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PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF OPERA SCENARIOS

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SUMMARY. The construction of opera scenarios involves the development of a dramatic and narrative framework upon which an opera is built. These scenarios serve as the foundation for the libretto, music, staging, and overall production of the opera. In this introduction, we will explore the principles and procedures that guide the creation of opera scenarios. In summary, constructing an opera scenario is a complex and collaborative process that involves the careful consideration of narrative, character, music, and cultural context. The principles and procedures outlined here provide a foundation for the creation of opera scenarios that can captivate audiences and convey the depth of human emotion through music and drama. Over time, the evolution of the singing voice follows a phenomenon of symbiosis between words and music. The intertwining of the act of speaking with that of singing is constantly found in the concerns of the creators in ancient monody. Greek declamation, Gregorian chant, in the polyphonic style, in the opera performance as well as in all the ramifications of the vocal genre.

Keywords: opera scenario construction, musical drama, analysis of the libretto, Eugene Onegin, The Queen of Spades.

1. Introduction — Principles of Opera Scenario Construction

The relationship between word-music, libretto-music, designed by musicians at a higher level, requires the research of all vocal possibilities (whispering, speaking, singing to the point of shouting, onomatopoeia, the voice pushed to its sonorous limits) conferring the importance of the primary sound of life.



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Storytelling and Drama \Diamond At the heart of any opera scenario is a compelling story. The narrative should be engaging, emotionally resonant, and capable of sustaining the audience's interest over the course of the opera. Opera often explores themes of love, conflict, tragedy, and human nature.

Character Development \Diamond The characters in an opera must be well-defined and evolve throughout the story. Their motivations, emotions, and relationships drive the plot. A well-constructed scenario provides opportunities for character development and growth.

Musical Integration \Diamond Opera is a fusion of music and drama. The scenario should be designed to accommodate musical elements, including arias, duets, ensembles, and recitatives. The music should enhance the emotional depth of the story.

Conflict and Resolution \Diamond A central conflict or conflicts should be at the core of the scenario. The resolution of these conflicts often leads to the climax and conclusion of the opera. The scenario should build tension and anticipation toward these moments.

Unity and Coherence \Diamond The scenario should have a cohesive structure, with scenes and acts logically connected. Themes, motifs, and leitmotifs may be used to create thematic unity throughout the work.

Cultural and Historical Context \Diamond The scenario should consider the cultural and historical context in which the opera is set. This includes the time period, social norms, and the cultural background of the characters. Authenticity can enhance the opera's impact.

2. The determining stages of the construction of a musical drama

Exposition Plot	Conflict Development	Climax	Outcome	
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In many works, the exposition and the plot are revealed to us against the background of a popular table scene, for example: the table scenes from the opening of the opera Carmen by Georges Bizet (1838–1875)² and the appearance of the Carmen character through "Habanera", which already herald the conflicts that will follow.

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Mordey, Delphine. Carmen, Communarde Bizet, 'Habanera' (Carmen), "Carmen", Act I, Vol. 28, No. 2, SPECIAL ISSUE: REMAKING THE ARIA, Published By: Cambridge University Press, 2016, Cambridge Opera Journal pp. 215–219.

Another way of exposing the plot is in the form of a quiet and bright life, which is suddenly interrupted by an unexpected dramatic event or the appearance of a character, for example the appearance and the aria of Santuzza in Lucia's tavern, which foreshadow the drama that will follow. Such a conventional construction can also generate the plot of the drama, an unexpected event that forces the heroes to act (for example, the opera Eugene Onegin — the arrival of Lenski and Onegin at the Larin family³ estate, which changes the course of events, Konstantin Stanislavski (1863–1938)⁴ wrote that from at that moment everything in the house was turned upside down).

In some lyrical-psychological works, the beginning of the dramatic development is a story that decisively influences a hero and in this way dramas are born. Il Trovatore (The Troubadour) by Giuseppe Verdi 1813–1901⁵ — drama and dramatic conflict found indirectly through the stories of the character Azucena⁶ who introduces us to them; Queen of Spades — Hermann's colleagues tell the story of the three winning cards at the card game).

In certain lyrical-psychological works, the exposition is built on the alternation between preparatory dramatic moments and neutral, secondary episodes. In rare cases, the action of the work begins directly with intrigue, everything is revealed gradually, later.

In some popular musical dramas, there is also the opposite phenomenon, that is, the fragmented exposition, a plot that starts late (for example: the representative works of the national schools).

The construction of a musical drama, whether it is an opera, a musical, or a ballet, involves several defining stages that shape the creative process. These stages are important to the development of the narrative, music, choreography, and overall production. Here are the main determining stages of building a musical drama:

Constantinescu, Grigore. Splendorile Operei (The splendors of the Opera). Editura didactică și pedagogică, R. A., București, 2008, p. 73.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konstantin_Stanislavski (accessed 9.09.2023, 20 o'clock).

^{***}Fragmente alese din scrisori, memorii şi articole de critică ale compozitorilor "mănunchiului puternic" — Despre Operă (Selected fragments from letters, memoirs and critical articles of the composers of the "strong bundle" — About Opera), culegere întocmită, redactată şi comentată de E. M. Gordeeva, traducere de Irina Vlad şi Eleonora Mircea, 1957, pp 104–105.

⁶ https://www.metopera.org/discover/synopses/il-trovatore/ (accessed 7.09.2023, 17 o'clock).

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Table 1

Libretto Creation:	If it is an opera or a musical, a librettist or lyricist works on the text, which includes dialogue, lyrics, and stage directions. This text serves as the foundation for the entire production.
Plot and	The librettist and creative team develop the plot, characters, and their relationships, ensuring they align with the central
Character Development:	theme and concept of the musical drama.
Performances:	The musical drama is presented to live audiences during a series of performances, often in a theater or opera house.
Feedback and Revision:	After early performances, the creative team may receive feedback from audiences, critics, and professionals. This feedback may lead to revisions or refinements in subsequent productions.
Documentation and Archiving:	Recordings, photographs, and written records of the production are often created for archival purposes and future reference.

The main determining stages of building a musical drama

These determining stages are essential for the successful construction and execution of a musical drama, ensuring that the narrative, music, choreography, and direction come together to create a cohesive and engaging theatrical experience. Each stage requires collaboration, creativity, and attention to detail from the entire production team.

In Richard Wagner's music (1813–1883)⁷, the vocal stage music, there are almost no patterns of architectural forms that are subordinate to the development of the text. However, the logic of the musical form imposes certain conditions. Introduction, exposition, development, and ending do not lose their importance even when architectural forms are missing.⁸

The vocal music must strictly correspond to the meaning of the text.⁹ The two great arts, poetry, and music, must complement each other, so that the impression produced by the written verses becomes stronger thanks to the music composed with talent, and together with the poet, shakes the viewer.¹⁰

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard Wagner (accesed 8.09.2023, 15 o'clock).

⁸ Abbate, Carolyn; Parker, Roger. O istorie a operei (A History of Opera). Traducere din limba engleză de Cosmin Nedelcu, Editura Vellant, Bucuresti, 2019, pp 260–282.

⁹ Revista Muzica (Music Magazine), No. 1, 1997, Editura Uniunii Compozitorilor şi Muzicologilor din România, 1997, p 74.

¹⁰ Donose, Vasile. Sinteze estetice (Aesthetic Syntheses). Editura Muzicală, București, 1988, p 17.

3. The construction of scenarios starting from the literary work that inspired the composers — defining elements of the composition of opera scenarios

The compositional technique and the requirements of the opera composers establish the basic principles that lead to the birth of an opera libretto, which coincides with the compositional style and thinking. As in the literary works from which they started, in the opera, two contrasting lines appear, intrigue and counter-intrigue, signifying worlds, interests, or antagonistic characters. This relationship between the antagonistic worlds (intrigue and counter-intrigue) is complex and very different in terms of the genres of the opera (social dramas, historical dramas, lyrical-psychological dramas, social-historical dramas, fairy-tale operas, or veristic operas).

Depending on the aesthetic, artistic, historical current, there may be a conventional structure or an innovative one.

3.1 Procedures for Opera Scenario Construction

Source Material: Many operas are based on existing literary works, historical events, or myths. The first step is often to select a source material that has the dramatic potential to be adapted into an opera.

Librettist Collaboration: The composer typically collaborates with a librettist or lyricist who specializes in crafting the text of the opera. Together, they develop the scenario, creating the dialogue, lyrics, and stage directions.

Structural Outline: An outline of the opera's structure is created. This includes acts, scenes, and the sequence of events. Key dramatic moments and arias are identified within the structure.

Character Profiles: Detailed character profiles are developed, including their backgrounds, motivations, and relationships. This informs how characters interact within the scenario.

Musical Considerations: The composer and librettist work together to ensure that the music aligns with the dramatic and emotional content of the scenario. They consider the vocal ranges of the characters and the musical styles that suit the characters and the opera's themes.

Revisions and Refinement: Scenario construction is an iterative process. The librettist and composer may revise and refine the scenario based on feedback and creative considerations.

Collaboration with Director and Designers: As the scenario takes shape, collaboration with the director, set designer, costume designer, and other production team members becomes essential to ensure a cohesive and visually striking presentation.

3.2 The differences of vision from literary work to libretto in Eugene Onegin and Queen of Spades by P. I. Tchaikovsky — applied case study

In what follows, we present the great reservations and controversies, the opinions of the other composers of his time regarding the libretto of this opera which is static: "I want it to be first in a small circle, at the Conservatory... Later I am ready to give it to a State Theater, but only if I please" (from letter to N.F. von Meck dated January 25, 1878)¹¹. In what follows, we present the great reservations and controversies, the opinions of the other composers of his time regarding the libretto of this opera which is static: "I want it to be first in a small circle, at the Conservatory... Later I am ready to give it to a State Theater, but only if I please" (from letter to N.F. von Meck dated January 25, 1878)¹². The composer is obliged to add to Pushkin's verses, original verses of his own or of the contemporary poet Silovschi, "This is what I fear, this is what worries me". he said in the letter to S. I. Tanneiev, dated January 24, 1878. The opera being static, the composer paints the character of Tatiana and Olga not through action but through monologues and dialogues. 13 The composer's ownership of his musical work also speaks for itself in his relationship with the librettists and creators of the show. "I want the opera to be represented the way I want it or not to be represented at all"14.

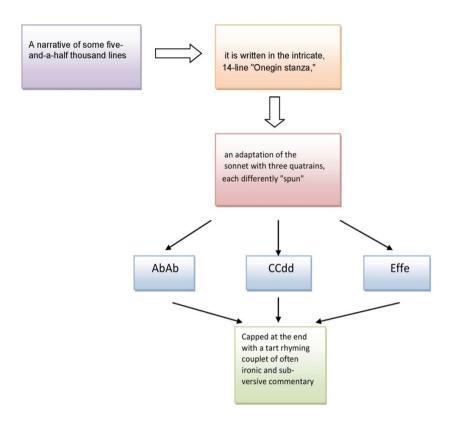
¹¹ P. I. Tchaikovsky. *About the opera*. A.R.L.U.S Cartea rusă Publishing House, Translation Anda Boldur, Bucharest, 1952, p. 48.

¹² Idem, p. 46.

¹³ Constantinescu, Gabriela; Caraman-Fotea, Daniela; Constantinescu, Grigore; Sava, Iosif; Ghid de operă (Opera guide). Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor, Bucureşti, 1971, pp. 66-67.

¹⁴ P. I. Tchaikovsky. *About the opera*, A.R.L.U.S Cartea rusă Publishing House, Translation Anda Boldur, Bucharest, 1952, p. 49.

Fig. 1



Analysis of the libretto of the opera Eugene Onegin¹⁵

¹⁵ Kearney, Leslie. *Tchaikovsky and His World*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1998, p. 216.

Table 2

Queen of Spades		T	Eugene Onegin		
Libretto	Opera		Libretto	Opera	
Character Development: Pushkin's story allows for detailed character development and exploration of the inner thoughts and motivations of the characters, especially Hermann.	Character Development: In the opera, character development is conveyed through music and sung text, which often simplify the psychological complexities present in Pushkin's original work.		Character Development: More extensive character development and internal monologue, providing insight into the thoughts and emotions of the characters. Pushkin's novel contains a combination of narrative descriptions, dialogues, and letters exchanged between characters.	Character Development: In the opera, due to the constraints of time and the focus on music, character development is often conveyed through the music and sung text The opera focuses primarily on dialogues and interactions between characters through sung text, with less emphasis on narrative.	
Dialogues and Narration: Pushkin's story contains narrative passages and dialogues that provide insights into the characters' minds and actions.	Dialogues and Narration: In the opera, the narrative elements are minimized, and the focus is primarily on the interactions and dialogues between the characters, set to music.		Dialogues and Narration: Pushkin's novel contains a combination of narrative descriptions and dialogues exchanged between characters.	Dialogues and Narration: The opera focuses primarily on dialogues and interactions between characters through sung text, with less emphasis on narrative.	

Queen of Spades Eugene Onegin Omission of Omission of **Omission of Omission of** material: material: material: material: In order to fit the The opera In order to fit the Notable streamlines the differences story into the story into the opera, some narrative to operatic format, include the secondary emphasize the some elements omission of characters are central love and characters Lensky's long omitted from the from Pushkin's story and poetic novel are omitted digression and opera. Hermann's obsession with from the opera. some secondary the secret of the characters. three books. Musical Musical Musical Musical Interpretation: Interpretation: Interpretation: Interpretation: Tchaikovsky's The arias and Tchaikovskv's The arias and music adds a ensembles of music adds an duets in the strong emotional the opera emotional depth opera capture dimension to the capture the and intensity to the characters' emotions and the story that feelings and story, heightening the dilemmas of the goes beyond the motivations text in Pushkin's drama and characters through melody intensity of key through the work. and scenes melodic line and orchestration orchestration. **Emphasis** on Emphasis on **Emphasis** on **Emphasis** on **Key Scenes: Kev Scenes: Key Scenes: Key Scenes:** Pushkin's story, The opera Pushkin's novel, The opera while containing places particular while containing places a strong these scenes, is emphasis on these scenes. emphasis on more focused on kev scenes. explores a kev scenes. the gradual such as broader range of such as social and build-up of Hermann's aria Tatvana's letterpersonal tension and "la vas lyublyu" writing scene Hermann's (I love you), the interactions and the duel descent into Countess's between Onegin madness. ghostly and Lensky. appearance. and the climactic gambling scene.

Queen of Spades		Eugene Onegin		
Conclusion: Tchaikovsky's The Queen of Spades retains the basic narrative and characters.	Conclusion: The libretto and music intensify the emotional and dramatic aspects of the story, while simplifying some of the psychological nuances present in Pushkin's original work.	Conclusion: The opera retains the basic narrative and characters.	Conclusion: The opera's libretto emphasizes emotional expression through music and focuses on key dramatic moments.	

Comparative analysis of libretto-opera in the operas Eugene Onegin and Queen of Spades

The libretto of the Opera Queen of Spades is written by the composer's brother after a short story by Alexander Pushkin, which largely follows the subject, the story of the writer's short story. From the epilogue of the short story, we learn that Hermann went mad and was in a hospice, he doesn't answer any questions, muttering over and over again 3.7, Ace!; 3.7, Lady!...¹⁶

The old lady, Liza's grandmother, is not killed, but dies of a heart attack as the librettist constructs the action for the sake of drama. The character Hermann has gone mad and does not commit suicide as in the libretto. Hermann, prey to hallucinations¹⁷, has a vision of the ghost of the old countess who names the three winning cards, being tortured by the passion of the game.

Liza, desperate, will find her end in the cold waters of the Neva, and Hermann, with a dagger, puts an end to his hopes and emotional upheaval. In A Pushkin's story, Lizaveta Ivanovna marries a decent young man with considerable wealth, the son of the former administrator of the old countess. 18

The construction of the libretto shows us Liza (Lizaveta Ivanovna), on the Neva quay, still in love, waiting for Hermann (Liza's aria). The libretto of the opera is built to outline concrete dramatic situations. 19

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Constantinescu, Grigore. Splendorile Operei (The splendors of the Opera). Editura didactică şi pedagogică, R. A., Bucureşti, 2008, p. 75.
 Zajaczkowsky, Henry. An Introduction to Tchaikovsky's operas. Praeger Publishers, 2005, p. 95.

Constantinescu, Gabriela; Caraman-Fotea, Daniela; Constantinescu, Grigore; Sava, Iosif; Ghid de operă (Opera guide). Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor, Bucureşti, 1971, pp. 68-69.

¹⁹ Pushkin, Aleksandr S. Dama de pică şi alte povestiri (Queen of spades and other stories). Editura Polirom, Traducere din limba rusă şi note de Eusebiu Camilar, Bucureşti, 2013, p. 228.

With respect to Pushkin's Eugene Onegin poem, its story unveils a profound irony reflecting the interplay of life and art. Events in Pushkin's poem and events of his own life were identical.²⁰

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)²¹ and Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837)²² shared many predilections. Both expressed a profound love for the Classical music era. Tchaikovsky adored Mozart, but Pushkin would extol Mozart even further in his short play in verse, Mozart and Salieri.

Tchaikovsky expressed a profound loyalty to aristocratic culture, which he expressed, for example, by including ball scenes in both Eugene Onegin and Pique Dame.²³

4. The role of the composer in the construction of a libretto

The composer creates the musical score, including arias, duets, ensemble numbers, overtures, and other musical elements. The music enhances the storytelling and emotional depth of the drama.

All the great composers attached great importance to the characterization and presentation of the main hero's personality. The first appearance of the characters consists of arias (Carmen-Habanera, Pagliacci — Prologue). The prologue represents the exposition, the introduction in which a drama is barely glimpsed. All the action occurs through the conflict in the soul between the desire for freedom and love and the reality in which the female character Nedda lives. The conflict is realized by the dialogues between the characters: Canio and Nedda, Nedda and Tonio, and Canio and Silvio. The culminating point is actually the threat and the dramatic tension, while the performance is performed by the medieval method "theater in theater" The denouement is the killing of the characters Nedda and Silvio through Canio's reply: "The comedy is over". In conclusion, verism reflects life and the events of life.

Adapted from the Opera Journeys Lecture Series by Burton D. Fisher, Eugene Onegin Russian opera in three acts. Music by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Libretto by Tchaikovsky and Konstantin Shilovsky after the poem Eugene Onegin, by Alexander Pushkin, Opera Journeys Mini Guide Series, Published and Copywritten by Opera Journeys, 2000, p. 14.

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyotr_Ilyich_Tchaikovsky (accessed 14.09.2023, 23 o'clock).

²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Pushkin (accessed 14.09.2023, 23 o'clock).

²³ Adapted from the Opera Journeys Lecture Series by Burton D. Fisher, Eugene Onegin Russian opera in three acts. Music by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Libretto by Tchaikovsky and Konstantin Shilovsky after the poem Eugene Onegin, by Alexander Pushkin, Opera Journeys Mini Guide Series, Published and Copywritten by Opera Journeys, 2000, p. 15.

https://www.earrelevant.net/2021/02/verismo-opera-pagliacci-in-a-fascinating-rendering-video/ (accessed 12.09.2023, 22 o'clock).

The first appearance of the main hero is not accidental, it reveals from the very beginning his characteristic features (for example Othello by Giuseppe Verdi is presented victorious, acclaimed by the crowd, which points outand highlights the masculine face of the warrior hero, loved by the people; Radames in the opera Aida, the hero who is not afraid of anything, has a similar figure).

Many times, in the opera, the principle of indirect exposition appears in which we get to know the essential features of the hero before his appearance (for example, Leporello in the aria "Madamina, il catalogo è questo" reflects the character of the main hero Don Juan²⁵ a significant example of indirect exposition).

The exposition and the birth of the plot often occur as a result of a decision taken by the main hero, which will influence his entire later stage behavior.

In the vast majority of operatic works, the development of conflicts lasts quite a long time for the entire duration of the work, representing real duels between the forces of intrigue and counter-intrigue, also new characters are introduced in the dramatic development that also contribute to the sharpening of the conflict (for example Jose at Lillas Pastia in the opera Carmen, he meets Carmen and at that moment the bugle is heard, calling the soldiers to the barracks; the scene of Tatiana's letter from Evgeni Onegin, the conflicting feelings of the characters sharpen the conflict). As we approach the climax, the dramatic tension increases.

In the composition of the operatic scenario, a fair exposition of the sequence of scenes and a continuous increase of the spectator's interest is of great importance. An important role is played by the inspired introduction of some episodes, having the character of everyday life. We could call it framing dramatic scenes with representative paintings. Also, this framing refers to the introduction of episodes with choirs, dances, comic scenes, the appearance of some characters. This system, in fact, highlights the main scene and contributes to relaxation for what we could call rest for the viewer. These scenes enliven the action and are an essential condition in the opera (for example: La Traviata — the dance of the gypsies and the matadors.²⁶

In the development of the conflict, not only interior scenes can take place, but also the sudden appearance of a new musical form (for example: the Duke's aria from Rigoletto).

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²⁵ Rice, John. *Music in the eighteenth century*. W. W. Norton and Company, New York, London, 2013, p. 229.

²⁶ https://brians.wsu.edu/2016/10/12/giuseppi-verdi-1813-1901-la-traviata/ (accessed 11.09.2023, 22 o'clock).

The culminating point in the opera is generally given by an acute conflict between the action forces of intrigue and counter-intrigue, that is, a decisive duel of antagonistic forces, a decisive dramatic meeting of the adversaries

In general, in national schools we also encounter another type of culmination: that of musical means (the appearance of a symphonic tableau or leitmotifs).

Always, the culminating point is a scene that produces a sudden change in the unfolding of the action and a violent conflict. Several peaks of the dramatic development can be revealed (for example: Act II of the opera Tosca, the moment of the stabbing of Scarpia by the main heroine, an example of the development of the conflict and of the culminating moment represented by the killing of Scarpia, because the denouement appears only in act III).

The climax often appears and plays an important role in the introduction of some scenes that act as an impetus for the denouement, after which the action rushes towards the tragic end.

The denouement in the action of the play represents the final stage in the development of the conflict. Sometimes the culmination and the denouement coincide (a good example can be the opera Pagliacci, the final scene between Carmen-Jose in the opera Carmen the tension generated between the two which represents a culmination that ends with the denouement).

Usually, the denouement represents the most concise, short stage of the development of the action. This stage does not allow lyrical deviations, arias, ensembles. There are also exceptions in which the final monologues of the main characters appear (the final aria of Othello by G. Verdi). The composer must work with the librettist to develop the changes necessary for dramatism and musical structure. Many times, they resorted to a new theme, to a change in the nature of the dramatic conflict, these being essential corrections of the structure of a scenario. The exposition of the subject matter takes different forms as the composers conceive it.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the construction of operatic scenarios is a highly nuanced and artistic endeavor that serves as a model for the entire opera production. By adhering to certain principles and following established procedures, opera composers, librettists, directors, and production teams can create compelling narratives that resonate with audiences.

Opera is a fusion of music and drama, so the script should accommodate musical elements that enhance the emotional depth of the narrative.

Central conflicts and their resolutions are essential elements of the screenplay, driving the tension and climax of the plot.

The script should exhibit structural unity, with logically connected scenes and acts and thematic elements for cohesion.

The successful construction of an opera script is the foundation upon which the entire opera production rests. It is a harmonious blend of storytelling, music, character development, and cultural context. When these principles and procedures are meticulously followed, they result in productions that move and inspire audiences, making the art form a timeless and cherished cultural treasure.

The construction of an opera libretto is a complex and essential component of the opera genre. A libretto serves as the foundation upon which the narrative, characters, and dramatic elements of an opera are built. It encapsulates the poetic and textual dimension of the work, setting the stage for the composer's musical interpretation.

Key considerations in opera libretto construction include the selection of a compelling story or source material, the development of well-defined characters, the integration of music and drama, and attention to cultural and historical context. The librettist's role is essential in crafting text, dialogue, and lyrics, working closely with the composer to ensure a harmonious fusion of words and music.

Throughout history, opera librettos have explored a wide range of themes, emotions, and styles, reflecting the diverse human experiences and cultural contexts from which they emerge. Whether inspired by classic literature, historical events or contemporary issues, opera librettos have the power to move and engage audiences through the union of storytelling and music.

The principles and procedures of opera libretto construction have evolved over time, adapting to changing artistic trends, social norms, and technological advances. Today, opera librettists continue to explore new narratives, experiment with innovative forms, and engage with contemporary issues, keeping the opera tradition vibrant and relevant.

As a dynamic art form, opera remains a testament to the enduring appeal of storytelling through music, where librettists, composers, directors, and performers come together to create moving and transformative experiences for audiences around the world. The opera libretto is a testament to the enduring power of words and music to inspire, challenge, and transport us to the heights of human emotion and imagination.

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https://imslp.org/wiki/Eugene_Onegin,_Op.24_(Tchaikovsky,_Pyotr)
(accessed 6.09.2013, 10 o'clock))

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