

## Opera & Baseball Chronology

**1849:** 1<sup>st</sup> connection between baseball and opera: Fans of American actor Edwin Forrest, who is playing Macbeth in New York, hire thugs from among ballplayers at Elysian Fields in Hoboken, New Jersey (1<sup>st</sup> famous ball field) to disrupt performances of British actor William Macready, also playing Macbeth in New York at what had been Astor Opera House. Deadly riot ensues; Macready is rescued by ex-Astor Opera House impresario Edward Fry, who later (1880) invents electronic home entertainment (and probably headphones) by listening to live opera by phone.

**1852:** Opera-house exclusivity dispute with composer's niece Johanna Wagner forms legal basis of baseball's reserve clause.

**1870:** Tony Pastor's Opera House baseball team is covered by *The New York Times* (they won).

**1875:** *San Francisco Chronicle* reports on that city's opera-house baseball team.

**1879:** Pirate King role created for primo basso Signor Brocolini, who, as John Clark, played first base for the Detroit Base Ball Club.

**1881:** Dartmouth College opera group performs to raise money for college's baseball team.

**1884:** Three telegraph operators, James U. Rust, E. W. Morgan, and A. H. Stewart, present live games remotely. One sends plays from ballpark, second receives and announces, third moves cards with players' names around backdrop. Starting in Nashville's 900-seat Masonic Theater, they soon move to 2,500-seat Grand Opera House, beginning half-century of remote baseball game viewing at opera houses (also Augusta, GA Grand Opera House starting 1885).

**1885:** *The Black Hussar* is probably 1<sup>st</sup> opera with baseball mentioned in its libretto (in trio "Read the answer in the stars").

**1886:** DeGive's Opera House in Atlanta tries twist on telegraphic idea. Using Western Union to telegraph plays, they lay out ball field on stage, hire boys, dress them in uniforms, and have them reproduce announced plays. Rust, Morgan, and Stewart move to other cities; at Detroit Opera House, grand perspective scenery of stage's ball field hailed in press, and, from 1<sup>st</sup> sportscast technique, "there came a storm of applause, just such as is heard on a veritable ball field."

**1888:** Baseball's most famous poem, "Casey at the Bat," is first recited at performance of Johann Strauss II opera *Prince Methusalem* by De Wolf Hopper, who will later have his own opera company and will perform "Casey" a reported 40,000 times (he will claim only 10,000). What is probably 1<sup>st</sup> baseball opera, *Angela, or the Umpire's Revenge*, premieres; John Philip Sousa scored it; among its tunes are "He stands in the box with the ball in his hands," "The umpire and the dude," and "An umpire I, who ne'er say die." *The New York World* is 1<sup>st</sup> of many newspapers to adopt telegraphic game display.

**1894:** Samuel Crowder installs "Little Men" baseball-game reproduction system at Richmond's opera house, Mozart Academy of Music, soon adopted at opera houses in 7 more cities. Female fan quoted in *Richmond Times* saying, "Why they bow just as sweetly as 'real live men' when applauded." At Ford's Opera House in Baltimore, Compton Electric Base Ball Game Reproducer sends fans into frenzy as local team beats New York Giants.

**1895:** Comic opera *The Mormons* features feminist baseball aria, "Who would doubt that I'm a man?" Frank Chapman's robotic "Automatic Baseball by Electricity" displays games at Palmer's Opera House in New York then goes on tour.

**1900:** Opera-composer John Philip Sousa's team plays baseball game in France on July 4 at Paris World's Fair.

**1908:** Baseball's greatest hit, "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," premieres at a Brooklyn opera house, has multiple recordings.

**1909:** "Operatic edition" of song "The National Game" is published; Boston-NY baseball rivalry begins between opera houses.

**1910:** *New York Times* runs headline "Opera Ball Team Trounces Boston."

**1911:** Outfielder Ty Cobb opens in *The College Widow* at Taylor Opera House, Newark, NJ (later Augusta, GA).

**1912:** Song "Baseball vs. Opera," with references to Caruso and Tetrizzini, is published.

**1914:** Providence Opera House installs Coleman Life-Like Scoreboard to show baseball games ("even arguments").

**1916:** Metropolitan Opera ball park tour of *Siegfried* includes rain checks and, in St. Louis, fans storming the field.

**1919:** "Black Sox" scandal begins at New York's Ansonia Hotel, home of many in baseball & opera.

**1920:** Pitcher Bob Lemon (then just weeks old) is introduced to baseball at Redlands, California opera house (reported by him in his 1976 Baseball Hall of Fame induction speech).

**1922:** U.S. Supreme Court first rules baseball trust okay based largely on Metropolitan Opera v. Hammerstein precedent.

**1923:** *Aida* performed at Polo Grounds baseball field.

**1926:** George Jean Nathan in *The American Mercury* writes, "Opera in English is, in the main, just about as sensible a plea as baseball in Italian" (often incorrectly attributed to Nathan's *American Mercury* partner H. L. Mencken).

**1930:** *Aida* performed at Montreal Stadium; 1988 *Aida* at Expos Stadium has one-performance audience of 44,000.

**1931:** *Arizona Daily Star* sponsors free World Series viewing on Play-O-Graph at Tucson Opera House.

**1935:** In Marx Brothers' *A Night at the Opera*, overture to opera *Il trovatore* segues into music of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game;" ballpark activity at opera house ensues (similar transition in *Caesar's Hour* "Gallipacci" opera spoof on NBC in 1955). "Opera Under the Stars" begins at Detroit's Navin Field.

**1947:** *The Fighting Phillies* operetta by Rod Johnston & Bill Schall; Robert Merrill records *Brooklyn Baseball Cantata*

**1951:** 1<sup>st</sup> performance of the score of William Schumann's opera *The Mighty Casey*

**1954:** *The Mighty Casey* opera by William Schumann (later 1<sup>st</sup> president of Lincoln Center) is published.

**1981:** Rusty Magee's *1919: a Baseball Opera* (actually a musical) performed.

**1986:** Jim Naples, long-time manager of Yankee Stadium becomes long-time manager of Metropolitan Opera House. Glimmerglass Opera, Cooperstown (home of Baseball Hall of Fame) presents *The Mighty Casey* (also 1989).

**2004:** Opera baritone Robert Merrill (who played semi-pro & had his own baseball uniform) dies watching World Series on TV.

**2007:** Staged scenes of *The Summer King* opera by Daniel Sonenberg performed. *Cooperstown* opera by Sasha Matson & Mark Miller premieres. San Francisco Opera begins "Opera in the Ballpark" simulcasts at AT&T Park.

**2008:** Washington National Opera begins "Opera in the Outfield" simulcasts at Nationals Park; 2010 "Play Ballo!"

**2010:** *Shadowball* opera by Julian Joseph premieres. 32,000 attend *Aida* simulcast at AT&T Park.

**2013:** *Bambino* opera by Richard Maltz premieres. Sky Deck to watch Tigers games opens at Detroit Opera House.

**2019:** *The Fix* opera by Joel Puckett premieres.