Opera plot quiz (contains immorality, stereotyping, deformity, chauvinism, violence, wrong attitudes and more)

1. A Basque in an army squad in Spain is seduced by a free-willed strong-minded beauty. Ignoring his nice girl-friend from his home village, he follows a new life of crime. His new lover tires of him, takes up with a bullfighter and is killed by her possessive former lover. The most popular opera ever, with brilliant music, simple story, high drama. Composer?

2. A 20th century Hungarian horror opera. A new bride of a blue-bearded duke, who has had several previous wives, is curious about the locked rooms in his castle. She insists on opening the doors. The first leads out to a beautiful garden. The next room is full of treasure, the next of weaponry. Her husband is anxious that she should not look further. But she insists. The penultimate room is a bloody torture chamber. Her husband begs her not to unlock the final room. But she does. Guesses as to what is in it and the opera.

3. Written in the 19th century, set about 1550 in a lovely old German city. An artisan guild has an annual song contest. This year the prize, put up by her father, is a young woman. She meets and falls in love with a young nobleman. Though not actually eligible, knowing little about songs or the rules, he determines to win the contest. He is generously helped by the leading artisan song-smith - who had anticipated winning a young wife for himself. In the longest regularly performed opera, the novice outsider finally sings the prize song and he gets the girl. Name this famous music drama. Who wrote both story and music?

4. Set in 18th century France, after a 19th c popular novel. A young lady is being escorted to a convent by her brother, who thinks it a waste of her good looks. They stop at an inn popular with students. The lady meets an impoverished aristocratic student who instantly, thereafter constantly, is in love with her. Her brother prefers to pimp her to a rich old man. The young lady and young lover run off to Paris. But poverty does not suit the young lady. She subsequently becomes the mistress of the rich old man. She later bores of this. Her devoted young lover returns and persuades her to go off with him again. She prevaricates to collect together the jewellery which the old man has given her. The bitter old man gets her arrested as a whore. She is deported to the American colonies. Her faithful lover tries to get her freed, unsuccessfully, then insists on joining her on the convict ship. The lovers later die together of thirst in Louisiana. Constant or clingy…? Who is she, the title-name of the story? Name the French and the Italian composers who each arranged it to music.

5. Written in the 20th century, set in 18th century Vienna, this comic opera begins with a thirty year old grand lady in bed with her fifteen year old cousin and lover, who dresses as a servant girl when the grand lady is unexpectedly called upon by a country cousin. The oafish, hard-up but titled country cousin has secured a lucrative marriage contract with the daughter of a parvenu merchant - who wants to have her married into nobility. Formal presentation by another aristocratic relative was a toffish custom in old Vienna. The country oaf has come to ask his grand lady cousin to persuade her young cousin, her secret lover and now posing as a girl - who the country cousin next fancies - to do the presentation. After all eventually leave, the thirty year old grand lady thinks about her advancing years, her invariably absent husband and her own arranged marriage. Her young lover meets the merchant’s daughter of the same age. They upset plans by falling for each other. Meanwhile the country cousin’s rough men-servants, some his illegitimate sons, are chasing the merchant’s women servants around the house. The young lover promises the merchant’s daughter to get her out of the marriage. He plots to discredit the country cousin with an on the side assignation - with him dressed as a servant girl. The grand lady appears after the country cousin’s disgrace, tells him to return home and graciously gives away her young lover to the merchant’s daughter. Fine lady or child snatcher? Lead roles are female, soaring above lush orchestration.

The first opera is well known. The title of the second opera is within the story. It sometimes gets harder.
6. Name any of 21st century American John Adams’ operas. One of them was lobbied against by pro-Israel Jewish groups in 2014. John Adams has written an equivalent to ‘Jesus’s blood never failed me yet’; his is ‘Jesus cured the man with the withered arm’.

7. All 18th century. A philandering aristocrat kills the father of one of his many conquests in a duel. When later passing the commendatore’s ornate tomb, the nobleman mockingly invites the statue on it to call in for dinner. To the horror of his comic servant, the stone guest turns up. Cool to the end, the aristocratic love rat is dragged down to hell by the statue. For health and safety, pulling down into hell may not appear in all modern productions.

8. A 19thc writer of well-known stories, including Nutcracker, is waiting for his mistress, an opera singer, currently on stage, in a nearby tavern. He is recognised by students, bought drinks and encouraged to tell his stories. In the first, he is duped by rose tinted spectacles into believing that a life-size mechanical doll is real. In another narrative his lover is consumptive and must never sing again, which an evil fake doctor circumvents, leading to her death. In the other story he loves a courtesan in Venice who is owned by an evil man. The evening ends; the story-teller’s opera singer mistress comes for him, but, finding him flat out drunk on the floor of the pub, she goes off with the evil man.

9. A 20th century Spaghetti Western opera, premiered at the New York Metropolitan. Minnie, the only woman in town, runs the saloon. A stranger rides in, Dick Johnson, who is really the Mexican bandit Ramerrez. Minnie falls for Dick Johnson-Ramerrez. The town’s sheriff fancies Minnie and he tries to catch Ramerrez, who gets shot. The wounded outlaw takes refuge in Minnie’s log cabin in the hills above the town. Minnie hides him upstairs. When the sheriff comes calling, he notices blood dripping through the floor above. Guessing its cause, the sheriff plays poker for the outlaw with Minnie. She produces a previously-concealed set of aces and wins her man. A Wells Fargo posse later ropes in Dick Johnson-Ramerrez and, with the sheriff’s OK, strings him up. Minnie sings her finest to rescue her lover and the two ride away together to a new life.

10. Biblical strongman brought down by Philistine temptress. Composer hard to name?

11. A personable, but amoral, young duke is being intimate with every woman in Mantua. Men come into court to complain about what has been done to their wives and daughters. The duke’s hunchbacked jester mocks them and his toadyng courtiers laugh them away. The court jester is later horrified to realise that the duke’s spies have reported back on a glimpse of his own concealed daughter. Posing as a student, the duke is soon in and out. The irate jester hires an assassin to kill the duke. Sadly, the jester’s daughter gets killed.

12. To the disgust of her Hindu father, a young Indian lady loves an English army officer. It all ends badly. Sung in French. The Flower Duet was the soundtrack to a television ad.

13. A 1900 shocker set in Rome at about 1800. An opera singer’s lover is imprisoned and tortured by the evil chief of police, who successively seduces her, blackmails her and is about to thrust himself upon the hot-tempered prima-donna when she kills him. He had previously arranged for her lover to be shot with blank rounds. Her lover is put before the firing squad and he very realistically falls down as if dead. He is dead. The police chief had double-crossed. The opera singer jumps off the castle battlements.

14. A Spanish-based 19th century Italian comic opera in which a young count contrives to abduct a young lady from the home of her guardian, employing a factotum to assist.

15. Now, when no-one is expecting it, which is the opera with the Spanish Inquisition?
16. Courtesan seeks naïve student for adventure, intercourse, true love, maybe more.

17. A forester brings home a female fox cub, as a pet. She kills the chickens, escapes and runs back to the forest. She meets a dog fox and has cubs, but is shot by a poacher. This charming opera was based on a comic strip in a 1920s Czechoslovakian newspaper.

18. Three American sailors in WW2 have one day shore leave from their warship docked in Brooklyn Navy Yard. Each of the sailors finds a girl and they enjoy New York together. A musical, actually. The jaunty score is frequently played as a suite in classical concerts.

19. Written in his spare time by a top chemistry researcher, this opera has a 12th century Russian prince leading his army against invading Tartars. The Russians are defeated. The Tartar khan puts on a song and dance spectacular for the captives. Despite offers of partnership and a pick of the Tartars’ Persian slave-women, the Russian prince insists on going home to his wife. The exotic oriental style music to the Tartar dances is lovely.

20. A brief 20th century Spanish opera, set in Andalusia. A Gypsy girl discovers that her lover is marrying a lady of his own class and dies of grief. Spanish Dance, any guitarist?

21. Wholly 18th century; a count invokes an ancient feudal right of enjoying the first night after the marriage of his wife’s maid-servant. The dismayed countess conspires with the servants to stop the nonsense, after various romps and a succession of beautiful tunes.

22. A governess comes to look after two children, who she begins to realise are haunted by the ghosts of previous paedophile servants - which only the children and she can hear. When trying to save the boy from the evil ghosts, the governess smothers him. Based on a Henry James story, with music by an English composer with good insight of the subject.

23. Set about 1910 in Paris docks, a bargee and his wife have grown apart after the death of their only child. The wife picks up a young stevedore as a lover. She will show a light when it is safe for him to come aboard. But her husband lights his pipe on deck, which the watching stevedore misinterprets. As he steps on board, he is confronted, strangled and wrapped in the bargee’s cloak. The bargee unrolls his cloak before his demoralised wife.

24. A Jewish-Austrian opera and orchestral composer was engaged to write the music for the 1938 Warner Brothers’ Adventures of Robin Hood. On arriving in Hollywood, he had to fit music around action scenes already shot, but produced some of the finest film music. He soon after heard that Nazi police had raided his home back in Austria. The composer remained in America and he subsequently reminisced that Robin Hood had saved his life.

25. Name Italian composers of any mid 19th c historic novel inspired operas, not previously mentioned, based on Scottish and English themes - such as Lucia di Lammermoor, Maria Stuarda, Elisabetta regina d’Inghilterra - fancifully interpreted in old style operatic tradition.

26. Notorious in the 1930s, a Soviet shocker which infuriated Stalin. An opera after a play in which a frustrated housewife kills her father-in-law and, with her lover, her husband too. Deported to Siberia, she fights another woman on the ferry across the Volga and pulls her together with her into the water to drown. This outrageous Russian lady killed by herself. Stalin hated the story. However, it was the lively music which was denounced in Pravda.

27. A late 19th century new style Italian commedia dell’arte verismo opera. Columbina has a real lover. A deformed clown exposes her affair. Her husband, the lead clown, has to go on with the comedy show. Becoming increasingly unstable, he kills his wife and her lover on the stage. A clown announces that the comedy is over. Name it…?