



THE ATLANTA OPERA

Georges Bizet's
Carmen

OPERA GUIDE



Photo by: David Nancarrow for Austin Lyric Opera

Welcome	3
What to Expect at the Opera	4
Synopsis.....	5
Meet the Composer	6
A Brief History of Opera.....	7
Opera Vocabulary.....	8
Operatic Voices.....	10
The Life Cycle of a Production	16
Special Thanks	17

Dear Educator,

Hello, and thank you for joining us for this production of Bizet's operatic masterpiece, *Carmen*. One of the most frequently performed operas in the world, *Carmen* has been delighting audiences since its premiere in 1875. This opera has some of the most quoted music in the mainstream today, and you and your students will instantly recognize some of the melodies as you are transported to Seville.

The Atlanta Opera Student Shorts are fully-staged, abbreviated versions of the mainstage production. The *Carmen* Student Short will feature the full Atlanta Opera Chorus and Orchestra, and will include Acts III and IV of the opera (lasting approximately 70 minutes).

This will be the first opera experience for many of your students, and will be most thoroughly 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 *Carmen*, 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 that will correspond with Common Core Georgia Performance and National Arts Standards.

Thank you again for allowing us to share this opera with you. It is our sincere hope that you enjoy the experience. We look forward to seeing you and your students at the opera!

Sincerely,

The Atlanta Opera
Community Engagement Department
1575 Northside Drive
Building 300, Suite 350
Atlanta, GA 30318
404-881-8801
atlantaopera.org
education@atlantaopera.org



The Atlanta Opera's 2004 production of *Carmen*. Photo by J.D. Scott.

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 nervous 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. Just like in movies and tv, it's not unusual to find love triangles, murders, fatal illnesses, and messages from beyond the grave. They don't call them "soap operas" for nothing!

MYTH #2 OPERA IS SUNG IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE SO I WON'T UNDERSTAND THE STORY.

It is true that many operas are sung in languages other than English. All of The Atlanta Opera productions feature English translations, called *supertitles*, of the opera projected on screens above the stage. This way, you can follow along even if you do not understand the language. *Carmen* is written and performed in French. 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.

Most people dress up when they go to an opera performance. Frequently men wear tuxedos and women wear evening dresses to opening night. When attending performances on other nights or matinees, you can wear business attire or "Sunday" clothes. Wearing a suit or dress is not required – but dressing up can be a part of the fun of going to an opera performance.

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! If you are not in your seat when the curtain goes up on an Atlanta Opera production, you will not be allowed to take your seat until after the first act or until the first intermission. This procedure prevents patrons from disrupting what is happening onstage or disturbing the rest of the audience. After the orchestra has tuned, the theater 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, (s)he worked very hard to bring this performance to life!

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. The Student Shorts of *Carmen* will be 70 minutes with no intermission.
2. If you have them, please turn off all cell phones and any other electronic devices that will make noise. No texting during the performance, please!
3. Please do not take photographs or video or audio recordings of the performance.
4. 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). Of course, a standing ovation is always welcome!



ACT I

Corporal Moralès and his men are resting outside the guardhouse as Micaëla comes looking for Don José. The change of guard arrives, among them Corporal José and Lieutenant Zuniga. Zuniga questions José about the nearby cigarette factory and the girls who work there. The cigarette girls leave the factory for a break, and the men await a glimpse of Carmen. When she appears, Carmen flirts with them and gives a flower to José. The girls then return to work and José is left alone. Micaëla returns and gives José a letter from his mother. She leaves when he begins to read the letter that advises him to marry Micaëla and settle down. Screams are heard from the cigarette factory, and Zuniga sends José to find out the cause of the disturbance. José returns with Carmen and another girl, Manuelita, whose face has a knife wound inflicted by Carmen. When Carmen refuses to speak, Zuniga orders José to tie her hands and take her to prison and leaves to make out the warrant for Carmen's arrest. Carmen hints to José about a rendezvous at her friend Lillas Pastia's tavern, and José agrees to let her escape. When Zuniga returns with the warrant, Carmen breaks free as she is being led off to prison. José is arrested.

ACT II

Carmen and her Gypsy friends Frasquita and Mercédès sing and dance at Lillas Pastia's tavern. At closing time the innkeeper begs the soldiers to leave. Zuniga tells Carmen that José has been released from prison. A torchlight procession announces the arrival of the torero, Escamillo. Escamillo acknowledges the soldiers' toast and describes the excitement of the bullfight. He is attracted to Carmen, who entices him. As the soldiers leave, Zuniga promises to return to see Carmen. Dancaïre and Remendado come to ask the three Gypsy girls to join them in a smuggling expedition. José arrives and gives Carmen the gold piece she sent him along with a file while he was in prison. He explains that his soldier's honor prevented him from trying to escape. Carmen dances for José, but when retreat sounds, he starts to leave for the barracks. She taunts him and challenges him to follow her to the mountains. When Zuniga returns, the two soldiers fight and are disarmed by the smugglers. José has no choice but to join the band of smugglers.

ACT III

The smugglers are at work in the mountains. Carmen has become fed up with José's jealousy. Frasquita and Mercédès read their own good fortune in the cards. When Carmen takes her turn, she only finds death. Dancaïre asks the girls to distract the customs men on duty. The girls agree and depart, leaving José on guard. Micaëla appears with a mountain guide looking for the Gypsies and runs off as Escamillo arrives. José challenges Escamillo to a duel, but Carmen intervenes as the smugglers re-enter and break up the fight. Escamillo invites the band of smugglers to his next bullfight. Micaëla is discovered hiding, and she tells José that his mother is dying. He leaves with her, but warns Carmen that they will meet again.

ACT IV

The crowd gathers outside the arena for the bullfight. When Carmen and Escamillo appear, Frasquita and Mercédès warn her that José is in the crowd. Carmen waits alone outside the arena. José confronts her and begs that she return to him. She refuses and returns his ring. Realizing that Escamillo is her new lover, he kills her.

Borrowed from The San Francisco Opera.
<http://sfopera.com/Season-Tickets/2011-2012-Season/Carmen.aspx>



The Atlanta Opera's 2004 production of *Carmen*. Photo by J.D. Scott.



GEORGES BIZET (1838-1875)

Georges Bizet was born in Paris, France, on October 25, 1838, the only child of musically talented parents. His mother, a pianist, and his father, a voice teacher, began to educate him in music at the early age of four. Bizet showed remarkable musical talent and an extraordinary memory. It is said that by the age of eight he could sing back a complex tune that his father had played for him only once. By the age of ten, Bizet had gained acceptance into the reputable Paris Conservatory of Music.

Bizet was an excellent student who soon gained recognition at the conservatory, and his talent at the piano was noted by well-known composers such as Berlioz and Liszt. When he was only eighteen years old, Bizet wrote *Dr. Miracle*. First performed in 1857, this one-act operetta won an important competition sponsored by Offenbach, whose works were popular at the time. Later the same year, Bizet won the Prix de Rome, the highest honor that France could award a young artist. This award paid for him to live and study in Rome for two years. During that time, Bizet began writing several operas but completed only one, *Don Procopio*.

When Bizet returned from Rome, he turned down a teaching position at the conservatory, deciding instead to devote himself to writing. His works only received

moderate recognition, however, so Bizet grudgingly made a living as a pianist, an accompanist, and a teacher, while continuing to compose.

The 1860s and early 1870s were hard time for Bizet. His mother died, his health was unstable, his efforts as a composer were seldom rewarded, and France was engaged in the Franco-Prussian War. Not all was lost for Bizet, however. In 1867, he became happily married to the daughter of his first music composition teacher. Also, the changes brought about by the Franco-Prussian War ushered in a renaissance of the arts in France. The following years were busy for Bizet.

In 1875, Bizet completed the opera *Carmen*, a work that, by most accounts, should have marked the beginning of a successful career for the young artist. The story for *Carmen* was taken from a short novel by Prosper Mérimée. The opera, written in the genre of *opéra comique* (comic opera) with musical numbers separated by dialogue, tells the story of the downfall of Don José, a naive soldier who is seduced by the wiles of the fiery gypsy Carmen. José abandons his childhood sweetheart and deserts from his military duties, yet loses Carmen's love to the glamorous toreador Escamillo after which José kills her in a jealous rage. The storyline was controversial at the time, for it included murder, betrayal, and situations of moral ambiguity. The opera showed Bizet's mastery of the musical genre of *opéra comique*, gracefully depicting both character and atmosphere.

Despite his fear that Parisian family audiences would not be able to handle the content of the work, Bizet refused to water down the story. *Carmen* was not well received by audiences or critics and was poorly attended throughout its run.

The failure of *Carmen* hit Bizet hard, and his health took a turn for the worse. Less than three months following the opera's debut, Bizet died of a heart attack in Bougival, France. Within a year of his death, *Carmen* began to receive critical acclaim on the stages throughout Europe, helping to revive the musical genre of *opéra comique*. Later commentators have asserted that *Carmen* forms the bridge between the tradition of *opéra comique* and the realism, or *verismo*, that characterized late 19th-century Italian opera. Since then it has become, and has remained, one of the most loved operas of the nineteenth century.

THE BIRTH OF OPERA

In the late 16th century, a small group of intellectuals in Florence, Italy gave birth to the dramatic musical form we now call opera. These writers and musicians, known as the Florentine Camerata, emphasized the emotions of the text by using the solo voice as a vehicle for expressing that emotion.

One of the first operatic composers, Claudio Monteverdi (1576 – 1643), used a series of recitatives and arias in his operas. The recitatives closely followed the accents and rhythms of natural speech and advanced the plot of the opera. Arias were more melodic solos in which a character could elaborate on his/her feelings and thoughts.

EARLY OPERA

In the Baroque era (1600 – 1750), the main focus of operas was the music and the staging of the story while plots were almost an afterthought. Emphasis was on spectacular stage effects and virtuoso singing with flashy ornamentation. Brief operas were programmed between acts in order to keep the audiences engaged. These comic scenes later gave rise to a new genre, opera buffa, or comic opera.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 – 1791, *left*) gradually abandoned the strict rules of the Baroque composers and created stories around realistic characters and situations. His musical genius was instrumental in charting the course of western music from that time forward.

ITALIAN OPERA

In Italy, composers such as Gioacchino Rossini (1792 – 1868) and Vincenzo Bellini (1801 – 1835) developed a musical style known as *bel canto* or “beautiful singing.” This style featured flowing melodies, long, open vowels, and vocal acrobatics. Giuseppe Verdi (1813 – 1901) built on that tradition with his prolific outpouring of operas. Not only was his music vibrant and beautiful, but the plots of his operas addressed the social and political issues of his day. Verdi also loved the plays of Shakespeare and wrote operas based on *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Falstaff*. Later, Giacomo Puccini (1858 – 1924) continued the Italian tradition of operatic composition with such famous works as *La bohème* and *Tosca*.

GERMAN OPERA

In this country of great philosophers and scholars, operas grappled with universal themes of human existence. Richard Wagner (1813 – 1883) looked to legends as the best sources of dramatic material for his emotionally

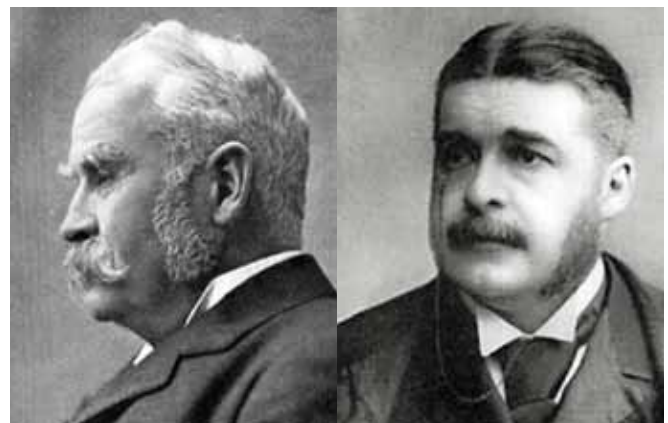
charged music. Richard Strauss (1864 – 1949) brought German opera into the 20th century by stretching the limits of musical style and by presenting stories that were considered quite “racy” in his day.

FRENCH OPERA

Early French opera reflected the interests of the Parisian audiences, featuring great spectacles: huge crowd scenes, large ballets, elaborate sets and costumes. This style became known as grand opera, and Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791 – 1864) was its most famous practitioner. Camille Saint-Saëns (1835 – 1921) moved away from spectacle toward a more lyrical style in the creation of such works as *Samson and Delilah*. Georges Bizet’s (1838 – 1875) *Carmen* was a milestone in the history of French opera as it focused on starkly realistic characters and action.

OPERA IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Opera has continued its path of modification as it has spread around the world. In England, a form of light, comic opera known as operetta evolved through the works of W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan (pictured below) (*The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Mikado*). A similar form known as the zarzuela is popular in Spain and Mexico. In the United States, operas show the influence of such American musical forms as jazz, ragtime and spirituals, and have been set in such distinctly American locales as the Appalachian Mountains and the plains of the mid-west.



The American invention of musical theater developed from a variety of styles ranging from vaudeville to opera. Though originally a spoken play with occasional songs, musical theater has shown a recent trend toward a more “operatic” style with such musicals as *Les Misérables* and *Phantom of the Opera*. Two musicals, *Miss Saigon* and *Rent*, are even based directly on two Puccini operas, *Madama Butterfly* and *La bohème* respectively.

OPERA TERMS YOU SHOULD KNOW

ARIA (AH-ree-yah)

A song for solo voice with instrumental accompaniment; generally expresses a state of mind rather than propelling the action forward.

RECITATIVE (retch-ee-tag-TEEF)

A musical form within an opera which, by imitating rapid speech, advances the plot; this is not the same as parlando, which is a style of singing, but rather a formal device, which links together the arias and choruses.

LIBRETTO (lib-REH-toe)

The text of an opera.

SCORE

The written text and musical notation of an opera.

BAROQUE (bah-ROKE)

The period of music from 1600 to 1759; baroque operas were highly stylized presentations, with elaborate vocal requirements and fanciful plots.

CLASSICAL

The period in music which comes after the baroque period and before the romantic; the dates are roughly 1756 (which is the birth of Mozart) to 1830 (three years after the death of Beethoven).

ROMANTIC

The period of music between 1830 and the turn of the 20th century; composers of romantic music frequently found inspiration in ideas other than music, such as nature, painting, birdcalls, rainstorms.

OPÉRA COMIQUE

A genre of French opera that contains spoken dialogue and arias.

VERISMO

A style of Italian opera that began in 1890, distinguished by realistic – sometimes sordid or violent – depictions of everyday life, especially the life of the contemporary lower classes. It by and large rejects the historical or mythical subjects associated with Romanticism.

ON STAGE & IN THE ORCHESTRA PIT

CAST

All singers and actors who appear onstage.

ACTORS

Performers who have dialogue or significant action, but do not sing.

PRINCIPAL

A singer who performs a large role in the opera.

COMPRIMARIO (cahm-prih-MA-ree-oh)

A singer who specializes in the small character roles of opera, from the Italian, meaning “next to the first.”

SUPERNUMERARY (soo-per-NOO-mih-rare-ee)

or **SUPER:**

An actor who participates in the action but does not speak.

DANCERS

Performers who dance or move to preset movement.

CHORUS

A group of singers who mostly sing together; sometimes this group contains actors and dancers who do not sing, but who are part of the group as a whole.

PROSCENIUM ARCH (pre-SEE-nee-um)

The architectural arch which frames the main curtain.

APRON: the front part of the stage, between the curtain and the orchestra pit.

BLOCKING

The moving of people about on stage; in opera rehearsals, these pattern of movements are created by the stage director.

UPSTAGE/DOWNSTAGE

The position on the stage farthest (upstage) or nearest (downstage) the audience. Because of the “raked” stage, which was so prevalent in early opera houses, the farther “back” a singer went on the stage, the “higher” he seemed to become in stature.

COLORATURA (coe-low-rah-TOOR-ah)

A type of soprano, generally, but also the description of singing which pertains to great feats of agility: fast singing, high singing, trills, embellishments and so forth.

SOPRANO

The highest range of the female voice; the soprano voice ranges from lyric (a light, graceful quality) to dramatic (obviously fuller and heavier in tone).

MEZZO-SOPRANO OR MEZZO (MED-zoe)

The female voice range which lies between the soprano, which is the highest, and the contralto; the tone of a mezzo-soprano can either be voluptuous or it can be thinner and more agile.

CONTRALTO

The lowest female voice; the term itself comes from two Italian words which signify against ("contra") the high ("alto") voice.

TENOR

A high male voice.

BARITONE

The male voice which lies between the low bass voice and the higher tenor voice; most baritone parts call for expressive, romantic singing.

BASS (BASE)

The lowest male voice.

MAESTRO (MY-STROE)

A title of courtesy, given to conductors, composers and directors.

THE ORCHESTRA

The musicians who play the musical instruments.

BACKSTAGE**ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**

The head of the opera who makes all of the final artistic decisions.

STAGE DIRECTOR

Handles the acting portion of the opera, helps the singers become effective actors, and shows them how to move and gesture.

MUSIC DIRECTOR

Instructs singers on singing and musical style. Leads music rehearsals.

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Coordinates between the artistic and business aspects of production.

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

Coordinates the lighting, set and costumes, and the crews for each area.

STAGE MANAGER

Assists the singers and the technical staff during rehearsals and performances.

SET DESIGNER

Plans or designs the sets and scenery. Supervises the set construction.

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Plans or designs the color, intensity and frequency of the light onstage.

COSTUME DESIGNER

Plans or designs the costumes and supervises their construction.

WARDROBE MISTRESS

Assists with the costumes and their care and helps dressers keep track of costume assignments and changes.

DRESSER

Helps performers dress in their costumes properly.

WIGS AND MAKE-UP DESIGNER

Designs and oversees hairstyles, wigs and make-up.

PROPERTIES MASTER

Designs and oversees all moveable objects that are not part of the set or costumes (props).

CHOREOGRAPHER

Creates dances and movements and teaches them to dancers and/or cast members.

CREW or STAGEHANDS

Carpenters, electricians, riggers, flymen, and prop runners who assist in the construction and installation of the set, lights, and props, and the running of the performance.

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:

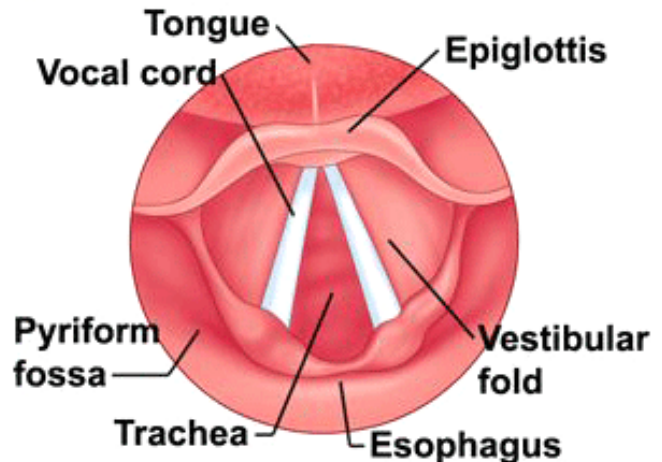
- an extensive range (the ability to sing both high and low)
- varying degrees of volume (loud and soft)
- resonance in the chest and sinus cavities (produces a hooty, full or round sound)
- an ability to project or fill a large space without amplification

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

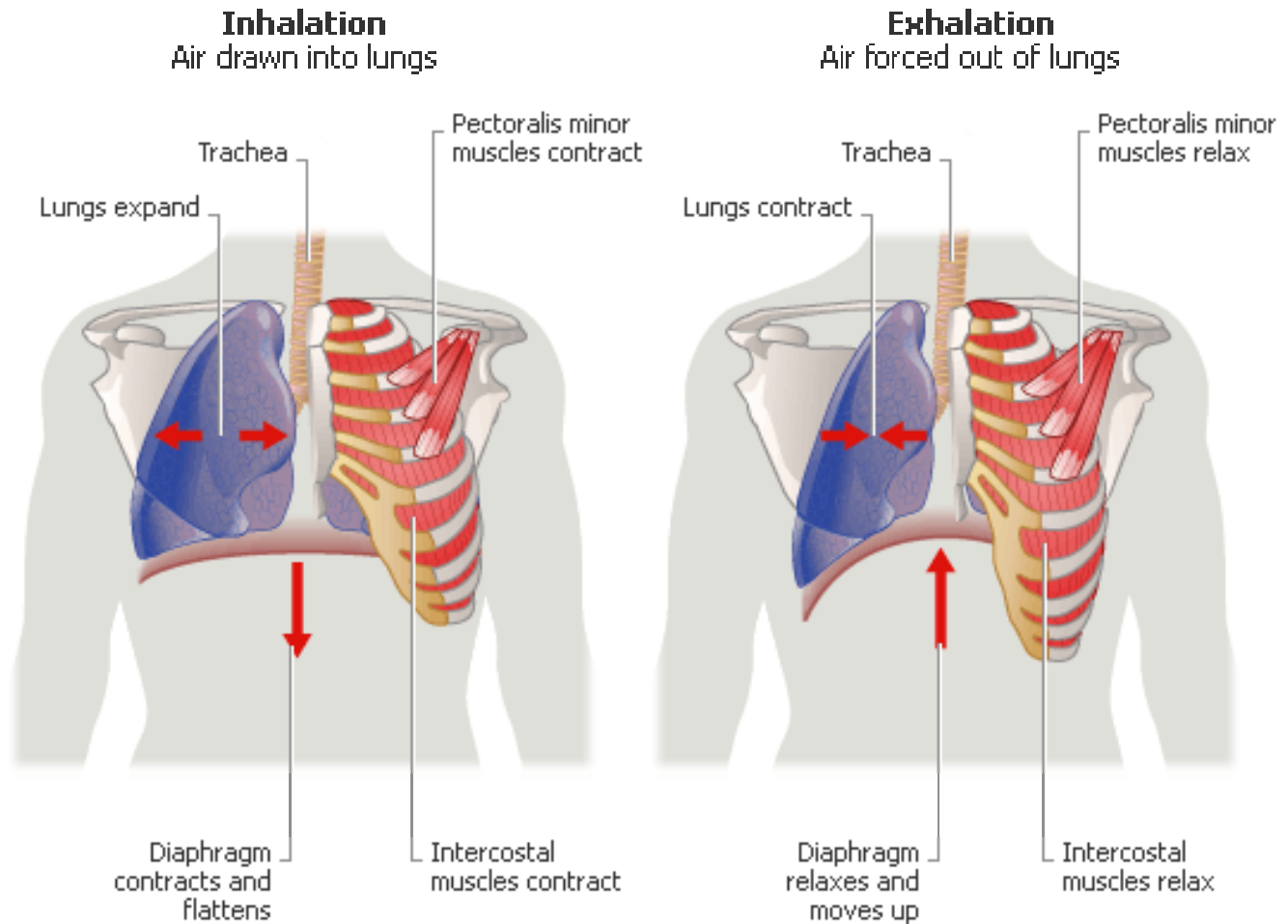
The vocal chords are only a small component of a larger machine which creates a beautiful singing voice. That machine is the entire body, from the tip of the toes to the top of the head. In order to sing with ease, every muscle needs to be relaxed (but not lazy!). If even one muscle is tense, it can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

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

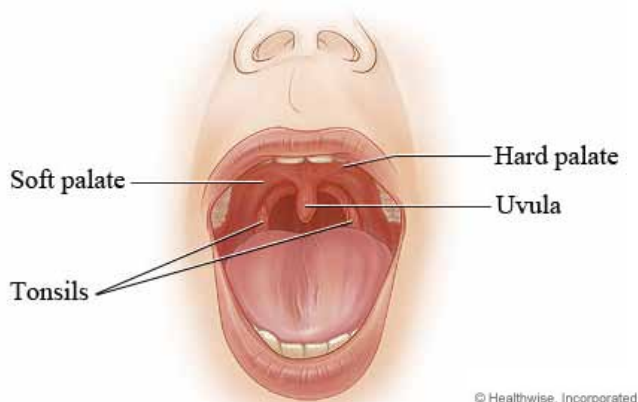
at the very back is your soft palate. Say the word "who" like you would say it in normal conversation. Now, say "hoooo" like a hoot owl. Can you hear the difference?

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.

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 the young girl or the heroine (sometimes called the Prima Donna), since a high bright voice traditionally suggests femininity, virtue and innocence. The normal range of a soprano is two octaves up from middle C, sometimes with extra top notes. Most women are sopranos.

Mezzo-Soprano

Also called a mezzo, this is the middle female voice and has a range similar to an oboe. A mezzo's sound is often darker and warmer than a soprano's. In opera, composers generally use a mezzo to portray older women, villainesses, seductive heroines, and sometimes

even young boys (like Hansel). This is a special operatic convention called a trouser role or a pants role. The mezzo's normal range is from the A below middle C to the A two octaves above it.

Contralto

This is the lowest female voice and has a range similar to a clarinet. Contraltos usually sing the roles of older females or special character parts such as witches and old gypsies. The range is two octaves from F below middle C to the top line of the treble clef. A true contralto is very rare, some believe they don't exist at all!

MALE VOICES

Countertenor

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

Tenor

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

Baritone

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

Bass

This is the lowest male voice and is similar to a trombone or bassoon in range and color.

Low voices usually suggest age and wisdom in serious opera. In comic opera they are generally used for old characters who are foolish or laughable. The range is roughly two octaves down from the F above middle C.

VOICE TYPES BASED ON SIZE AND QUALITY

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

Soubrette

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

Character

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

Coloratura

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

Lytic

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.

FAMOUS OPERA SINGERS

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

Sopranos

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

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

Natalie Dessay, French coloratura. *Vocalises* - EMI Classics label. emiclassics.com/artistbiography.php?aid=53

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

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

Mezzo-Sopranos

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

Olga Borodina [bor o dée nuh], Russian dramatic. *Olga Borodina: Arias* - Philips label.

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

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

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

Contraltos

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

Countertenors

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

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

Derek Lee Ragin, American. *Handel Cantatas and Sonatas* - Channel Classics label. derekleeragin.net

Other countertenors to consider: Brian Asawa, David Walker, Bejun Mehta

Tenors

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

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

Rolando Villazón, Spanish. *Anna Netrebko & Rolando Villazón Duets* - Deutsche label. Grammophone label. rolandovillazon.com

Juan Diego Florez, Argentinean. *Great Tenor Arias* - Decca label. juandiegoflorez.com

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

Baritones

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

Dmitri Hvorostovsky [vor oh stâhv skee], Russian lyric. *Verdi Arias* - Delos label. hvorostovsky.com

Thomas Hampson, American lyric. *The Very Best of Thomas Hampson* - EMI Classics label. hampsong.com

Other baritones to consider: Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Rodney Gilfry, Thomas Quastoff, Thomas Allen, Robert Merrill, Sherrill Milnes

Basses

Samuel Ramey, American. *A Date with the Devil* - Naxos label. samuelramey.com

Nicolai Ghiaurov, Bulgarian. *Great Scenes from Verdi - Operas* Decca label.

James Morris, American. *Opera Arias* - Capitol Records label. cami.com/?webid=776

Other basses to consider: Kurt Moll, Robert Milne, Rene Pape, Ezio Pinza

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The Atlanta Opera's 2004 production of *Carmen*. Photo by J.D. Scott.



The Atlanta Opera's 2011 performance of *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Photo by Tim Wilkerson © 2011.

This season, The Atlanta Opera will produce three mainstage productions at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre. The Atlanta Opera season runs similarly to an academic calendar, opening in the fall and closing in the spring. This 2012-2013 season, The Atlanta Opera will present *Carmen*, *La traviata*, and *The Italian Girl in Algiers*.

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

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

The conductor begins orchestra rehearsals about a week and half before opening night. They have four rehearsals with the conductor, and then the singers are added into the mix. The size of the orchestra will vary with each production, depending on what the

composer has written. Many of the orchestra members live in the metro Atlanta area and have other jobs playing or teaching, or something non-music-related at all. Some of the orchestra members travel to Atlanta from other parts of the country specifically to play in the orchestra for our productions.

The Atlanta Opera owns some sets, but many of the set we use are rented from other opera companies. Other opera companies also rent the sets that we own. This 2012 production of *Carmen* was originally built by the Opera Company of Philadelphia and was recently purchased by The Atlanta Opera. Many of the costumes that you see on stage also have been rented from other opera companies. The Atlanta Opera Costume Shop alters the costumes to fit our singers. Sometimes they do have to make costumes if there aren't enough, or if there is nothing that fits, etc. Once the sets are in place, the cast begins rehearsing at the theatre. The Opera production staff works with staff at the theatre to get all of the lighting and technical aspects of the production together. The orchestra comes together with the singers in a special rehearsal called *sitzprobe*. There are no costumes during the *sitzprobe*, this is mainly to hear the voices with the orchestra. There is a piano dress rehearsal, when the singers rehearse in full costume for the first time so they can get used to wearing them. Finally, all of the pieces are put together for two full dress rehearsals leading up to opening night. The production is performed four times over a period of a week and half before everything is broken down, the singers and artistic staff move on to their next job, and the sets and costumes move on to the next city.

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The Atlanta Opera's 2004 production of *Carmen*. Photo by J.D. Scott.