



PRESENTS

THE ATLANTA OPERA'S  
LA BOHÈME



STUDENT SHORT

THE ATLANTA OPERA

LA BOHÈME  
PUCCINI

2015-2016

FIELD TRIP EDUCATOR GUIDE

# Dear Educators,

Welcome to ArtsBridge’s 2015-16 Field Trip Season!  
We are thrilled to present The Atlanta Opera’s production of *La bohème*.

The Atlanta Opera Student Short is a fully-staged, abbreviated version of our mainstage production and will feature mainstage artists and the full Atlanta Opera orchestra and chorus. Highlights from the four-act opera have been carefully selected and threaded together to create this special performance, providing students with a thorough narrative of the opera.

This will be the first opera experience for many of your students and will be most fully enjoyed with a bit of preparation before they arrive at the theater. This guide has been developed to acquaint both you and your students with the opera *La bohème*, as well as to familiarize students with the world of opera (vocabulary, history, etc.) 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) at the end of each activity or lesson. Thank you again for sharing this experience with your students. We value your feedback and we use it when planning future community engagement programs. We welcome comments from you, your students, and/or administration following the performance. It is our sincere hope that you enjoy the performance, and look forward to seeing you and your students at the opera!

We look forward to inspiring and educating your students through the arts on October 5th at the world-class Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre!

**See you at the theater,**

**The Atlanta Opera and The ArtsBridge Team**

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*This study guide was written by Natalie Barrow, Cara Myler, Wade Thomas and designed by Gibbs Creative.*

# ABOUT COBB ENERGY PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE



The landmark Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre is a cultural, entertainment and special events venue of a national significance. Atlanta's first major performing arts facility in four decades, Cobb energy Centre boasts state-of-the arts systems, amenities and design featured that allow the expression of any artistic idea and captivate performers, patrons and event planners. The Centre's strong suit is versatility. It can accommodate events as diverse as Broadway, concerts, corporate functions, private parties and family entertainment.

The Centre's distinctive façade and three-story lobby – highlighted by a 65-foot, floor-to-ceiling glass curtain wall – offer visitors a grand welcome and stunning introduction to a venue of great warmth, elegance and possibilities. Nothing speaks "special occasion" like the majestic lobby – a gathering space and promenade with two grand staircases, specially designed, colored- glass chandeliers and walls of Venetian plaster.

The Centre's 2,750-seat John A. Williams Theatre captures the richness and intimacy of vintage theaters. Yet it incorporates modern touched and technology – including advanced sound, lighting and acoustical elements – that allow fine-tuning for each performance. With equal poise, the Theatre can host concerts, opera, drama, comedy, lectures, dance and spoken word.

For special occasions and events – from wedding receptions and themed parties to corporate banquets and black-tie galas- the Centre's flexible spaces include a 9,500- square foot Courtyard, 3,100-square-foot Terrace and 10,000-square-foot Ballroom – divisible into three independent spaces, each with autonomous sound and lighting controls. The Ballroom's pre-function area is ideally suited for pre-and post-event gatherings.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- More than 250,000 patrons visit the Cobb Energy Centre each year.
- The Cobb Energy Centre opened in 2007.
- The Cobb Energy Centre has two main spaces:
  - John A. Williams Theatre, 2750 seats
  - Kessel D. Stelling Ballroom, 10,000 square feet
- No seat is more than 160 feet from center stage in the John A. Williams Theatre.
- There are 1,000 parking spaces on site.
- The Centre is located one mile from the new Braves stadium and only 15 minutes from downtown Atlanta.
- ArtsBridge programs began in 2007 and reach 30,000 – 40,000 students each year.

# FIELD TRIP GUIDELINES

*Below are some simple guidelines for your ArtsBridge Field Trip to the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre. Please read carefully and contact us at (770) 916-2805 if you have questions or require additional information.*

**Reservations:** All field trip admissions are to be made in advance. Please do not bring more than the number of seats reserved. Performances are expected to sell out and we will not be able to accommodate an increase in numbers at the last minute. All patrons, including teachers and chaperones, must have a reservation in order to attend these performances. Children under the age of three are not permitted to attend.

**Payment:** Payments must be made in full, 3 weeks prior to the day of show or we will not be able to accommodate your reservation. An invoice will be given to you at the time your reservation is made. Once you have paid in full, we will send a Confirmation, which will serve as your school's ticket into the performance. ArtsBridge reserves the right to cancel unpaid reservations after the payment due date.

**Transportation:** The Centre can accommodate school buses, vans and cars. Please be aware that vans and cars will incur a \$6 per vehicle parking fee. A third party contractor runs the Centre's garage and charges this fee. There is no charge for parking school buses. All buses, vans and cars must comply with directions provided by on-site staff.

**Arrival:** All vehicles should approach the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre from AKERS MILL ROAD. (map enclosed) Upon entering the driveway, buses will be directed to the circular drive where they will temporarily pull up to the curb for unloading. A Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre representative will board the bus and check-in your school. Classes will be immediately unloaded and buses will be directed to their designated parking areas.

**Seating:** Classes are seated as they arrive, starting with the floor level, first row. The exception to this is for programs with older and younger students in attendance at the same time. In this case, students in kindergarten and first-grade will be seated in the first few rows of the theatre. There are three levels of seating, with the back row of the top level no more than 160 feet from the stage.

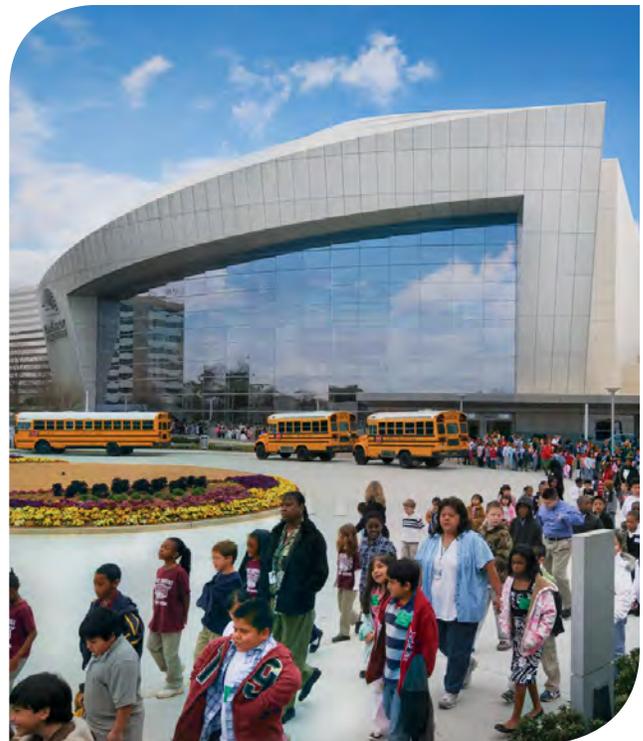
**Restrooms:** Please seat your entire group, before taking restroom breaks so that you can be easily found. Students MUST be accompanied by adult chaperones when going to the rest room. We encourage that you take groups so that there are fewer trips.

**Chaperones:** Chaperones have a job to perform while at the Centre. Please make sure that your chaperones are interspersed among students, and that they are prepared for the day's responsibilities. Please discuss restroom visits, emergencies, behavior, etc. with your chaperones prior to arrival.

**Behavior:** Students and teachers are encouraged to enjoy performances, applaud and express enthusiasm in a manner that is appropriate for the performance, yet not disruptive for others. We request that all phones, tablets and any other electronic devices be completely turned off or on silent mode during the performance. We ask that chaperones on upper levels watch for students tossing or throwing items to lower levels and prevent students from climbing or leaning on railings. No student can leave the audience chamber without an accompanying chaperone. Students/classes that are disruptive may be asked to leave the performance with no refund. (See Theatre Etiquette on Page 7)

**Departure:** Performances last approximately one hour. Upon conclusion of the performance, classes will be dismissed to the designated parking area to board their buses and return to school.

**Lunch:** There is no facility for classes to eat lunch in the Cobb Energy Centre. We recommend classes eat lunch at the Galleria Specialty Mall, Cumberland Mall, at a park on the route to/from the venue or on their bus.



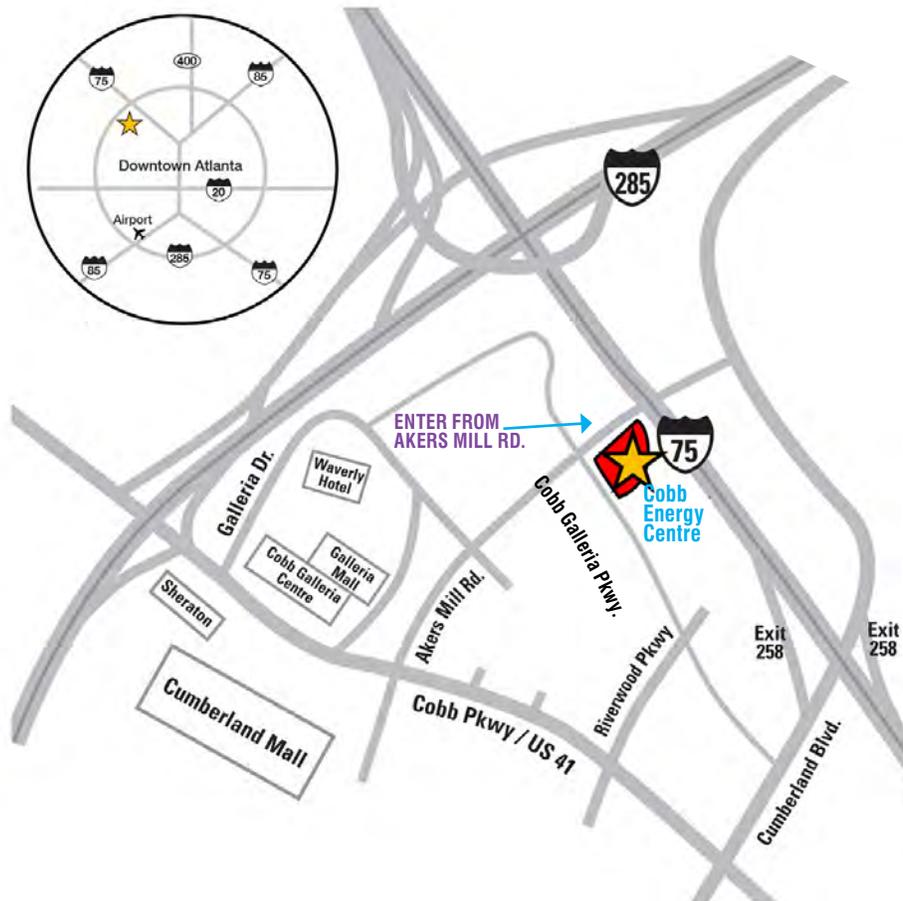
# TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION

**Buses:** All school buses must approach the building from AKERS MILL ROAD on the North side of the building. This will be crucial in assuring a fairly smooth flow of traffic. There will be Centre representatives guiding you. Buses will pull onto the site from behind the building and then drive to the front. PLEASE MAKE SURE YOUR DRIVERS USE THE MAP BELOW. There is no charge to park school buses on-site.

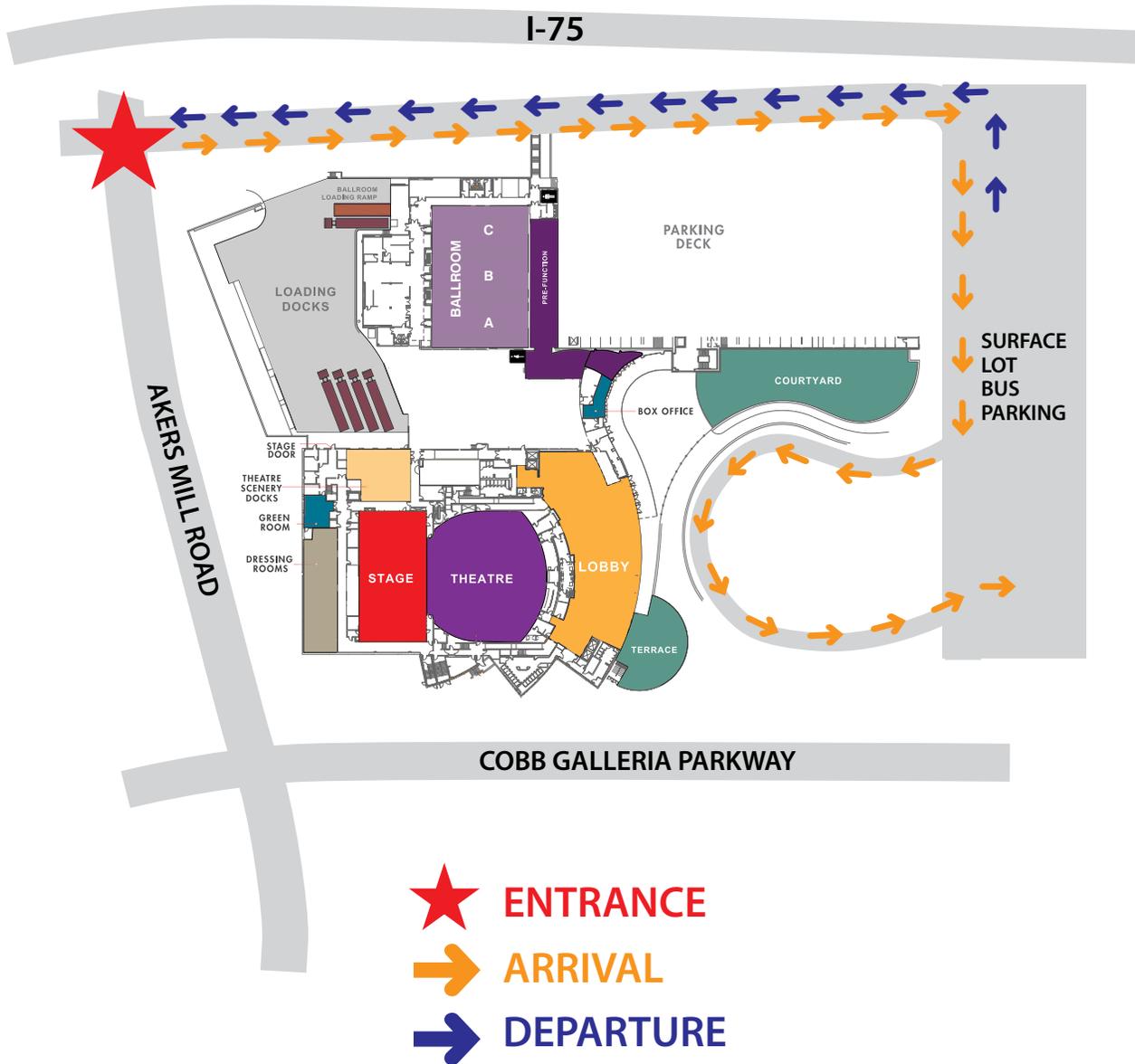
**Checking In:** When you arrive at the front of the building, a representative from the Centre will board your bus to check-in your school. You and your bus driver will be given a large number that will be taped to the bus windows. Please remember your number, as it will help you find your bus after the performance.

**After the Show:** After the performance, buses will be parked in the Centre's surface lot in numerical order and representatives will assist you in locating your bus(es). We encourage everyone to board their buses as quickly and safely as possible. For safety reasons, we are going to try and hold all buses until everyone has boarded, so please make your way directly to the surface parking lot following the performance. (see map below)

**Cars/Vans/SUVs:** You will still approach the building in the same manner, but will parking in our parking deck. Please note there is a \$6 per vehicle parking fee for cars/vans/SUVs. After you have parked, make your way to level 2 of the deck and to the west side (theater side) of the building. When you emerge from the parking deck, there will be a Centre representative to check you in and direct you to your seats.



# ADDITIONAL MAP FOR ALL VEHICLES ATTENDING



2800 Cobb Galleria Pkwy, Atlanta, GA 30339

# THEATER ETIQUETTE

*A live performance is a unique experience shared between performers and audience members. Unlike television or movies, audience distractions can disrupt the performers, production and audience. Before you arrive at the Cobb Energy Centre, please review the following information with your students and chaperones, and help ArtsBridge create a meaningful experience for all.*

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- Arrive early. Groups are seated on a first come, first serve basis. Seats are not assigned for ArtsBridge events.
- Food, drink, candy, gum, etc. is not permitted in the theater.
- Silence or turn off all electronic devices. We encourage you to share your ArtsBridge experience at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre via social media, but please refrain from doing so or texting during performances; the glow from your device is distracting.
- Photography and video/audio recording of any kind is not allowed in the theater during the performance.
- Respect the theater. Remember to keep your feet off of the seats and avoid bouncing up and down.
- When the house lights dim, the performance is about to begin. Please stop talking at this time.
- Talk before and after the performance only. Remember, the theater is designed to amplify sound, so the other audience members and the performers on stage can hear your voice!
- Use the restroom before the performance or wait until the end.
- Appropriate responses such as laughing and applauding are appreciated. Pay attention to the artists on stage – they will let you know what is appropriate.
- If you need assistance during the show, please find your nearest volunteer usher.
- As you enter and exit the theater, remember to walk and stay with your group.
- Open your eyes, ears, mind and heart to the entire experience. Enjoy yourself!



# PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

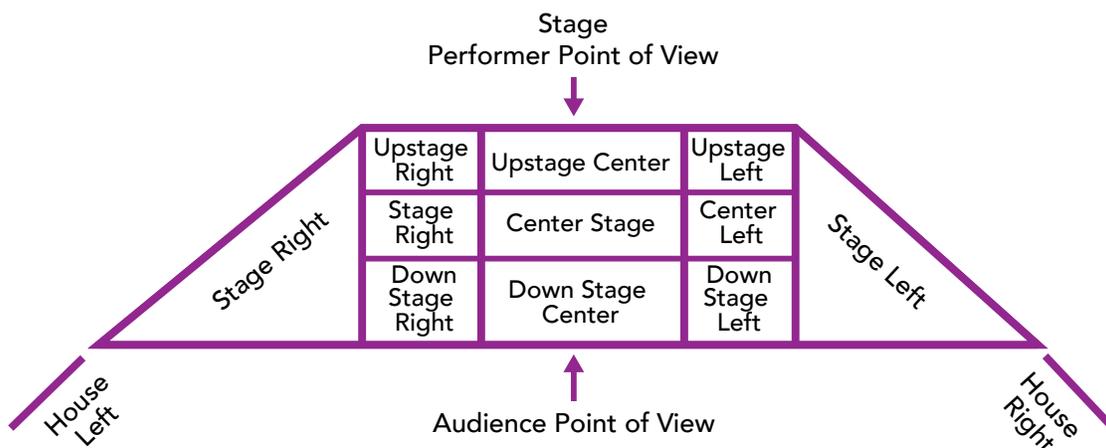
Before attending an ArtsBridge Field Trip, review the following questions and vocabulary with your students:

1. How many of you have experienced a live theater performance? What did you see?
2. What are some of the differences between going to the theater and watching television or going to a movie?
3. The BAD Audience Member! A fun way to review theater etiquette with your students is to have them point out bad audience behavior during a show. Here's one way to illustrate this concept:



- a. Have students present something to the class. The key is they are “actors” and the class is the audience.
- b. Once they are into the activity, you (the teacher) leave the room and then re-enter. Enter loudly, chew gum, step on people’s feet, talk to them, etc. Be the worst audience member. Find a seat and continue to talk to others, ask what’s going on in the performance, take pictures, talk on your cell phone etc.
- c. Ask the class to list all the bad behavior. Write these on the board.
- d. Ask the audience members how they felt when the bad audience member came into the theatre. Could they hear the actors? Were they distracted?
- e. Ask the actors how they felt. Could they concentrate on their performance?

4. Review the stage diagram below with the students. Draw the diagram on the whiteboard and have students come up and write in each part of the stage.



# THEATRICAL VOCABULARY

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**Review the following theatrical terms with your students before attending the performance! This will help them better understand all of the elements of a production.**

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**Author** – the writer of a script also called the book

**Audition** – to perform to get a role for the production; usually includes singing, dancing and reading scenes from the show; usually takes place in front of the Director & Creative Team

**Ballad** – a slow song for actors to showcase vocal clarity

**Blocking** – the specific movement of actors on stage; usually given by the Director

**Box Office** – a booth inside the theater where tickets are sold

**“Calling the Show”** – the process of calling out the lighting, sound and scene-change cues during a performance; usually done by the stage manager

**Casting** – the process through which actors are chosen for roles in the production

**Casting Agent** – one who chooses actors for roles in the production

**Choreographer** – one who designs dance sequences and teaches them to the cast of the production

**Composer** – one who writes the music

**Conductor** – one who directs the orchestra

**Costumes** – a set of clothes in a style typical of a particular country or historical period

**Curtain Call** – the appearance of one or more performers on stage after a performance to acknowledge the audience’s applause

**Director** – one who supervises the creative aspects and guides the artistic vision of the production

**Dress Rehearsal** – rehearsal in which performers practice with costumes, props, lights and microphones

**Dresser** – one who assists performers with their costumes during dress rehearsals and shows

**Electrician** – one who works with the lighting designer to adjust and operate lighting instruments

**Ensemble / Chorus** – typically singers, dancers or actors who perform in group numbers

**Head Carpenter** – one who builds the sets for the production

**House Left** – the left side of the theater, when facing the stage (audience’s point of view)

**House Manager** – one who oversees all aspects of the audiences; responsible for ushers and audience safety

**House Right** – the right side of the theater, when facing the stage (audiences point of view)

**Lighting Designer** – one who decides where the lighting instruments should go, how they should be colored and which ones should be on at any particular time to affect mood, visibility and to showcase costumes and sets

**Lyricist** – one who writes the words to a song

**Makeup Artist** – one who applies cosmetics to a performer’s face and body

**Music Director** – one who teaches and rehearses the music with the orchestra

**Orchestra Pit** – the lowered area in front of a stage where the orchestra (musicians) sit and play during the performance

**Overture** – an orchestral piece at the beginning of an opera, suite, play, oratorio, or other extended composition

**Producer** – a person responsible for the financial and managerial aspects of staging a play, opera, musical, ballet, etc.

**Program** – a listing of the order of events, names of the cast and crew and other relevant information for the production

**Property (Props) Manager** – one who manages all items used on stage that cannot be classified as scenery, electrics or wardrobe

**Proscenium arch** – the arch opening between the stage and auditorium; the frame of the stage

**Read-through** – the cast reads through the script without movement or music; typically done at the first rehearsal

**Set Designer** – one who creates the scenery for the stage

**Sitzprobe** – the first rehearsal with both the performers and the orchestra, with no staging or dancing

**Sound Designer** – one who plans and executes the layout of all sound playbook and equipment for the show

**Sound Operator** – one who handles the sound playbook and mixing equipment for the show; work with Sound Designer

**Sound Board** – a desk comprising a number of input channels where each sound source is provided with its own control channel through which sound signals are routed into two or more outputs; controls all microphones and music

**Spotlights** – a lamp projecting a narrow, intense beam of light directly onto a place or person, especially a performer on stage

**Standby / Understudy** – one who studies a role and is prepared to substitute a performer when needed

**Stage Left** – the left side of the stage, when facing the audience (performer’s point of view)

**Stage Manager** – one who is responsible for the quality of the show’s production, assists the director and oversees the show at each performance

**Stage Right** – the right side of the stage, when facing the audience (performer’s point of view)

**Technical Rehearsal** – rehearsal incorporating the technical elements of a show such as the scene and property shirts, lighting, sound and special effects

**Uptempo Song** – a fast, upbeat song for actors to showcase dancing and acting ability

**Usher** – one who guides audience members to their seats

**Wig Master / Mistress** – one who obtains and customizes wigs for performers to wear

# WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE OPERA

Many people have preconceived ideas about 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's not unusual to find love triangles, murders, fatal illnesses, and messages from beyond the grave.

## 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 *La bohème*, are sung in languages other than English. This Atlanta Opera production will be sung in Italian. Since most people in our audience do not speak Italian, we project English translations called "supertitles" on the screen 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.



Elise Bakketun Photography, Seattle Opera, 2013



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!

## MYTH #3: I NEED TO WEAR A TUXEDO OR A BALL GOWN TO THE OPERA.

Some people like to dress up when they go to an opera performance, but there is no dress code to attend an opera. You will see people wearing everything from jeans to ball gowns. Dressing up can be a part of the fun of attending an opera performance but you should wear whatever makes you comfortable. The opera is a place for everybody.



## MYTH #4: OPERA SINGERS JUST SCREECH AND HIT HIGH NOTES ALL THE TIME

Most of the music we listen to today is electronically reproduced and amplified by speakers. Opera is one of the only places you'll hear singers perform without a microphone. All the sounds you will hear at the opera are natural and coming straight from the singer's throats and the orchestra's instruments to your ears. Opera singers have trained for years to project their sound and make it larger than life. While you may not be accustomed to live, unamplified singing, it can be a wonderful experience if you think about how much skill is required.

# ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

# LA BOHÈME

## THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

### RODOLFO

(tenor) a writer; Marcello's roommate

### MARCELLO

(baritone) a painter; Rodolfo's roommate

### COLLINE

(bass) a philosopher

### SCHAUNARD

(baritone) a musician

### BENOIT

(bass) landlord of Rodolfo and Marcello

### MUSETTA

(soprano) Marcello's ex-girlfriend

### MIMI

(soprano) a poor seamstress; neighbor of Rodolfo and Marcello

### ALCINDORO

(bass) Musetta's wealthy new love interest

## ACT I - An attic apartment in Paris's Latin Quarter on Christmas Eve.

The poet Rodolfo and his roommate, Marcello, a painter, are trying to work but it is too cold to concentrate. Rodolfo offers to burn his manuscript to stay warm. Colline, a philosopher, arrives as the play burns. All three try to warm themselves. Schaunard, a musician, arrives soon after with a bounty of food and wine. As the four toast their good fortune, Benoit, the landlord, arrives to collect rent, which is past due. The four friends invite him in, offer him wine and reassure him they will pay what is owed. With ingenuity they distract and confuse Benoit, ultimately forcing him out before he is able to collect. To celebrate the holiday and their luck, they decide to dine at Café Momus. Rodolfo stays behind to finish an article, promising to join them shortly.

There is a knock on the door. Rodolfo opens it to find a beautiful young woman, Mimi at the threshold. She asks Rodolfo for a light for her candle. He invites her in. She faints suddenly, dropping the key to her apartment. When she recovers, they begin to search for her key but both of their candles go out. They are left with only moonlight to guide them. The two search for Mimi's key, and in the darkness, Rodolfo touches her hand. They begin to confide in one another, sharing their hopes and dreams. Rodolfo's friends call from below, asking him to join them at Café Momus. Rodolfo takes Mimi's arm, and they leave for the café.

## ACT II - Outside the Café Momus, the street is bustling with holiday shoppers and vendors.

On the way to the café, Rodolfo buys Mimi a bonnet. The two join his friends at a sidewalk table outside Café Momus. The toy seller Parpignol is followed by a crowd of children. A little while later, Musetta, Marcello's old flame, arrives accompanied by Alcindoro, a wealthy, older gentleman. Although Marcello feigns indifference, he finds it increasingly difficult to ignore Musetta. To gain his attention she sings about her captivating beauty. No longer wanting Alcindoro's company, Musetta cries out that her shoe pinches her. She demands that Alcindoro run and buy her a new pair. The moment Alcindoro is out of view, Musetta runs into Marcello's arms. They join their friends and are swept up in celebration. By the time Alcindoro returns, the group has left the café and he is left with the check.

# ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

# LA BOHÈME

## ACT III - Early dawn on a bitter, cold February morning outside a tavern near one of the city gates.

Customs officers search people coming into the city for work. Mimi, in a weakened state, seeks out Marcello to ask for his help. She confides in him that Rodolfo's jealousy is the cause of their constant fighting. Rodolfo comes looking for Marcello, and Mimi hides. She overhears Rodolfo explain why he is so tormented. Mimi is ill, and his poverty is weakening her condition. Rodolfo hears Mimi cough and rushes to her. At the same time, Marcello hears Musetta laugh and goes inside the tavern to find out what she is up to. At first, Mimi and Rodolfo try to end their relationship but they are still deeply in love. They decide to stay together until the springtime, when it will be easier to separate. Meanwhile Marcello's worries are confirmed; he catches Musetta flirting with a stranger. He drags her out of the tavern to confront her, they quarrel, and Musetta storms off leaving Marcello behind. Meanwhile, Rodolfo and Mimi depart arm and arm, blissfully reunited.

## ACT IV - The following summer in Marcello and Rodolfo's attic apartment.

Marcello and Rodolfo are trying to work but each is distracted by thoughts of the woman he loves. The somber mood changes when Colline and Schaunard arrive to share a paltry meal. The four of them forget their worries, improvising a sword fight when suddenly, Musetta arrives with Mimi. Mimi is dying and wants to be with Rodolfo again. Musetta and Marcello leave to find a doctor. Colline leaves to sell his overcoat. Schaunard follows them out. Rodolfo and Mimi are left alone. They recall their first meeting. The others return with medicine, but it is too late. Mimi has died. At first, no one dares tell Rodolfo. Looking at their faces, he realizes she is gone.

Puccini's  
*La bohème* is  
among the **top 3**  
most popular operas  
of all time!

Elise Bakketun Photography, Seattle Opera, 2013



Elise Bakketun Photography, Seattle Opera, 2013

# ABOUT THE COMPOSER

# GIACOMO PUCCINI

Giacomo Puccini was born in Lucca, Italy on December 22, 1858. Puccini was fifth in a family of seven girls and two boys. His father died when he was a young boy, leaving his mother to care for Giacomo and his six siblings. They had very little money, but his mother had great dreams for Giacomo. She arranged for his uncle, Fotunato Magi, to give him music lessons. Giacomo began work at age 11 as a church organist to contribute to the family's finances, and later earned money by teaching music and playing in Lucca's taverns. Puccini saw his first opera when he was 18 years old. Too poor for train fare, he walked 20 miles to see Verdi's *Aida*, and it totally changed his life. He made plans to move to Milan, the center of Italian opera and the home of La Scala, the most famous opera house in Italy.



Giacomo enrolled in the Milan Conservatory and began meeting the most influential people in the opera business, slowly working his way up the career ladder. During this time, Puccini lived the life of a poor student. He shared an apartment with two other artists, always scraping for money. His lifestyle during this period later served as inspiration and motivation for *La bohème*. Puccini could not have succeeded without the friendship of Giulio Ricordi, the most important publisher in Italy. Ricordi saw great promise in Puccini, and believed he would become a great opera composer. He paid Puccini a stipend for several years and supported his early attempts at writing opera. His faith in Puccini was paid back beyond the wildest expectations. The Ricordi publishing house would own the performance rights to four of the most popular operas ever written: *La bohème*, *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly*, and *Turandot*.

In 1893, at age 35, Puccini premiered his first successful opera, *Manon Lescaut*. It launched his career and made him a front runner in the search for a successor to the great Giuseppe Verdi. Puccini followed *Manon Lescaut* with two big hits, *La bohème* in 1896 and *Tosca* in 1900. After their success, Puccini was in the limelight, overseeing productions of his operas in Europe's greatest theaters. When Verdi died in 1901, Puccini became the future of Italian opera, and he knew that the opera world would expect nothing but the best. His next opera, *Madama Butterfly*, had to be a success. *Madama Butterfly* did become a huge success, but it cost Puccini seven years of strife. The opera was cursed with delays, a car accident which severely injured Puccini, a disastrous premiere, and five revisions. In the end, Puccini triumphed with one of the world's most popular operas. With three tremendous successes behind him and a seat at the top of the opera world, Puccini entered a long period of creative struggling, experimentation, and limited successes. He took a six-year hiatus following *Madama Butterfly*, due in part to the suicide of one of his personal servants and an ensuing court battle. After the buzz died down, Puccini returned to the music world premiering *La fanciulla del West* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City in 1910. Though it had a lukewarm reception by American audiences, it remains a staple in Italian opera houses.

He would live another 17 years and compose five more operas but only one, *Turandot*, would match the fame of his "big three". *Turandot* was Puccini's final masterpiece. Diagnosed with throat cancer in 1923, Puccini battled to complete his most beloved project before his health failed. But he fell short, suffering a fatal heart attack after surgery in November, 1924. *Turandot* was completed by another composer. Unlike many composers, Puccini died a wealthy man, with an estate valued at \$24 million in today's money. His only direct living descendant is his granddaughter, Simonetta Puccini, a retired teacher of literature who devotes her time to researching her grandfather's works. She owns and operates the "Villa museo Puccini", on the grounds of which Puccini is buried, along with his wife and son.

# PARIS

The setting of *La bohème* is the Paris of 1831. At that time, Paris was a city of great energy, vitality and ebullience. It was in every way, politically, socially, economically and culturally, the center of France. It was also a world center of art and literature, attracting artists and writers from all over the world. This Paris was a city of great contrasts: of enormous wealth and of abject poverty, of intellectual and artistic brilliance and of popular literacy, of a glittering and powerful high society and of disenfranchised masses. Paris was also the center of European revolutionary thought and activity. The ruling monarch, Louis Phillippe, had come to the French throne on the wave of a Parisian revolution in 1830. The entire decade of the 1830s was marked by political uprisings and labor strikes in Paris. (The student uprising depicted in Hugo's *Les Miserables* takes place there in 1832.) Louis Phillippe's regime greatly favored the propertied classes and did little to relieve the poverty and illiteracy of the great majority of French-men. He was forced from the throne by another revolution in 1848. Although in 1831 Paris was one of the world's great cities, it was not yet the modern metropolis of wide, tree-lined avenues, great squares, beautiful public buildings, and museums that it would be come in the 1850s under Napoleon III. Rather, it was a cramped city of 1,000 narrow winding streets and blind alleys where 30,000 houses sheltered a populace of more than 800,000. Modern improvements such as a system of sewers and bridges were being implemented, but much of the city resembled an overpopulated anthill.

In 1831, most Parisians traveled the busy crowded street on foot and face, in Chopin's words, "more mud than it is possible to imagine." Custom gates marked the roads that led out of the crowded confines of the city into fields and small villages. Of course, all was not grim in the

lives of the lower classes of Paris. Each quarter of Paris had restaurants and cafes where its citizens, no matter their social class or occupations, could relax, wine, dine and socialize. The Café Momus, which is the setting for Act II of *La bohème*, was a real café, catering to young artists and writers. Indeed, all of the locales of the opera were real places and its characters based on real people.



Photography used by permission of the Pittsburgh Opera.

## ACTIVITY

- 1 Have students research further the geography and culture of France. What were some of the changes that happened under Napoleon III that led to the modernization and distinction that we see in Paris today? What is the current governmental system in France?
- 2 What was happening in the U.S. and Georgia during the time of *La bohème*?



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# THE BOHEMIANS

Bohemia is a region in the Czech Republic, and its nomadic natives – a group that we often call Gypsies – were known as “Bohemians” in French. The term “Bohemian,” however, also came to mean anyone who behaved in strange ways and didn’t live their lives as most people do. Artists, writers, musicians, philosophers – these people shared certain traits with gypsies and therefore came to be known as “Bohemians.” All have a vagabond lifestyle and are known for their merry poverty and disregard of money and steady work in pursuit of freedom and relationships. These are not qualities that are typically admired by society, but while there are many who disdain them, many envy them, too.



Photography used by permission of the Opera Colorado.

The French author Henri Murger, being a Bohemian himself, decided to try to change the way people thought about Bohemians. He wrote a series of character sketches about a group of four free-thinking Bohemians (one an artist, one a writer not unlike himself, one a musician, and one a philosopher) that was published in the literary magazine *Corsaire* in 1846. Murger’s “Bohemians” were a group of young, struggling artists who accepted their lack of money and “creature comforts” in exchange for the knowledge that they were intellectually and romantically free to do as they chose. The sketches caught the eye of the playwright Theodore Barriere, who approached Murger about turning them into a stage play. The resulting work, entitled *La Vie de Bohème*, was a smash hit. Murger, who as a youth had lived with friends in an attic apartment (the group called themselves the Water-Drinkers because they couldn’t afford any other beverages!), now found himself quite famous and wealthy. The popularity of his Bohemian characters led him to revise his earlier newspaper columns and publish them as a book entitled *Scènes de la vie de Bohème*, in 1851. This publication was immediately followed with a sequel called *Scènes de la vie de Jeunesse*. Giacomo Puccini is said to have first seen the novel *Scènes de la vie de Bohème* in the winter of 1892-3 when a friend gave him a copy and suggested that he consider it as material for a new opera. Puccini and his friends were not unlike Murger’s “Bohemians” – in fact, they were fond of meeting at the local café and calling themselves “Club Bohème.” Feeling closely aligned with the subject matter, Puccini decided to take on the project. In March of 1893, however, Leoncavallo (composer of *Pagliacci* and a rival of Puccini) learned that Puccini had decided to write an opera based upon the very same subject matter that he himself was in the process of writing an opera about. Leoncavallo was particularly upset because he had offered Puccini his libretto for

*La bohème* (which he had written himself) sometime earlier and Puccini declined it – likely thinking that if it was good, why wasn’t Leoncavallo writing music for it? Well, that is exactly what Leoncavallo had decided to do, and he made this known in the papers along with the fact that Puccini knew of his plans perfectly well before starting on his own “Bohème.” He was accusing Puccini of stealing subject matter. Puccini answered this accusation the next day, in a published response that stated how he welcomed the competition and felt confident that the public would choose the best “Bohème.” Choose they did. Although Leoncavallo’s *La bohème* received a warmer reception at its premiere than Puccini’s did, it is rarely performed on the opera stage today and has been almost entirely forgotten. Puccini’s *La bohème*, however, is among the top 10 most popular operas of all time and is still performed time and again in all of the great opera houses of the world!

- 1 Through this opera, we see an example of Bohemian life in Paris in the early 1800’s. Do you think that the Bohemian lifestyle exists in 2015? What examples can you think of? Is the lifestyle the same now as it was in 1831? How is it the same/different?
- 2 Can you think of “bohemian” characters in recent movies, television shows or books? Do you see any examples of “bohemian” characters in the news or current events?

ACTIVITY

# OPERA HISTORY

**Opera is a dramatic story told through song.** Considered by many to be the most complete art form, it combines all of the elements of art, words, music, drama and dance. The earliest Italian operas were called by several names, such as “favola in musica” (fable in music) and “drama 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 about 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 makes 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*.



Tim Wilkerson

## A BRIEF HISTORY

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. In the 1100s the early Christian church set religious stories to music, a style known as liturgical drama. The first true opera, *Daphne* (1597), was composed by Jacopo Peri. It told the story of a Greek myth. The first great composer of opera was Claudio Monteverdi. Some of his operas are still performed today. German composer Christoph Gluck’s most famous opera, *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762), marked a shift in importance from the performers to the drama. It also reduced the amount of recitative and laid the foundations for the progression of the art form. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was another prolific composer during this time and many of his operas like *Le Nozze di Figaro* (The Marriage of Figaro - 1786) and *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute - 1791) are still frequently performed around the world.

# OPERA HISTORY



## OPERA 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 that a balance was achieved between the role of the orchestra and that of the singer. These two forces were combined 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. For example, the Paris opera audience 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. 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.

## DIFFERENT OPERA STYLES

**Opera Seria** – serious opera. These stories are often tragic, and typically involve heroes and kings or ancient myths and gods. *Julius Caesar* (1724) by George Frederic Handel is a classic example of opera seria.

**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. *The Italian Girl in Algiers* (1813) by Rossini is an amusing example of opera buffa.

**Singspiel, or “sing Play,”** 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* (1791) is an example of this style.

**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. *The Barber of Seville* (1816) by Gioachino Rossini is a popular example of bel canto.

**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 can often last for several hours. Charles Gounod's *Faust* (1869 version) is an example of grand opera.

**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. *Die Walküre (The Valkyries)* (1870) and other operas by Richard Wagner defined this style.



Jeff Roffman

# LA BOHÈME vs RENT

Puccini is said to be one of the main catalysts of American musical theater. From *Showboat* to *Rent*, the works of Puccini have influenced them all. Puccini's well-mastered use of verismo (the use of melodramatic situations with common characters) has endured well through both the 20th and 21st centuries. Puccini meant for his operas to relate to the common everyday people. Musical theater writers simply took his brilliant idea a step further by inserting dialogue into their works.

Puccini's *La bohème* is a timeless classic that will be revered by audiences for many centuries to come. Although *La bohème* is still performed as an opera, the tragic story of the struggling French Bohemians has also been transformed into a modern day musical: *Rent*. Despite the many differences between modern day New York City and 19th Century France, there are many striking similarities that exist between *La bohème* and *Rent*; most exclusively the plot twists, lyrics and a few melodies.

Many starving artists exist in the same essence now as they did in the 19th century: underpaid, rebellious and passionate. It's the ideal of the Bohemians to live a life full of truth, beauty, freedom and love; in this story, these vibrant characters search for these ideals and live them to the fullest. This philosophy is illustrated in both the original and updated version of *La bohème*. Puccini operas do not end with "happily ever after," so Mimì suffers from, and ultimately dies of, Tuberculosis, the deadliest disease of their time. Similar to *La bohème*, Mimì in *Rent* is infected with and ultimately is killed by HIV, the deadliest disease of our time. *Rent* creator Jonathan Larson magnified Puccini's

traumatic story by making a majority of his characters infected with HIV as well. In both versions, the characters grieve, love and learn together in their search to find their place in the world. Baz Luhrmann, director of *Moulin Rouge*, showcased *La bohème* on Broadway in its original form. Using many of the sets borrowed from *Moulin Rouge* and young vibrant cast members, Luhrmann transformed Puccini's 19th century opera into a glitzy Broadway show set in the 1950's. The show received two Tony Awards for excellence in theater. *La bohème* is only the fourth opera in Tony Award history to be nominated for an award. The story of *La bohème* endures the test of time because of its versatility and uniqueness. It's a story that will never become out-dated or unlovable. On the opera or Broadway stage, this story will sing its way into the heart of every audience member for many centuries to come.



The successful Broadway musical *Rent* is based on the story of *La Bohème*. Watch the movie to compare and contrast the two storylines. Which one resonates more with you

# CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRAINED VOICE

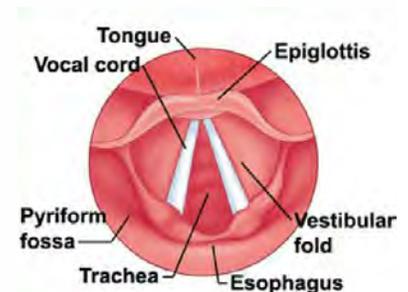
Singing in Europe and America is now generally divided into two categories: classical and popular. What most people think of as *operatic* or *classical* singing developed in Europe hundreds of years ago. This style flourished during the seventeenth century as opera became a popular form of entertainment 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

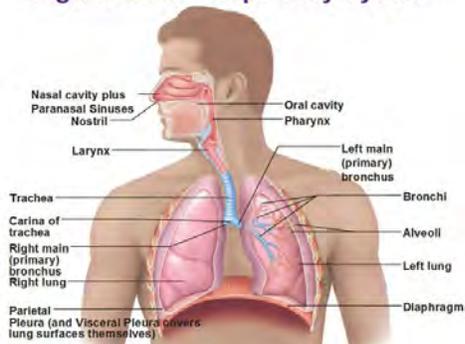
Very few people are born with the capability to sing this way. Classical singers take voice lessons about once a week and practice every day for many years in order to develop a beautiful operatic sound. In fact, most trained voices are not mature enough to perform leading roles on a big stage until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

## THE VOCAL CORDS

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 strands of tissue 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. 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.



## Organs of the Respiratory System



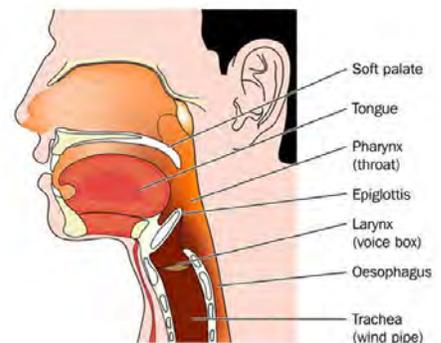
## BREATHING/SUPPORT

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. 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 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 “hooho” 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.



# CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRAINED VOICE

If you sing in a choir at school or church, you're probably already familiar with the different kinds of voice types. We have the same kinds of voice types in opera, but there are a few differences:



**Butterfly from *Madama Butterfly***

Jeff Roffman

**Sopranos** are the highest female voice type, with a range similar to a violin. In opera, they usually sing roles like the daughter, the girlfriend or wife. They can be princesses and good girls, but they can also have some tricks up their sleeves!

**Mezzo-sopranos** are similar to your choral altos. Their sound is darker and warmer than a soprano. They often play older women, sometimes they play evil women, and sometimes they even play young boys! They can be witches but they can also be attractive – sometimes both at the same time.



**Carmen from *Carmen***

Jeff Roffman



**Faust from *Faust***

Jeff Roffman

**Tenors** are the highest male voice type – they often sing roles like the hero, the prince, the boyfriend. They can sound like a trumpet in both range and color. Tenors can be athletic and energetic and they can also be sensitive and emotional. They get all the good high notes and a lot of the applause!



**Figaro from *The Barber of Seville***

Jeff Roffman

**Baritones** fit between choir tenors and basses – not as high as the tenors, but not as low as the basses. They can play both good and bad characters: sometimes they're the boyfriends or brothers – or the ringleader for some comedic shenanigans – but in serious operas they can sometimes be the bad guys.

**Basses** are the lowest male voice type – they can sound like a bassoon, tuba or low trombone. In a serious opera they can represent age and wisdom (and sometimes evil geniuses), in a comic opera they can make you laugh. Sometimes they steal the show with their super low notes and provide a comforting presence with their warm rumbly tones.



**Sarastro from *The Magic Flute***

Tim Wilkerson

Think of your favorite story, movie or television show. If that story was to be turned into an opera, what kind of voice types would be best for each of the characters?

You can hear different kinds of voice types in popular music too. Think about your favorite singers – do they have high voices or low voices? What do you like best about the way they sing?

# STANDARDS

**Opera composers** would sometimes hire a group of people to cheer their works or boo the works of their rivals.

During the 17th century, women were not allowed to sing onstage, not even in a chorus so men would sing the soprano/mezzo/alto parts.

The term "opera" comes from the Latin opus, or "work."

## Reading:

ELACC(6-12)RL, ELACC(6-12)RI  
*La bohème* synopsis

## Writing:

ELACC(6-12)W  
Become an opera critic

## Language/Vocabulary:

ELACC(6-12)L(4-6)  
Introduce Vocabulary and Terms and activities

## Science:

S(6-12)CS1, S7L2, S8P4, SPS9, SAP1  
Operatic Voices

## Social Studies:

Government/Civics: SS(6-7)CG(6-7)  
Paris during *La bohème*

## World Geography:

SSWG5, SS7G9, SS7G12  
Paris during *La bohème*

## History:

SSuSH(9-16), SS6H6, SSWH11, SSWH14, SSWH15, SSWH17, SSWH18  
About the Composer  
Paris During *La bohème*  
The Bohemians

## Music:

M(6-8)GM.6, M(6-8)GM.8, M(6-8)GM.9  
Opera 101  
Meet the composer  
Voice types  
Rent 21st Century

## Theater:

TAMS(6-8).8, TAHSMTI.8, TAMS(6-8).9, TAHSFTI.9  
Opera 101  
Important Jobs at the opera and theatre  
Rent 21st Century

# POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

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## Become an Opera Critic

Reviews of performances are important to every opera company. They help the company know how the performance was enjoyed in the outside world, and get other people excited about coming to see the show!

To write your own review, you can focus on two different elements – what you saw and what you heard.

### Writing About What We See:

A review often combines two things – facts and feelings. It is a piece of straight reporting in which the reviewer tells the reader what he or she saw (facts), and an opinion piece in which the reviewer tells the reader what they liked or didn't like about those elements (opinions). Here is an example of a reviewer reporting what they saw:

“The town plaza is suggested by Paul Steinberg’s dizzily colorful set, with a mosaic floor and walls and piñatas hanging from above.”

For the first part of your review, briefly describe what you saw on stage – report what the sets, costumes and lights looked like. These are the facts about the show. Next, give your opinion about whether you liked these choices. Did they help tell the story effectively?

### Writing About What We Hear:

Critics need to have a great vocabulary of descriptive words when they write about what they hear so that the people reading their reviews can imagine what it was like to be there. People use lots of different adjectives to describe the voices of opera singers. Here’s a review that’s chock-full of great adjectives:

“The light, smoky baritone of George Gagnidze only hints at Rigoletto’s outsize emotions, and the sweet, pure soprano of Lisette Oropesa keeps Gilda sweet but inert. The handsome, hyperactive tenor Vittorio Grigolo has two registers, bellowing and crooning, and the conductor, Marco Armiliato, has his hands full trying to keep up with Mr. Grigolo’s wayward tempos.”

Sometimes it is very hard to describe the way music makes us feel. While there are definitely objective facts we can evaluate when we listen to music (qualities like loud or soft, fast or slow) most of the time we listen subjectively. This means that every opinion is valid – you don’t have to know anything about opera to be moved by someone’s singing or a beautiful instrumental solo.

Write a few sentences about the character you liked best and why. How did the music help tell you who the character was? Think of five adjectives to describe the way that person’s voice sounded to you. How did it made you feel to listen to **them**?

### Sum It All Up

In your opinion, what did you like best about the production? What did you think could use some improvement? Would you recommend that other people come see this opera?

# POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

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## #1 Write a Letter

**Goal:** To reflect on the performance experience and to practice writing skills.

**When:** After the performance.

**Explanation:** After the show, students will write letters to *La bohème* performers or to ArtsBridge donors whose support keeps field trip tickets accessibly priced for school groups.

### Activity:

**1.** After attending the performance, discuss the experience with your students. Use the following discussing questions to guide the conversation:

- a. What was the show about?
- b. What parts of the show were most exciting?
- c. Which character did you enjoy the most? Why?
- d. What did the characters learn?

**2.** Next, invite students to write a letter to the performers or to ArtsBridge donors about their theater experience.

#### a. Letter Example #1

Dear *La bohème* Performers,  
My favorite part of the show was....  
While watching your show I felt... because...  
I have drawn a picture of the scene when....  
If I could be in your show, I would play the part of ... because...

#### b. Letter Example #2

Dear ArtsBridge donors,  
Thank you for helping my class go to the Cobb Energy Centre to see *La bohème*! My favorite part of the show was.... While I was watching the show I felt... because... I have drawn a picture of the scene when... This experience was special because...

**3.** After writing the letter, students can illustrate a scene from the performance.

**4.** Last, mail the letters to use and we'll make sure they get to the right people.

ArtsBridge Foundation  
Attn: Education Department  
2800 Cobb Galleria Parkway  
Atlanta, GA 30339

### Follow-Up Discussion Questions:

- 1.** What did you choose to share in your letter? Why?
- 2.** How does receiving a letter make you feel?
- 3.** How do you think the recipient of your letter will feel when he or she receives your letter? Why?
- 4.** Why do you think the performers choose to make being a performer their career?
- 5.** Why do you think people give money to help students like you attend ArtsBridge performances at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre?

# RESOURCES AND SOURCES

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## Web Sources

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

[http://encarta.msn.com/media\\_461517091/Diaphragm\\_and\\_Respiration.html](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://64.143.176.9/library/healthguide/en-us/images/media/medical/hw/hwkb17_073_003.jpg)

<https://www.sinfinimusic.com/uk/learn/composers/giacomo-puccini>

## The France of Victor Hugo

<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwart/hist255/bohem/tlaboheme.html>

## Great recordings of *La bohème* on Youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDDAF2qT73A> –Pavarotti, Freni (actual stage production)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ntg9vXxAia8> – Netrebko, Villazon (a “movie” version)