Mrs. Page and Mrs. Ford, who plan their revenge, while Pistol—Falstaff’s follower—tells Ford what is happening. Nannetta, Ford’s daughter, has a brief moment of love with Fenton. Mistress Quickly executes the plan against Falstaff. Ford appears at the inn disguised and offers Falstaff a bribe to seduce Mrs. Ford. The women prepare a laundry basket for the track they will play on Falstaff, while Mrs. Ford assures Nannetta that she will not allow her father to arrange a marriage with Dr. Caius. Ford arrives at his home, in a jealous rage, and mistakes Fenton—behind a screen—for Falstaff. Falstaff, in the laundry basket, is thrown into the river, but still believes Mrs. Ford to be in love with him. He is lured into a rendezvous at Windsor Forest, where he is tormented by “fairies.” Fenton and Nannetta are united, Dr. Caius frustrated, and Falstaff resigned.

**WAGNER, Richard (1813-1883)**

**Der fliegende Hollander, 1841**

The Dutchman is condemned to sail the seas with his ghostly crew, allowed to return to shore every seven years, until redeemed by the pure love of a woman. When he lands, he finds Daland and asks for hospitality. The Dutchman expresses interest in Daland’s daughter, Senta. She has long thought of the story of the Dutchman and is fascinated by his portrait. Erik, a huntsman, loves her and tells her of an auspicious dream. Senta, however, is more preoccupied by her vision of a strange seafarer, whom her father now brings home. Senta’s love seems to be the redemption the Dutchman seeks, but he overhears Erik reproaching Senta for her infidelity and resolves to leave. As the Flying Dutchman disembarks, Senta leaps from the cliff in a pure act of love. The Dutchman’s ship and crew sink at once, and he and Senta are united forever.

**PUCCINI, Giacomo (1858-1924)**

**La Boheme, 1895**

In an attic apartment in the Latin Quarter of Paris, a group of young artists are living together in poverty. Their neighbor, the little seamstress Mimì, introduces herself, seeking a light for her candle, when Rodolfo is left alone. They fall in love. At the Café Momus, Rodolfo presents Mimì to his friends, while the singer Musetta abandons her elderly rich lover to join Marcello. Time has passed. Mimì has been living with Rodolfo, but they quarrel, because of his apparent jealousy. He has planned to leave her, as we learn in a scene set on a cold winter morning by the city gates. Musetta, a contrast in character to the gentle Mimì, later returns to the attic apartment of the four young men, bringing with her the dying Mimì, whom they now try to comfort, but in vain, as she dies before their eyes of tuberculosis.

**Tosca, 1899**

The fugitive Angelotti takes refuge in a private chapel, in which the painter Cavaradossi paints a picture of Mary Magdalene, influenced by the features of his beloved Tosca and of a woman he often sees in the church. Angelotti emerges from hiding, explaining that he has escaped from imprisonment in the Castel Sant’Angelo. The voice of Tosca is heard and Angelotti hides again. Tosca is jealous of what she thinks may have been an assignation with another woman but agrees to meet her lover later. The church fills for a celebration of a supposed victory over Napoleon, and Baron Scarpia and his agents seek Angelotti, suspicion falling on Cavaradossi as a possible accomplice. Scarpia orders his men to follow Tosca, when she leaves. Cavaradossi has been arrested, interrogated and, when Tosca comes in, tortured in the next room. She betrays Angelotti’s hiding-place at the well in the garden of Cavaradossi’s villa. Cavaradossi is to be shot at dawn, but can be saved if Tosca will give in to Scarpia’s demands. She pretends to agree and when he has signed a safe-conduct she kills him. At Castel Sant’Angelo, Cavaradossi prepares for death, as dawn draws near. Tosca is brought in and explains how there is to be a mock-execution, after which they can escape together. Scarpia’s orders did not countermand the execution, and Cavaradossi is shot. When Tosca realises that he is dead, she leaps from the battlements to her own death, while Scarpia’s men draw threateningly near, having discovered their master’s body.

**Madama Butterfly, 1903**

Goro, a marriage-broker, shows Lieutenant Pinkerton the house where he will live with Cio-Cio-San, after their marriage, and introduces the servants. Pinkerton explains to the consul, Sharpless, that he has the house on a long lease, to be terminated at a month’s notice: his coming marriage is to be undertaken on similar terms, since he has no intention of continuing the relationship. Cio-Cio-San and her family arrive and the wedding takes place, before the Bonze curses her as a renegade. Three years later she awaits the return of Pinkerton, who has never seen the son she has borne him. Attempts are made by Goro to arrange another marriage, to Prince Yamadori. Pinkerton returns with his American wife, and Cio-Cio-San kills herself with the knife that her father had used for his own death by imperial command.

**Turandot, 1924**

By imperial decree, Princess Turandot is to marry the first royal suitor able to answer her three riddles, failure leading to execution. Calaf resolves to try his chance with the cold-hearted Princess, although Ping, Pang and Pong and his father try to dissuade him. Turandot poses her three riddles, which Calaf answers correctly, but he offers her a chance of escape, if she can find out his name before morning. Every effort is made to find out Calaf ’s name, with the slave-girl Liù tortured, but remaining loyally silent, killing herself rather than reveal it. Finally, Calaf tells her his name, but now Turandot has learned that his true name is Love.