

The performance is typically given in an opera house, accompanied by an orchestra or smaller musical ensemble, which since the early 19th century has been led by a conductor. Although musical theatre is closely related to opera, the two are considered to be distinct from one another. Opera is a key part of the Western classical music tradition. Originally understood as an entirely sung piece, in contrast to a play with songs, opera has come to include numerous genres, including some that include spoken dialogue such as Singspiel and Opéra comique (meaning comical in French). In traditional number opera, singers employ two styles of singing: recitative, a speech-inflected style, and self-contained arias. The 19th century saw the rise of the continuous music drama.