

# CINDERELLA

by Gioacchino Rossini

## EDUCATION STUDY GUIDE



The Atlanta Opera's 2008 performance of Cinderella.  
(photo: Tim Wilkerson)

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Hello! Thank you for inviting the Atlanta Opera into your school to perform for your students!

The Atlanta Opera Studio was founded in 1980 in an effort to teach students throughout the state of Georgia about opera through live performances and workshops. Thousands of students have been introduced to the art form through the Atlanta Opera Studio touring production. It is our intention for students to gain introductory knowledge about opera through the performance experience and accompanying educational materials.

This guide has been developed to acquaint you and your students with *Cinderella*, 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 Common Core Georgia Performance Standards. Where applicable, you will find the corresponding standard(s) in parenthesis at the end of each activity or lesson.

What you can expect from the Atlanta Opera's performance of *Cinderella*:

- We will be performing a 55-minute opera in English with English dialogue for your students.
- Our show requires attentive silence from the audience.
- The opera may take place in your school gymnasium or cafeteria rather than an auditorium, so students may be seated on the floor.
- You and your students will be invited to ask questions at the end of the performance.

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

Sincerely,

The Atlanta Opera  
Community Engagement Department  
1575 Northside Drive, Suite 350, Atlanta, GA 30318

404-881-8801 - [education@atlantaopera.org](mailto:education@atlantaopera.org)  
[atlantaopera.org](http://atlantaopera.org)



The Atlanta Opera's 2008 performance of *Cinderella*.  
(photo: Tim Wilkerson)

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Are you worried about how to act or what to wear? You are not the only one! Opera stereotypes can make the art form seem intimidating to lots of people. Having an idea of what to expect at the performance may make it easier to enjoy your experience. Here are some suggestions of things you can do before you visit the Atlanta Opera.

## START WITH THE STORY

In simple terms, an opera is just a story that is sung. Before the performance, review the plot synopsis of *Cinderella* (page 8). Ask students to consider the story, characters, and setting of the opera. Use the following questions to lead a class discussion:

- Where is the opera set? What is the time period? Who are the main characters?
- What is this opera about? What struggles do the characters face? What are their relationships to each other?
- What do you expect to see and hear at the opera?

## INTRODUCE VOCABULARY TERMS

Refer to the Glossary of Opera Terms (page 24) and the Glossary of Terms for *Cinderella* (page 9). Discuss with the students which of these terms they may hear and/or see during the performance.

- Are any of these words familiar in other settings?
- Are there root words, prefixes or suffixes that are familiar or lend an idea to the meaning of the term?
- Use the activities on pages 10 and 25 to familiarize students with these terms.

## DESIGN A PROMOTIONAL POSTER

Create a poster to promote the upcoming performance of *Cinderella*. Display the poster in your school and send samples to The Atlanta Opera at [education@atlantaopera.org](mailto:education@atlantaopera.org).



Students at the Cobb Energy Centre for an Atlanta Opera performance. (photo: Andrew Snook)

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 & STUFFY

Not true! Operas tell some of the most interesting, scandalous, and beautiful stories of all time. It is not unusual to find love triangles, murders, fatal illnesses, and messages from beyond the grave.

## 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 are sung in languages other than English. Since most people in our audience do not speak other languages, 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.

## 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 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 & 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 singers' 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.



Make-up artists and wig stylists work to ready singers for performances. (photo: Jeff Roffman)

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.
2. Please turn off all cell phones, pagers, beeping watches and anything else that may go "beep" in the night!
3. Please do not take photographs or video or audio recordings of the performance. The light can affect the singers on stage.
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. You can even 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!





**HEATHER WITT** is a mezzo-soprano originally from the Midwest but is now living in Decatur, GA. She started studying classically when she was sixteen. Ms. Witt received her Masters in Music from Georgia State University and her Bachelors

from Millikin University. Her favorite role that she has performed is Mrs. Lovett from *Sweeney Todd*.



**ALEXANDRA RODRICK**, mezzo-soprano is from Baltimore, Maryland and is the recipient of an Artist Diploma from Boston University's Opera Institute. She has sung all over the country, and some of her favorite roles include

Dorabella in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, Hermia in Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Angelina (Cinderella) in Rossini's *Cinderella*.



Soprano **BRYN HOLDSWORTH** is originally from New Jersey. She went to school in New York City at The Manhattan School of Music where she fell in love with opera. Her favorite role is Norina in *Don Pasquale* and she can't wait

to sing it again with The Atlanta Opera!



**ALAN HIGGS** is a bass-baritone from Melbourne Beach, Florida and attended Florida State University for his Masters Degree. He also has a Bachelors Degree from University of Florida. He chose to be a singer because singing made him happy and

music has always held a special place in his heart. He feels lucky enough to be able to follow his dream and perform around the country doing what he loves!



**ANDREW PARDINI** is thrilled to be serving as Studio Baritone as part of The Atlanta Opera's 2016-17 Studio artist program, making his company and role debuts as William Dale in *Silent Night*, Notary in *Don Pasquale*, and Dandini

in *La Cenerentola*, in addition to covering the role of Malatesta in *Don Pasquale*. Pardini holds a Master of Music degree in Opera Performance from the University of Maryland – Maryland Opera Studio, and a Bachelor of Music degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Southern California – Thornton School of Music. A native of Modesto, California, Pardini is based in the New York metropolitan area.



**KHARY WILSON** is a Tenor from Baton Rouge, Louisiana and currently lives in Atlanta, Georgia. Khary loves to play tennis and hike with his dog, Cayenne. His favorite opera is *Carmen* because of the drama and beautiful music.



**VALERIE POOL** began her first season as resident pianist and vocal coach with The Atlanta Opera in September 2016. Some of her favorite operas that she has played and coached are *Silent Night*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *La bohème*,

*Of Mice and Men*, and *The Magic Flute*. A native of Marietta, Georgia, Valerie attended Kennesaw State University for her undergraduate degree in Piano Performance. She then went to the University of Georgia for a master's degree in Chamber Music and Accompanying, and most recently the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music where she completed an Artist Diploma in Opera Coaching.



The Atlanta Opera's 2008 performance of *Cinderella*.  
(photo: Tim Wilkerson)

Cinderella is sitting by the fire making coffee for her step-sisters Clorinda and Tisbe, as they primp and admire themselves in the mirror. While Cinderella goes about her work, a knock is heard at the door. It is Alidoro, a philosopher and a friend of the Prince. He is disguised as a beggar. The two sisters are disgusted, and they curtly dismiss him. Cinderella takes pity on him and offers him a cup of coffee and a piece of bread, annoying her step-sisters greatly. The quarrel is interrupted by the entrance of the Prince's courtiers. They announce that the Prince, Don Ramiro, is coming to escort them to the ball where he will select the most beautiful and charming woman to be his bride. Both Clorinda and Tisbe are convinced that their charms will make the Prince fall in love with them easily, and they go to prepare for the Prince's visit and the upcoming ball.

When the Prince arrives, he is disguised as his valet, Dandini. He maintains this disguise because he is in search of a bride who will love him for himself and not for his wealth and position. Upon seeing Cinderella, he is taken by her charm and beauty. Cinderella and the Prince fall in love at first sight and express their feelings in a beautiful love duet. The romantic mood is broken when the lazy sisters, who are preparing for the ball in an upstairs room,

order Cinderella to come upstairs to help them. Cinderella dutifully goes to her sisters' aid, leaving the Prince alone and bewildered about his feelings for this woman who has captured his heart. His musings are interrupted by the arrival of the real Dandini who is masquerading as the Prince. The Prince and Dandini leave, but Alidoro stays behind and promises to help Cinderella get to the ball. The next scene takes place in the Prince's palace. Prince Ramiro, still disguised as the Prince's valet, has seen enough of Clorinda and Tisbe by this time to know that neither of them could make him happy.

The girls are determined to capture Dandini, who is still disguised as the Prince. When Dandini tells the sisters that he can only marry one of them, he suggests that the other marry his valet (who is really the Prince in disguise). The sisters are thoroughly disgusted, and they refuse. The arrival of an elegant, veiled lady is announced and Clorinda and Tisbe become extremely jealous. When the unknown lady removes her veil, they are all surprised by how much she looks like Cinderella. Clorinda and Tisbe decide that it couldn't possibly be their Cinderella; therefore, there is no cause for alarm. By this time, Dandini, who is still disguised as the Prince, has fallen in love with Cinderella and asks her to marry him. Cinderella refuses and confesses her love for his "valet". The Prince overhears her, comes forward, and proposes to her. Cinderella admits that she loves him, but before consenting to be his bride, the Prince must first find out who she really is. She gives him a bracelet which matches another she is wearing and swiftly departs as the clock strikes twelve.

Cinderella is sitting in front of the fire in her old tattered clothes. Clorinda and Tisbe scowl at Cinderella, who resembles their rival, the unknown lady at the ball. They comment on the fact that she is still there, and therefore, couldn't possibly have been at the ball. A storm rages outside and the Prince seeks shelter in the house. The Prince notices that the bracelet she wears is the companion of the one he holds. Clorinda and Tisbe, unable to understand, rudely order Cinderella away. The Prince grows angry and threatens them with his displeasure. Cinderella, on behalf of her step-sisters, begs for the Prince's forgiveness. She also tells her step-sisters that she forgives them. She says she would like to be their sister as well as their friend.



**ADVICE**

an opinion or suggestion about what someone should do

**ASSESSMENT**

an idea or opinion about something

**BEGUILING**

to attract or interest someone

**BEWILDERED**

to confuse someone very much

**BRUISER**

a large, strong man

**CINDERS**

a very small piece of burned material

**CONFECTION**

a very sweet food

**DELICIOUS**

very pleasing or enjoyable

**DISCREETLY**

not likely to be seen or noticed by many people

**DISGUISE**

clothes or other things that you wear so that people will not recognize you

**GARMENTS**

a piece of clothing

**RAGGEDY**

not in good condition

**ROYALTY**

members of a royal family – example: king, queen, prince, princess

**SASHAY**

to walk in a slow and confident way that makes people notice you

**SITUATION**

an important or sudden problem

**VALET**

a man's personal male servant

**ACTIVITY** WORD SEARCH

R	A	G	G	E	D	Y	S	I	T	U	A	T	I	O	N	S	F
C	G	A	R	M	E	N	T	S	G	C	B	D	B	A	B	A	Q
V	O	C	P	G	G	O	Q	L	G	R	P	I	E	S	E	S	F
D	E	N	I	M	W	E	Y	C	D	O	W	S	W	S	G	H	A
I	I	D	F	N	B	A	J	R	S	Y	P	C	I	E	U	A	D
P	E	S	V	E	D	R	F	Q	Z	A	J	R	L	S	I	Y	V
E	T	C	G	A	C	E	U	L	J	L	S	E	D	S	L	E	I
O	A	C	A	U	L	T	R	I	L	T	Z	E	E	M	I	L	C
H	C	N	G	P	I	E	I	S	S	Y	Y	T	R	E	N	K	E
E	V	B	Q	R	F	S	T	O	W	E	U	L	E	N	G	X	T
J	C	S	A	C	N	B	E	D	N	R	R	Y	D	T	O	W	L
D	E	L	I	C	I	O	U	S	G	K	B	Z	P	L	J	V	Z

Find the following words in the puzzle.

Words are hidden → ↓ and ↘ .

ADVICE  
ASSESSMENT  
BEGUILING  
BEWILDERED  
BRUISER  
CINDERS

CONFECTION  
DELICIOUS  
DISCREETLY  
DISGUISE  
GARMENTS  
RAGGEDY

ROYALTY  
SASHAY  
SITUATION  
VALET



**Gioacchino Rossini** was born on February 29, 1792, in Pesaro, Italy. His father, Giuseppe, was the town trumpeter as well as a horn player in the local brass band. His mother, Anna, was a baker's daughter. They were both members of a traveling theatrical company, Giuseppe playing in the orchestra and Anna singing on stage. As a child, little Gioacchino studied singing and horn playing at home. At the age of twelve, the family settled in Bologna, Italy where he could pursue his musical studies to the fullest. He soon began to earn money as a chorus master, an accompanist and a singer, particularly in churches. His work in music was so impressive that at the age of fourteen he was awarded a great honor – he was elected a Fellow of the *Accademia Filarmonica*. At age fifteen, he entered the conservatory where he pursued studies in composition, counterpoint, cello and piano. He was particularly interested in studying the music of Haydn and Mozart, and he imitated their orchestration and fluency. During his lifetime, Rossini was described as the “Italian Mozart”, a compliment he must have thoroughly enjoyed because he considered Mozart his idol. Like Mozart's, Rossini's music has laughter, and he understood the human voice and its possibilities.

Rossini wrote his first opera in 1810, *La Cenerentola* (*The Marriage Contract*), at the age of eighteen. By his twenty-second birthday, he had several successes to his credit. By 1829, he produced thirty-six operas. From then until his

death on November 13, 1868, he composed only nonoperatic music at sporadic intervals.

***La Cenerentola (Cinderella)***, Rossini's nineteenth opera, was composed in a remarkable twenty-four days before premiering in Rome on January 25, 1817. The original story of “Cinderella” had been written by Charles Perrault, a Frenchman who lived in the seventeenth century.

Before Rossini set this well-known fairy tale, the story had attracted at least three other composers. Rossini and his librettist, Jacopo Ferretti, made some surprising changes in Perrault's story. They decided to base their libretto on Charles-Guillaume Etienne's libretto for the opera *Cendrillon (Cinderella)* by Nicolas Isouard.

This opera based on the Cinderella story was first performed in Paris in 1810. Being a very practical man and unattracted to the supernatural, Rossini decided to remove all magic from the tale. He concentrated instead on the opposing qualities and characters of the leading figures in the story. Thus, there is no fairy godmother, no pumpkin coach, no horses and footmen made of mice, no midnight chiming bell, and above all, no glass slipper. Instead, it is the Prince's friend and tutor, Alidoro, who manipulates the plot so that Cinderella wins the Prince, and the glass slipper becomes a down to earth bracelet (one of a pair). Rossini retains the two ugly and self-centered step-sisters, but the wicked step-mother becomes a step-father, whose character is more sympathetic but also somewhat bumbling. Originally, Rossini planned to call his opera by the original name given to its heroine, “Angelina”, with the subtitle “The Triumph of Goodness”, as if to emphasize the human rather than the magical quality of the work. While he decided to call the opera *La Cenerentola*, goodness still triumphed.

The work ends with one of the most beautiful and difficult arias ever written, in which Cinderella forgives her sisters for past wrongs, telling them she will not only be a sister to them but a friend to them as well. There are wonderful human insights in Rossini's operas. His ability to transform characters into people with whom the audience can relate is what he did quite well through his music. That is why the composer and his music, particularly his operas, are still celebrated today, more than two hundred years after his birth.

Used by permission of the Washington Opera



## Rossini

**1792** Rossini is born on February 29th

## World History

**1792** Gas lighting is introduced in England

**1806** Rossini composes his first full-scale opera, *Demetrio e Polibio* (Demetrius and Polybius)

**1812** The War of 1812 between America and Britain begins

**1812** The Brothers Grimm fairy tale collection is published

**1813** Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri* (The Italian Girl in Algiers) opens in Venice

**1813** Napoleon is imprisoned on the island of St. Helen

**1816** Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (The Barber of Seville) premieres in Rome, under the title *Almaviva*, or the Futile Precaution. It flopped

**1816** The metronome is invented in Germany

**1817** Rossini's *La Cenerentola* (Cinderella) premieres in Rome

**1817** America purchases Florida from Spain for \$5 million

**1822** Rossini marries Isabella Colbran

**1822** The accordion is invented in Germany

**1824** Rossini receives a 10-year contract from Charles X of France



NAPOLEON



METRONOME



ACCORDIAN



**1824** A train is pulled for the first time by a steam locomotive

**1825** America's first fully-staged opera performance takes place at the Park Theater, New York City: the American premiere of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*

**1829** Rossini's last opera, *Guillaume Tell* (William Tell), premieres in Paris. Following this success, Rossini decides to retire from composing

**1829** W.A. Burt invents the typewriter

**1829** Louis Braille invents embossed printing, permitting the blind to read

**1830** The French government collapses and Rossini loses his contract

**1830** New Orleans burns down in the Great Fire of 1830

**1837** Rossini leaves Paris for Bologna, where he falls victim to a prolonged illness

**1837** Oberlin College enrolls women, becoming the first co-ed college in the U.S.

**1845** Isabella Colbran dies

**1846** Rossini marries Olympe Pélissier

**1848** Wisconsin becomes the 30th U.S. state

**1855** Rossini and Olympe return to Paris

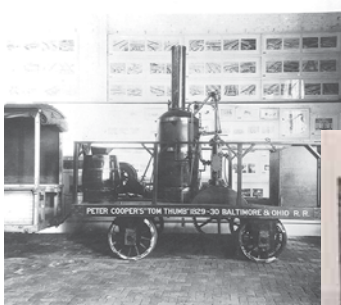
**1867** African-American men are given the right to vote in Washington, D.C.

**1868** Louisa May Alcott writes *Little Women*.

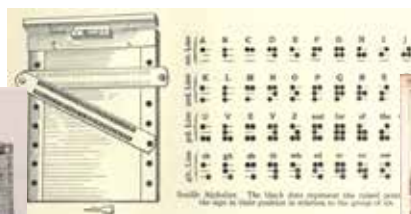
**1868** The first professional baseball team is founded: the Cincinnati Red Stockings

**1868** Rossini dies in Passay, France on November 13th

## LOCOMOTIVE



## BRAILLE



**TYPEWRITER**



**CINCINNATI RED STOCKINGS**



The Atlanta Opera's 2008 performance of *Cinderella*.  
(photo: Tim Wilkerson)

*Cinderella* is a prime example of the early 19th-century operatic style known as *bel canto*—in Italian, beautiful song or singing. Its most famous composers, together with Rossini, include Gaetano Donizetti and Vincenzo Bellini.

*Bel canto* is characterized by:

- a pure, clear vocal sound with an emphasis on smooth and even delivery
- precise control of the singer's voice in terms of pitch, dynamics, enunciation, and transition from each note to the next
- vocal agility displayed in runs, trills, cadenzas, and other ornaments (collectively known as *coloratura*)
- a straightforward, simple orchestration that directs the focus on the vocal line

The *bel canto* style is rooted in the tradition of Italian opera to showcase the human voice. Singers were expected to embellish their music and improvise ornamentation beyond what was set down in the score.

By the time Rossini wrote *Cinderella*, more of these vocal feats would be notated by the composer than had been the case in earlier decades. But singers would still add their own flourishes and personal touches.

What makes these passages especially notable is the composer's dual purpose, transcending the conventions of the form. Rossini creates breathtaking sounds, but they always carry specific information about characters' moods and relationships.



Here is a short list of Cinderella fairy tales from around the world:

**Rhodopis** (Egypt)  
**Chūjōhime** (Japan)  
**Sootface** (Native American - Ojibwa)  
**Chinye** (Kenya)  
**Pepelyouga** (Serbia)  
**The Gift of the Crocodile** (India)  
**Ye Xian** (China)  
**Fair, Brown, and Trembling** (Ireland, from the Celtic tradition)  
**Domitila** (Mexico)  
**Tam and Cam** (Vietnam)  
**Vasilissa's Doll** (Russia)  
**The Way Meat Loves Salt** (Poland, from the Jewish tradition)  
**Rushen Coatie** (Scotland)  
**Girl Clad in Mouseskin** (Denmark)  
**The Hearth Cat** (Portugal)  
**The Little Red Fish and the Clog of Gold** (Arabia)  
**The Magic Orange Tree** (Haiti)

Western audiences are most familiar with the version of Cinderella written by French author Charles Perrault, who is largely responsible for developing the fairy tale genre. Perrault's stories were based on folk tales, most of which were passed down orally from generation to generation. In 1697, he published Cinderella, or The Little Glass Slipper. The Brothers Grimm wrote their own version in 1812, and were followed themselves by the animated Disney film in 1950.

The Cinderella fairy tale is not unique to Europe or the Western world. While scholars disagree about the exact number, it is believed that there are over 1,000 variations of Cinderella from around the globe. While each one differs in setting or plot details, the basic outline is the same: a young person (most often a girl, sometimes a boy) is mistreated. They suffer at the hands of a family member whose own lifestyle is one of leisure or idleness, and who may lavish gifts and attention on other members of the family.

Despite the cruelty, the heroine or hero remains kind-hearted and modest, often in the hope that they will one day receive love and affection. A valuable prize is put before the family and the wicked ones

scheme to win it. In the end, Cinderella, with the help of animal or human friends, triumphs and receives the prize. In most versions, the prize is the love of a handsome prince and a life of luxury. The widest variation between the Cinderella tales is the ending: in some versions, Cinderella forgives the cruelty of family members, while in other versions, the family is severely punished.

How can one fairy tale appear in so many different cultures? Fairy tales are one category within the larger genre of folklore, which includes myths, legends, music traditions, oral history, proverbs, and traditional beliefs specific to a culture. A culture's folklore comes from the experiences of the people within that culture.

Cinderella is largely a tale about feeling powerless and unloved, and the fear of being mistreated or undervalued. These feelings are not unique to any one culture, but are universal experiences. So, too, is the desire for revenge on those we feel have wronged us. Cinderella's rise from lowly servant to Princess is a type of revenge, and is her reward for being a good person.

## ACTIVITY FIND THE COUNTRIES

Find and identify the countries from the list (on the previous page) on the map:



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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.

## 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.



The Atlanta Opera’s 2009 production of *Orfeo ed Euridice*. (photo: Tim Wilkerson)





## 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 Frideric 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.



The Atlanta Opera's 2016 production of *The Pirates of Penzance*. (photo: Jeff Roffman)

## ATLANTA OPERA HISTORY

Opera has been an integral part of Atlanta's cultural fabric since October 1866 when the Ghioni and Sussini Grand Italian Opera Company presented three operas in the city. The performances were well received and soon after, small touring companies began to bring more full-length operas to Atlanta.

Atlantans became avid fans of opera and in 1910 The Metropolitan Opera of New York toured Atlanta for the first time. Once a year, for a full week during spring, people flocked to the city to see the Met's wonderful performances and enjoy the many parties that were hosted throughout the city.

The opera was the place to be seen, with people crowding the lobbies and balconies of the various performance venues. The Met tour returned to Atlanta every spring until 1986, with the exception of 1931-1939 due to financial complications of the Great Depression.



The Metropolitan Opera Company's 1968 production of *Tosca* with Gabriella Tucci as Tosca, singing "Vissi d'arte."  
(photo: The Metropolitan Opera Company, *Tosca* 1968 touring season program book / The Atlanta Opera archives)

With the success and popularity of the Met's annual tour came a desire for Atlanta to have its own opera company. Soon, several smaller, local opera companies began to operate in the area. In 1980, The Atlanta Civic Opera Association was created through the merging of two smaller companies, The Atlanta Lyric Opera and the Georgia Opera. In 1987 the company changed names to The Atlanta Opera, Inc. Since its early beginnings, the company has grown and changed tremendously.

The Atlanta Opera was the first resident company in the new Cobb Energy Performance Arts Centre in the fall of 2007. The Atlanta Opera season runs similarly to an academic calendar, opening in the fall and closing in the spring. It presents three mainstage productions at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre, with four performances each. We offer two additional productions at smaller venues, often of special productions or contemporary works best staged in smaller, more intimate settings, with three performances each. We also invite students to attend special "student short" matinees.



Leontyne Price was one of the first African American featured singers with The Metropolitan Opera Company. This photo appeared in the program for the 1964 tour of *Don Giovanni*, in which she sang the role of Donna Anna.  
(photo: The Metropolitan Opera Company, *Carmen* 1964 touring season program book / The Atlanta Opera archives)

## 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:

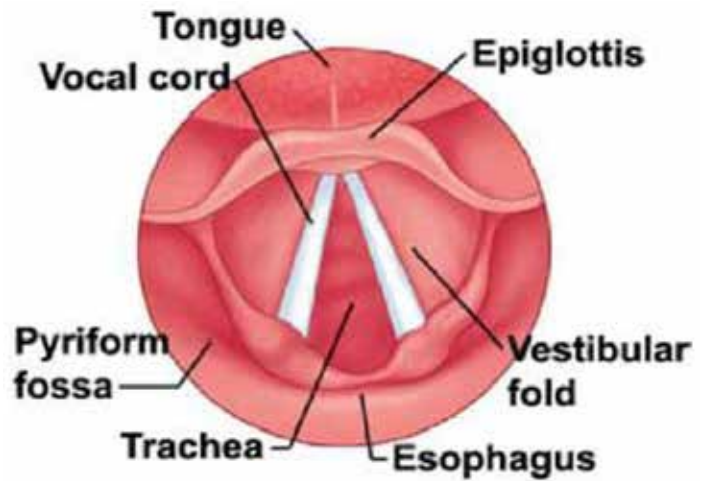
- an extensive range (the ability to sing both high and low)
- varying degrees of volume (loud and soft)
- resonance in the chest and sinus cavities (produces a “hooty,” full or round sound)
- an ability to project or fill a large space without amplification

## 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 who could release their first albums as teenagers!

## THE VOCAL CORDS

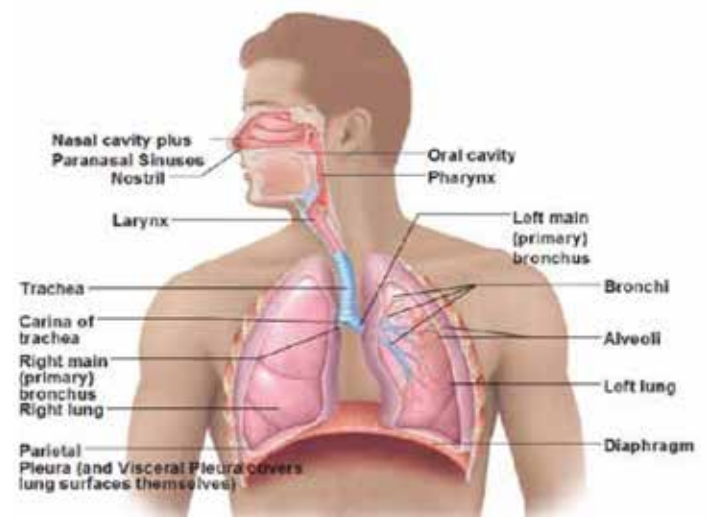
Science tells us that all sound is made by two things vibrating together. The same concept applies when we talk or sing. The sounds we make are really just the vibration of two little muscles called the vocal cords. The vocal cords are held in the larynx, which is sometimes called the voicebox or (in 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 cords to pull together until they’re touching lightly. Then, air pushes through them,



and the vocal cords 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 cords vibrate. A faster vibration creates a higher pitch. The length of the cords also affects the pitch of the voice. Longer cords equal a lower voice.

## 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 entire torso area (lungs, ribs, diaphragm and viscera). As they breathe in, each part of this network does its job: the lungs fill up with air, which forces the ribs to expand and the diaphragm (a flat muscle below the lungs) to move down. As the diaphragm descends, the





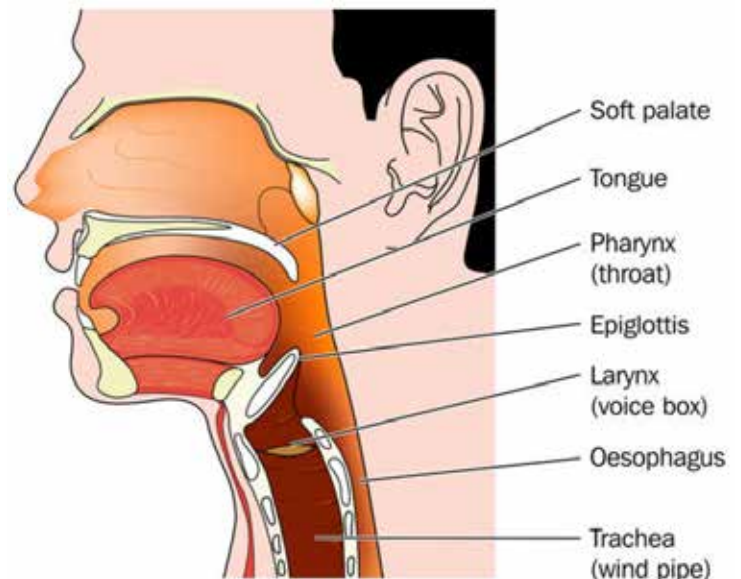
viscera (stomach, intestines and other organs) are forced down and out. Singers describe this feeling as fatness in the low stomach or filling an inner-tube around their waist. Expelling the air, or singing, is essentially a slow and controlled movement of those muscles. If all of the air escapes from 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.



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:

**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! Some modern day sopranos are Beyonce and Taylor Swift.



Butterfly from *Madama Butterfly*

**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. Lady Gaga would be considered a mezzo.



Carmen from *Carmen*

**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! Today's pop tenors include Justin Timberlake and Adam Levine.



Faust from *Faust*

**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. Elvis Presley and Josh Groban are examples of baritones.



Figaro from *The Barber of Seville*

**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 rumbling tones. A few characters that would be considered basses are Darth Vader and Chef on South Park.



Sarastro from *The Magic Flute*

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?

(photos: Tim Wilkerson, Ken Howard, Jeff Roffman)

In addition to the singers and musicians you see on stage and in the orchestra pit, there are many other folks who help bring the show to life!

**Music Director/Conductor** is responsible for the musical excellence of an opera. They ensure the singers understand the music, sing in the appropriate style, and work with the orchestra to make sure everyone is playing correctly together.

**Stage Director** is responsible for the action on the stage. They work with the designers to create the concept for the production. He or she helps the singers understand why their characters would act in certain ways, and how the characters communicate with each other.

**Choreographer** creates movement or dancing for operas. They study dance, movement and do research on different historical periods.

**Production Manager** helps make the director's and designers' vision a reality by working with the shops that build the scenery and costumes.

**Technical Director** makes sure that the lighting, scenery, costumes and props are coordinated and that the crews who handle those elements know what needs to be done during the performance.



The Atlanta Opera stage manager calling lighting cues backstage, during the 2016 production of *Silent Night*. (photo: Jeff Roffman)

**Stage Manager** manages the rehearsal schedule and takes detailed notes about the stage directions, lighting cues and scenery changes. During the performance, they are backstage calling all the technical cues and making sure the show runs smoothly.

**Set Designer** creates the concept for the physical environment of the opera and works with the director to create the scenery that helps tell the story. They research history, color, space, architecture, and furniture.

**Lighting Designer** helps create the mood of each scene with light, shadow, and color. They also study the music and work with the set designer and the director to decide how light will be used to help tell the story.

**Costume Designer** creates the look of the characters with clothing. They choose the fabrics and supervise the construction of the costumes, or selection of pre-made costumes.

**Wig and Make-Up Designer** creates the hair and make-up styling for the show in tandem with the costumes and the production design. They are also responsible for any special effects make-up like scars, wounds or blood.

**Wardrobe Manager** makes sure all the costumes are clean and pressed and coordinates all the costume changes. Dressers help the singers put on their complicated costumes and change their costumes during the performance.

**Properties (Props) Master** is responsible for all the objects that the singers touch or move that are not part of their costumes. They do a lot of research to find the perfect period newspaper, set of glasses, bouquet of flowers, or book. They make artificial things look real on stage, like food or drink.

**Crew and Stagehands** includes carpenters and electricians. They assist with the installation of the set on stage once it has been built. During the performance they are responsible for set and lighting changes.

**Act**

A group of scenes with a common theme, such as a specific time or place.

**Aria**

Italian for “air”; A piece sung by one person.

**Bravo**

Italian for “nicely done”; shouted by audience members after a performance

**Cast**

All the singers and actors who appear on stage

**Chorus**

A musical piece sung by a group of people.

**Conductor**

The individual who determines the musical direction of the performance

**Duet**

A song sung by two singers or voices

**Finale**

The final musical number in an opera, often involving multiple people

**Libretto**

The words or text of an opera

**Overture**

Musical introduction played by the orchestra

**Quartet**

A song sung by four singers or voices

**Recitative**

Speech-like singing in-between arias that advances the plot

**Score**

A notated piece of music showing each part on its own staff

**Trio**

A song sung by three singers or voices



**ACTIVITY** ***A NIGHT AT THE OPERA WORD MATCH***

Match up the opera term with its appropriate definition.

<b>Act</b>	A song sung by two singers or voices
<b>Aria</b>	All the singers and actors who appear on stage
<b>Bravo</b>	The individual who determines the musical direction of the performance
<b>Cast</b>	A notated piece of music showing each part on its own staff
<b>Chorus</b>	The words or text of an opera
<b>Conductor</b>	A song sung by three singers or voices
<b>Duet</b>	Italian for “air”; A piece sung by one person
<b>Finale</b>	The final musical number in an opera, often involving multiple people
<b>Libretto</b>	A musical piece sung by a group of people
<b>Overture</b>	Speech-like singing in-between arias that advances the plot
<b>Quartet</b>	Musical introduction played by the orchestra
<b>Recitative</b>	Italian for “nicely done”; shouted by audience members after a performance
<b>Score</b>	A group of scenes with a common theme, such as a specific time or place
<b>Trio</b>	A song sung by four singers or voices

## ACTIVITY WRITING ABOUT WHAT WE SEE & HEAR

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**.

### FACTS & OPINIONS

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 dizzyingly 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?

### THE ART OF THE ADJECTIVE

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?

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