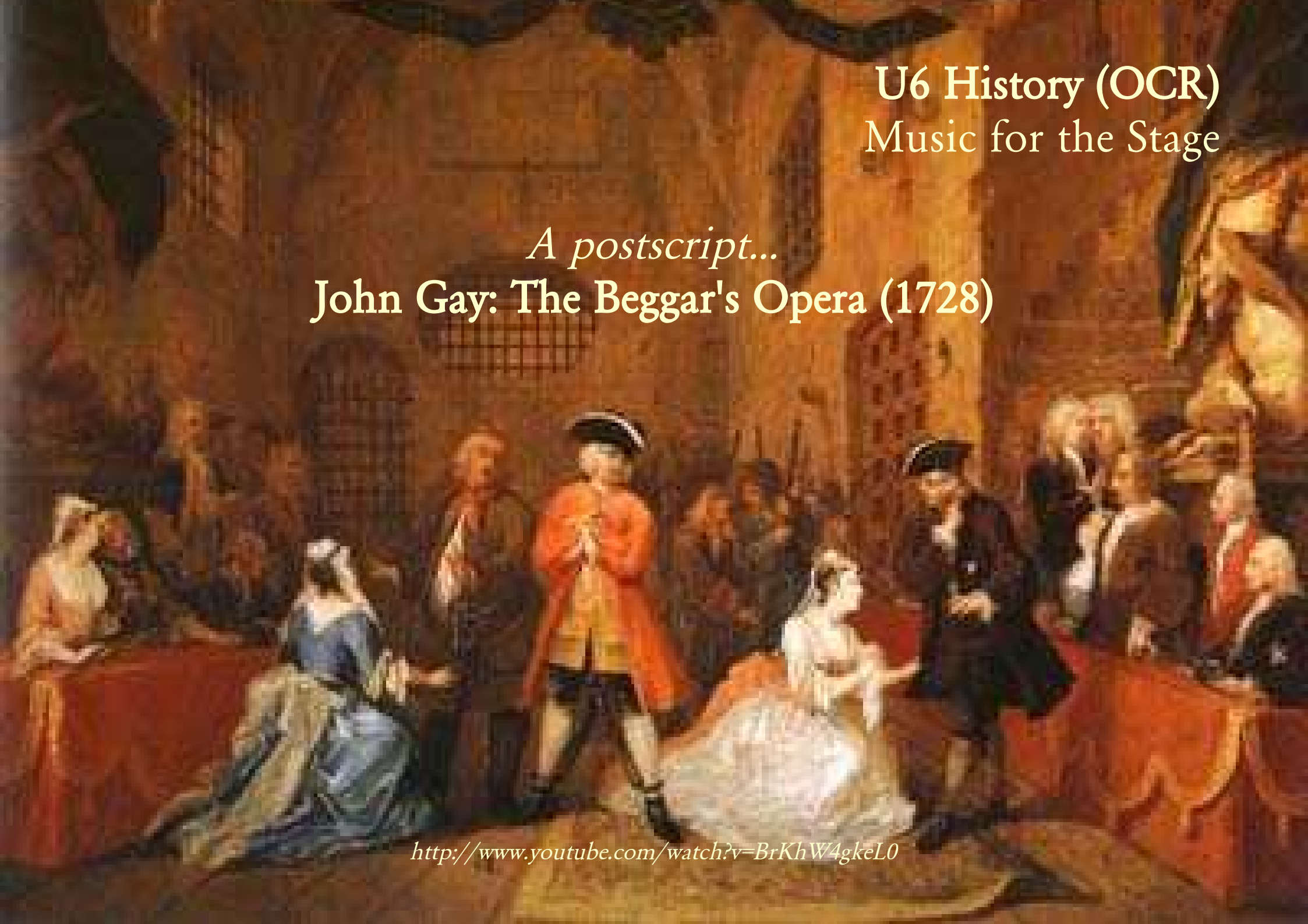


U6 History (OCR)
Music for the Stage

A postscript...
John Gay: *The Beggar's Opera* (1728)



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrKhW4gkL0>

The Beggar's Opera

by

John Gay

Historical Background

- Popularity of opera was declining (Handel stopped writing opera after 1741)
- There was a growing opinion that
 - Italian star singers were overpaid and uncivil
 - the language was a frustrating barrier
 - recitative was artificial
 - plots were unrealistic

The Ballad Opera

- The rise of the **ballad opera** offered an appealing alternative genre:
 - popular, simple tunes
 - disposed of recitative altogether in favour of spoken dialogue
 - main characters are thieves and bawds
 - makes fun of the Italian divas

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ExD1QqUrHF4>

The Beggar's Opera

- First run of the performance lasted 62 nights.
- Later performed internationally in Dublin, Glasgow, Jamaica and New York.
- In 1750, *The Beggar's Opera* was one of the earliest musical comedies produced in America.
- Audience included people from the lower class, middle class, and upper class.
- *The Beggar's Opera* was performed every year of the 18th century after 1728
- Gay's ballad opera also satirized Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole and his government.
- Londoners loved the realism and satire in the ballad opera; they left the theatre talking about it and singing the familiar tunes. The book trade was also stimulated because of its controversial subject matter and satire.

The tunes Gay used can be arranged *ad infinitum* - see this modern-day arrangement...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLlZfOnTHys>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhBQNp6DjGc>