CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI: OPERA IS COOL!

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) is credited as being the first major composer of opera. Indeed, his opera Orfeo (1607) is viewed as the first modern opera. Simply defined, an opera is a drama that is sung. It combines several different elements of music such as soloists, ensembles, chorus, orchestra, and sometimes ballet, with poetry and drama, acting, scenery, and costumes.

In the sixteenth century there were many musical experiments combining drama with music. The idea was not new. A story that was told through music had been used in a much simpler fashion in ancient Greek culture. The new name that was given to this style was called monody – a single vocal line accompanied by a few inconspicuous chords. However, with the tremendous musical developments that had been taking place throughout the Renaissance and toward the beginning of the Baroque period, a simple melody accompanied by a few inconspicuous chords could not hold the attention nor the interest of either the composer, the performer, or the listener. It wasn't until the compositions of Jacopo Peri and, a few years later, Claudio Monteverdi that musicians realized there were many exciting ways in which this newly rediscovered style of monody could be used effectively to portray the drama of opera.

In Monteverdi's opera Orfeo there are numerous arias (solo pieces for a singer), chorus pieces, and orchestral preludes and interludes. Monteverdi's treatment of each of these types or aspects of the opera is what helped launch opera as a new and exciting art form.