

- 1849:** 1st 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 (1st 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; according to *The New York Times*, 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 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 the 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 at Augusta, GA Grand Opera House starting 1885).
- 1885:** *The Black Hussar* is probably 1st 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 1st 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 1st 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 1st of many newspapers to adopt opera-house 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 NYC and tours other opera houses.
- 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; NY-Boston rivalry begins with opera-house teams.
- 1910:** *New York Times* runs headline "Opera Ball Team Trounces Boston," refers to "Coloratura Curves."
- 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; idea spreads across U.S. & Canada.
- 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:** 1st performance of the score of William Schumann's opera *The Mighty Casey*
- 1954:** *The Mighty Casey* opera by William Schumann (later 1st 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 in 1989).
- 2004:** Opera baritone Robert Merrill (who managed Yankees Old-Timers in own 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.

Baseball-Opera Connections (HOF = Hall of Fame, MLB = Major League Baseball)

Adrian “Cap” Anson: HOF player-manager who performed (with teammates) in opera houses

Emmett Ashford: 1st MLB African-American umpire, who attended opera & knew some libretti

Ty Cobb: HOF outfielder who performed in a play in opera houses and would attend operas in spare time

Vince DiMaggio: MLB outfielder (Joe’s brother) who aspired to be an opera singer

Andrew Freedman: MLB team owner who was an opera patron and endowed a home for singers fallen on hard times

Lou Gehrig: HOF player who attended every performance (7!) of *Tristan und Isolde* in one season at the Metropolitan Opera

Harry Howell: MLB pitcher who took lessons to become an opera singer & said they helped his pitching

Mike “King” Kelly: HOF player-manager who sang in opera houses

Bob Lemon: HOF pitcher introduced to baseball in 1920 at the Redlands, California opera house

Tom Lynch: MLB umpire who worked at an opera house

Ted Lyons: HOF pitcher who went to operas with MLB pitcher Tommy Thomas

Rube Marquard: HOF pitcher who sang and danced on opera-house stages, once in the clothes of a female ballplayer

Erskine Mayer: MLB pitcher whose father wrote an opera (in Hebrew)

Lewis “Sport” McAllister: all-around MLB player & long-time employee of opera houses

Pedro Ramos: pitcher responsible for 1st all-Cuban MLB triple play, previously played on Cuban team La Opera

Michael Ricigliano: baseball newspaper cartoonist who also covered opera

Dave Sheinin: *Washington Post* baseball reporter who trained as an opera singer

Ulysses S. Grant “Lil” Stoner: MLB pitcher who was a devoted opera fan with a big recording collection

Sammy Strang: MLB player for whom term “pinch hitter” was created, studied opera singing under Jean De Reszke

Moses Fleetwood Walker: 1st African-American MLB player later ran an opera house

Opera-Baseball Connections

Michael Adams: baritone who switched from baseball after an injury

Charles W. Barnum: bass-baritone who had been a professional umpire

Digby Bell: bass-baritone who had own opera company and appeared in 1888 Chicago White Stockings team photo

Ara Berberian: bass who pitched for Kansas City Athletics

Joyce Castle: mezzo-soprano whose father pitched to Babe Ruth

Dennis Russell Davies: conductor whose father-in-law was a professional pitcher in Japan

Michael Fabiano: tenor who was previously a professional umpire

Geraldine Farrar: soprano whose father, Sid, was an MLB player; ballplayers reportedly paid for her singing lessons

John Fowler: tenor who played minor-league baseball before an injury

Robert Herman: Greater Miami Opera general manager whose father was an MLB right fielder

De Wolf Hopper: bass-baritone w/own company who 1st recited “Casey at the Bat,” appears in 1888 Chicago team photo

Charles Hale Hoyt: librettist, playwright, and producer (ex-umpire) who hired MLB ballplayers for opera-house stages

Clayton Matthews: baritone who switched from baseball after an injury

Robert Merrill: baritone, pitched semi-pro ball with teammate (later MLB) Tommy Holmes

Riccardo Muti: conductor who, in uniform, threw out the first pitch for the Cubs in 2012

Philip Winston Pillsbury: Met Opera trustee whose father-in-law was Minnesota Twins president Calvin Griffith

Robert Pomakov: bass who co-owns Toronto baseball pub Opera Bob’s

Elizabeth W. Scott: opera conductor while an MLB executive

John Philip Sousa: composer, band had two ball teams, scored the 1st baseball opera, wrote “The National Game” march

Helen Traubel: soprano who was a fan of and part owner of the St. Louis Browns

Baseball-Opera Hotel

The Ansonia Hotel in Manhattan was home to many in the baseball and opera communities. HOF ballplayer (and sax player) Babe Ruth traveled its halls in his silk robe; singer Lauritz Melchior practiced archery in them.

Besides Ruth, other baseball players who lived at the Ansonia included HOF “Pete” Alexander, “Sleepy Bill” Burns, Jean Dubuc, Bob Meusel, “Lefty” O’Doul, Wally Schang, and HOF “Honus” Wagner. Visiting players (including HOF Ty Cobb) also often lodged there. It’s where the 1919 Black Sox scandal was arranged in Chick Gandil’s room (it was also home to gambler Arnold Rothstein). Ray Chapman was staying at the Ansonia the day he was fatally hit by a pitch, the only player in Major League Baseball history to have been killed that way. Baseball’s first agent, Christy Walsh, started there.

On the opera side, the Ansonia’s most-famous resident was Enrico Caruso (though his residency is disputed). Others included Karin Branzell, Bruna Castagna, George Cehanovsky, Fyodor Chaliapin, Fausto Cleva, Alessio De Paolis, Geraldine Farrar, Giulio Gatti-Casazza, Gustav Mahler, Ezio Pinza, Lily Pons, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Elisabeth Rethberg, Bidu Sayao, Tito Schipa, Eleanor Steber, Teresa Stratas, Arturo Toscanini, and Thelma Votipka (who sang more performances at the Metropolitan Opera than any other woman).

Reportedly, asked what he thought of neighbor Ruth, Caruso replied, “I can’t say; I’ve never heard her sing.”

Miscellaneous

- Called “the Babe Ruth of opera”: Enrico Caruso, Luciano Pavarotti, Beniamino Gigli, and Maria Callas

- Called “the Caruso of baseball”: Marty McHale, Lew Fonseca, Joe DiMaggio, and (by Robert Merrill) Babe Ruth

- “The opera ain’t over until the fat lady sings” - said by HOF Baltimore Orioles baseball manager Earl Weaver

- “Bass Paul Plishka,” announced on opera broadcast but misheard, led to his nickname of Baseball Plishka.

- Some shared vocabulary: balls/bawls, base/bass, coach, fly, hit, line, manager, pitch, practice, run, score, strike, warming up