Lodoïska: comédie héroïque en trois actes, by Luigi Cherubini
Rare Music Collection, University of Melbourne Library

Luigi Cherubini (Italian, 1760–1842)
Lodoïska: comédie héroïque en trois actes, 1792
Paris: J.H. Naderman
Rare Music Collection
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In 1791, at the height of the French Revolution, Luigi Cherubini premiered *Lodoïska*, a new opera based on a libretto by Claude-François Fillette-Loraux (1753–1821). At this time of rapid social change, the world of opera was being opened up to a broader audience. With this in mind, composers sought subject matter that would speak to the masses. Themes that resonated with the public during the French Revolution are front and centre in Cherubini’s opera. *Lodoïska* is considered one of the first ‘rescue operas’, a type that grew from the Revolution, with a narrative based on the rescue of a prisoner (usually one of the main protagonists) and the triumph over a clear foe.

Performed more than 200 times in one year, and one of the longest-running French operas, *Lodoïska* had clearly become extraordinarily popular, with Cherubini coming to be referred to as the musical voice of Revolutionary France. As Bruce Scott said recently of *Lodoïska*: ‘in revolution-era France, its story of an innocent couple, separated by tyranny and reunited by the power of a just cause, hit a powerful chord’.

This score in the Rare Music Collection is thus significant in more ways than one, being both a document of operatic history and a document of the French Revolution.

**Teaching ideas**

The University of Melbourne’s curriculum is rich and varied, and changes from year to year. For more teaching ideas, contact a collection manager.

**The French Revolution**

Discuss the sentiment among the general public during the French Revolution, around 1791 when *Lodoïska* was first performed. Examine the story of this opera and consider what features brought the strongest responses from audience members.

**Studies in Opera**

Situate *Lodoïska* in the history of opera, discussing its influence on future works, particularly of the ‘rescue opera’ type (for example, Beethoven’s *Fidelio*) and on the genre at the time. Discuss how the narrative progression of these rescue stories is particularly well suited to opera.

**Art and Revolution**

Explore the rich artistic world of Revolutionary France and the works of painters, poets, playwrights and composers. Can comparisons be made between the various creative art forms and the manner in which they responded to social and political events at the time?

**The Theatre Experience**

Consider whether an understanding of the original contemporary audience is important when experiencing works of opera and theatre today. Research the events taking place around the premiere of *Lodoïska* in 1791 and discuss how the original audience’s theatre experience may have differed from that of an audience today.

**History of Books and Reading**

Research the expense and popularity of printed music scores. Examine the original object in the Rare Music Collection and analyse physical elements such as the binding, frontispiece and ornamentation throughout.

**Knowledge, Learning and Culture**

Consider the different stories communicated by this object and discuss it in its different contexts, for example, the French Revolution, the history of opera, and the history of book production and illustration. Which fields of knowledge can be better understood with the help of this object?
Intersecting objects

Luigi Cherubini (Italian, 1760–1842)
arranged by Rodolphe Kreutzer (French, 1766–1831)
The favorite overture to *Lodoiska*: As performed at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, composed by M. Krietzer [sic]
London: George Hughes, c. 1810
Rare Music Collection
University of Melbourne Library

Ludwig van Beethoven (German, 1770–1827)
arranged by Johann Nepomuk Hummel (Austrian, 1778–1837)
*Fidelio* (in E major): Arranged for two performers on the piano forte [by] Hummel
London: Ashdown & Parry, c. 1860s
Rare Music Collection
University of Melbourne

To learn more, visit the website of the Rare Music Collection.

References