Renaissance Theatre: Italy
1400 - 1620
Contributions of the Italian Renaissance

1. *Commedia dell'arte*
2. Opera
3. Proscenium Theatre
4. Painted Scenery
Commedia dell'arte
**Commedia dell'arte**

- The popular theatre of Renaissance Italy
- Much of the dialogue and business was improvised
- A *scenario* was posted back stage
- Produced mostly *low comedy*, slap stick
- Used *stock characters* similar to Plautus
The straights – A pair of young lovers..

1. A dapper young man
2. A sophisticated young lady, noble and innocent.
• Il Capitano – a pompous braggart who boasted of his great prowess in love and battle, but was usually discredited in both
Stock Characters of the Commedia

- **Pantalone** -- a greedy, lustful, meddling **old man**. Often a merchant.
Stock Characters of the Commedia

- *Il Dottore* – A *doctor* (or professor) who spoke inaccurate Latin. His standard dress was the academic cap and gown.
Stock Characters of the Commedia

- Two servants or *zanni*. One smart and one less smart. The less smart servant was usually an insolent liar, thief and/or drunkard.

- Most of the humor came through the actions of the servants.
Commedia's Influence

- Characters and bits of comic business were borrowed by Shakespeare for Taming of the Shrew and All's Well That Ends Well and...
Commedia's Influence

- Moliere’s *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* is borrowed from a Commedia scenario
Birthplace of Opera

Firenze (Florence)
Location of Firenze
The Birth of Opera

- **First opera**: *Dafne*
- Based on a Greek legend
- Produced by the *Camerata*, an Italian academy in 1597
- By Ottavio Rinuccini (text) and Jacopo Peri (music)
- They were attempting to recreate an "authentic Greek tragedy."
Camerata Fiorentina

- An association (or "academy") of wealthy Italians who met at home of Count Giovanni de’ Bardi to study the arts (including music and drama) of ancient Greece and Rome
- They believed the arts had become corrupted and could be improved by returning to the original style
- They believed that Greek drama was primarily sung, not spoken
Dafne

- The story of Apollo (God of light) falling in love with Daphne, a nymph.
- Prologue + 6 scene
- Presented to members of the Camerata
- Mostly semi-song dialogue
- Text, but not music, published in 1600
• Composed and published in 1601
• By the team that created *Dafne*
• For the court wedding of King Henry of Navarre and Marie de Medici
• Performed at the Medici's *Palazzo* for a court audience
Opera’s First Major Composer

Claudio Monteverdi, Court composer of Mantua
1567-1643
His First Major Work

L’Orfeo performed in Madrid
Monteverdi’s Formula

Monteverdi increased the size of the orchestra, **shifting the emphasis** from the text to the **music**

1. **Aria**: A **solo** sung by one of the opera's major character

2. **Recitative**: The **chanted dialogue** which joins the opera's musical moments.
Giuseppe Verdi
1813-1901

• Most often produced composer at the Metropolitan Opera
• Wrote mostly tragic operas
• One comic opera: *Falstaff*
• Most famous work: *Aida*
Aida
by Verdi
Richard Wagner
1813 - 1883

• German opera composer
• Believed that opera should be a "total art work."
• created music dramas based on Teutonic myths and legends
Wagner's *Music Drama*

- No distinction between a recitative and an aria
- One **long** continuous melody line
- Melody created by **combining themes** (*leitmotifs*) which represent characters, objects, and emotions
Wagner's masterpiece
Der Ring des Nibelungen

1. *Das Rheingold* ("Rhinegold")
2. *Die Walkure* ("The Valkyries")
3. *Siegfried*
4. *Gotterdammerung* ("The Twilight of the Gods")

Combined playing time of seventeen hours
Die Walkure
Evolution of the Proscenium Theatre
Marcus Vitruvius Pollio
90-20 BCE

- **Roman writer, architect and engineer**
- Served both Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus
- Wrote *de Architectura libri decem* ("The Ten Books on Architecture")
- Described both Greek and Roman theatres
- Had a monumental effect on Renaissance architecture
de Architectura libri decem

VITRUVIUS
THE TEN BOOKS ON ARCHITECTURE

TRANSLATED BY MORRIS HICKY MORGAN
68 ILLUSTRATIONS
Teatro Olimpico
1580 – 1584, Vicenza
Location of Vicenza
Teatro Olimpico

- Oldest surviving Renaissance playhouse
- Combination of the old - a classical Roman facade and the new -- a perspective vista
- Attempting to create for the Accademia Olimpica an, accurate indoor Roman theatre
- Designed by Andrea Palladio (1508-1580) and Vincenzo Scamozzi (1552-1616)
Teatro Olimpico
Front Entrance
Teatro Olimpico
In Performance Today
Teatro Olimpico
Floor Plan

Stage
Teatro Olimpico
Cross Section Thru Center Line
Teatro di Sabbioneta
1588-1590, Sabbioneta
Location of *Sabbioneta*
Teatro di Sabbioneta

- Designed by Vincenzo Scamozzi
- Small, intimate, 250 seat playhouse
- Contained only 5 rows in the cavea and a single street scene
- First European indoor theatre built as a theatre
Teatro Sabbioneta
Scamozzi’s Plan and Cross Section
Teatro Sabbioneta
Cavea (seating)
Teatro Sabbioneta
Stage
Teatro Farnese
1618, Parma

Palazzo della Pilotta
Teatro Farnese

- First permanent proscenium theatre
- Built into the Great Hall of the Palazzo della Pilotta
- Used primarily for state functions
- Almost destroyed by Allied bombs during World War II
- Rebuilt in the 1950s
Location of Parma
Teatro Farnese
View of the Stage
Teatro Farnese
View from the Stage
Teatro Farnese
Plan View

Stage

Proscenium Arch
Teatro Farnese
Cross Section Thru Center Line
Painted Scenery
In The Beginning…

• **Around 1415**: Filippo Brunelleschi discovers the secret of linear perspective: a mathematical system for creating the illusion of space and distance on a flat surface

• **1435**: Leon Battista Alberti publishes Brunelleschi's secret in *Della Pitture*

• **1508**: Pellegrino di San Daniele places individual houses in front of a painted backdrop for a staging of Ariosto's *The Casket at Ferrara*
Sebastiano Serlio
1475-1554

An Italian writer and court architect publishes *Regole generali di architettura* (1545) the first work detailing the design and construction of a court theatre

1. Describes the set for a tragedy, comedy and pastoral play
2. Gives instructions on how to lay out a theatre in a “Great Hall”
3. Create perspective scenes
From Vitruvius…

- There are three sorts of scenes, the **Tragic**, the **Comic**, and the **Satyric**. The decorations of these are different from each other.

- The **Tragic** scenes are ornamented with columns, pediments, statues, and of the royal decorations.
• The Comic scene represents private buildings and galleries, with windows similar to those in ordinary dwellings.

• The Satyric scene is ornamented with trees, caves, hills, and of the rural objects in imitation of nature.
Serlio: Layout of a Theatre
Serlio: Tragedy Set
Serlio: Comedy Set
Serlio: Pastoral Set
Ideal City (1470)
Piero della Francesca
Wing – Border -- Backdrop

![Diagram of Wing, Border, and Back Drop]
• **Wing**: A piece of scenery on the side of the stage used to mask the side walls of the theatre.

• **Border**: A piece of scenery hung above the stage used to hide the rafters, pulleys, and ropes used to change the scenery.

• **Backdrop**: A large piece of scenery at the rear of the stage used to mask the back wall.
Wing-Border-Backdrop Set
Annie Get Your Gun
Wing Unit
Hotel
Tree Portal
Back Drop
Woods with Clearing
Perspective Study
Raffaello Sanzio (1483 -1520)
Perspective Study
Jean Cousin (1500-1560)
One Point Perspective
Giacomo Torelli (1608-1678)
An Exterior Set
Giacomo Torelli (1608-1678)
Two Point Perspective
Filippo Juvarra (1678-1736)
Two Point Perspective
Giovanni Piranesi, (1720-1778)