



THE ATLANTA OPERA

The Pirates of Penzance



Opera Guide

The Pirates of Penzance

The Atlanta Opera Studio Tour

October 25 – November 19, 2010

February 28 – April 1, 2011

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Welcome!

2010-2011

Hello and thank you for inviting The Atlanta Opera into your school to perform for your students!

We are so pleased to be traveling throughout the state this year introducing thousands of students to opera and giving them a live performance experience in their school.

The Atlanta Opera Studio was founded in 1980 in an effort to teach students throughout the state of Georgia about opera through live performances and workshops. Thousands of students have been introduced to the art form through **The Atlanta Opera Studio Touring Production**. The Studio Touring Productions are designed to travel and are a different kind of performance experience than attending an Atlanta Opera mainstage production.

The Atlanta Opera mainstage productions are presented at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre, and feature a full cast, chorus and Atlanta Opera Orchestra. The Atlanta Opera Costume Shop builds costumes, and there are many people working backstage to produce the large-scale performances. The Atlanta Opera Studio performances are generally performed by a small cast of singers accompanied by a pianist. Sets and props are minimal to accommodate travel and varying performance space. It is our intention for students to gain introductory knowledge of the entire art form through the performance experience and accompanying educational materials.

The guide has been developed to acquaint both you and your students with the opera *The Pirates of Penzance*, as well as to familiarize students with the world of opera (vocabulary, history, etc.) A large portion of the material was developed by Opera for the Young ©, and is combined here with information and lessons from The Atlanta Opera. Our goal is to provide you with an innovative, multidisciplinary approach to teaching required skills and curriculum, including Georgia Performance Standards and National Arts Standards. Where applicable, you will find the corresponding standard(s) in parenthesis at the end of each activity or lesson.

What you can expect from The Atlanta Opera's performance of *The Pirates of Penzance*:

- *We will be performing a 45-minute opera in English for your students.*
- *Our show requires attentive silence from the audience, but there is also opportunity for general audience participation. Selected students will be invited to participate in the performance, and we ask that you use the accompanying tutorial CD to familiarize them with the music they will be performing.*
- *The opera may take place in your school gymnasium or cafeteria rather than an auditorium, so students may be seated on the floor.*
- *You and your students will be invited to ask questions at the end of the performance.*

Thank you again for allowing us to share this opera with you. We value your feedback and take this into account in planning future educational programs. We look forward to hearing from you, your students, administration, and/or parents following the performance.

Sincerely,

The Atlanta Opera Education Department

Preparing Your Students for the Performance

The Pirates of Penzance Cast

Music by Arthur S. Sullivan

Libretto by William S. Gilbert

Adaptation by Diane Garton Edie and Bill Lutes for Opera for the Young©

Cast and Crew

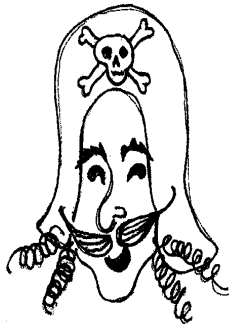
<i>Mabel</i>	<i>Elizabeth Claxton, soprano</i>
<i>Frederic</i>	<i>Wesley Morgan, tenor</i>
<i>Ruth</i>	<i>Lara Longworth, mezzo-soprano</i>
<i>Pirate King/Major General Stanley</i>	<i>Wade Thomas, baritone</i>
<i>Chorus of Pirates</i>	<i>Selected Students</i>
<i>Chorus of Wards</i>	<i>Selected Students</i>
<i>Constables</i>	<i>Selected Students</i>
<i>Stage Director/Scenery Designer</i>	<i>Richard Kagey</i>
<i>Musical Director</i>	<i>Catherine Schaefer</i>
<i>Costume Designer</i>	<i>Joanna Schmink</i>
<i>Production Manager</i>	<i>Michael Benedict</i>
<i>Zurich General Director</i>	<i>Dennis Hanthorn</i>
<i>Education Manager</i>	<i>Emmalee Iden</i>
<i>Education Assistant</i>	<i>Kimberly Harbrecht</i>

Cast of Characters

Chorus of Pirates



Pirate King



Ruth



Frederic



Mabel



Chorus of Wards



Major General Stanley



Constables



Chorus of Pirates (students) - the famous Pirates of Penzance *

Pirate King (baritone) - leader of the Pirates of Penzance

Ruth (mezzo) - Frederic's nanny and pirates' "maid-of-all-work"

Frederic (tenor) - apprentice to the Pirate King

Mabel (soprano) - daughter of Major General

Chorus of Wards (students) – adopted family of Major General *

Major General Stanley (baritone) - retired army officer

Constables (students) - Cornish police *

*Teachers should select and prepare students ahead of time for these roles using **Student Preparation Handbook**.

Plot Synopsis for Younger Children

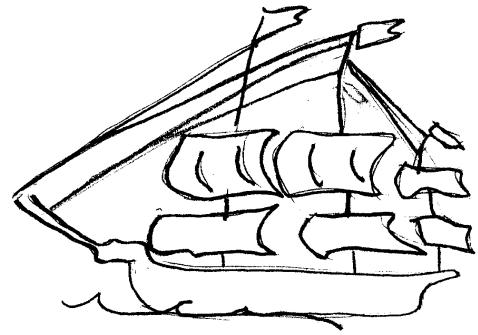
SETTING:

Scene One - Rocky coastline, Cornwall, England (a summer's day, mid 1800's)

Scene Two – Church ruins (later that evening)

ACT ONE

The **Pirates of Penzance** sail to shore and celebrate **Frederic's** 21st birthday. He is finally a full-grown pirate! But, his nursery maid, **Ruth**, explains that Frederic was never supposed to be a pirate in the first place; his father wanted him to be a ship's pilot! Ruth made a mistake and handed the little boy over to the **Pirate King** for training. Now that he's an adult, Frederic decides to say goodbye to the pirates and become a law-abiding citizen.



He soon discovers **Mabel** and the **Wards** playing by the seashore. Frederic asks if anyone might like to marry him and Mabel says she would! Suddenly, the pirates appear and begin to kidnap the wards in order to turn them into pirates. Mabel's father, the **Major General**, enters and convinces the pirates NOT to take away his family. He says that, since he's an orphan, losing the wards would make him lonely. The pirates – who are all orphans – give in and try to cheer him up by making him an honorary pirate.

ACT TWO

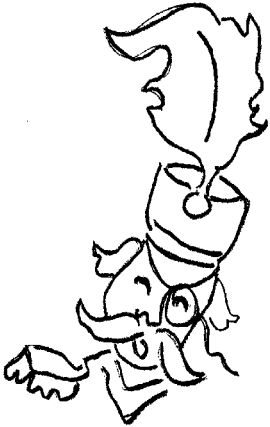
The Major General confesses to Mabel and Frederic that he told the pirates a lie: he's not really an orphan. But he's afraid to tell that to the pirates, and hopes that the **Constables** will scare them away. The timid Constables enter and don't seem as if they could scare anyone! Mabel encourages them to be brave.

Ruth and the Pirate King find Frederic and explain a shocking fact to him: although Frederic's been alive for 21 years, he's only had five birthdays because he was born in "leap year." That means – according to their original agreement – he must still be a pirate! Frederic is very sad, but, since he is a loyal person who always does his duty, he tells the pirates that the Major General lied about being an orphan. The King and Ruth are furious and storm off to kidnap the wards!

Frederic explains his unusual predicament to Mabel. She is surprised and sad, but agrees to wait to marry Frederic until he's had 21 leap year birthdays and is no longer a pirate – which will be a VERY long time, indeed! Frederic rushes off to join the pirates and Mabel gathers the Constables to protect the wards. They hear the pirates approach and dash away to safety. The pirates get ready for their attack but hide when they hear the Major General at an upstairs window. Mabel and the wards scamper in to look for the Major General; they're worried because he has left his bedroom. The pirates jump out and grab the wards. The King angrily announces that the wards must now become pirates because the Major General told a lie! The Constables appear and bravely demand that the pirates surrender in the name of the Queen. Being loyal subjects, the pirates immediately surrender. Ruth explains that the pirates were once all nobles themselves. Everyone shakes hands, Mabel and Frederic are reunited, and the operetta ends on a joyful note!



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Plot Synopsis for Older Children

(includes CD Track Numbers)

ACT ONE

A band of pirates led by the Pirate King and Ruth celebrate Frederic's 21st birthday as they land on a sunny seashore ("Come, Let's Celebrate" #19). Ruth explains that Frederic never was supposed to be a "pirate": she had misunderstood her former master's instructions to apprentice him to a ship's "pilot" until he reached adulthood ("When Frederic Was a Little Lad" #20). However, Frederic has been a loyal pirate all these years. No longer bound to the service of the Pirate King as of this birthday, Frederic prepares to go off on his own adventure, inviting the others to join him. The King explains that he, himself, will remain a pirate forever ("Oh, Better Far to Live and Die" #21). Ruth realizes the pirate band will have to find new members to take Frederic's place! Maybe there will be some likely "recruits" in the neighborhood...the band exits to search the area.



Mabel and her fellow wards enter to enjoy the seaside air ("Climbing Over Rocky" #22). Frederic interrupts them ("Stop, Madam, Pray" #23) and asks if anyone would consider marrying him ("Oh, is There Not One Maiden Here" #24). He explains that though he was once a pirate, he is now a reformed man. Mabel volunteers herself ("Poor Wandering One" #25), then blushing changes the subject in the face of Frederic's delight ("How Beautifully Blue" #26). Frederic comes back to his senses and warns Mabel of the pirates ("Stay, We Must Not Lose" #27). Suddenly, the pirates jump up to capture the wards, planning on turning them into pirates as well. The wards escape this fate when their father, Major General Stanley, enters and introduces himself ("I am the very model" #28). The Major General has heard of the pirates, and knows they are very soft-hearted about orphans, so he claims to be an orphan ("I'm telling a terrible story" #29) and the pirates release the general's wards ("You May Go" #30).



ACT TWO

The Major General confesses to Mabel and Frederic that he lied about being an orphan (Dialogue #31), but he hopes the constables will rid the village of the pirates ("Then Frederic" #32). Mabel tries to encourage the timid constables who then leave with her to locate the pirates.

Ruth and the Pirate King find Frederic ("Young Frederic" #33) and tell him the shocking news that, although he has lived 21 years, he was born in leap year, and, therefore, has only had five birthdays ("When you had left our pirate fold"). This means that Frederic is still bound to serve the pirates! Despite being heart-broken, Frederic realizes he must, as always, do his duty (Dialogue #34). So, Frederic tells the Major General's terrible and guilty secret: he is NOT an orphan! This infuriates the King and Ruth, who storm off to gather the pirates to kidnap the wards!

Mabel arrives to discover Frederic about to re-enter his pirate life ("All Is Prepared" #35). Frederic explains that they may not get married until he reaches his 21st BIRTHDAY...not 21st year. This plunges Mabel into despair ("Stay, Frederic, stay"), but they promise to remain true to

Plot Synopsis for Older Children (*cont.*)

each other until the day Frederic is a free man (“Oh, here is love”). Frederic runs off to find the pirates.

Mabel gathers the constables again, but their preparation is interrupted by the approach of the pirates (“A Rollicking Band” #36). Mabel leaves and the constables hide as the pirates prepare for their conquest (“With Catlike Tread” #37). The Major General appears in an upstairs window and the pirates hide (“Hush, Hush” #38). Mabel comes on to rouse the wards to search for their father who has left his bedroom (“Now what is this”). The pirates spring up to capture the wards and the Pirate King proclaims they are rightfully his new enlisted crew because the Major General lied about being an orphan (“With base deceit”). The constables spring up and proclaim the pirates must surrender in the name of the Queen! The Pirate King, being a loyal subject, agrees to yield at once to this higher claim. Ruth explains that the pirates are actually all British nobles who have gone wrong over the years. This touches Major General Stanley deeply, and, with Mabel’s help (“Poor Wandering Ones” #39) welcomes the pirate band as friends, and Frederic as Mabel’s betrothed!

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About Gilbert & Sullivan

Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas are especially appropriate for school performances, since the collaborators organized supplemental children's companies to perform two of their works: *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *The Pirates of Penzance*.

Sir William Schwenck Gilbert was born in London on November 18, 1836, the son of a novelist and a descendant of the eminent scientist, Sir Humphrey Gilbert. After a brief career in the law, he became a journalist, drama critic, and playwright. His nonsense verses, which appeared briefly in *Punch* and afterwards in *Fun* magazine, were later published as *The Bab¹ Ballads*, cleverly illustrated by Gilbert himself. (He also drew illustrations for his father's novels.) For the stage, he wrote comedies, sentimental dramas, librettos², and parodies. In 1871, a musician colleague, Frederick Clay, introduced him to Sullivan.

Unlike Gilbert, Sir Arthur Seymour Sullivan was virtually born into his profession. He was destined for music from the time of his birth on May 13, 1842, in London. Since both parents were musical (his father a bandmaster), Sullivan always said: "I learned to walk with a clarinet." He sang in the Chapel Royal boy's choir and won a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music. Later he studied on the Continent, in Leipzig. A gifted organist, teacher, and conductor, Sullivan composed in nearly all musical genres, but soon his theatrical talents became evident as he began setting comic librettos to music.

The first lasting operetta³ of Gilbert and Sullivan's was *Trial by Jury*, 1875, an adaptation of a Bab Ballad and an instant hit. It was followed by the popular *H.M.S. Pinafore*, 1878, and *The Pirates of Penzance*, 1879. (Penzance is a coastal resort town in Cornwall, England, somewhat akin to our Atlantic City, not at all appropriate for a pirate lair!) The music for *Pirates* was composed by Sullivan in New York City. He and Gilbert had come there in 1879 partly for a production of *Pinafore*, in order to combat the spurious *Pinafore* imitations which were springing up in America⁴. But their hidden purpose was to insure that their next operetta (*Pirates*) did not suffer the same fate. At that time, Britain and the United States had no copyright agreement, so British works were often plagiarized in America. Naturally, their original creators earned no royalties from these unauthorized productions. Gilbert wryly remarked, "It's not that I need the money so much, but it upsets my digestion."

So the two men decided to produce *Pirates* themselves, in New York. Gilbert brought his libretto with him, and Sullivan composed the music during December of 1879. (He had left his Act I music in England by mistake so had to rewrite all of it from memory!) All was done in utmost secrecy, including rehearsals, and Sullivan, who was ill, barely managed to finish it in time, writing the Overture⁵ the night before the premiere, December 31, 1879. (Gilbert actually helped him copy the orchestral parts.)

Pirates had a fairly successful run. To avoid plagiarism, theater-goers were not allowed to bring pencil and paper into the auditorium, and the music was locked up at night! The operetta contains one of Gilbert and Sullivan's best and most tuneful "patter" songs⁶, the Major-General's

¹"Bab" was Gilbert's nickname as a child.

²See GLOSSARY for definition.

³There was an earlier joint work *Thespis*, 1871, which has not survived. One of its choruses was incorporated into *The Pirates of Penzance*.

⁴One New York version of *Pinafore* even included Handel's Hallelujah Chorus!

⁵See GLOSSARY for definition.

⁶See GLOSSARY for definition.

About Gilbert & Sullivan (*cont.*)

aria. Not only is it a tongue-twister, but it includes skillful juxtapositions of unusual rhymes, one of Gilbert's specialties.

New York still loves *Pirates*. In 1980, a revival of this operetta, starring Linda Ronstadt and Kevin Kline, was a big hit. It also won a Tony award!

During 1881, Richard D'Oyly Carte, Gilbert and Sullivan's theater manager, built the Savoy Theatre in London solely in order to put on the G. and S. operettas. After that, the cast members were always known as Savoyards, as are other companies today who produce Gilbert and Sullivan works, of which there are fourteen altogether including *Patience* (1880-81), *Iolanthe* (1882), *Princess Ida* (1883), *Ruddigore* (1886), *The Yeoman of the Guard* (1888), *The Gondoliers* (1889), and the most famous one, *The Mikado* (1884-85).

Although he collaborated with musicians on many stage works, Gilbert was tone-deaf. He supposedly said, "I know only two tunes. One is 'God save the Queen' and the other isn't." However, he had a wonderful sense of theater. He not only wrote superb librettos but masterfully staged all of the G. and S. productions, allowing no acting deviations from his instructions, directing everyone to do the comic scenes with utmost seriousness, and insisting on clear enunciation.

Sullivan conducted the performances as skillfully as he had previously set Gilbert's lyrics to music. While he was very firm about musical accuracy, his criticisms were more tactful than Gilbert's. He also urged the cast to sing as though they were doing grand opera itself! His approach to the cast was patient and humorous. Once the chorus women complained that they could not sing the words on a high "A". "You don't like my 'A'?" queried Sullivan, "Why, I consider it one of the best 'A's' I ever composed in my life!"

Eventually Gilbert and Sullivan became estranged over business matters and wrote no more operettas together. Each wanted to be remembered primarily for his serious works. (Sullivan wrote an opera, *Ivanhoe*, 1890). Today, their non-comic compositions are largely forgotten, except for Sullivan's hymns, "Onward, Christian Soldiers" and "Nearer, My God, to Thee," as well as his song, "The Lost Chord," written in memory of his brother.

Sullivan was a kindhearted, spirited, charming gentleman, well-liked. Though he never married, he had many friends, including royalty, and was knighted in 1883. After a long illness, probably brought on by overwork, he died at age 58, on November 22, 1900, St. Cecilia's Day⁷.

It was not until 1907 that Gilbert was knighted. A brilliant wit, he had a more prickly and contradictory personality than Sullivan did, but he was a devoted husband, fond of children and animals, and had a strong sense of fair play. In 1911, at 75, Gilbert died of a heart attack while trying to rescue a drowning woman.

Neither of the two collaborators is considered great by himself, but each brought out the best in the other, as they created the finest British musical theater of the Victorian Age. The hilarious satire of society, in ingenious word-play, well-crafted dialogue and music, melodious parody of other genres, lack of vulgarity, and overall sprightliness have made G. and S. operettas well-known and popular around the world. Not only have these works influenced all English speaking musicals since, but they themselves will no doubt continue to delight audiences for years to come!

by Joanna Overn – Opera for the Young ©

⁷St. Cecilia is the patron saint of music.

Glossary of Opera Terms

<i>aria</i>	ah'-ree-uh	a solo song in opera or operetta
<i>bravo!</i>	brah'-vo	literally "very good" (in Italian); a compliment shouted by the audience to the performers following an exceptional performance
<i>coloratura</i>	co-lo-rah-too'-ruh	ornate vocal writing which demonstrates a singer's vocal agility
<i>duet</i>	dyoo-et'	a song sung by two singers or voices
<i>encore</i>	ahn'-cor	to repeat a given piece of music by popular demand
<i>ensemble</i>	ahn-sahm'-b'l	literally "together"; a piece of music to be performed by multiple musicians; also refers to the group performing such a piece
<i>finale</i>	fee-nah'-leh	the final musical number in an opera, often involving multiple soloists and chorus
<i>libretto</i>	lih-bret'-toh	literally "small book" (in Italian); the script, in poetry or prose, of an opera; the words the characters sing; in an operetta, some of these words are spoken
<i>operetta</i>	op-uh-ret'-tah	literally "little opera" (in Italian); usually a light comic opera, combining sung and spoken text;
<i>overture</i>	o'-ver-choor	an orchestral prelude to the opera
<i>patter song</i>		a rapid operetta aria with many words, which must all be pronounced clearly at lightning speed. It is usually witty and very difficult, and it is prominent in Gilbert and Sullivan works
<i>quartet</i>	kwar-tet'	a song sung by four singers or voices
<i>recitative</i>	reh-sih-tah-teev'	a free-style declamation, a kind of "sung speech" used to provide exposition and often heard as an introduction to arias and ensembles
<i>trio</i>	tree'-oh	a song sung by three singers or voices

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Glossary of Words from *The Pirates of Penzance*

Note: Part of the fun of the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas is the richness of Gilbert’s language, which includes many topical references and difficult words or phrases. These may be unfamiliar to you and your students. In our adaptation of *The Pirates of Penzance*, we have changed some of the language to help younger listeners follow the story and the situations. In many cases, however, we did not want to lose the flavor of the original and are providing you with a list of some of the words and/or phrases and their definitions. We know that this is a partial list and that you and your class may want to discuss other words when you read the libretto together.

<i>indentures</i>	p. 1	a written agreement to serve someone for a specified length of time
<i>apprentice</i>	p. 1	an apprentice learns a trade or skill under the guidance of an expert
<i>breakers</i>	p.2	waves
<i>gyrate</i>	p. 2	go round and round
<i>sanctimonious</i>	p. 3	making a show of following the rules of good behavior
<i>rivulet</i>	p. 4	little river, a brook
<i>matrimonial ambition</i>	p. 5	the desire to be married to someone wealthy
<i>Wards</i>	p. 6	young people placed under an adult guardian’s care, by the court of law in London, England; (these boys and girls are Wards of the Major General)
<i>Major General</i>	p. 6	an officer of the army
<i>categorical</i>	p. 7	special kind of order for studying a subject
<i>equations quadratical binomial theorem square of the hypotenuse integral and differential calculus</i>	p. 7	all these are terms learned in mathematics
<i>beings animalculous</i>	p. 7	tiny creatures, only seen through a microscope
<i>plucky and adventury</i>	p. 7	full of courage and ready for action
<i>If I hadn’t in elegant diction, indulged in an innocent fiction</i>	p. 8	“If I hadn’t in such nice, convincing words, told an innocent lie,”

Glossary of Words from *The Pirates of Penzance*

<i>your escort lionhearted</i>	p. 10	your brave companion
<i>quips & quibbles</i> <i>quaint</i>	p. 11	strange jokes and arguments
<i>paradox</i>	p. 11	A statement that may be true but seems to say two opposite things
<i>ingenious</i>	p. 11	clever
<i>through the agency of</i> <i>an ill-natured fairy</i>	p.11	caused by a bad-tempered magical being
<i>leap year</i>	p. 11	one year out of every four in which a day is added to the calendar year (February 29)
<i>my natal day</i>	p. 12	my birthday
<i>a terrible disclosure</i>	p. 13	an awful bit of information
<i>appalls</i>	p.13	shocks
<i>soothe</i>	p. 14	promise
<i>upon our prey we steal</i>	p. 14	sneak up on our enemies
<i>Truce to navigation,</i> <i>take another station,</i> <i>let's vary piracy, with</i> <i>a little roguery</i>	p. 14	“Let’s take time off from being pirates and go do something else mischievous or naughty.”
<i>tormented with the</i> <i>anguish dread of</i> <i>falsehood unatoned</i>	p. 15	feeling bad because of a guilty conscience for having told a lie
<i>effect their capture</i>	p. 15	bring about their capture
<i>with base deceit</i>	p. 15	with the worst kind of trickery

Suggested Pre-Performance Activities

Teachers are encouraged to review the Pre-Performance and Follow-up activities suggested below and select any that seem appropriate for their students, as preparation time permits. **All schools should incorporate those activities marked with asterisks (**).**

- ** **Select a CHORUS of up to 16 students.** Prepare them for their singing and speaking roles using instructions in the **STUDENT PREPARATION HANDBOOK** and the **CD**.
- ** **Discuss the story,** characters, musical terms and operatic art form with students, preparing them for what they can expect to see and hear. The Atlanta Opera encourages classroom teachers to participate in student prep. Materials and information from this **OPERA GUIDE** may be photocopied and shared with all classroom teachers.
- ** **Teach the CHORUS their music** which is found in the tutorial section of the CD with sheet music in the **STUDENT PREPARATION HANDBOOK**. We heartily recommend teaching some of the music to the *entire student body* so that they can join in singing with their fellow students who are onstage.
- ** **Play the cast recording of Opera for the Young’s adaptation of *The Pirates of Penzance* in class** to introduce students to the music they’ll hear in performance. (This follows the tutorial section on the CD.)
- ** **Encourage students to interact with artists** during the question-and-answer session immediately following the performance by asking questions regarding singing, careers in music, the costumes and sets, etc.

Georgia Performance Standards:

ELAKR.6, ELA2R.4, ELA3R.3, MKGM.1, M1GM.1, M2GM.1, M2GM.1, M4GM.1, M5GM.1, MKGM.7, M1GM.7, M2GM.7, M3GM.7, M4GM.7, M5GM.7

ACTIVITIES FOR ALL AGES

1. Using the CD and/or LIBRETTO, have students **act out the story of *The Pirates of Penzance***.
2. **Decorate the school** with piratical drawings or paintings in the hallway and gym. Students might like to create pirates, ships at sail or make British and pirate flags.
 - a. Find in books (Encyclopedia, British history, and single topic texts) and on internet (“google” Gilbert and Sullivan for a wealth of resources) pictures from the Victorian era. Look at the styles of dress, carriages, castles, etc.
 - b. Study a map of England and locate London and Penzance.
 - c. Depending on age-appropriateness, suggest students watch piratical and seafaring films “Pirates of the Caribbean” and “Master and Commander”
3. Review the GLOSSARY OF OPERA TERMS and WORDS FROM *The Pirates of Penzance* (found in this OPERA GUIDE) with students to **acquaint them with the unfamiliar terms** in the libretto and associated with the art form.

Suggested Pre-Performance Activities (*cont.*)

4. Encourage audience members (grown-ups, too) to wear some type of costume the day of the show – this builds great excitement for the event!
5. Discuss how an opera is like a musical or a play (e.g., a theatrical event which tells a story through words and actions; actors perform before a live audience — unlike film or television). Then discuss how opera is different from other forms of entertainment (e.g., the text is sung rather than spoken; the actors often sing in a foreign language; etc.). Compare with ballet. **Compare live performance with TV and film** – focus on performer/audience chemistry and spontaneity. Explain “the show must go on!”
6. Explain to students that they may not understand every word, especially when characters sing extremely high or when two or more characters are singing at the same time. Encourage them to listen for the general idea of each song, and to let the sound of the music communicate the characters’ emotions to them. Repeated words in the libretto serve an important purpose: words that might be missed the first time become clear and more significant when repeated.
7. Discuss the rigors of a career as a professional musician with students, covering such topics as training, competition for jobs, artistic discipline, etc.
8. Discuss the qualities that make the **operatic (or "trained") voice different from that of a rock, "pop," or folk singer**. Focus on such aspects as range (opera singers usually vocalize over more than two octaves; non-classical singers generally use little more than an octave); volume (opera singers must be able to sing to an audience as large of 4,000 over a full orchestra without using a microphone, while non-classical singers use amplification); etc.
9. Discuss different ways in which music plays a role in daily life, aiming at communicating and influencing our emotions, i.e., movie soundtracks, religion, politics (movement songs, civil rights), nursery songs, etc.
10. Help prepare your class to be a good audience.

Georgia Performance Standards:

SSKG2, SS1G3, SS4H3, SSK, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; ELAKW, ELAKLSV1, ELA1LSV1, ELA3LSV1, ELAKR5, ELA1R5, ELA2R3, ELA3R2, ELA1R6, ELA2R4, ELA2W2, ELA4W3, ELA5W3, ELA4R3, ELA5R3, ELA5LSV2, ELA5R1

ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION TOPICS FOR VARIED AGES

1. If opera/opera is a completely new art form to your students, this first exposure may have been quite different from what they expected. Discuss how their responses differ from their expectations. If some students have previous experience with opera, talk about how they felt returning to the art form and how seeing opera for a second (or third) time compared with the first. Does the fact that everything is sung seem less strange on subsequent hearings?
2. Discuss how the main characters in *The Pirates of Penzance* change over the course of the action. What do they learn about themselves and each other? What do they learn about telling the truth?

Suggested Pre-Performance Activities (*cont.*)

What do your students think about the concept of “duty?” Is it just old-fashioned or still pertinent in today’s world?

3. See if the students recognized the “broad” style of comedy in the operetta – in both the written text and the acting/singing. How does this differ from more realistic drama?
4. Discuss “parody” and “satire” and how they relate to this Gilbert and Sullivan operetta. These words apply to both the musical (operatic parody) and social/political/military (British society) elements.
5. Encourage students to undertake an opera-related project (e.g., writing a review of the next opera televised on Public Television, bring magazine or newspaper clippings about a famous opera singer to share with the class, etc.).
6. Pick a well-known opera story to study. Over a period of time, read the story of the opera to your students, one "chapter" (or "act") at a time. When you have read the whole story, play a recording of excerpts (available at your public library or local record store) for students and help them identify the music that goes with different characters and parts of the narrative. Have students act out parts of the stories using the recorded music as a "soundtrack.
7. Secure a DVD of an opera (preferably in English) from your library or video store. Prepare students by telling them the story. Then play the DVD as a special class activity. Excellent DVDs are available for such suitable operas as Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*.
8. If your students have reacted favorably to this introduction to opera, encourage them to take advantage of future opportunities to see opera live or on television and film. If there is sufficient interest, arrange a field trip to a live performance or film.
9. Put on your own play (with or without music) using students in your school. Use an existing script or make up your own. You could even devise a simple narrative around songs your students already know. Encourage participation in a variety of ways: performing, making costumes, painting scenery, ushering (greeting audience members), etc.

Georgia Performance Standards

SSKCG1, SS2CG1, SS4CG5, TAESK.1, TAES1.1, TAES2.1, TAES3.1, TAES4.1, TAES5.1, TAES1.7, TAES2.7, TAES3.7, TAES4.7, TAES5.7, ELAKR5, ELA1R5, ELAKR6, WLAKW2, ELAKLSV1, ELA1R6, ELA2R4, ELA3R3, ELA1W2, WLA2W2, WLA3W2, ELA2W1, ELA2LSV1, ELA3W1, ELA4R1, ELA5R1, ELA4W2, ELA5W2, ELA4LSV2, ELA5LSV2

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Preparing Your Students for the Performance

Opera stereotypes can make the art form seem intimidating for some. Breaking down these stereotypes and preparing your students for the performance can make it a more enjoyable experience for everyone. Here are some suggestions of things that you can do before The Atlanta Opera comes to your school:

Suggested Activities

- Lead a class discussion on opera. What preconceptions about the opera do your students have? Are they fact or opinion? Document their perceptions so that you and your students can revisit them later to see how they've changed. (ELA3R3)
- Split the students into groups and have them act out a 1-minute scene that includes all their ideas of what they think opera is (fat ladies and all – make no restrictions here). Do the same activity after they have watched the performance. (TAES 3)
- Divide the bulletin board into two sections. On one half, have the students post descriptive words related to opera (don't limit them to "nice" words). After watching the performance, collect a second list and post these words on the other half. (MESGM.7-10, ELA2R3, ELA3R2, ELA4R3, ELA5R3, ELA2LSV1, ELA4LSV1, ELA5LSV1)
- Have the students draw pictures of what they think a typical opera singer looks like. Go to a few of the famous opera websites listed on page 38 and look at their photographs. Get students' reactions to what opera stars really look like.
- Discuss how opera is like a play (they both have a story, characters, costumes, audiences and words) and how it is different (opera has singers, music throughout arias, duets, ensembles, etc). Similar comparisons can be made with movies, television, musical theater and ballet. (MESGM9)
- Discuss some characteristics of opera. (MESGM7, MESGM9-10, ELAKLSV1, ELA1LSV1, ELA2LSV1, ELA3LSV1, ELA4LSV1, ELA5LSV1) For example:
 - Sometimes it takes longer to express an idea since the words are sung instead of spoken
 - When several characters are singing at the same time (this is called an ensemble), they can each sing about different things. This wouldn't be possible if all the characters were speaking instead of singing.
 - The action often stops so that a character can express how he/she is feeling by singing an aria. Shakespeare did this with soliloquies ("To be or not to be...").
 - It's okay if you can't understand every word that is sung (i.e., if it's in a different language) because the music will help set the context of the story.
- Start with the story. In simple terms, an opera is just a story that is sung. Before the performance, read them the plot synopsis of *The Pirates of Penzance* (pg. 7). Then brainstorm with the students: What would be a good topic for an opera? Think about movies, books, fairy tales,

Preparing Your Students for the Performance

historical events, and everyday situations. What kind of music would accompany different topics... fast/slow, loud/soft, smooth/jumpy? (MESGM7, MESGM9-10, ELAKLSV1, ELA1LSV1, ELA2LSV1, ELA3LSV1, ELA4LSV1, ELA5LSV1, ELA2R4, ELA4R1, ELA1R6, ELA3R3)

- Ask the students who their favorite singers are. Discuss whether or not they sound like trained classical singers, explaining why or why not. See pg. 35 for a comparison of trained and untrained voices. (MESGM7-8)
- Talk about the people required to produce an opera. There are four groups of people necessary for an operatic performance to happen: creators, producers, performers and observers. Discuss the roles of each group using “The Life Cycle of a Production” sheet on pg 40 and “Other jobs in the performing arts” on pg 41 as guides. Talk about what would happen if even one of these groups didn’t do their job. (MESGM9)
- Put on a play. Go through the production process from start to finish. Hold auditions, post a cast list, create simple costumes, build a set, rehearse lines, stage the action, and perform! (TAESK-1.1-7, TAES2-3.1-7, TAES4-5.1-7)
- Discuss the viewpoint from which *The Pirates of Penzance* is told. Divide students into groups, and have them write their own *Pirates of Penzance* story from the perspective of one of the characters from the story. Allow students to perform their plays for one another. List the inconsistencies between each version and discuss how a situation can seem different when looked at from someone else’s perspective. (TAESK-5.1-10, TAES2-5.11, ELA5LSV1, ELA5W1, ELA5R1, ELA4R1, ELA4W1, ELA4LSV1, ELA3W1)
- Look at the importance of setting. Sometimes a director may take artistic license and decide s/he wants their production of an opera to be set in a non-traditional time and place. For example, s/he might set the fairy tale *Hansel and Gretel* in a modern-day high school. The Mom and Dad would be the children s favorite teachers, while the witch might be an evil substitute. Instead of a forest, *Hansel and Gretel* could wander through the basement of the school. The setting of *The Pirates of Penzance* is the coast of England in 1897. Pick an unlikely time and place for the story like the Old West or the year 2100 on Mars. How would a time/location change affect the way the actors would portray their characters? Think about their speech patterns, the way they walk and carry themselves, their costumes and their interactions with one another. Discuss the differences. Have students pick their own location and sketch out their ideas for sets and costumes. (ELA5LSV1, ELA5W1, ELA5R1, ELA4R1, ELA4W1, ELA4LSV1, ELA3W1)
- Map out a storyboard. After reading the synopsis of *The Pirates of Penzance*, have the students create a storyboard to illustrate the sequence of events and what they think the opera might look

Preparing Your Students for the Performance

like. Have the students share their storyboards in small groups. (ELAKR1, ELAKR6, ELAKW1, ELAKW2, ELAKLSV1, ELA1R6, ELA1W2, ELA1LSV1, ELA2R4, ELA2W1, ELA2W2, ELA2LSV1)

- Design a poster to promote the opera. The Atlanta Opera marketing department designs all the printed materials for a production. Create posters or programs for the upcoming production of *The Pirates of Penzance* that might represent the “look” of the show and draw people to attend. (VAKMC.3, VAKPR.6, VAKCO.12, VA1MC.2, VA1MC.3, VA1PR.6, VA1CO.12, VA2MC.3, VA2PR.6, VA2CO.12, VA3PR.6, VA3CO.12, VA4PR.6)

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Education Department, Stuart Holt – Education Director

Sample Press Release

[name of your school]
 [school address, phone, fax and email here]
 Contact: [contact person and title]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
 [today's date]

[Your school] STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN PROFESSIONAL PRODUCTION OF "THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE"

Performances Produced by The Atlanta Opera

The Atlanta Opera is coming to [your city]. The company will present an adaptation of Gilbert & Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance* at [your school] on [date of performance(s)]. A chorus of students from [your school] will appear onstage, performing right alongside The Atlanta Opera's professional artists. These performances are produced by The Atlanta Opera, and are a part of The Atlanta Opera's annual Studio Tour, interactive productions in public and private school settings, designed to be a fun way for elementary students to experience opera.

About The Atlanta Opera The Atlanta Opera strives to present opera productions of the highest standards possible, while fostering education about the art form and encouraging its growth with services and programs designed to fill the needs of the community.

The Atlanta Opera Studio was founded in 1980 in an effort to teach students throughout the state of Georgia about opera through live performances and workshops. Thousands of students have been introduced to the art form through the Atlanta Opera Studio Touring Production. This production of *The Pirates of Penzance* was originally adapted and produced by Opera for the Young ©.

About *The Pirates of Penzance* Opera for the Young's Artistic Director **Diane Garton Edie** and **Bill Lutes** have adapted Gilbert and Sullivan's score and libretto. Sixteen **students** from [your school] will perform onstage as Constables, Pirates and Wards. With all of its zany word play and physical comedy, *The Pirates of Penzance* is an excellent springboard for discussion of the time-honored values of honesty, integrity and respect for commitment.

Sample Press Release *(cont.)*

MORE

For further information about The Atlanta Opera, please visit <http://www.atlantaopera.org/>. Further information about Opera for the Young is available at www.operafortheyoung.org.

[Add a paragraph here about the logistical details of your performance: whether the public is invited; time, location, name of your performance's sponsor, etc]

Parent and Grandparent Invitation



Dear Parents and Grandparents!

You are cordially invited to join us for The Atlanta Opera's production of

The Pirates of PENZANCE

Featuring our students as Pirates, Wards and Constables

Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____



Dear Parents and Grandparents!

You are cordially invited to join us for The Atlanta Opera's production of

The Pirates of PENZANCE

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All About Opera

Opera at a Glance

WHAT IS OPERA?

Opera is a dramatic story told through song. It is considered by many to be the most complete art form, combining all of the elements of art, words, music, drama and dance. The earliest Italian operas were called several things, such as “favola in musica” (fable in music) and “dramma per musica” (drama by means of music). This last title is very close to the dictionary definition, and is the correct basis for any discussion about opera.

The unique thing in opera is the use of music to convey an entire story/plot. This is based on the feeling that music can communicate people’s reactions and emotions better than words (read or spoken) or pictures. Opera takes any type of dramatic story and tries to make it more exciting and more believable with the help of music. Many famous stories have been made into operas, including *Cinderella*, *Hansel and Gretel* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

HOW DID OPERA GET STARTED?

The concept of opera was developing many years before the first opera was written. Its beginning can be traced to the ancient Greeks. They fused poetry and music, creating plays that incorporate song, spoken language and dance, accompanied by string or wind instruments.



Bernini's *Apollo and Daphne*

In the 1100s the early Christian church set religious stories to music, a style known as liturgical drama. The first true opera, *Daphne*, was composed by Jacopo Peri (1561-1633). It told the story of a Greek myth. The first great composer of opera was Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643). Some of his operas are still performed today.

HOW IS OPERA DIFFERENT AROUND THE WORLD?

Italy was the first country where opera became popular. It was the homeland of Jacopo Peri and Claudio Monteverdi. In time this exciting form of entertainment spread to the rest of Europe. France and Germany joined Italy as the principal opera producers. Eventually opera came to reflect the stories and musical styles of each of these countries.

The Italians have always been famous for their love of singing, and so in Italian Opera there has always been great emphasis placed on the singer and the beautiful sounds of the human voice. It wasn't until the late 19TH century and early 20TH century with the later works of Verdi and the operas of Puccini was a balance achieved between the role of the orchestra and that of the singer, and the combining of these two forces, to give a more effective presentation of the story.

The French have favored the pictorial side of drama, and this has led to a continuing emphasis on the visual spectacle, especially with dancing. An example of this: the Paris opera in the 19TH century would not accept a work for performance if it did not contain a major ballet. Verdi, an Italian composer, had to add ballets to all of his works to get them performed in Paris.

Opera at a Glance (cont.)

The Germans have always sought to extract from both the Italian and French traditions, and go beyond both in an attempt to present more than just a story. In fact, one of the greatest German opera composers, Richard Wagner, chose legends or myths for most of his opera plots so that he could communicate ideas as well as just a story.

ELEMENTS OF OPERA

A **score** is the blueprint to an opera. It consists of the words, music, stage directions, and often performance notes for the entire show. An opera score is often divided into sections. It begins with the **overture**, followed by one to five **acts**, and one or more **intermissions**. Each act may be divided into scenes. The scenes are comprised of **recitatives**, **arias**, **duets**, larger **ensembles** and **choruses**.

OPERA

Overture

Musical introduction played by the orchestra that often consists of excerpts from the opera.

Act

A group of scenes with a common theme, such as a specific time or place. Most operas consist of 1-5 acts.

Recitative

Speechlike singing that advances the plot and fills the spaces between arias and choruses.

Chorus

A musical piece sung by a group of people. The chorus may sing on stage or off stage.

Duet

A musical piece sung by two people.

Trio

A musical piece sung by three people.

Aria

A piece sung by one person. Arias allow singers to “show off” while reflecting on their emotions.

Intermission

A break between acts. This allows the audience to stretch and the performers to rest. Singing is hard work!

Check out excerpts from *The Pirates of Penzance* in the Student Preparation Handbook.

Opera at a Glance (cont.)

DIFFERENT STYLES OF OPERA

Bel Canto

This Italian phrase means “beautiful singing.” These operas grew from a style of singing emphasizing long phrases, breath control and flexibility in singing both loudly and softly. Because the voice is considered the most expressive element, the words are often secondary. Gaetano Donizetti composed in this style.



Cinderella

Opera Buffa

Comic opera, always sung in Italian. The jokesters in these operas are always the working class, such as maids, peasants, or servants, who keep busy getting the best of their employers. Gioachino Rossini composed in this style.

Opera Seria

Serious opera. These stories are often tragic, and typically involve heroes and kings or ancient myths and gods. Some of Handel’s operas are in this style.



The Magic Flute

Singspiel

Singspiel evolved in German speaking countries out of the comic opera tradition. It includes elements of comic opera, spoken dialogue interjected among the sung phrases, and, often, an exotic or fanciful theme. Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* is an example of this style.

Grand Opera

Spectacular opera. It is performed with elaborate sets and costumes. Many people are needed to make it happen. Grand opera involves royalty, heroism, an elaborate ballet scene, and is often long. Composer Giacomo Meyerbeer wrote opera in this style.

Music Drama

A style of opera that is created by a single artist who writes both the text and the music to advance the drama. This style fuses many art forms, and makes each one as important as the others. Composer Richard Wagner defined this style.

The Elements of an Opera

An opera is a musical work in which the actors sing most of the dialogue. The art form was developed in Italy at the end of the 16th century and is based on folktales, popular literature, dramas and comedies. Opera has remained a popular art form for centuries because of its unique ability to tell a story by combining music, drama and spectacle.

MUSIC

Music moves the action of a story, expresses emotions and moods, and deepens our understanding of the characters.

- *Orchestra*: In most cases, operas are accompanied by a group of musicians. Led by a conductor, an orchestra is an ensemble that is comprised of string, woodwind, brass and percussion instruments.
- *Score*: Musicians read from a score which is a notated piece of music showing each voice or instrumental part on its own staff.
- *Overture*: An overture is an orchestral piece that may be played at the very beginning of the opera before any action takes place on stage (not all operas have overtures).
- *Musical themes*: Musical themes are complete ideas that are crafted to be memorable to the listener. They are heard throughout operas and are associated with a particular character or characters, a situation, an idea, object or emotion.

Listed below are four types of musical forms composers use to help them describe how characters are feeling during the course of an opera.

- *Recitative*: Composed to sound like natural patterns of speech, a recitative is singing that has the rhythm of talking. It is used for conversation between characters or to move the plot of the story.
- *Aria*: A vocal solo expressing personal emotion or reflection.
- *Ensemble*: A piece that is sung by two or more characters at the same time (duet for two characters, trio for three characters, quartet for four characters, etc). Different melodies are sung simultaneously by each character involved in the ensemble.
- *Chorus*: Often providing background music for the above, a chorus is a group of people singing together in parts or in unison.

Each musical form is sung by singers in one of the six basic vocal categories which are listed below:

- *Soprano*: The highest female voice. In *The Pirates of Penzance*, a SOPRANO sings the role of Mabel.
- *Tenor*: The highest male voice. In *The Pirates of Penzance*, a TENOR sings the role of Frederic.
- *Mezzo-Soprano*: The middle-range female voice. In *The Pirates of Penzance*, a MEZZO sings the role of Ruth.
- *Baritone*: The middle-range male voice. In *The Pirates of Penzance*, a BARITONE sings the role of Major General Stanley and Pirate King.
- *Bass*: The lowest male voice.

The Elements of an Opera (cont.)

DRAMA

Operas unfold a dramatic or comic story involving a protagonist, antagonist, and/or a hero/heroine. Actors that portray these roles must be very good at both singing and acting.

Certain character tendencies often exist for each vocal category. They include the following:

- *Soprano*: most often the heroine of the opera
- *Mezzo-Soprano*: mothers, older women, villains, servants, women playing men (called “trouser roles”)
- *Contralto*: old women, witches, comic roles
- *Tenor*: most often the hero of the opera
- *Baritone*: helpful companions, villains, sometimes heroes
- *Bass*: kings, villains, priests

Operas usually feature primary and secondary characters who figure in the dramatic flow of the story.

- *Principals*: The primary roles of an opera. These may be heroes/heroines, villains or other strong characters. Principal roles are sung by the more experienced artists who have already made a name for themselves in smaller roles.
- *Comprimarios*: The secondary roles of an opera. Comprimario roles are often confidantes, maids, servants, messengers, or medical personnel. They are usually sung by younger or lesser known artists.

Similar to a play, opera tells a story that is divided into acts and scenes. Each scene is further divided into numbers, each representing a different musical form (i.e. aria, recit., chorus number, or ensemble). In contrast to plays, the text is written with the intention of being accompanied by music.

- *Libretto*: The text of an opera.
- *Librettist*: The artist who arranges the text of a story to fit the accompanying music.

SPECTACLE

The spectacle of an opera encompasses sets, costumes, special effects, props and staging. These elements are combined to tell the story in a multi-dimensional manner.

- *Set*: The place where the action will occur on stage. Operas often have large, spectacular sets that reflect the time and place of the story being told.
- *Costumes*: The outfits worn by each actor to reflect the time and place of an opera as well as the personality of each character.
- *Props*: Items that may be carried onstage in an actor’s hands or that “dress” the set (such as furniture or decorative accessories).

During the course of an opera, it is not uncommon to have a large number of people on stage. Many of these people will be chorus while the others will appear as supernumeraries or extras.

The Elements of an Opera (cont.)

- *Super/Supernumerary*: A performer who appears in a non-singing role; a “super” might have a solo walk-on to deliver a message, or might be included as part of a large procession, for example.

The stage director impacts how the action is conveyed by assigning various blocking.

- *Blocking*: The patterns of movement of the people onstage as the opera progresses.
- *Stage Right/Stage left*: The division of the stage from the performer’s point of view; thus when a singer goes stage right, he moves to his/her right but to the audience’s left.
- *Upstage/Downstage*: The position on stage farthest or nearest the audience; because of the raked stage which was so prevalent in early opera houses, the farther “back” a singer went on the stage, the “higher” he seemed to become in stature, thus the distinction of being “up”-stage. Downstage, then, would be lower and closer to the audience.

BRAVO!

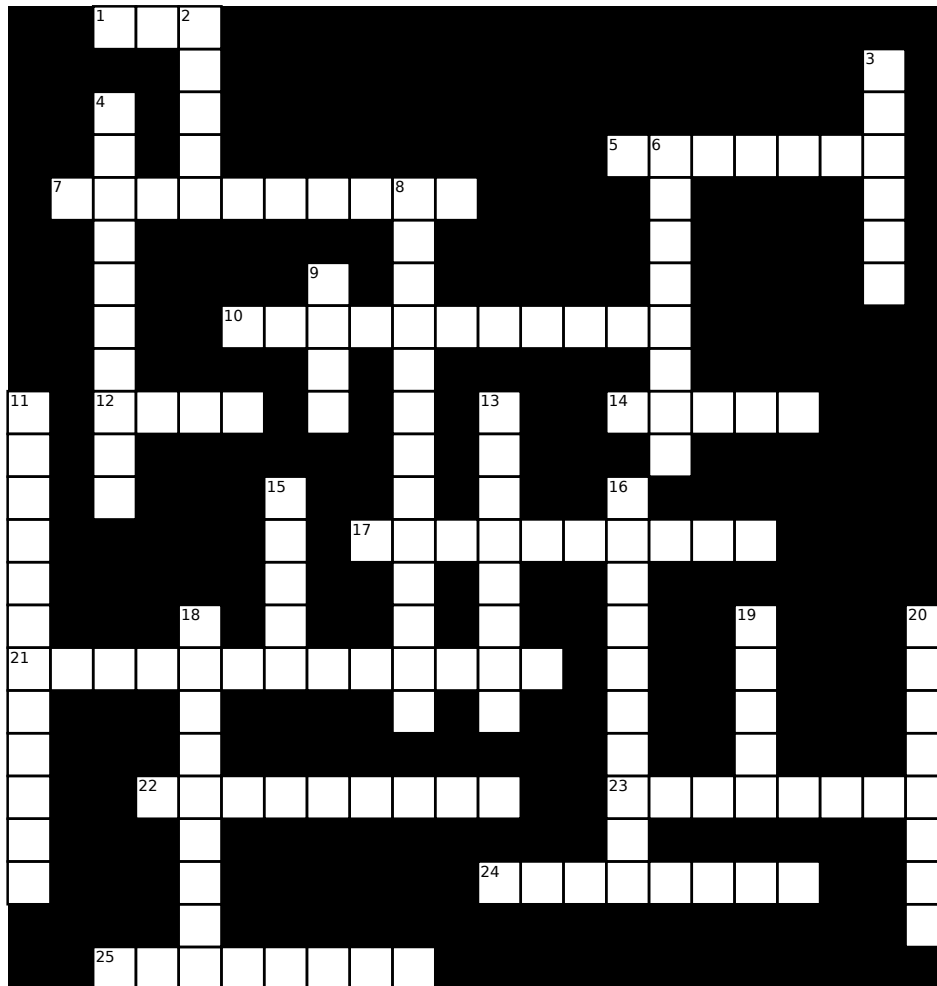
Audience members may shout this Italian word after an exciting aria, scene, act or performance. It is pronounced “brah-voh.” A female performer would be accorded a “brava” (the feminine form of bravo).



The Elixir of Love

The Elements of an Opera (cont.)

Test your opera Knowledge!



ACROSS

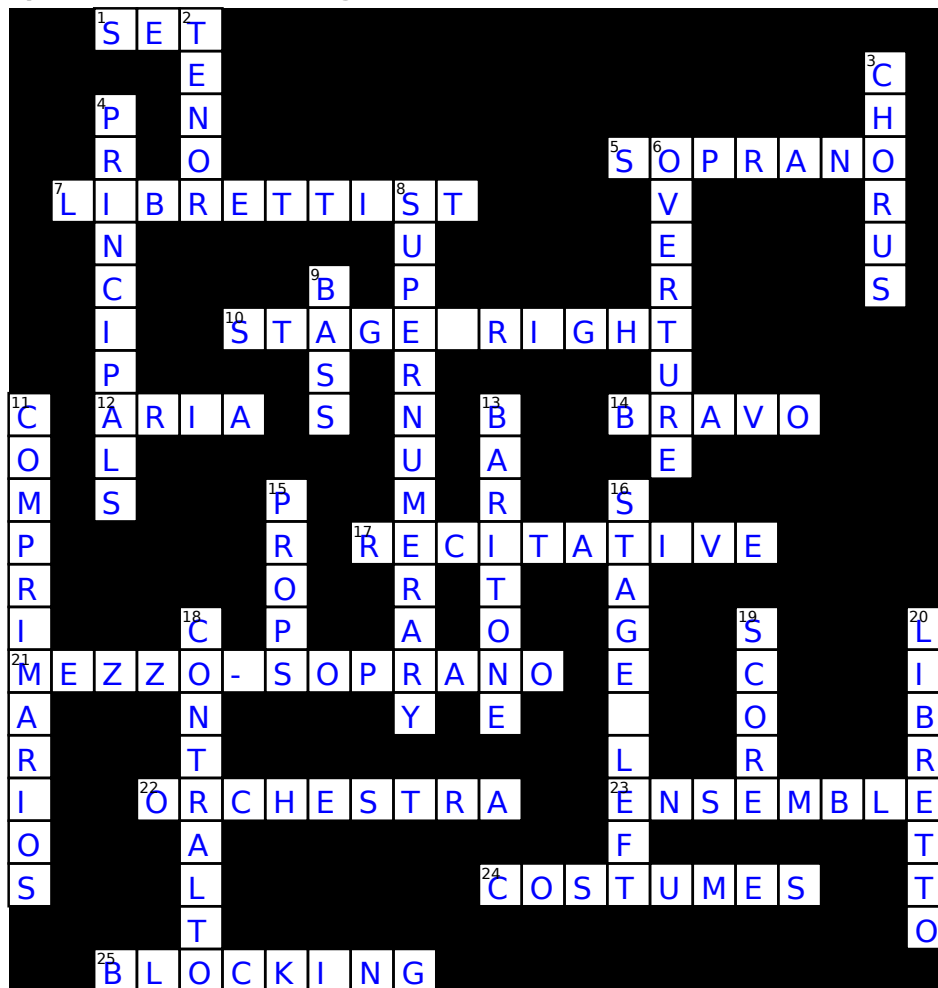
- 1 The place where the action will occur on stage.
- 5 The highest female voice; most often the heroine of the opera.
- 7 The artist who arranges the text of a story to fit the accompanying music.
- 10 The audience's left
- 12 A vocal solo expressing personal emotion or reflection.
- 14 An Italian word that people may shout after an exciting aria.
- 17 A musical form that sounds like natural patterns of speech.
- 21 The middle-range female voice; sometimes older women or villains.
- 22 A large group of musicians led by a conductor.
- 23 A piece that is sung by two or more characters at the same time.
- 24 The outfits worn by each actor to reflect the time and place.
- 25 The patterns of movement of the people onstage.

DOWN

- 2 The highest male voice.
- 3 A group of people singing together in parts or in unison.
- 4 The primary roles of an opera; may be heroes or heroines.
- 6 An orchestral piece that may be played at the very beginning.
- 8 A performer who appears in a non-singing role.
- 9 The lowest male voice; often kings, priests or villains.
- 11 The secondary roles of an opera.
- 13 The middle-range male voice; often helpful companions.
- 15 Items that may be carried onstage in an actor's hands or that "dress" the set.
- 16 The audience's right.
- 18 The lowest female voice; often old women or witches.
- 19 A notated piece of music showing each voice or instrumental part.
- 20 The text of an opera.

The Elements of an Opera (cont.)

Test your opera Knowledge!



ACROSS

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Operatic Voices

CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRAINED VOICE

Singing in Europe and America is now generally divided into two categories: classical and popular. What most people think of as operatic or classical singing developed in Europe hundreds of years ago. This style flourished during the seventeenth century as opera became a popular form of entertainment and operatic music increased in complexity. The most recognizable characteristics of a classically trained voice are:

- an extensive range (the ability to sing both high and low)
- varying degrees of volume (loud and soft)
- resonance in the chest and sinus cavities (produces a hooty, full or round sound)
- an ability to project or fill a large space without amplification

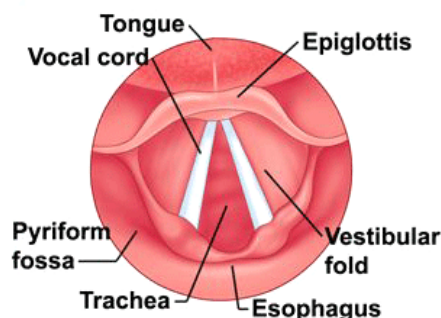
TRAINING

Very few people are born with the capability to sing this way. Classical singers take voice lessons about once a week and practice every day for many years in order to develop a beautiful operatic sound. In fact, most trained voices are not mature enough to perform leading roles on a big stage until they're at least 28 years old. Compare that with the most popular singers on the radio today...Britney Spears was 15 when her first album was released!

TWO TINY MUSCLES

Science tells us that all sound is made by two things vibrating together. The same concept applies when we talk or sing. The sounds we make are really just the vibration of two little muscles called the vocal chords. The vocal chords are held in the larynx, which is sometimes called the voicebox or (in boys) the Adam's Apple. These two little folds of tissue vary in length but are typically between 1 and 2

inches long. When you want to say something, your brain tells your vocal chords to pull together until they're touching lightly. Then, air pushes through them, and the vocal chords begin to vibrate, open-



ing and closing very quickly. This vibration creates a sound. The pitches you sing are dependent on the speed at which the chords vibrate. A faster vibration creates a higher pitch. The length of the chords also affects the pitch of the voice. Longer chords equal a lower voice.

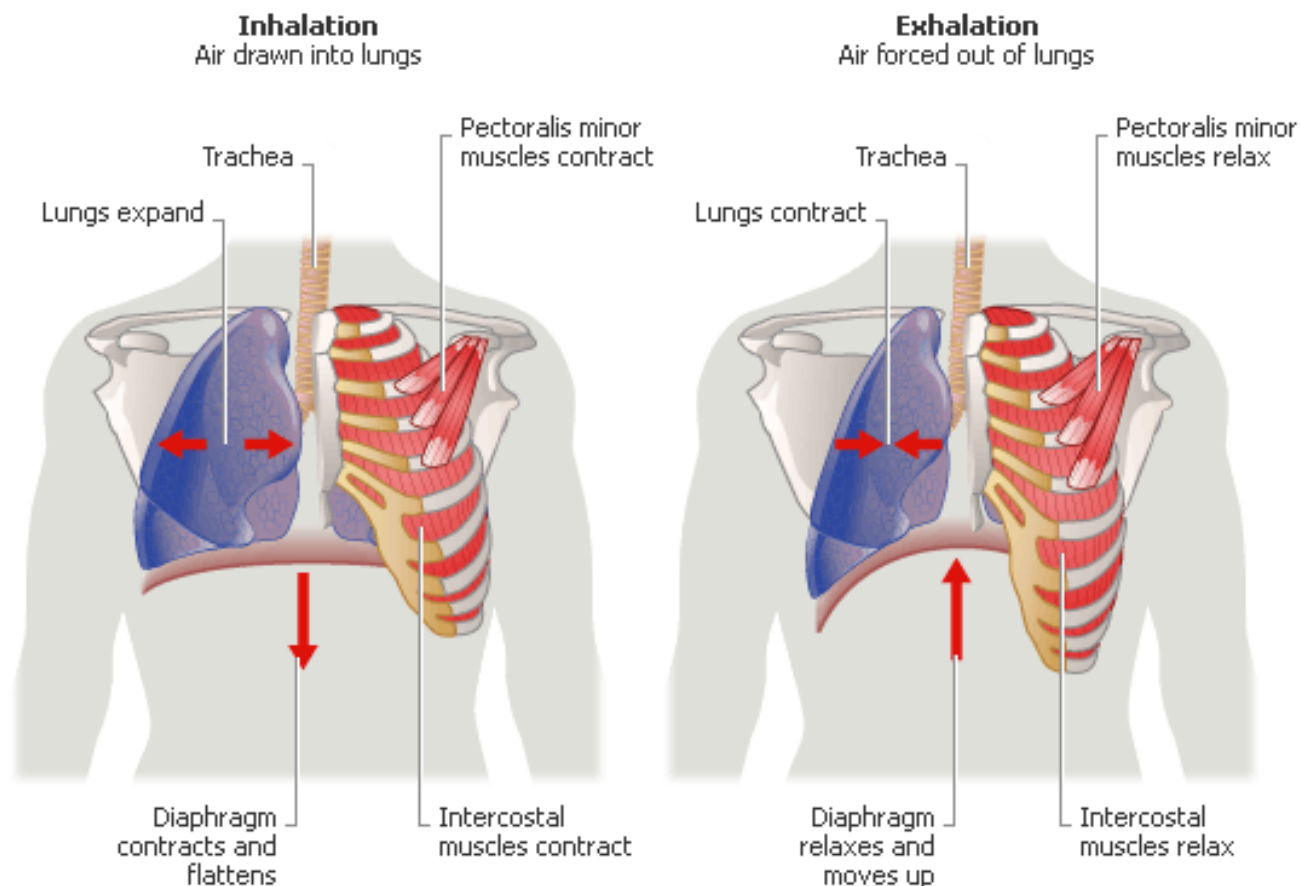
THE REST OF THE BODY

The vocal chords are only a small component of a larger machine which creates a beautiful singing voice. That machine is the entire body, from the tip of the toes to the top of the head. In order to sing with ease, every muscle needs to be relaxed (but not lazy!). If even one muscle is tense, it can throw off the entire machine, which is immediately obvious in a singer's vocal quality.

BREATHING/SUPPORT

In order to sing long phrases with a lot of volume and a good tone, singers must breathe in a specific manner, making use of the whole torso area (lungs, ribs, diaphragm and viscera). As they breathe in, each part of this network does its job: the lungs fill up, which forces the ribs to expand and the diaphragm (a flat muscle below the lungs) to move down. As the diaphragm descends, the viscera

Operatic Voices (cont.)

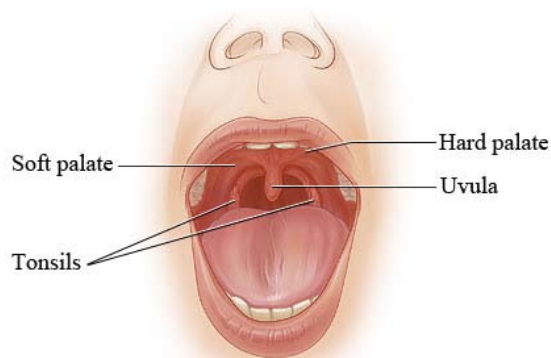


(stomach, intestines and other organs) are forced down and out. Singers describe this feeling as fatness in the low stomach or filling an inner-tube around their waist. Expelling the air, or singing, is essentially a slow and controlled movement of those muscles. If all of the air escapes from the lungs quickly, the tone of the voice will sound breathy and will lack intensity. Successful opera singers must be able to isolate the diaphragm and ribs, controlling the rate at which they return to their original positions. This allows for a consistent stream of air that travels from the lungs, through the larynx and out of the mouth.

RESONANCE

One of the most obvious characteristics of an operatic voice is a full, resonant tone. Singers achieve this by lifting their soft palate. This is a part of the

mouth that most people don't ever think about and it can be difficult to isolate. Here are some simple exercises to feel where it is and hear the resonance in your voice when you lift it: Start to yawn. Feel that lifting sensation in the back of your mouth? That is the soft palate going up. With a relaxed mouth, slide your tongue along the roof of your



Operatic Voices (cont.)

mouth, from your teeth back toward your throat. You should feel your tongue go up, then down (that's your hard palate), then back up again. That soft, fleshy area at the very back is your soft palate. Say the word "who" like you would say it in normal conversation. Now, say "hoooo" like a hoot owl. Can you hear the difference?

Say the sentence "How do you do?" as if you were an old British woman. Lifting the soft palate is the foundation for the resonance in a singer's voice.

With a lot of practice, a singer can lift his or her palate as soon as they begin to sing, without even thinking about it.

VIBRATO

Proper breathing and full resonance are essential for producing a clear vocal tone with an even vibrato (the Italian word meaning to vibrate). Vibrato can be described as a wiggle in the voice or, technically, a consistent variation in the pitch of a tone. While many pop singers try to remove this element of singing for the sake of style, vibrato in an opera singer's voice is a must. It increases the warmth and resonance of the tone and also allows for accurate tuning.

REGISTERS OF THE VOICE

Head voice

Without getting too technical, the head voice is the higher register, which is achieved by tapping into the resonance in the sinus cavities. It's called the head voice because you literally feel like your voice is coming out of your head rather than your throat or chest.

Chest voice

This is where the natural speaking voice falls. If you put your hand on your chest and yell "Hey!" you can feel that this register resonates in the chest rather than the head. Broadway and pop singers use it almost exclusively, but female opera singers generally avoid it unless they are singing really low notes. Even then, it must have the same fullness as the head voice. Men sing mostly in this voice.

Falsetto

This register applies to male voices only. Falsetto happens when the vocal chords do not vibrate fully, which creates a high, feminine sound. It is frequently used by male characters when they are imitating females.

A COMPARISON:

TRAINED VS. UNTRAINED

Since we've already covered the characteristics of a trained voice, it may be interesting to see how they differ from those of an untrained voice. (Remember, it's important to be able to compare the differences between two things without implying that one is superior to the other; an operatic voice is great for opera, but would sound silly in a pop song where an untrained voice is more appropriate.) Singers of pop music, rock and roll, R&B, folk and country are often referred to as commercial. While their styles vary considerably, the way they use their voices seems to be relatively consistent.

Training

First of all, commercial singers don't historically train like classical singers do. Many of the most successful non-classical singers of today are known more for their unique style, natural talent and personality than for their technical mastery of the voice.

Breathing / Support

Unlike classical singers, commercial singers usually breathe just as they would when they're speaking normally. A long phrase might warrant a big breath, but studying the placement and movement of one's internal organs is not usually done by pop singers.

Resonance

Most commercial singers are not concerned with creating a resonant tone. In fact, a pop song sung with a lot of resonance would probably sound pretty silly to most people.

Projection / Volume

Essentially all commercial singers depend upon microphones to be heard in a large performance space.

Operatic Voices (cont.)

This enables the singers to deliver their message in either a loud, dramatic style, or in an intimate, conversational style, with little physical effort. Opera singers, however, depend on the acoustics of the performance space and their ability to project their voices naturally to be heard. Microphones are rarely used in operatic performances.

Voice Types

All classical singers fall into one of the categories listed below. A singer cannot choose his/her voice-type; it is something they are born with. Composers usually assign a voice type to a character based on his/her personality or age. Read these descriptions for specific examples.

FEMALE VOICES

Soprano

This is the highest female voice and has a range similar to a violin. In opera, the soprano most often plays the young girl or the heroine (sometimes called the Prima Donna), since a high bright voice traditionally suggests femininity, virtue and innocence. The normal range of a soprano is two octaves up from middle C, sometimes with extra top notes. Most women are sopranos.

Mezzo-Soprano

Also called a mezzo, this is the middle female voice and has a range similar to an oboe. A mezzo's sound is often darker and warmer than a soprano's. In opera, composers generally use a mezzo to portray older women, villainesses, seductive heroines, and sometimes even young boys (like Hansel). This is a special operatic convention called a trouser role or a pants role. The mezzo's normal range is from the A below middle C to the A two octaves above it.

Contralto

This is the lowest female voice and has a range similar to a clarinet. Contraltos usually sing the roles

of older females or special character parts such as witches and old gypsies. The range is two octaves from F below middle C to the top line of the treble clef. A true contralto is very rare, some believe they don't exist at all!

MALE VOICES

Countertenor

This is the highest male voice, which was mainly used in very early opera and oratorio (a genre of classical vocal music similar to opera but generally based on a religious topic and accompanied by a choir). The voice of a countertenor sounds very much like a mezzo-soprano's voice and they often sing the same repertoire. Like the contralto, true countertenors are very rare.

Tenor

This is usually the highest male voice in an opera. It is similar to a trumpet in range, tone, color and acoustical ring. The tenor typically plays the hero or the love interest in an opera. His voice ranges from the C below middle C to the C above.

Baritone

This is the middle male voice and is close to a French horn in range and tone color. In opera buffa (comedic opera), the baritone is often the ring-leader of the comedy, but in opera seria (serious or tragic opera), he is usually the villain. The range is from the G that is an octave and a half below middle C to G above.

Bass

This is the lowest male voice and is similar to a trombone or bassoon in range and color. Low voices usually suggest age and wisdom in serious opera. In comic opera they are generally used for old characters who are foolish or laughable. The range is roughly two octaves down from the F above middle C.

Operatic Voices (cont.)

VOICE TYPES BASED ON SIZE AND QUALITY

Voices are also categorized according to size and quality. There are small, medium, medium-large and large voices in opera. The quality of a voice can be defined using the following terms:

Soubrette

A soprano of very light vocal weight, comparatively small range, and has the looks of a young girl. Soubrette roles are often flirtatious and witty, and outsmart the rich and powerful by the end of the opera. Many soubrette roles have names that end in -ina: Despina (Mozart's *Così fan tutte*), Adina (Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love*), and Zerlina (Mozart's *Don Giovanni*) are soubrettes.

Character

Singers with an exceedingly unique and not always beautiful sound can make a fine living singing character roles. While they don't get the biggest paycheck, they do tend to get all the laughs. This classification is reserved for the lower voices (mezzo, tenor, baritone, and bass). Examples are the Witch (Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*) and the stuttering lawyer Don Curzio (Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*).

Coloratura

Female singers described as coloraturas have great vocal agility, stunning high notes, and the ability to sing complicated vocal ornamentation. The Queen of the Night (Mozart's *The Magic Flute*) is a coloratura soprano. Rosina (Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*) was written for a coloratura mezzo.

Lyric

The word lyric generally describes a singer who specializes in long phrases and a beautiful tone. They can be broken down further into light-lyric, full-lyric and just plain old lyric. These titles can precede the general voice type of soprano, tenor and so on. While there are no hard and fast rules, there are a few widely accepted distinctions, which are outlined below.

- A light-lyric soprano like Pamina (Mozart's *The Magic Flute*) should have a bigger voice than a soubrette but still possess a youthful quality. A full-lyric soprano (Mimi in Puccini's *La bohème*) has a more mature sound and can be heard over a bigger orchestra. Full-lyric sopranos are typically the highest paid of all the voice types.
- A light-lyric mezzo is the equivalent of the soubrette and generally plays young boys like Hansel (Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*). The long phrases mentioned above are traded for agility and charm. A lyric mezzo (no full distinction here) is usually an old woman or a temptress (Bizet's *Carmen* is the quintessential lyric mezzo).
- Most tenors fall into the lyric category and don't call themselves light or full. However, operatic roles for tenors are separated further. Tamino (Mozart's *The Magic Flute*) must be sung by a youthful tenor with a light voice, thus earning the distinction of a light-lyric tenor role. Puccini's Cavaradossi (*Tosca*) is decidedly heavier than Tamino but is still considered lyric by most people.
- There are light baritones, but they fall into the lyric pot with the rest of the bunch. Baritones are baritones, unless they're really loud.

Dramatic

This describes the heaviest voices in any category except for bass. Dramatic singers are capable of sustained declamation and a great deal of power, even over the largest operatic orchestra of about 80 instruments. Puccini's *Turandot* is sung by a dramatic soprano. Most of Verdi's lead characters require a dramatic voice (e.g., *Otello*). It can be dangerous to stand too close to one of these singers.

Helden

A German prefix meaning heroic, applied to a large voice capable of performing the most demanding roles, usually used in reference to roles written by Richard Wagner. Brünnhilde (the character most often associated with braids and a horned helmet) is a helden-soprano role.

Operatic Voices (cont.)

FAMOUS OPERA SINGERS

Listed with each singer is an example of one album in case you would like to build your library. Some of their websites are included too.

Sopranos

Renée Fleming, American full-lyric. Formerly a jazz singer. Won a Grammy award for *The Beautiful Voice* Decca label. www.renee-fleming.com

Deborah Voigt, American dramatic. Obsessions: Wagner and Strauss Arias and Scenes EMI Classics label. www.deborahvoigt.com

Natalie Dessay, French coloratura. Vocalises EMI Classics label. <http://www.emiclassics.com/artists/biogs/dessay.html>

Maria Callas, Greek opera singer, impossible to categorize. Sang both soprano and mezzo roles. *Maria Callas: The Voice of the Century* EMI Classics label. www.callas.it

Other sopranos to consider: *Renata Scotto*, *Diana Soviero*, *Anna Netrebko*, *Mirella Freni*, *Birgit Nilsson*, *Angela Gheorghiu*, *Joan Sutherland*, *Kiri TeKanawa*.

Mezzo-Sopranos

Susan Graham, American light-lyric. Il tenero momento: Mozart and Gluck Arias Erato label. www.susangraham.com

Olga Borodina [bor o dée nuh], Russian dramatic. *Olga Borodina: Arias* Philips label. www.deccaclassics.com/artists/borodina

Marilyn Horne, American singer also difficult to categorize. *Rossini Heroes and Heroines* Decca label. www.marilynhornefdn.org

Dolora Zajick, American dramatic mezzo. *The Art of the Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano* - Telarc label. www.dolorazajick.com

Other mezzo-sopranos to consider: *Frederica von Stade*, *Denyce Graves*, *Lorraine Hunt Lieberson*, *Ewa Podles*, *Cecila Bartoli*

Contraltos

Marian Anderson, American contralto. Made history in 1955 as the first African-American female to sing at the Met. Also sang on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1939 for an integrated audience of 75,000. *Marian Anderson* RCA Victor label. www.mariananderson.org

Countertenors

Andreas Scholl, English. *Andreas Scholl: Heroes* Decca label. www.andreasschollsociety.org

David Daniels, American. *Handel Operatic Arias* Veritas label. www.danielssings.com

Derek Lee Ragin, American. *Handel Cantatas and Sonatas* Channel Classics label. www.colbertartists.com/ArtistBio.asp?ID=9

Other counter-tenors to consider: *Brian Asawa*, *David Walker*, *Bejun Mehta*

Tenors

Luciano Pavarotti, Italian. *The Pavarotti Edition: Vols 1-10* Decca label. www.lucianopavarotti.com

Franco Corelli, Spanish. *The Very Best of Franco Corelli* EMI Classics label.

Rolando Villazon, Spanish. *Anna Netrebko & Rolando Villazón Duets* Deutsche Grammophone label. www.rolandovillazon

Juan Diego Florez, Argentinean. *Great Tenor Arias* Decca label. www.deccaclassics.com/artists/florez/

Other tenors to consider: *Fritz Wunderlich*, *Enrico Caruso*, *Plácido Domingo*, *Roberto Alagna*, *Mario del Monaco*, *Jose Carreras*

Baritones

Bryn Terfel [tûr fuhl], Welsh bass-baritone. *Opera Arias* Deutsche Grammophone label. www.deutschegrammophon.com/artistmicrosite/?ART_ID=TERBR

Operatic Voices (cont.)

Dmitri Hvorostovsky [vor oh stáhv skee], Russian lyric. Verdi Arias Delos label.

www.hvorostovsky.com (fan site)

Thomas Hampson, American lyric. The Very Best of Thomas Hampson EMI Classics label.

www.hampsong.com

Other baritones to consider: *Dietrich Fischer-*

Dieskau, Rodney Gilfry, Thomas Quastoff,

Thomas Allen, Robert Merrill, Sherrill Milnes

Basses

Samuel Ramey, American. A Date with the Devil.

Naxos label. www.samuelramey.com

Nicolai Ghiaurov, Bulgarian. Great Scenes from Verdi

Operas Decca label. <http://www.deccaclassics.com/artists/ghiaurov/biog.html>

<http://www.deccaclassics.com/artists/ghiaurov/biog.html>

James Morris, American.

Opera Arias Capitol Records label.

<http://www.ffaire.com/wagner/morris.html>

Other basses to consider: *Kurt Moll, Robert Milne,*

Rene Pape, Ezio Pinza

CREDITS: TEXT

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CREDITS: IMAGES

<http://www.streetmusician.co.uk/Assets/Vocal%20chords%20diagram.gif>

http://encarta.msn.com/media_461517091/Diaphragm_and_Respiration.html

http://64.143.176.9/library/healthguidelen-us/images/media/medical/hw/hwkb17_073_003.jpg

http://www.gifs.net/Animation11/Jobs_and_People/Musicians_and_Singers/Opera_lady.gif

The Life Cycle of a Production

Each season, The Atlanta Opera presents a series of mainstage productions at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre. The Atlanta Opera season runs similarly to an academic calendar, opening in the fall and closing in the spring. This 2010-11 season, The Atlanta Opera will present *La bohème*, *Porgy & Bess*, and *Così fan tutte*.

The Atlanta Opera presents four **performances** of each of these **productions**. We also present special matinee performances just for students.

Each production is led by a director and a conductor. The **director** is in charge of the staging for the production, and directs the acting of the singers. The **conductor** works closely with the singers and coach in rehearsals, and also prepares the **orchestra**. He or she conducts the orchestra in the pit and soloists and chorus on stage during performances. The **coach** and **chorus master** prepare and rehearse with the singers before they sing with the whole orchestra. The chorus begins rehearsing several months before the production. Most of The Atlanta Opera chorus members live in the Atlanta area and have other jobs in addition to performing with the Opera. The principal singers, director and conductor come from all over the world. They come to Atlanta about three weeks before the first performance to begin rehearsing. Most of the rehearsals are held in our rehearsal hall and not the actual theatre.

The conductor begins orchestra rehearsals about a week and half before opening night. They have four rehearsals with the conductor, and then the singers are added into the mix. The size of the orchestra will vary with each production, depending on what the composer has written for. Many of the orchestra members live in the metro Atlanta area and have other jobs playing or teaching, or something non-music related. Some of the orchestra members travel to Atlanta from other parts of the country specifically to play in the orchestra for our productions.

The Atlanta Opera owns some sets, but many of the sets we use are rented from other opera companies. Other opera companies also rent the sets that we own. Many of the costumes that you see on stage have also been rented from other opera companies. The Atlanta Opera Costume Shop alters the costumes to fit our singers. Sometimes they do have to make costumes if there aren't enough, or if there is nothing that fits, etc. Once the sets are in place, the cast begins rehearsing at the theatre. The Opera production staff works with staff at the theatre to get all of the lighting and technical aspects of the production together. The orchestra comes together with the singers in a special rehearsal called sitzprobe. There are no costumes during the sitzprobe; this is mainly to hear the voices with the orchestra. There is a piano dress rehearsal, when the singers rehearse in full costume for the first time so they can get used to wearing them. Finally, all of the pieces are put together for two full dress rehearsals leading up to opening night. The production is performed four times over a period of a week and half before everything is broken down, the singers and artistic staff move on to their next job, and the sets and costumes move on to the next city.

Other jobs in the performing arts: An overview of The Atlanta Opera

It takes many people working together to create opera productions like these described. The Atlanta Opera is managed by one General Director who works with several different departments to run the company.

PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT

Director of Artistic Administration

The Director of Artistic Administration works very closely with the General Director. Together, they decide which operas the company will present, which sets and costumes they want to use, which singers should sing each role, etc. They watch operas all over the United States and sometimes in other countries, to hear singers and see the work of different opera companies. The Director of Artistic Administration and General Director also hold auditions for singers several times each year. The Director of Artistic Administration oversees all aspects of the production, including stage crew, musicians, conductor, director, etc.

Production Manager

The Production Manager is in charge of all of the technical aspects of the production including lights, sound equipment, video, supertitles, etc. He works very closely with the staff at the theatre. In the off season, the Production Manager plans carefully for each production for the following seasons.

Company Manager

The Company Manager takes care of travel and housing arrangements for all of the singers, seasonal production crew, etc. Many times the Company Manager works with the artist's agents to make arrangements, and is the main contact for the artists when they are in Atlanta. The Company Manager also organizes orchestra and chorus auditions and manages contracts for the orchestra and chorus.

Principal Coach and Accompanist

The Principal Coach and Accompanist works with singers cast in principal roles and musicians in the orchestra to prepare them for rehearsals with the conductor and the ultimate performances. This person accompanies and coaches singers, and also performs with the orchestra. The Principal Coach and Accompanist accompanies singers during all rehearsals prior to the orchestra's arrival. The orchestra begins rehearsing about two weeks prior to the first performance.

There are many other people that work seasonally in production department to make performances happen: Costume Shop Staff, Chorus Master, Stage Managers, Props Masters, Stage Director and Assistant Director, etc.

DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

The Development Department staff works hard to raise money for the company. Revenue from ticket sales account for less than half of The Atlanta Opera expenses, the rest of the income for the company is donated by individual donors, corporations, foundations, and sources of public funding. The development department staff works together to fundraise for the company. They also plan special events to thank donors and cultivate relationships. Fundraising is done through one-on-one visits with individuals, hosting parties and special events, attending meetings with business people, and writing grants. The Development Department for The Atlanta Opera is led by a **Director of Development** who works with business and other community organizations to get funding. There are several people who manage gifts from individuals including the **Annual Fund Manager** and **Major Gifts Officers**. The **Foundation & Grants Manager** writes grants and proposals, and the all of the department works together to organize special events, parties and receptions.

Other jobs in the performing arts: An overview of The Atlanta Opera (*cont.*)

MARKETING DEPARTMENT

The Marketing Department is responsible for selling tickets and season subscriptions to the opera. The **Marketing Director** works closely with the **Marketing Manager** to identify creative ways to attract people to the opera and move ticket sales. The **Creative Services Manager** is a graphic designer and designs all the printed material for the company. This includes brochures, ads, posters, the ARIA program book, invitations, education guides, etc. These three individuals also manage the company's website, www.atlantaopera.org. The **Director of Communications** works closely with the media to communicate the message of The Atlanta Opera. She schedules and conducts interviews, photo shoots, television ads, and all things public relations. The **Box Office Staff** sells tickets for the Opera. They sell tickets over the phone, in person at the Box Office, and online.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

The Education Department designs programs to teach kids and adults about opera. The Atlanta Opera has education programs for families and young children, in-school programs, field trips, programs in the community, as well as programs for training and professional development. The **Education Manager** works closely with the marketing and production departments to make sure people have the opportunity to learn about opera and the performing arts. The Education Manager writes education guides, designs and schedules programs, and works to develop new opera audiences.

FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT

The **Director of Finance** manages all the finances for the company. This person works with the **Accounting Manager** to track all income and expenses. The **Data Operations Manager** also works in this department managing the company's huge database of ticket buyers and donors. Together, this team also manages the administrative operations of the company including human resources, facilities, etc.

Suggested Follow-up Activities

Uncovering the Plot

Every story has a plot. The events that happen in a story must go in a particular order to make sense.

DIRECTIONS

Draw a picture for each of the plot scenes described below. Then cut out each square and arrange them in the proper order to tell the plot of *The Pirates of Penzance*. You may wish to glue the squares onto another piece of paper to create your own comic strip.

<p>The Major General confesses to Mabel and Frederic that he lied about being an orphan.</p>	<p>The Pirates surrender in the name of the Queen!</p>
<p>Ruth and the Pirate King explain to Frederic that he's been alive for 21 years, but has only had five birthdays.</p>	<p>Frederic says goodbye to the Pirates to become a law-abiding citizen.</p>

Become an Opera Critic

You are the opera critic. Think about the performance you just saw of *The Pirates of Penzance* and write your thoughts like you might see in the newspaper or an online review. Remember that a critic reports both the positive and negative features of a production. You might want to focus on one part of the opera that you particularly liked or disliked. Keep in mind that reviews express the opinions of the person who writes the review and different people will often have different ideas about the same performance! Below are some tips to get you started.

FOUR TIPS FOR WRITING A REVIEW

1. **Create a catchy first sentence.** You want to get the readers' attention, so the opening, or "lead" sentence, is very important. This can be a difficult part of writing a review. Ask yourself: How can I sum up my opinion in one sentence? What would catch my attention if I were reading this review?
2. **Clearly state what performance you saw.** Tell who gave the performance, the name of the opera, where the performance took place, and the date of the performances. Ask yourself: What if people want to come see this performance? What details do the readers need?
3. **Tell why the performance was wonderful, all right, or bad.** Be sure to say WHY you feel the performance was good. It is easy to say what you think. It is more difficult to say why you think it. For most beginning reviewers, the "why step" is the most difficult. Ask yourself: What did I like/not like about the performance? How was the singing? Were the costumes nice? Was it too loud? Too soft? How did the instrumentalist(s) sound? Readers like to know the reasons for your opinions. Don't forget to tell them how you developed your opinions about the performance.
4. **Talk about individual performances.** Toward the end of the review, you may write about the details of singers' performances. Ask yourself: Did Lisa sing well? Did Frank play his character convincingly? Whose performance stood out?

EXPANDING SENTENCES

A critic needs to write sentences that really describe how she feels about a performance. Practice writing descriptive, interesting sentences on this page. All English sentences have two basic parts: a **subject** and a **predicate**. The subject is the noun that is the "doer" in the sentence. The predicate is the verb that tells what the subject is doing. For example:

Margo is playing.

"Margo" is the doer of the sentence, so she is the subject. "Playing" is the predicate because it tells Margo (the subject) is doing. This sentence gives some information but it could give more details.

Ask yourself: Where is she playing? What is she playing? How is she playing? What other details can I give?

Then change the sentence to answer the questions:

Even though it is raining heavily, Margo is skillfully playing soccer on the wet, muddy field.

Adding details and descriptions gives the reader more information. It also creates a more interesting sentence.

Become an Opera Critic (cont.)

You try it! Change the following sentences so that they give more information. Use details and descriptions to make them more interesting.

The costume glittered. _____

She sang a song. _____

The boy danced on the stage. _____

The audience cheered. _____

Share your critique with us! The Atlanta Opera wants to know what you thought of our performance. If you would like to share your review with us, please send it on!

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The Science of Sound

Your Sense of Sound: Energy and Equipment

Sound is important to human beings because it helps us to communicate with each other. Your sense of sound also helps you to enjoy music like opera. Musicians use sounds to communicate thoughts or feelings. But what is sound exactly? How do we hear it?

THE ENERGY: HOW SOUND IS MADE

Sound is vibrating air. Sounds can vibrate in different patterns. These patterns are called sound waves. The different patterns change the sound we hear. Listen to traffic on a busy street. Noise like this is disorganized sound. Now listen to a piece of music. Music is sound and silence that is organized into patterns.

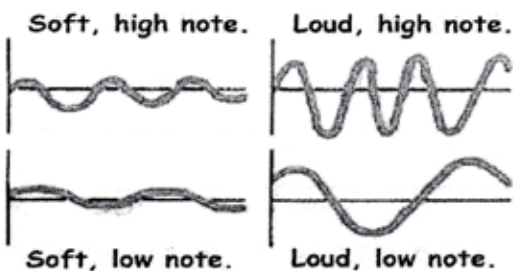
Think about it!

How are the sounds of traffic and music different? How does each sound make you feel? Can traffic sound like music? Can music sound like traffic?

Sound waves can vibrate many times in one second. The number of times a sound wave vibrates in one second is called its frequency. The frequency tells how high or low the sound will be. This is called pitch. High-pitched notes vibrate at a fast rate, so they have a fast frequency. Low-pitched notes have a slow frequency. In opera, the highest pitches are usually sung by women. Very low pitches are sung by men.

Just as the speed of the sound wave determines the pitch, the shape of the wave determines how loud or soft the sound will be. This is called volume.

This is what sound waves look like.



Try this!

Stretch a rubber band between your thumb and forefinger on one hand. Pluck it a few times. Can you see and feel the vibrations? What happens if you pluck the rubber band harder? Softer? Change the shape of the rubber band by making it longer and thinner. What do you hear?

The Equipment: How Sound is Heard

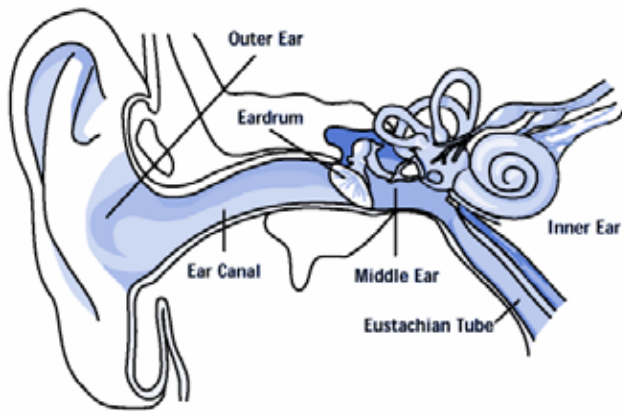
Now that we understand how sounds are created, you want to know how you hear those sounds, right? Your ear has an important job. It collects sounds, interprets sounds, and sends the sound signals to your brain. Human beings, like most mammals, have two ears to do all this work.

Your ear has three different sections:

- 1). Outer ear
- 2). Middle ear
- 3). Inner ear

Each of these sections has a different role to play in collecting and interpreting sound.

The Science of Sound (cont.)



The Outer Ear

This is the only part of your ear that you can see. Your outer ear has two jobs: to collect the sound and protect the rest of the ear. Invisible sound waves travel through the air and enter the outer ear through the canal. The canal is the opening in your ear. The outer ear also makes earwax.

Did you know? Earwax (the yellowish stuff that forms in your ears) is your friend! It protects the rest of the parts of your ear from getting dirt in them.

The Middle Ear

After sound waves travel through the canal, they reach your middle ear. The middle ear turns the sound waves into vibrations before it sends them to the inner ear. Sound passes through your eardrum and three tiny bones called ossicles. Each ossicle has a name. They are the hammer, the anvil, and the stirrup. The eardrum is a thin piece of skin attached to the hammer. The hammer is attached to the anvil and the anvil is attached to the stirrup. When these three tiny bones vibrate, sound is passed on to the inner ear.

Did you know? The ossicles are the three smallest bones in your body. The stirrup is the tiniest of all!

The Inner Ear

Once vibrations enter your inner ear, they travel to the cochlea. The cochlea is a small, curled tube. It is shaped like a snail's shell. It is filled with liquid and lined with millions of tiny hairs. Vibrations cause the liquid and the hairs to move. Then the hairs change the sound into nerve signals for your brain. The brain interprets the nerve signals and tells you what sound you are hearing.

The Balancing Act

Your ears do more than just hear... they also help keep you standing upright! Three small loops are located directly above the cochlea. The loops are called the semi-circular canals. They help us maintain our balance. The semi-circular canals tell your brain the position of your head – is it looking up? Turned to the left? Your brain determines where your head is and then keeps the rest of your body in line.

Try this! Fill a cup halfway with water. Move the cup around a bit, then stop. Notice how the water keeps swishing around even after the cup is still. Sometimes this happens in your semi-circular canals when you spin around very fast. The fluid that continues to move around in your ear is what makes you feel dizzy!

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