



THE ATLANTA OPERA



ORFEO & EURIDICE

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Opera Guide

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WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE OPERA

Are you unsure about how to act, what to wear or what you are going to see at the Opera? You are not the only one! Many others, students and adults, are apprehensive about their first trip to the opera. Read the truth behind some of the most popular opera myths and see if they answer some of your questions about the opera as well!

MYTH #1

OPERA IS BORING AND STUFFY.

Not true! Operas tell some of the most interesting, scandalous, and beautiful stories of all time. It is not unusual to find love triangles, murders, fatal illnesses, and messages from beyond the grave. It's like *Days of Our Lives* set to music!

MYTH #2

OPERA IS SUNG IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE SO I WON'T UNDERSTAND THE STORY.

We can help! It is true that many operas, like *Orfeo ed Euridice* are sung in languages other than English. Since most people in our audience do not speak Italian, we project English translations, called supertitles, of the opera on screens above the stage. This way, you can follow along even if you do not understand the language. You also can read the synopsis of the opera before you arrive. Knowing the story will also help you follow along.

MYTH #3

I NEED TO WEAR A TUXEDO OR A BALL GOWN TO THE OPERA.

While many people like to dress up when they go to the opera, it is definitely not required. Wear something that makes you feel comfortable, but remember that it is a special event and you may want to wear something a little nicer than ripped jeans and a sweatshirt!

MYTH #4

IF I'M A FEW MINUTES LATE, NO ONE WILL CARE. AFTER ALL THE OPERA IS SO LONG, IT DOESN'T MATTER IF I MISS THE FIRST FEW MINUTES.

You don't want to miss the beginning! At most opera houses, the ushers will not seat you if you arrive after the opera has begun, as it is disturbing to the rest of the audience and the performers. If you arrive late, you may need to wait until after the first act before you can enter the hall. And a lot happens in the first act!

ADDITIONAL TIPS

HERE ARE A FEW MORE TIPS TO MAKE YOUR TRIP TO THE OPERA MORE COMFORTABLE.

- 1. Remember:** the opera is a live performance. You can hear the performers on stage and that means they can hear you too! Please refrain from talking or whispering during the opera. It is distracting to others around you as well as to the singers. Please do not leave your seat during the performance. This performance of *Orfeo ed Euridice* will be one hour with no intermission.
- 2.** If you have them, please turn off all cell phones, pagers, beeping watches and anything else that may go "beep" in the night!
- 3.** Please do not take photographs or video or audio recordings of the performance.
- 4.** After the orchestra has tuned, the auditorium will become quiet. The conductor, or maestro, will then enter the pit. It is acceptable (and appreciated) to applaud the maestro's entrance. After all, he/she worked very hard to bring this performance to life!
- 5.** If you like what you have seen and heard, let the performers know! It is okay to applaud at the end of songs, called arias, and at the end of a scene. If you really liked what you heard, call out "bravo" (to the men on stage), "brava" (to the women) and "bravi" (for all on stage). And of course, a standing ovation is always welcome!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Orfeo – The mythical hero of music, poetry, medicine, art, and agriculture

Euridice – An oak nymph or one of the daughters of Apollo (the god of light); wife of Orpheus

Amore – The primordial god of beauty, and love

SYNOPSIS



GLIMMERGLASS'S 2007 PRODUCTION OF *ORPHÉE ET EURYDICE* (GEORGE MOTT)

ACT I

A pleasant, yet lonely grove

The opera opens with Orfeo, a poet and musician, standing at the grave of his beloved wife, Euridice. Nymphs and shepherds have come to her funeral, but Orfeo is left alone after they leave the grove. Grieving her loss and his newfound solitude, he curses the gods for taking her away from him and begs them to either bring her back or allow him to join her in death.

Hearing his plea, Amore, the goddess of love, comes to him and says that the gods will allow him to brave the journey to Hades and bring back Euridice. Orfeo rejoices in this good news, but there is one stipulation in the plan—he must not look at her nor explain why not until they are safely back on earth and have crossed over the river Styx. Eager to be with his wife once more, Orfeo looks to the powers of love and begins his voyage to the underworld.

ACT II

The gates of Hades

Orfeo has arrived at the entrance to the underworld, but is refused entry by the Furies and monsters who are guarding the gates. Unable to convince them to let him in, he sings an eloquent song and plays his lyre, eventually softening the hearts of the Furies. This beautiful music inspires them to take pity on him and they allow him to pass the gates and enter the underworld.

The Elysian Fields

Orfeo enters the Elysian Fields, the home of eternal peace for the dead, and is welcomed by the Dance of the Blessed Spirits. They dance and sing of their state of bliss and enjoyment in such a beautiful and peaceful place, but Orfeo is unable to appreciate it, knowing that he is closer than ever to reuniting with Euridice. He pleads for them to bring Euridice to him, and she is soon brought into the field. Careful

SYNOPSIS (cont.)

not to look at her face, Orfeo takes her hand and begins the journey back to earth. The Blessed Spirits are amazed at the power of love and its ability to transcend even death.

ACT II

A dark passage back to earth

As Orfeo and Euridice make their way out of the underworld and towards the life they once knew, Orfeo is impatient. Euridice, marveling at her reunion with Orfeo and feeling the excitement of returning to earth, notices that he has not looked at her at all since they were reunited. Confused by the situation, she wonders if death has faded her beauty and laments that she would rather return to her death than endure a life in which Orfeo no longer loves her. At this point, both Orfeo and Euridice pray to the gods for the sorrow that they must endure. Euridice pleads Orfeo to tell her why he is treating her with such indifference and is putting her in so much pain. She seems to be slowly disappearing back into the underworld when Orfeo is unable to bear it any longer. He defies the rules of the gods and looks at Euridice, causing her to die immediately.

This gives Orfeo much pain, for he must endure her death a second time and grieves her loss. Unsure of how he will ever live without her, he laments by singing "Che farò senza Euridice" and contemplates how he will get her back. Believing that there is only one way to win her back, he prepares to take his own life and enter the underworld but is interrupted by Amore. Taking pity on Orfeo, Amore declares that he has passed the tests of the gods and has proven that love can defy even the boundaries of death. He rewards Orfeo by reviving Euridice and bringing her back to earth. The two rejoice in their reunion once more on earth and celebrate the power of love.



PHOTOGRAPHY FROM GLIMMERGLASS'S 2007 PRODUCTION OF *ORPHÉE ET EURYDICE* (GEORGE MOTT)

MEET THE COMPOSER

CHRISTOPH WILLIBALD GLUCK (1714-1787)

Christoph Willibald Gluck was born in Erasbach, Germany on July 2, 1714 and was the oldest of nine children. His father was a forester and even though Gluck had ideas of following in his father's footsteps, he soon discovered his own passion for music and ultimately decided to pursue this new career. Gluck ran away from home as a teenager to Prague, where he had heard Italian opera.

He soon visited Prague and Vienna's flourishing music scenes and eventually landed a job in Prince Lobkowitz's Viennese orchestra. He travelled between Italy and Vienna often, composing operas for existing librettos by Metastasio, but settled in Vienna in 1750. It was then that Gluck married Maria Anna Bergin, who came from a wealthy banking family. However, her father did not approve of Gluck and the two had to wait until his death to go through with the wedding. Throughout the years, Gluck was able to lean on her wealth during the dry spells of his composing and success. In 1756, he was knighted by Pope Benedict XIV and insisted on being addressed as Ritter von Gluck or Chevalier Gluck.

Gluck wrote his first opera, *Artaserse*, at the age of 27 in 1741 but did not receive much praise for his first 30 or so operas. In fact, the first sign of true recognition came after the premiere of *Orfeo ed Euridice* in 1762, for it revolutionized the traditional Italian opera at the time. He continued this new approach in the rest of his operas and became known for his reformation of opera seria, the opera of the nobility, which is characterized by a more serious style. He unified all aspects of the performance and increased the roles of the orchestra and chorus. Instead of having the harpsichord accompany the performers, he utilized the entire orchestra, and he made the overall work itself more important than the elaborate passages singers used to perform.

In *Alceste* (1767), he advanced the reforms even more, composing the overture to reflect the music of the opera. Previously, the overture was a collection of music unrelated to the opera that only served as background noise for the audience while they



CHRISTOPH WILLIBALD GLUCK

settled in their seats. With this approach, audiences would listen to a musical synopsis of the opera before even seeing it, further enhancing their visit and making it a more complete experience. Gluck's reforms of the opera may have been during the classical period, but they paved the way for future composers of the modern drama, such as Hector Berlioz and Richard Wagner.

Gluck had one main source of competition during his life—Niccolo Piccinni. He was an Italian composer who attempted to keep the classic Italian opera alive that Gluck tried so hard to modernize. Even though the two thought the whole rivalry was a bit ridiculous, they agreed to enter a competition as to who could compose the best opera based on the same story. Gluck's *Iphigenie en Tauride* was a greater success than Piccinni's and secured his fame.

Through Gluck's experiences as a forester's son, a student, and wealthy traveler (through marriage), he was able to view opera from many perspectives (peasant common sense and aristocratic vantage points) and became known for his practical approach to opera. In 1773, Gluck returned to Paris as a court composer for the Paris Opera under his previous pupil, Marie Antoinette. Years later, he died in Vienna, composing a total of about 40 operas and five ballets (including *Don Juan*) throughout his lifetime. But even with this impressive number of compositions, he remains most famous for the reforms of the modern opera found in *Orfeo ed Euridice*.

GLUCK'S OPERA REFORM

During Gluck's lifetime, Italian opera had become a very complex production that was known for its multifaceted plots and intricate music. The composer wrote Italian operas of the popular style until he was appointed Court composer in 1754.

Gluck was tired of the so-called "ornamentations" of the period, and was more interested in moving toward a direction of simplicity rather than maintaining the status quo. He thought that the Italian, French, and Handelian styles of opera were full of excesses that betrayed the reasons for which the art form was invented. Perhaps he was able to evaluate the state of the art form of opera because he had such a wide variety of experiences – working and living in Vienna, Prague, London, and Paris.

Gluck was in agreement with the Florentine Camerata*, wanting to use Greek theater as the major source of his subject matter. The thought was that opera should offer the emotional transport and purification that was inherent in the great theater works of antiquity. (Other later composers like Berlioz and Wagner would later look at Gluck as a sort of renegade—pointing the way toward modern music drama.)

Gluck felt the need for reform along the lines of the French musical theater, where text settings were simpler and more direct. In this style, emotional expression would take precedence over vocal display. He liked the concept of fluent dialogue, and didn't really follow the traditional rules of diligent counterpoint and musical forms like the fugue. He did excel at instrumental coloration – setting the mood of scenes and characters with distinct kinds of music, and only used the singer's virtuosity where it could make an expressive point. Not all of his contemporaries agreed with this however. Composer George Frederic Handel is said to have scoffed that Gluck "knows no more counterpoint than my cook Walz." (Apparently Walz was a singer in addition to being Handel's cook!)

Orfeo ed Euridice premiered in Vienna on October 5, 1762 in Italian. The role of Orfeo was written for a male contralto castrato*. Gluck simplified many aspects

of the opera with this work, focusing mainly on the music. He highlighted natural and melodic singing, which had been overshadowed by the stark recitative (singing that imitates the spoken language) of recent years. Everything the composer used, he used with great purpose including the orchestra, the chorus, and the voices. Gluck wanted to restore balance between the voice, the words, the orchestral accompaniment, and more restrained stagecraft to enhance the drama of the story rather than overwhelm it. He also wanted to use the overture as a way of introducing audiences to the atmosphere of the music and story that would follow. Prior to that time, the overture was intended to merely entertain audiences but didn't necessarily relate to the story of the opera.

The famous aria, "Che farò" in Act III was a complete change from the ornamental, acrobatic arias of the past and even special effects were simplified, adding a certain elegance to the opera. With *Orfeo ed Euridice*, Gluck emphasized the orchestra's independent expressive function, rather than simply accompanying the singing and action on the stage. He also made extensive use of the chorus as an additional character, which was not the tradition of the time. This is illustrated in Act II of the piece, when Orfeo appears at the entrance to Hades and is greeted by threats of the Furies.



GAETANO GUADAGNI, THE FIRST ORFEO.

GLUCK'S OPERA REFORM (cont.)

Unfortunately, Italy did not quite embrace Gluck's new and revolutionary operas, convinced that the elaborate operas were best. The trend he wanted to start did not catch on with the premier of *Orfeo ed Euridice* or his next three works over the next several years in Vienna. So, Gluck moved on to Paris in 1773 and adjusted *Orfeo ed Euridice* for a French audience. At that time, the Parisian audiences were somewhat divided over the traditional Italian opera versus the tragédie lyrique of composers Lully and Rameau. Gluck's "modern" operas – using recitative with full orchestral accompaniment, sparing use of set pieces – added fuel to the fire.

The second version of the opera, *Orphée et Eurydice*, was first performed in Paris in 1774 in French. The role of Orfeo was also reworked to be sung by a tenor rather than a castrato, and Gluck added some new material for the French version, making it a little longer than the original 90-minute Italian work. The orchestra parts were also changed a bit for the new French version. In both the Italian and French version, Orfeo's lyre is represented by the harp, and it was this use of the instrument in 1774 that it is usually thought introduced the harp to French orchestras. Ballet was also added to suit the French audiences. The integration of dance

into the action was new for opera audiences. Paris embraced this new approach to opera, even gaining a nod from Queen Marie Antoinette.

The opera was revised again by French composer Hector Berlioz in 1859. Berlioz tried to make a compromise between Gluck's two versions, using the 1774 version (Paris), but transposed the tenor role of Orfeo to fit a female alto voice. Most modern revivals use the original 1762 version (Vienna), but incorporate the most famous of the 1774 additions.

Gluck himself described his work in the following manner in this excerpt from his preface to the score of *Alceste*:

I have striven to restrict music to its true office of serving poetry by means of expression and by following the situations of the story, without interrupting the action of stifling it with useless superfluity of ornaments; and I believe that it should do this in the same way as telling colors affect a correct and well-ordered drawing; by a well-assorted contrast of light and shade, which serves to animate the figures without altering their contours.

GLOSSARY

***Castrato** - a male voice equivalent to soprano or contralto; The role of Orfeo was originally written for male castrato, but is frequently sung by female contralto or mezzo-soprano since French revival in nineteenth century. The role of Orfeo will be sung by mezzo-soprano Magdalena Wór for The Atlanta Opera Student Shorts. The role of Orfeo will be sung by countertenor David Daniels for The Atlanta Opera mainstage performances of *Orfeo ed Euridice*.

***The Florentine Camerata** was a group of humanists, musicians, poets and intellectuals in late Renaissance Florence who gathered under the patronage of Count Giovanni de' Bardi to discuss and guide trends in the arts, especially music and drama. They met at the house of Giovanni de' Bardi, and their gatherings had the reputation of having all the most famous men of Florence as frequent guests. The apex of influence for the Camerata was between 1577 and 1582, gaining influence before this time, and dying off afterward.

Largely concerned with a revival of the Greek dramatic style, the Camerata's musical experiments led to the invention of the *stile recitativo* (a type of vocal writing, normally for a single voice, which follows the natural rhythms and accentuation of speech and its pitch contours). Cavalieri was the first to employ the new recitative style, trying his creative hand at a few pastoral scenes. The style later became primarily linked with the development of opera.

MEET THE CONDUCTOR

HARRY BICKET

(ATLANTA OPERA DEBUT)



Internationally renowned as an opera and concert conductor of distinction, Harry Bicket is especially noted for his interpretation of the baroque and classical repertoire, and in September 2007 took up the position of Artistic Director of The English Concert, one of the UK's finest period orchestras. Harry Bicket made his Glyndebourne Festival debut in 1996 with Peter Sellars' landmark production of *Theodora*. In 2004 he began his relationship with the Metropolitan Opera with an acclaimed new production of *Rodelinda*, and was immediately re-engaged for *Giulio Cesare* and *La clemenza di Tito*. He made his debut with the Bayerische Staatsoper conducting *Rinaldo* in 2000. 2003 saw debuts with the Lyric Opera of Chicago, conducting *Partenope*, and with the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden conducting *Orlando*, which received an Olivier Award nomination for Best New Opera Production. Other highlights of the last few seasons have included *St. Matthew Passion* with the Rotterdam Philharmonic and *Messiah* with the New York Philharmonic. He has also led the San Francisco Symphony, Bayerische Rundfunk, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, St Paul Chamber Orchestra and Scottish Chamber Orchestra. He has conducted productions for Opera Australia, Scottish Opera, New York City Opera, Royal Danish Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, New Israeli Opera, Aldeburgh Festival, Edinburgh Festival, Spoleto Festival, English National Opera, Welsh National Opera, Opera North, Los Angeles Opera and the Canadian Opera Company. The current season and beyond includes concerts with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, his Japanese debut with the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra, concerts, recordings and extensive touring with The English Concert as well as productions for the Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu, Opéra de Bordeaux, Theater an der Wien; he will also return to both the Met and Lyric Opera Chicago.

MEET THE DIRECTOR

LILLIAN GROAG

(ATLANTA OPERA DEBUT)



Lillian Groag works in the theatre as an actress, writer and director. Her acting credits include Broadway, Off Broadway, Mark Taper Forum, and regional theatres throughout the country. She has directed at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the Old Globe Theatre, New York City Opera, Chicago Opera Theatre, Florida Grand Opera, Center Stage, The People's Light and Theatre Company, Berkeley Repertory, Milwaukee Repertory, Missouri Repertory, Seattle Repertory, Glimmerglass Opera, Asolo Repertory Theatre, San Jose Repertory, the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco, The Juilliard School of Music, Florentine Opera, the Sundance Institute Playwrights Lab, and the Company of Angels. Her plays *The Ladies of the Camellias*, *The White Rose* (AT&T award for New American Plays), *The Magic Fire* (Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays), *Menocchio* and *Midons* have been produced variously by the Old Globe Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, The Kennedy Center, The Guthrie Theater, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Yale Repertory, Denver Center, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, the Northlight Theatre, the WPA Theatre, Seattle Repertory, The Wilma Theatre, and The Shaw Festival. Abroad: Mexico City, Junges Theatre in Bonn, Landesbuhne Sachsen-Anhalt in Eisleben, Schauspielhaus in Wuppertal, Hessisches Landestheater in Marburg, Schauspielhaus in Stuttgart, and Tokyo. She has done translations and adaptations of Lorca, Feydeau, Musset, Marivaux and Molnar. She is an Associate Artist of the Old Globe Theatre.

MEET THE CAST

DAVID DANIELS

ORFEO (Mainstage Production)
(ATLANTA OPERA DEBUT)



David Daniels is known for his superlative artistry, magnetic stage presence and a voice of singular warmth and surpassing beauty, which have helped him redefine his voice category for the modern public. The American countertenor has appeared with the world's major opera companies and on its main concert and recital stages. He made history as the first countertenor to give a solo recital in the main auditorium of Carnegie Hall. Two highly anticipated European recital tours highlight David Daniels's 2009-2010 season. He returns to Houston Grand Opera as Arsamene in Nicholas Hytner's renowned production of Handel's *Serse* opposite Susan Graham. Concert engagements include a special tour of Handel's *Messiah* and Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* with the celebrated Canadian orchestra Les Violons du Roy. Highlights of recent seasons include a reprisal of his portrayal of Bertarido in Handel's *Rodelinda* at the San Francisco Opera, which thrilled audiences at the Metropolitan Opera, his role debut as Orfeo in the Robert Carsen production at Lyric Opera of Chicago, which he reprised at the Metropolitan Opera and Covent Garden, his first performances in the title role of Handel's *Orlando* at the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich, and his portrayal as Didymus in Peter Sellars' renowned production of *Theodora* at the Glyndebourne Festival (available on DVD). Mr. Daniels has also performed opposite Plácido Domingo in the title role in Washington National Opera's production of Handel's *Tamerlano*, which he also sang at the Bayerische Staatsoper. David Daniels has worked with many of the most notable conductors and stage directors of our day including James Levine, Sir Andrew Davis, Emanuelle Haïm, Christophe Rousset, Fabio Biondi, Robert Carsen, David McVicar, Pierre Audi, and David Alden. Honored by the music world for his unique achievements, David Daniels has been the recipient of two of classical music's most significant awards: Musical America's Vocalist of the Year for 1999 and the 1997 Richard Tucker Award.

MAGDALENA WÓR

ORFEO (Student Shorts)
ATLANTA OPERA DEBUT: *La Cenerentola*, 2008



Magdalena Wór is a 2005 First Place Winner of the Heinz Rehfuss Vocal Competition, a 2002 Metropolitan Opera Competition National Finalist, an alumna of the San Francisco Opera's 2003 Merola Summer Opera Program and Chautauqua Music Institution's 2005 Marlena Malas Voice Program as well as a winner of the 2002 Mozart Society of Atlanta Competition. Ms. Wór was a member of the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program at the Washington National Opera from 2006-2008 where she sang the role of Zita in *Gianni Schicci* for the Young Artist Program as well as Grimgerde in *Die Walküre*, Herdswoman in *Jen fa*, The Witch in *Hansel and Gretel*, Third Maid in *Elektra* and Giovanna in *Rigoletto* for Washington National Opera's mainstage. *The Baltimore Sun* praised Ms. Wór's portrayal of Enrichetta last season for Washington Concert Opera's *I Puritani*: "with a burnished mezzo, technical ease and drama-inflected phrasing." Ms. Wór sang Anitra in Grieg's *Peer Gynt* with the National Symphony Orchestra in June 2008 in performances directed by John de Lancie. Her past roles include Rosina, Meg Page, Principessa, Zita, Mme. de la Haltière, Baba the Turk and Rebecca Nurse. Past performances include the alto solo in Bach's *Magnificat* with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Bach's *Cantata BWV 54* and Vivaldi's *Stabat Mater* with New Trinity Baroque, Górecki's *Third Symphony* (Symphony of Sorrowful Songs), Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Charpentier's *Missa de Minuit*, and Carissimi's *Jephte and Jonas* with New Trinity Baroque. Magdalena is originally from Poland and has lived in the United States since 1991. She received her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in vocal performance from Georgia State University and studies with Magdalena Moulson-Falewicz.

MEET THE CAST

KATHERINE WHYTE

EURIDICE

(ATLANTA OPERA DEBUT)



Soprano Katherine Whyte has performed on opera and concert stages across her native Canada and the United States. Ms. Whyte made her Metropolitan Opera debut during the 2006-2007 season as First Elf in Richard Strauss' *Die Ägyptische Helena*. She began the 2009-2010 season as Gilda in *Rigoletto* with English National Opera. Later in the season she sings Iphis in Handel's *Jephtha* with l'Opéra National de Bordeaux. Ms. Whyte began the 2008-2009 season as a soloist in Nielsen's *Symphony No. 3* with the San Francisco Symphony. Her season continued with a concert performance with the Aldeburgh Connection in Toronto and as a soprano soloist in Berg's *Seven Early Songs* with Ensemble ACJW at Zankel Hall. In the 2007-2008 season, she returned to The Metropolitan Opera as the Garish Lady in *The Gambler* by Sergei Prokofiev, with Valery Gergiev conducting, and in productions of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Peter Grimes*, *Manon Lescaut* and *War and Peace*. The winner of the 2007 Alice Tully Recital Competition, Ms. Whyte made her Carnegie Hall debut in solo recital at Weill Hall in January 2008. She returned to Carnegie Hall to sing with the Academy Program of Carnegie Hall, Juilliard and the Weill Music Institute in April under James Conlon. Ms. Whyte is a recent graduate of the Juilliard Opera Center where she performed the role of Betty in the world premiere performance of Lowell Liebermann's *Miss Lonelyhearts*. Additional roles while a member of the Juilliard Opera Center include Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Esmerelda in *The Bartered Bride* and Princesse in *L'enfant et les Sortilèges*.

DEANNE MEEK

AMORE

(ATLANTA OPERA DEBUT)



Deanne Meek's engagements in the 2009-10 season include her return to the Théâtre du Châtelet for Charlotte in *A Little Night Music*, Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra and Guilhen in d'Indy's *Fervaal* with the American Symphony Orchestra. Last season she made her La Scala debut as Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and returned to Utah Opera for the title role in *Regina*. Her performances on international stages include Ruggiero in *Alcina* at English National Opera, Dorabella in *Così fan tutte* for Strasbourg's Opéra National du Rhin, Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier* with Opera North, and Hermia at Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu, Opéra de Lyon and at La Monnaie in Brussels. She has appeared at London's Grange Festival as Angelina in *La Cenerentola*. Among the mezzo-soprano's other recent engagements is the creation of the role of Ma Joad in Ricky Ian Gordon's *The Grapes of Wrath* in the work's world premiere at Minnesota Opera with subsequent performances at Utah Opera, where she returned as Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*. Her other American credits include Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro* with Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Dido in *Dido and Aeneas* at the Spoleto Festival, the Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos* with Tulsa Opera, Dryade in *Ariadne auf Naxos* for Los Angeles Opera, Sesto in *Giulio Cesare* for Portland Opera, Octavian with Opera Pacific and Jo March in *Little Women* with Minnesota Opera. She has also joined the Metropolitan Opera for productions of *Idomeneo*, *Rusalka*, *Parsifal*, and *Madama Butterfly*. She has performed frequently in leading roles with both New York City Opera and Boston Baroque.

THE MYTH OF ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

ORPHEUS HAS APPEARED IN MANY MYTHS IN GREEK MYTHOLOGY. THE MAIN ONE INVOLVES A TRIP HE TAKES TO THE UNDERWORLD TO RESCUE HIS WIFE.



ORPHEUS LEADING EURYDICE FROM THE UNDERWORLD BY JEAN-BAPTISTE-CAMILLE COROT (1861)

Orpheus married the nymph Eurydice, one summer's day. However, she soon stepped on a snake while dancing with other nymphs in celebration of her wedding and died. Orpheus was so distraught that he went to the underworld and begged Hades to allow him to bring her back to the land of the living. Orpheus played the sweetest of melodies on his lyre, and sang the saddest of songs, eventually able to melt the heart of Hades and Persephone, the only person ever able to do so. Hades relented on one condition: that Orpheus not look at Eurydice until they had left the underworld. As they were leaving the underworld, Orpheus couldn't help but cast one last reassuring glance over his shoulder, to make sure he wasn't being deceived. In the blink of an eye, she was whisked away to remain in the underworld forever.

Orpheus was so overcome with grief that he went back to Hades to beg for another chance. He was, however, rebuked. Orpheus was so full of sorrow that he sat and played some of the saddest music. Thracian maidens tried to entice him and win his heart, but he was still enraptured by Eurydice. The maidens, eventually, having become so disgusted by him, tried to kill him. They hurled spears and javelins. They all fell helplessly to the ground at the sound of his lyre. The maidens then screamed, drowning out the lyre, and ending the magic. Orpheus was soon perforated by many spears. Orpheus was torn to pieces, with his head eventually being found by nymphs, floating down the river Hebrus. His lyre was carried to heaven to become a constellation, and his body was buried at Libethra.

Source: <http://orpheusandeuridyce.org/myth.aspx>

OPERA: THEN AND NOW

INTRODUCTION

Opera combines all of the fine arts: music, drama, visual art, and dance. The performance of an opera includes many craftspeople: costume designers, seamstresses, stagehands, makeup artists and wig-makers; the musicians in the orchestra, the singers in the chorus, and the dancers on stage; the artistic director, stage director and choreographer; the engineers running the computers and lighting. How have major inventions over the centuries affected the opera performances we see? Let's find out!

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

If so many operas are in **foreign languages** how can we understand the story, the humor, or the dramatic situations in which the characters find themselves? Throughout history, on-stage conventions have helped audiences understand the stories of their favorite operas. Period **costumes**, magnificent **stage sets** and elaborate **dances** describe the time and place in which the opera is set. The **stage direction** and **choreography** communicate elements of the story. The **music** conveys emotions and the subtexts of the story. Many opera companies, however, offer their audiences a little more help, with the aid of modern technology. Using large screens above or beside the stage, English translations are projected. These **Supertitles** do not include every word that is sung, but enough to understand the story. As the technology advances, opera companies have begun to move from using slide projectors to computers to project the Supertitles onto the screens.

THE SINGERS

Over the years, the **singers** have changed, too! In early Italian operas, singers did very little acting on stage, focusing on showcasing their voices. Operas often resembled concerts, more than plays. By Mozart's time in the late 18th century, however, singers were encouraged to play out the action in the story, adding the dramatic element that we see on stage today. At that time, the singers sometimes did not always "look the part" they were singing. The singers sometimes did not look like princesses or lovely young maidens, and the prince may not

THE SINGERS (cont.)

have looked young and handsome. The **bel canto** style of singing, which literally means "beautiful singing," was favored in Italian opera, especially in the operas of Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti. This style focuses on the voice as the most important expressive element in the opera. It is more important than the words and even the orchestra. In later operas by Wagner and Berlioz, the orchestra became a partner with the singers, rather than an accompanist. This meant that the singers had to produce even more power to be heard over a large, rich symphonic orchestra.

THE ORCHESTRA

And what about the **orchestra** in the pit? The orchestra provides a framework for the opera by playing recurring themes and providing dramatic clues to the drama while accompanying the singing. But the orchestra wasn't always as we see it today. In the 17th century, some operas were intended for entertainment at private parties, primarily at weddings (Monteverdi's *Orfeo* begins with a wedding scene). The principal accompanying instruments were a **continuo** (a small organ) or **harpichord** and a few **viols** (stringed instruments). In the 18th century, Mozart began to write his operas for an orchestra of 20 musicians and harpichord and he was the first composer to add clarinet to his opera orchestra. The small-scale accompaniment, however, was still often used during a **recitative**, a musical selection in which the singing imitates the sound of spoken words and helps to move along the story line. (**Arias**, on the other hand, are more melodic and are often written to express strong emotion, rather than to tell parts of the story.) By Wagner's 19th century, the opera orchestra had increased in size, mostly due to large symphonies composed by Beethoven (d. 1827). Wagner referred to opera as "**music drama**" and is one of the few composers who wrote the **libretto** (the book or story of the opera) as well as all the stage directions and music! Many composers work with colleagues to complete one or more of these elements. [FYI: Beethoven only wrote one opera, *Fidelio*. Just as he persistently

OPERA: THEN AND NOW (cont.)

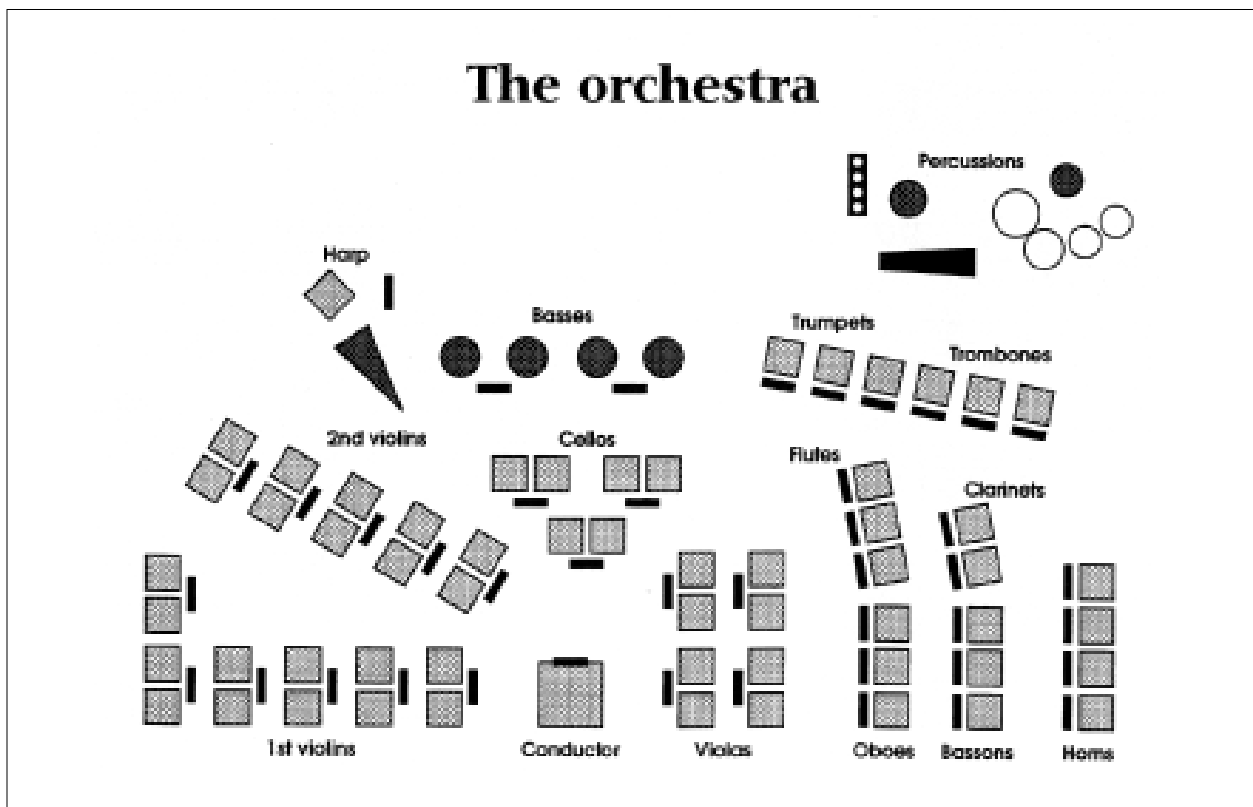
THE ORCHESTRA (cont.)

made changes and corrections in his other works, Beethoven composed four different overtures for this one opera.]

The orchestras that you see at opera houses today consist of between 45 and 120 musicians, depending on the requirements of the composer. It is made up of several sections: strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion. It is situated in the orchestra pit, the area which is in front of the stage. The orchestra is

seated lower than the stage so that the sound of the singers' voice may travel over it. The orchestra pit in the John A. Williams Theatre at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre has a retractable cover. The cover is removed for Atlanta Opera productions to accommodate the orchestra. For some other performances at the theatre, the pit may be closed to allow for extra seating in the theatre.

Diagram used by permission of the Montréal Opera Guild



THE STAGE

Power to the stage! Even before electricity was available, Monteverdi used torches to light his early opera, Orfeo, in 1607 and all of Mozart's operas (1769 – 1791) were staged with candle-powered and reflected oil lamps around the front of the stage. While Wagner's Festival Theatre at Bayreuth (1870's) had one of the first electric generators in all of Europe, **electricity** continues to enhance fantastic opera performances in many ways in opera houses around the world. At the Metropolitan

Opera at Lincoln Center in New York, for example, four stages move **hydraulically**: one stage lifts and moves to the side as another replaces it with the scenery for the next act. This changes work the stage crews need to do and allows for more elaborate and grandiose sets and smoother scene changes. Engines controlled by computers make this possible as well as controlling lighting and special effects on stage.

OPERA: THEN AND NOW (cont.)

THE OPERAS

Where do the stories for operas come from? Are all operas based on fairytales and myths? Do they all have tragic endings like *Orfeo ed Euridice*? Throughout the history of opera, their stories have come from many sources, including myths and history, are funny and tragic, take place hundreds of years ago or in modern times, and address topics including love, death, and fantasy.

Myths have been the inspiration to many composers for highly imaginative operas. Monteverdi's *Orfeo* was based on the Greek myth that was a familiar story during the Renaissance. Ideas of the ancient world, primarily from the Greeks, were popular themes in architecture, painting and drama at that time. Even in the 19th century, Wagner was fascinated with many of the same tales, though they had since evolved into Nordic folktales. "The Lord of the Rings" stories are very much like many of Wagner's "music dramas," including greedy dwarves and the precious golden ring that makes one invincible.

Traditional stories of medieval kings and queens, magicians, and great knights are favorite topics for opera. Classic **literature** has also provided the basis for many operas. Popular themes from literature include various Shakespeare plays and the adventures of Don Quixote. Some operas, especially in more recent times, have been inspired by **actual events**. *Andrea Chenier* (1896) by Umberto Giordano was based on the life of the poet Andrea Chenier, a supporter and then victim of the French Revolution and *Nixon in China* by John Adams reflected actual events in the 1970's. There is even an opera written in the 1960's based on the life of Lizzie Borden!

Grand opera is a term that is often heard in opera circles. Grand opera means grand everything: big stage sets, big voices, big orchestra! Grand opera was popular in Europe in the mid-19th century. Grand operas include huge crowd scenes and feature a wide range of emotions and events, including heroic feats, great passion and intense suffering within a religious or romantic story. One of the best-known grand operas is Verdi's *Aida*.

Composers from different countries and periods of history use different **styles** of writing. In his writing, Puccini matches specific instruments and combinations of instruments to dramatic moments, allowing the orchestra to create the atmosphere for the scene. Music scholars agree that Puccini's style of writing emphasizes melody, and he uses **leitmotif** to connect characters (or combinations of characters). A leitmotif is a recurring musical theme, associated with a particular person, place, or idea. Wagner also used this tool in his operatic works. Another distinctive quality in Puccini's works is the use of the voice in the style of speech: characters sing short phrases one after another as if they were talking to each other.

GEORGIA PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

MUSIC: MIDDLE SCHOOL CHORUS - 8; MUSIC: HIGH SCHOOL CHORUS - 8: Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts. MUSIC: MIDDLE SCHOOL CHORUS - 9; MUSIC: HIGH SCHOOL CHORUS - 9: Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

**** Next, you will find a worksheet entitled "What Have You Learned?" for your students to complete. You may want to assist them by listing the bold words from this lesson on the board.**

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Name the four fine arts.

In what language is *Orfeo ed Euridice* written and performed? _____

What do the singers do that helps the audience understand what is happening in the opera?

What are Supertitles? _____

Name two ways in which stages were lit in the early days of opera. _____

What is a recitative? _____

What is bel canto? When was it popular? _____

What is leitmotif? _____

What are two themes/story ideas that are often seen in opera? _____

After reading the synopsis of *Orfeo ed Euridice*, do you think that this opera is based on a myth or fairy tale? What kinds of themes do you think will be represented?

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

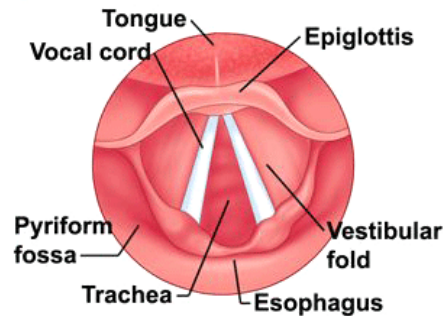
TRAINING

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, opening 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.



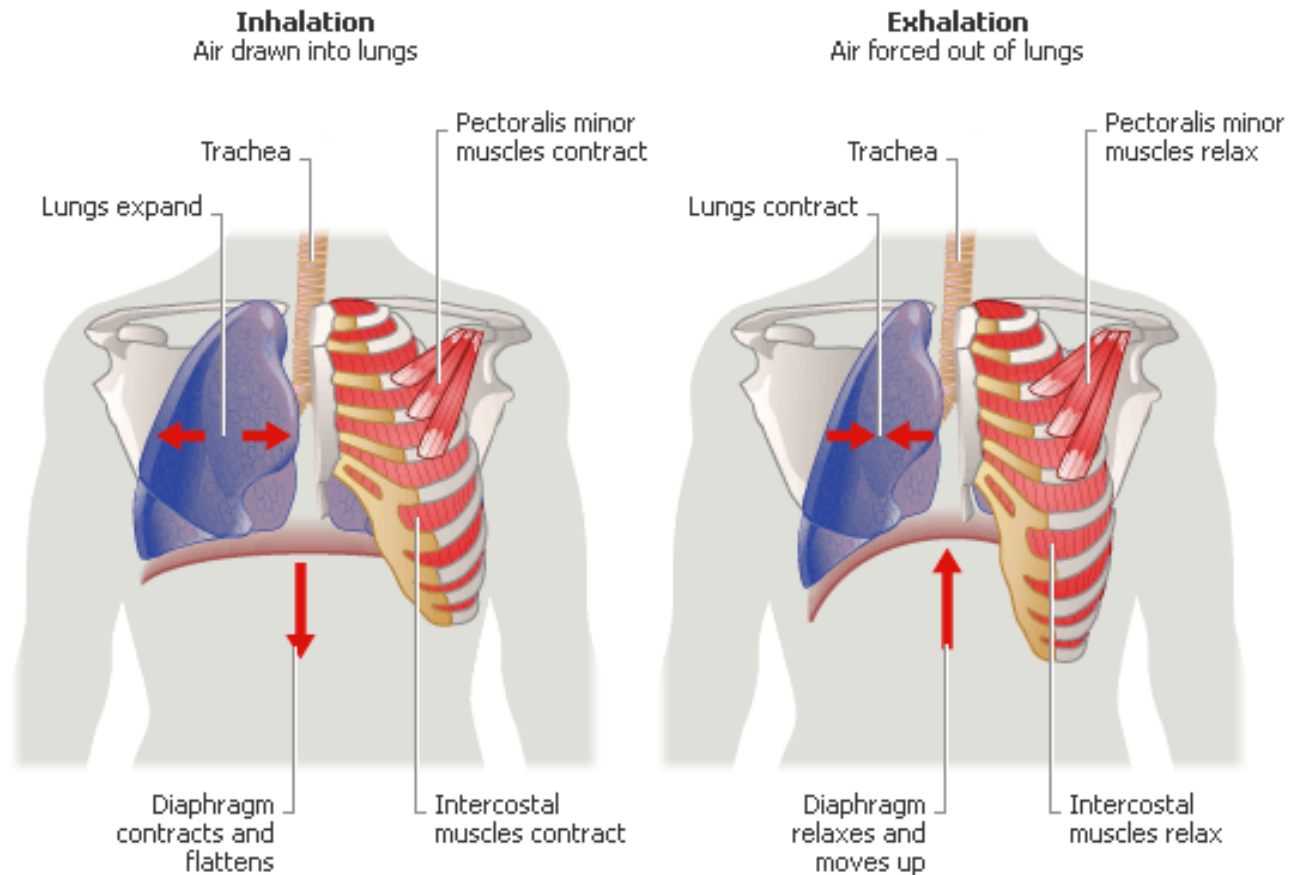
THE REST OF THE BODY

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 (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.

OPERATIC VOICES (cont.)

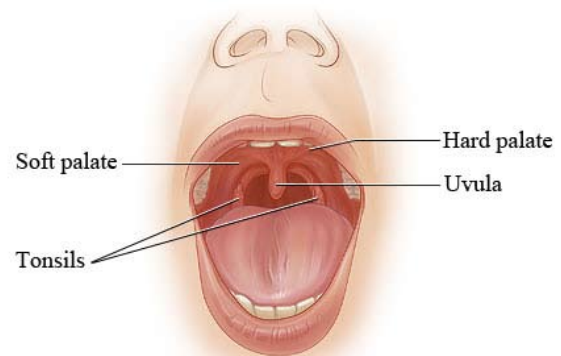


RESONANCE

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 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.



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OPERATIC VOICES (cont.)

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. 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

OPERATIC VOICES (cont.)

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 (come-

dic 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.

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 out-smart 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.

OPERATIC VOICES (cont.)

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.



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<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/healthguide/en-us/images/media/medical/hw/hwkb17_073_003.jpg

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

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The following lesson plans and activities are designed to build such skills as creative writing, observing, vocabulary development and art appreciation. They can be used independently of each other and are not intended for use in any particular sequence. You can choose the activities that are most appropriate for your curriculum.

A. COMPOSITION

- What could be easier than rescuing Eurydice from Hades in the underworld? Students can demonstrate how easy it is by writing “How To” compositions based on these tasks.
- Students can use their knowledge of the myths as a foundation for writing character sketches. What were Orpheus, Eurydice, Hades, and the other gods and goddesses really like? Students will be able to disclose to the world the truth about these characters in the sketches they write.
- Students can also use Greek myths as a basis for writing opinion essays. Should mortals be allowed on Mt. Olympus? This notable topic was never settled in Ancient Greece. It is up to your students to resolve the issue by developing persuasive argumentative essays. Other topics to consider: why (or why not) were the Labors of Hercules sufficient to absolve him of the crime of killing his children? If you were the judge, what punishment would you have administered to Tantalus for stealing the nectar of the gods? After reading the story of King Midas, what do you think is more important -- wealth or wisdom?
- Have students read a variety of art criticisms both online and in print. Discuss as a class the type of reporting observed by arts critics. Have the students write a critique of The Atlanta Opera’s production of *Orfeo & Euridice*. Would the style of critique be different in print than online? Remember that a critic reports both the positive and negative features of a production. Students may want to focus on one part of the opera that they 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. Students may submit their critiques to The Atlanta Opera by email, education@atlantaopera.org.

Reviews and comments can also be posted to The Atlanta Opera Facebook page or mailed to:

The Atlanta Opera Center
1575 Northside Drive N.W.
Bldg. 300, Suite 350
Atlanta, GA 30318

GEORGIA PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: READING & LITERATURE 1: The student demonstrates comprehension by identifying evidence in a variety of texts representative of different genres and using this evidence as the basis for interpretation. ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: CONVENTIONS 1: The student demonstrates understanding and control of the rules of the English language, realizing that usage involves the appropriate application of conventions and grammar in both written and spoken formats. ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: WRITING 1: The student produces writing that establishes an appropriate organizational structure, sets a context and engages the reader, maintains a coherent focus throughout, and signals closure. ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: WRITING 2: The student demonstrates competence in a variety of genres.

B. LETTER WRITING

- Tell students their favorite mythological character has just retired. Zeus, the father of the gods, is now accepting applications for a replacement. Ask your students to write letters of application and a brief resume or biographical sketch.
- Students, in the role of their favorite hero or heroine, will be leading an expedition on a dangerous journey (e.g., Orpheus traveling to the underworld, Jason questing after the Golden Fleece, Perseus seeking Medusa’s head or Theseus attempting to defeat the Minotaur). Before they can go, students must order the necessary supplies. Letters can be addressed to Heroic Discount Supplies, 744 Olympian Way, Athens, Greece.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES (cont.)

- Every aspiring hero or heroine needs to receive the proper instruction and training. Fortunately, there are a few openings in the most distinguished university in ancient Greece. In order for your students to secure a space, they should write for an application, a catalog and financial aid information. Requests can be sent to: University of the Muses, 300 Aphrodite Way, Laconia, Greece.
- As the best friend of a mythological character, students write a letter offering support, encouragement or guidance. For example, students might write to the following characters: Orpheus after failing to bring back Eurydice from Hades (sympathy and advice), Polyphemus after being tricked by Odysseus (compassion and concern), Ariadne after being jilted by Jason (commiseration).

GEORGIA PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: READING AND LITERATURE 3: The student deepens understanding of literary works by relating them to contemporary context of historical background. ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: WRITING 1: The student produces writing that establishes an appropriate organizational structure, sets a context and engages the reader, maintains a coherent focus throughout, and signals closure. ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: WRITING 2: The student demonstrates competence in a variety of genres. ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: CONVENTIONS 1: The student demonstrates understanding and control of the rules of the English language, realizing that usage involves the appropriate application of conventions and grammar in both written and spoken formats.

C. DESIGNING A MYTHOLOGY GAME

Designing a mythology game provides students with an ideal opportunity to put their creative imaginations to work. Allow them to use their expertise and enthusiasm to create a board game based on the famous adventures of the Greek heroes and heroines. Stories rich in details and adventures include: Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece, the Labors of Hercules, the adventures of Theseus, or Odysseus and the Cyclops. Students choose a favorite story and note the details they wish to include in the game. They write a rule book and design and produce the necessary accessories: board, cards, dice, spinners, etc. Invite your students to exchange their games and provide feedback to each other on the ease of use and playability of their creations.

GEORGIA PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: READING AND LITERATURE 3: The student deepens understanding of literary works by relating them to contemporary context of historical background. ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: WRITING 1: The student produces writing that establishes an appropriate organizational structure, sets a context and engages the reader, maintains a coherent focus throughout, and signals closure. ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: WRITING 2: The student demonstrates competence in a variety of genres. ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: CONVENTIONS 1: The student demonstrates understanding and control of the rules of the English language, realizing that usage involves the appropriate application of conventions and grammar in both written and spoken formats. ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: LISTENING SPEAKING AND VIEWING 1: The student participates in student-to-teacher, student-to-student, and group verbal interactions. ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: LISTENING SPEAKING AND VIEWING 2: The student formulates reasoned judgments about written and oral communication in various media genres. The student delivers focused, coherent, and polished presentations that convey a clear and distinct perspective, demonstrate solid reasoning, and combine traditional rhetorical strategies of narration, exposition, persuasion, and description.

D. HOW MYTHS HAVE INFLUENCED OUR LANGUAGE

Mythology's influence is evident in our language. It is hard to imagine reading or writing without drawing upon myth-oriented adjectives or idioms. As part of your everyday curriculum or as part of a separate word-study unit, ask your students to research the histories of words that come from the Greek myths. For instance, ask them what it means to have an "Achilles heel". As they do their research, they'll find that Achilles was a Greek hero whose mother rubbed him with ambrosia and put him in a fire (or dipped him in the river Styx) when he was a baby so his body could not be pierced by weapons. Since he was held by the heel during the process, his heel was not protected. Paris found this out and shot Achilles in the heel with an arrow. From this, let pupils speculate on the meaning of the modern-day expression and then let them check their definition with dictionaries. Students might record words in a notebook or compile a mythological dictionary.

The following list of mythological references and some words they have inspired will get you started.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES (cont.)

- **Atlas:** A mythical giant who supported the heavens on his shoulders. (The book of maps known as an atlas is named after a legendary African king, sometimes thought to be descended from the Atlas of Greek myth.)
- **Hercules:** Also known as Heracles, the greatest hero of Greece. (A particularly great exertion is said to be a Herculean effort.)
- **Labyrinth:** A dangerous maze built for King Minos. Sacrificial victims were sent into the Labyrinth from which it was almost impossible to escape. At the center was the monstrous Minotaur. (The English words labyrinth and labyrinthine may derive from certain double-headed axes, archaeological examples of which have been found on the Greek island of Crete, site of the kingdom of mythological King Minos and the Labyrinth.)
- **Midas:** A king who had the power to change all he touched to gold. This blessing became a curse. (The Midas touch.)
- **Pan:** Shepherd god, son of Hermes, with legs and horns of a goat. (Pan was considered to be the cause of the sudden fear that sometimes comes for no reason, especially in lonely places. That's why it's called "panic".)
- **Procrustes:** Man who offered his "one-size-fits-all" bed to passing travelers, adjusting his guests to the bed by stretching or chopping them as appropriate. (An article in The New York Times refers to art historians who try to force the famous painter Pablo Picasso into "the Procrustean bed of theories.")
- **Sisyphus:** Sinner condemned to roll a rock uphill for eternity. (A Sisyphean task.)
- **Tantalus:** A king allowed to partake of the nectar of the gods. He abused this privilege by stealing the divine beverage to share with his human friends. For this sin he was condemned to the Underworld, where he stood in fresh water that receded whenever he tried to drink and under a tree filled with ripe fruit always just beyond reach. (tantalize)
- **Titans:** An ancient race of giants who were overcome by Zeus in a struggle that shook the world. (titanic)

GEORGIA PERFORMANCE STANDARDS:

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: READING 5: The student understands and acquires new vocabulary and uses it correctly in reading and writing.

E. VALUES DISCUSSION ON THE NATURE OF HEROISM

Tales from the past generally equate heroism with physical strength and raw courage in the face of danger (see the stories of Hercules, Theseus and Bellerophon). Recently, however, new definitions of heroism and new kinds of heroes have emerged. To many, research scientist Jonas Salk, astronaut John Glenn and civil rights leader Martin Luther King are contemporary heroic types on the American scene. They do not slay monsters or engage in bloody battles, but they have captured the imagination of many Americans. What qualities of heroism, redefined, do they possess? It is possible that they will someday find their place in the myths our generation leaves as a legacy to future ages?

In another sense, POWs, sports figures, actors and actresses and some holders of high office are looked at as heroes. Ask your students to write a paper based on the question, "Who is your hero... and why?" These additional questions will aid your students in developing their essay: What are some of the traits that make this person a hero to you? Are these heroic traits parallel in some way to the traits of the ancient heroes you have learned about from the Greek myths?

GEORGIA PERFORMANCE STANDARDS:

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: READING 3: The student deepens understanding of literary works by relating them to contemporary context or historical background, as well as to works from other time periods.

F. YOUR STUDENTS CAN BE MYTHMAKERS

There are a variety of other ways that your students can work creatively with myths. The activities described below can be adapted for use at any level.

- A valuable experience for your students is writing, telling and illustrating their own myths. These can be recorded in little booklets and compiled in a class anthology. Your students can write a myth explaining a natural phenomenon or create a story with a moral lesson. Some students may want to think of an emotion (love, envy, fear or jealousy)

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES (cont.)

and write an adventure using that emotion as the theme. After the myths have been written, invite your students to read their myths to the class.

- Assign each student or pair of students a character from the Greek myths (Orpheus, Eurydice, Daedalus, Persephone, Athena, Pan, etc.). Ask them to find out who their character is and what significance he or she plays in the myths. Upon completion of their research, have each student or pair present a short oral report to the class.
- Impromptu role playing offers your students an opportunity to interpret the Greek myths. Ask your class to brainstorm a list of characters and their corresponding adventures. Begin with a dramatic incident such as Odysseus being held captive by Polyphemus the Cyclops and let your students build in as much action and dialogue as they wish. Medea reacting to being abandoned by Jason after aiding him in his quest offers the basis for an interesting monologue. Your students may want to refine their role-playing by trying many versions, discussing them and taping the best. They can combine their episodes into a dramatic collage or present one-act plays complete with props and costumes based on specific episodes.
- Have your students pick a character from the Greek myths and create a “family tree” based on the information they can find about the various gods, goddesses and heroes who have passed through their character’s life. If your student picks Medea, he or she would probably want to include Jason, Theseus and King Aeëtes in the family tree. Family trees can be illustrated with pictures and accompanied by short descriptions of each individual’s respective importance in the character’s life.

GEORGIA PERFORMANCE STANDARDS:

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: READING AND LITERATURE 3: The student deepens understanding of literary works by relating them to contemporary context of historical background. ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: WRITING 1: The student produces writing that establishes an appropriate organizational structure, sets a context and engages the reader, maintains a coherent focus throughout, and signals closure. ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: WRITING 2: The student dem-

onstrates competence in a variety of genres. ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: CONVENTIONS 1: The student demonstrates understanding and control of the rules of the English language, realizing that usage involves the appropriate application of conventions and grammar in both written and spoken formats. ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: LISTENING SPEAKING AND VIEWING 1: The student participates in student-to-teacher, student-to-student, and group verbal interactions. ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: LISTENING SPEAKING AND VIEWING 2: The student formulates reasoned judgments about written and oral communication in various media genres. The student delivers focused, coherent, and polished presentations that convey a clear and distinct perspective, demonstrate solid reasoning, and combine traditional rhetorical strategies of narration, exposition, persuasion, and description. THEATRE ARTS: MIDDLE SCHOOL: STANDARD 2: Developing scripts through improvisation and other theatrical methods. THEATRE ARTS: MIDDLE SCHOOL: STANDARD 3: Acting by developing, communicating, and sustaining roles within a variety of situations and environments.

Source: www.mythweb.com/teachers/index.html

A HISTORY OF OPERA IN ATLANTA

Opera has been beloved in Atlanta since 1866! Though there hasn't always been a local opera company, audience members throughout Atlanta have been enjoying opera for over 137 years.

It began when the Ghioni and Sussini Grand Italian Opera Company presented three operas in Atlanta in October 1866. They were well received and soon after, small touring companies began to bring full-length operas to Atlanta. When there wasn't a touring opera company in town, people would throw parties where they could entertain, often with musical presentations. Even without the presence of an opera in town, audience appreciation for opera was growing!

In 1910, New York's Metropolitan Opera first brought its opera tour to Atlanta. By this time, Atlantans were in love with opera. Once a year, for a full week during spring, people flocked to the city to see the Metropolitan Opera's wonderful performances and enjoy the many parties that were hosted throughout the city in celebration of the operas' arrival. It was a magnificent time! The opera was the place to see and to be seen, with people crowding the lobbies and balconies. This continued for nearly seven decades, with the exception of 1931-1939, when the Metropolitan was unable to tour due to the Depression.

Soon, citizens of Atlanta began to yearn for their own opera company, to represent and support local talent, as well as to provide performances throughout the year, instead of only once in the spring. Several smaller, local opera companies began to crop up. With the arrival of local opera companies, and with troubles of its own, the Metropolitan Opera discontinued its nationwide tour, giving its last Atlanta performance in 1986.

In 1980, The Atlanta Civic Opera was born as a result of two smaller companies merging together, the Atlanta Lyric Opera and the Georgia Opera. Since then, the company has changed and grown tremendously! The Atlanta Civic Opera officially changed its name to The Atlanta Opera in 1985. Over the years, the company has presented its productions at the Woodruff Arts Center's Alliance Theatre and Symphony Hall, The Fox Theatre and the Boisfeuillet Jones Atlanta Civic Center.

The Atlanta Opera was the first resident company in the new Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre upon completion of the facility in fall 2007. Patrons and performers alike are extremely happy with the new theater, acoustically designed for opera. The Atlanta Opera celebrates our 30th Anniversary Season in 2009-2010. The 30-year history of The Atlanta Opera is only a small part of the 100+ years that opera has flourished in this city. The company has been, and still is, a significant contributor to the Atlanta community and to the countless singers, conductors and directors who have developed their careers here.

Besides our mainstage performances, The Atlanta Opera has many programs to offer. There are balls and galas to attend, dinners, concerts, opera classes and talks. The Atlanta Opera Studio, founded in 1980, brings children's opera (complete with sets and costumes) opera workshops and master classes to schools throughout the state in an effort to teach students about opera. We also offer arts administration internships, technical theater apprenticeships, and started the new High School Opera Institute in Fall 2009.

The Atlanta Opera strives to present quality opera productions, while educating and fostering a sense of appreciation for the opera within the community. So long as there are those in Atlanta who love music and the art of opera, we can continue to perform and to grow!

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