

## Welcome to Manitoba Opera

This Study Guide has been created to assist you in preparing your students for their visit to the opera. It is our hope that you will be able to add this to your existing curriculum in order to expand your students' understanding of opera, literature, history, and the fine arts. Materials in the Study Guide may be copied and distributed to students. Some students may wish to go over the information at home if there is insufficient time to discuss in class. Make the opera experience more meaningful and enjoyable by sharing with them knowledge and background on opera and *Otello* before they attend.

*Please Note: The Dress Rehearsal is the last opportunity the singers will have on stage to work with the orchestra before Opening Night. Since vocal demands are so great on opera singers, some singers choose not to sing in full voice during the Dress Rehearsal in order to preserve their vocal chords and avoid unnecessary strain.*



### Table of Contents

A Short Introduction to Opera .....	2
Audience Etiquette .....	3
Cast List .....	4
The Composer: Giuseppe Verdi .....	5
The Librettist: Arrigo Boito .....	6
Synopsis .....	7
What to Listen for .....	8
Recordings of <i>Otello</i> .....	9
Suggested Books .....	9
The Operatic Voice .....	10
Vocal Categories .....	11
Glossary .....	12
Workshop #1- Stage Business .....	17
Stage Facts .....	18
Workshop #2- <i>Otello</i> .....	19
Workshop #3- Writing a Review of <i>Otello</i> .....	22
Optional Activity / Approach .....	25
Peer Evaluation .....	26
Self Evaluation .....	27
Other Activities .....	28
Opera Comprehension Test .....	29
Teacher's Evaluation Sheet .....	31

## A Short Introduction to Opera

An **opera**, like a play, is a dramatic form of theatre that includes scenery, **props**, and costumes. In opera, however, the actors are trained singers who sing their lines instead of speaking them. An **orchestra** accompanies the singers. A **conductor** coordinates both the singers on stage and the musicians in the **orchestra pit**.

Opera consists of many dimensions: the human voice, orchestral music, the visual arts (scenery, costumes and special effects), drama (tragedy or comedy), and occasionally dance. The melding of these elements can make you cry tears of joy or sadness, produce laughter or anger, but most importantly transport you to a magical land of music and song.

Opera has its roots in Greek drama and originated in Florence, Italy, in the late 1500's, with a small group of men who were members of a Camerata (Italian for society). The intellectuals, poets and musicians of the Camerata decided they wanted words to be a featured aspect of music. They used ancient Greek drama as their inspiration, including the use of a **chorus** to comment on the action. The Camerata laid down three principles for their new art form:

- ◆ The text must be understood; the accompaniment must be very simple and should not distract from the words.
- ◆ The words must be sung with correct and natural declamation, as if they were spoken, and must avoid the rhythms of songs.
- ◆ The melody must interpret the feeling of the text.

The first significant composer to fully develop the ideas of the Camerata was Jacopo Peri (1561-1633), whose opera *Dafne*, based on a Greek myth, was performed in 1594 and is regarded as the first opera. Operas continue to be composed today.

Operas are divided into scenes and **acts** that contain different types of vocal pieces for one or many singers. An **aria** is a vocal solo that focuses on a character's emotions rather than actions. A **recitative** is sung dialogue or speech that occurs between arias and **ensembles**.

**Composers** write the **score** or the music for the opera. Sometimes the composer will also write the text of the opera, but most often they work with a **librettist**. The story of the opera is written as a **libretto**, a text that is easily set to music. In the past, the libretto was also bound and sold to the audience. Today, the audience can easily follow the plot with the use of **surtitles**. Surtitles are the English translation of the libretto, which are projected onto a screen above the stage.

There are several differences between opera and musicals like *Phantom of the Opera*. One significant difference is the 'partnership' found between the music and the drama in an opera. While musicals use songs to help tell a story, in an opera, the music contributes to the drama, it does not only accompany it. The musical style is another important difference between the two art forms; opera is usually **classical** and complex, while musicals feature pop songs and sometimes rock and roll. Also, singers in musicals have microphones hidden in their costumes or wigs to amplify their voices. The voices of opera singers are so strong, no amplification is needed, even in a large venue. Furthermore, operas are almost completely sung, while the use of spoken words are more common to musicals. There are some operas with spoken words and these are called **singspiels** (German) and **opera-comique** (French). Examples are Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and Bizet's *Carmen*, respectively.

All terms in **bold** are defined in the Glossary.

## Audience Etiquette

The following list will help you (and those around you) enjoy the experience of a night at the opera:

- ◆ **Dress** to be comfortable. Many people enjoy dressing up in formal attire.
- ◆ **Arrive** on time. Latecomers disturb the singers and others in the audience. Latecomers will only be seated at suitable breaks - often not until intermission.
- ◆ **Find** your seat with the help of your teacher or an usher.
- ◆ **Remove** your hat. This is customary and is respectful to the artists and to people sitting behind you.
- ◆ **Turn off** cell phones, pagers, digital watch alarms and all electronic devices.
- ◆ **Leave** your camera at home. A flash can be very disturbing to the artists and audience members alike.
- ◆ **Save** all conversations, eating and drinking, and chewing gum, for the intermission. Talking and eating can be disruptive to other audience members and distracts from your ability to be absorbed by the show. The audience is critical to the success of the show – without you, there can be no performance.
- ◆ **Settle in** and get comfortable **before** the performance begins. Read your program before the performance – rustling through the program during the show can disrupt everyone.
- ◆ **Clap** as the lights are dimmed and the conductor appears and bows to the audience. Watch as the conductor then turns to the orchestra and takes up his or her baton to signal the beginning of the opera.
- ◆ **Listen** to the prelude or overture before the curtain rises. It is part of the performance. It is an opportunity to identify common musical themes that may reoccur during the opera.
- ◆ **Sit** still during the performance. Only whisper when it is absolutely necessary, as a whisper is heard all over the theatre, and NEVER (except in an emergency) stand during the performance.
- ◆ **Applaud** (or shout Bravo!) at the end of an aria or chorus piece to show your enjoyment. The end of a piece can be identified by a pause in the music.
- ◆ **Laugh** when something is funny – this is a performance and you are expected to respond!
- ◆ **Read** the English surtitles projected above the stage. Most operas are not sung in English (*Otello* is sung in Italian). Use the surtitles to understand the story.
- ◆ **Listen** for subtleties in the music. The tempo, volume and complexity of the music and singing often depict the “feeling” or “sense” of the action or character. Also, notice repeated words or phrases; they are usually significant.

**Finally, have fun and enjoy the show!!!**

Manitoba Opera  
Presents

# Otello

April 19, 2007, Manitoba Centennial Concert Hall  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Music by Giuseppe Verdi

Libretto by Arrigo Boito

Based on the play Shakespeare's tragedy, *Othello, The Moor of Venice*

Sung in Italian with Italian surtitles

Approximately 3 hours

(With two intermissions (20 minutes and 15 minutes respectively))

## Cast & Crew

Otello, a Moor, general of Venice, Duke of Cyprus	Tenor	Mark Lundberg
Iago, Otello's ensign	Baritone	John Fanning
Cassio, Otello's captain	Tenor	Kurt Lehmann
Roderigo, a gentleman of Venice	Tenor	Benoit Boutet
Lodovico, ambassador of the Venetian republic	Bass	Brian McIntosh
Montano, former Duke of Cyprus	Bass	Gregory Atkinson
Desdemona, wife of Otello	Soprano	Sally Dibblee
Emilia, wife of Iago & chambermaid of Desdemona	Mezzo	Elizabeth Turnbull

Conductor	Tyrone Patterson
Director	Larry Desrochers
Assistant Director	Ann Hodges
Lighting Designer	Bill Williams
Set Designer	Alan Rusnak
Costumes	(Supplied by Malabar)
Stage Manager	Paul Skirzyk
Assistant Stage Manager #1	Jacquie Dawson
Assistant Stage Manager #2	Marilyn Lawrie
Apprentice Stage Manager	Melissa Novecosky

## *About the Composer – Giuseppe Verdi*



Born in October, 1813, in northern Italy during its Napoleonic occupation, Giuseppe Verdi displayed an early interest in music. At age nine, he was playing the church organ in the small town of Busseto. Over the next nine years, the townspeople became sufficiently impressed with Verdi's musical abilities to raise the money to send him to the Conservatory in Milan. At age 18, however, Verdi was considered too old (14 was the average age of the students) and not talented enough for the Conservatory.

Fortunately for Verdi, a merchant and music lover in Busseto, Antonio Barezzi, paid for Verdi to study privately in Milan. After completing his studies, Verdi returned to Busseto to work as a conductor and music instructor. In 1836, he married Barezzi's daughter, Margherita. They moved to Milan and had two children. Sadly, their children died very young and Margherita died in 1839 from encephalitis.

Verdi's first opera, *Oberto*, was performed at La Scala (in Milan) in November, 1839. *Oberto* was well received, but Verdi's second opera, a comedy, was a failure. Coinciding with the loss of his family, Verdi contemplated giving up opera composition. A libretto, virtually forced upon him by the impresario (manager/producer) of La Scala, inspired him to continue composing. The result was Verdi's third and highly successful opera, *Nabucco*, first performed in 1842. It also was an opportunity to Verdi to re-connect with the soprano, Giuseppina Strepponi, whom he ultimately married in 1859.

*Nabucco* was the start of Verdi's ever-growing popularity. Its theme of freedom for enslaved people caught the imaginations of the Italian people who, at that time, wanted a united, free Italy. Verdi became the symbol of that freedom movement. "Viva Verdi" was the independence cry heard during the fight for Italian independence. It was an anagram of his name to mean Vittorio Emmanuel King of Italy – *Vittoria Emanuele Re d'Italia*. In 1871, when Italy became united, Verdi's most famous opera, *Aida*, was produced.

Despite his great success as an opera composer, Verdi had many other interests outside the world of opera. In 1849, Verdi and his partner (and ultimately wife), Giuseppina Strepponi, moved to a rural estate near his home town. There, he planted a tree for every opera he wrote. His employees were paid well and he extended his humanitarianism to others in society, including founding a hospital near his estate and establishing a home for aging musicians in Milan. He referred to this latter, the Casa di Riposo, as "my last and best work."

Verdi even did a brief stint as a politician, serving, in 1863, as (elected) deputy to the newly formed Italian Parliament. A passionate Italian patriot, Verdi hated politics and did not remain long in the parliament. He was made a lifetime Senator by King Victor Emmanuel in 1874, but Verdi only showed up once and that was to take his oath.

Two decades of tremendous creativity, from 1851 to 1871, culminated with *Aida*. Commissioned by the Khedive of Egypt as part of the celebration of the opening of the Suez Canal, *Aida* was produced with no expense spared. Props included a shield and helmet made of solid silver, a crown of pure gold, and a cast of 300 in the second act triumphal march.

From 1872 to 1883, Verdi temporarily 'retired' from opera writing. He continued to compose music, including the *Manzoni Requiem*, considered his most important non-operatic work. Much of this time period, however, was devoted to his farm. Then, in 1884, he began work on his second-last opera, *Otello*. It premiered in 1887 to great anticipation and then to great acclaim. At age 80, Verdi wrote one last opera, *Falstaff*, based on another Shakespearian play.

Verdi died in January, 1901. Italy mourned his death, closing schools, holding a special session of the Senate where eulogies were read, and thousands jammed the streets to see his funeral procession.

### About the Librettist – Arrigo Boito

Born Enrico Boito in Padua, Italy, in 1842, Boito changed his name to Arrigo as a young man. A poet, novelist, and composer, he wrote one opera, *Mefistofele*. His father, a painter, abandoned the family when Boito was still young. His mother succeeded in having Boito accepted into the Milan Conservatory on scholarship. He won a prize that allowed him to travel abroad to study for two years where he was influenced by Beethoven's and Wagner's operas. Boito composed cantatas and operas, but is only known for *Mefistofele*. Its original version was more than six hours long but he revised it and today it is performed by many opera companies.

Boito is recognized for his gifted writing skills, as evidenced in his poetry and in his libretto for Verdi's operas *Otello* and *Falstaff*, and for Ponchielli's opera, *La Gioconda*.

## Synopsis – *Otello*

Late 1400's at a coastal city on the island of Cyprus.

**ACT I.** Cyprus, late fifteenth century. The Moor Otello, governor of the island and a general in the Venetian army, arrives in port as a storm rages. Iago, Otello's ensign, confers with Roderigo, a fop who is in Cyprus because of his unrequited love for Desdemona, a Venetian beauty recently married to Otello. Promising to help Roderigo, Iago says Desdemona should soon tire of Otello. Iago adds that he has reasons for revenge on Otello because he passed him over for advancement, promoting Cassio instead. Iago proposes a toast; when Cassio declines any more drink, Iago says he cannot refuse to salute Otello's new wife. Cassio consents and grows tipsy as Iago provokes Roderigo to a duel with Cassio. When Montano, Otello's predecessor in command, tries to separate the two, Cassio attacks him as well. Otello comes out of the castle to restore order. When he sees Desdemona disturbed by the fray, he takes away Cassio's recent promotion. Sending everyone home, Otello turns to his bride, and they recall their courtship. Leading her back into the castle, Otello kisses her.

**ACT II.** A room in the castle, opening on a garden. Iago tells Cassio that by presenting his case to Desdemona he can be reinstated, because Otello is influenced by his wife. As soon as Cassio is out of sight, Iago declares his belief that a cruel God created man wicked and life has no meaning. Iago watches as Cassio approaches Desdemona in the garden and when Otello comes in, the lieutenant makes casual remarks about Desdemona's fidelity. Softened by his wife's beauty, Otello greets her, but she brings up the question of Cassio's demotion, annoying him. When she offers a handkerchief to wipe his brow, he throws it to the ground where her attendant, Emilia, retrieves it. As Desdemona tries to calm Otello, Iago orders Emilia (his wife) to give him the handkerchief. Otello asks to be alone and the others leave, except for Iago, who hangs back to observe Otello's growing suspicion. To fan the flames, Iago invents a story about how Cassio spoke lovingly of Desdemona in his sleep. Then he mentions her handkerchief, saying he saw it in Cassio's hand. Beside himself, Otello swears to have vengeance, and Iago joins in the oath.

**ACT III.** In the armory, Iago tells Otello that more proof is forthcoming of his betrayal by his wife and Cassio. Desdemona enters and Otello speaks calmly until she revives the subject of Cassio. When Otello demands the handkerchief he gave her, she again pleads for Cassio. Otello calls the shocked woman a courtesan and dismisses her. He cries out that heaven could have afflicted him with anything but this, then hides as Iago returns with Cassio. Iago flashes the handkerchief he stole and leads Cassio on in banter in such a way that Otello overhears only fragments and thinks they are talking about Desdemona. As trumpets announce dignitaries from Venice, Otello vows to kill his wife that very night. The Moor greets Lodovico, who recalls him to Venice and appoints Cassio to govern Cyprus. Losing control at this news, Otello pushes his wife to the floor with insults. He orders everyone out and collapses in a seizure as Iago gloats over him, crying, "Behold the Lion!"

**ACT IV.** As Emilia helps Desdemona prepare for bed, the frightened woman sings of a maiden forsaken by her lover. Startled by the wind, she bids Emilia an impassioned farewell and kneels in prayer before retiring. As soon as she has dozed off, Otello enters through a secret door and kisses his wife. This wakens her, but the jealous man, deaf to her protestations of innocence, strangles her. Emilia knocks with news that Cassio has killed Roderigo; entering, she is horrified to find the dying Desdemona and summons Cassio, Lodovico, and Iago, who escapes when his wife reveals his

treachery. Realizing his tragedy, Otello pulls out a concealed dagger and stabs himself, dying upon a final kiss.

Courtesy of Opera News

## What to Listen For

- "Una vela!" ~ "A sail!" (the opening chorus)
- "Inaffia l'ugola!" (Iago and Cassio's drinking song)
- "Già nella notte densa" ~ "Already in the dense night" (Otello and Desdemona's Act I duet)
- "Credo in un Dio crudel" ~ "I believe in a cruel God" (Iago's second act aria)
- "Sì, per ciel" ~ "Yes, by heaven" (Otello and Iago's vengeance duet)
- "Dio, mi potevi scagliar!" (Otello's Act III aria)
- "A terra!" (the concerted piece that ends Act III)
- Willow Song and Ave Maria (Desdemona's extended Act IV solo scene)
- "Niun mi tema" (Otello's death)



## Sampling of Disc and Video Recordings

### CD

For a comprehensive list of recordings of *Otello*, from 1931 to 2003, see:  
<http://www.verdisdisco.de/showopera2.php3?oper=otello>

### DVD

<http://www.naxos.com/searchresults.asp>

## Suggested Books

### General

Boyden, Matthew. *Opera, The Rough Guide*, The Rough Guides Ltd, 1997.

Brener, Milton. *Opera Offstage*, Walker & Co., 1996.

Cross, Milton. *The Complete Stories of the Great Operas*, Doubleday, 1952.

Earl of Harewood, ed. *The New Kobbe's Complete Opera Book*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976.

Forman, Sir Denis. *A Night at the Opera*, Random House Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1994.

Jellinek, George. *History Through the Opera Glass*, Pro. Am Music Resources, 1994.

Orrey, Leslie (Rodney Milnes ed.). *A Concise History of Opera*, Thames and Hudson, 1987.

Plotkin, Fred. *Opera 101: A Complete Guide to Learning & Loving Opera*, Hyperion, 1994.

Pogue, David Speck, Scott. *Opera for Dummies*, John Wiley & Sons, 1997.

Sadie, Stanley, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Macmillan Press Ltd., 1992.

Simon, Henry. *One Hundred Great Operas and Their Stories*, Doubleday, 1989.

Walsh, Michael. *Who's Afraid of Opera?* Fireside, 1994.

## The Operatic Voice

Operatic singing developed in Europe during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The vocal demands are far greater on an opera singer than on any other singer. Opera singers rarely use microphones, and therefore must develop their voices to make a sound that will project and be heard above an orchestra and be heard throughout a large theatre.

After years of practice and study, an opera singer learns to use his or her body as an amplification device. By controlling the muscles of the diaphragm (a muscle beneath the lungs and above the stomach) the singer can regulate the amount of breath used. By tightening the diaphragm the singer can push out the right amount of air to make the vocal cords vibrate. The speed at which the cords vibrate determines the pitch. As the sound passes through the mouth it resonates in the upper chest cavities and the sinus cavities of the face and head. These cavities act as small echo chambers and help amplify the sound. The shape of the mouth and the placement of the tongue near the lips contribute to the tone and sound of the words.

Many singers begin their operatic training in university. Opera students study singing, music history, composition and vocal pedagogy (voice teaching). In addition to music classes, they study diction and often study at least one foreign language. After university, singers begin to work in the professional world. Their first roles are usually small parts, but if they continue to study and train, they may move on to the bigger principal roles.

Professional singers develop a number of roles in their repertoire. Since the principal artists are required to have their parts memorized before rehearsals begin, singers must prepare well in advance of each contract. Singers have voice teachers who help them refine their singing techniques and many will also have an acting coach. Even a well-established singer will have a vocal coach to teach singing and acting techniques for specific roles.

Each person's vocal tract is constructed differently. The roles that a singer performs are dependent mostly upon their vocal range, but within the vocal ranges, there are many colours and weights of voice that further determine which roles he or she can sing safely. Vocal colour refers to the richness of the sound and vocal weight refers to how powerful a voice sounds.

After the role has been studied intensely and the singer is hired to perform, they arrive at the opera company for the rehearsals. This time is spent refining the music with the conductor and staging the action with the stage director. Each director has a different idea of how the character should be played, and each conductor has a different idea of how the character should sound, therefore the singer must modify his or her techniques to reach the desired result.

Physical health is a major priority to a singer. Contrary to popular belief not all opera singers are overweight. Conventional wisdom used to state that excessive weight gave added volume and richness to the voice however, in recent years; people have discovered that physical fitness can give similar benefits to a voice. Plus, the overall health benefits of being in shape overshadow any loss of vocal power. Most singers, like professional athletes try to avoid such substances as tobacco, alcohol and caffeine.

## There are six basic vocal categories:

### Women:

**Soprano:** The highest female voice, similar to a flute in range and tone colour. Usually plays the heroine in the opera since a high, bright sound can easily suggest youth and innocence.

**Mezzo-Soprano:** The middle-range female voice, similar to an oboe in range and tone colour. Called an alto in choral arrangements, can play a wide variety of characters including gypsies, mothers and even the part of a young man (trouser role).

**Contralto:** The lowest female voice, similar to an English horn in range and tone colour. Usually plays unique roles including fortune-tellers, witches and older women. Not very common.

### Men:

**Tenor:** The highest male voice, similar to a trumpet in range, tone color and acoustical “ring.” Usually plays the hero or the romantic lead in the opera.

**Baritone:** The middle-range male voice, similar to a French horn in tone color. Often plays the leader of mischief in comic opera or the villain in tragic opera, sometimes even the hero.

**Bass:** The lowest male voice, similar to a trombone or bassoon in tone color. Usually portrays old, wise men, or foolish, comic men.

The vocal parts overlap each other. The notes that are high for baritone to sing are low for a tenor. The notes that are low for a baritone to sing are high for a bass. For this reason you may see a high range mezzo-soprano singing a soprano’s role or a low range baritone singing a bass’ role.

## *The following terms can be used to describe special characteristics in a vocal range:*

**Coloratura:** a light, bright voice that has the ability to sing many notes quickly, usually with an extended upper range.

**Lyric:** A light to medium weight voice, often singing beautiful sweeping melodies.

**Dramatic:** Dark, heavy and powerful voice, capable of sustained and forceful singing.



## Glossary: Important Words in Opera

**Act**- a section of the opera that is then divided into scenes.

**Aria**- means “air” in Italian. This is a piece of music written for a one singer (soloist), usually with instrumental accompaniment.

**Aside**- a secret comment from an actor directly to the audience that the other characters cannot hear.

**Baritone**- the middle singing range of the male voice. is an example of this vocal range.

**Bass**- the lowest singing range of the male voice.

**Basso buffo** (Italian)- a bass singer who specializes in comic characters.

**Basso profundo** (Italian)- the most serious bass voice.

**Baton**- short stick that the conductor uses to lead the orchestra.

**Bel Canto**- Italian phrase literally meaning “beautiful singing.” A traditional Italian style of singing emphasizing tone, phrasing, coloratura passages, and technique. Also refers to the operas written in this style.

**Blocking**- directions given to the performers for movement on stage.

**Bravo** (Italian)- a form of appreciation shouted by audience members at the end of a particularly pleasing performance. Technically, Bravo refers to a male performer, Brava refers to a female performer and Bravi refers to many performers.

**Buffo**- from the Italian for “buffoon.” A singer of comic roles (basso-buffo) or a comic opera (opera-buffa.)

**Cadenza**- a passage of singing, often at the end of an aria, which shows off the singer's vocal ability.

**Castrato** (Italian)- a castrated male prized for his high singing voice.

**Choreographer**- the person who designs the steps of a dance.

**Chorus**- a group of singers of all vocal ranges, singing together to support the vocal leads.

**Classical**- the period in music which comes after the Baroque and before the Romantic, roughly from the birth of Mozart (1756) to shortly after the death of Beethoven (1827). It represents the greatest standardization in orchestral form and tonality.

**Coloratura**- elaborate ornamentation of music written for a singer using many fast notes and trills. Also used to describe a singer who sings this type of music.

**Composer**- the individual who writes all the music for both voice and instrument.

**Comprimario** (Italian)- a nineteenth century term referring to secondary or supporting roles such as confidantes, messengers, and matchmakers.

**Contralto**- the lowest female voice range.

**Conductor**- the person responsible for the musical interpretation and coordination of the performance. The conductor controls the tempo, the dynamic level and the balance between singers and orchestra. You will see this person standing in the orchestra pit conducting the musicians and the singers. The conductor for *Otello* is Tyrone Patterson.

**Countertenor**- a male singer with the highest male voice range, generally singing within the female contralto or mezzo soprano range.

**Crescendo**- a build in the volume or dynamic of the music.

**Cue**- a signal to enter or exit from the stage, to move or to change lighting or scenery; or a signal given by the conductor to the musicians.

**Curtain Call**- occurs at the end of the performance when all the cast members and the conductor take bows. This can occur in front of the curtain or on the open stage.

**Designer**- a production can have two or three designers: a lighting designer, a costume designer, a set designer, or someone who is both costume and set designer. They work closely with the stage director to give the production a distinctive look.

**Diva**- literally, “goddess” in Italian. An important female opera star. The masculine form is divo.

**Dress Rehearsal**- the final rehearsal before opening night, includes costumes, lights, makeup, etc. Sometimes it is necessary to stop for adjustments, but an attempt is made to make it as much like a regular performance as possible.

**Duet**- music that is written for two people to sing together.

**Encore**- a piece that is performed after the last scheduled piece of a concert. An encore is usually performed because the audience wants to hear more music even though the concert is over.

**Ensemble**- a part of the opera written for a group of two or more singers. This may or may not include the chorus.

**Falsetto**- the upper part of a voice in which the vocal cords do not vibrate completely. Usually used by males to imitate a female voice.

**Finale**- the last musical number of an opera or an act.

**Grand Opera**- spectacular French opera of the Romantic period, lavishly staged, with a historically-based plot, a huge cast, an unusually-large orchestra, and ballet. It also refers to opera without spoken dialogue.

**Helden**- German prefix meaning “heroic”. Can also apply to other voices, but usually used in “heldentenor.”

**House**- the auditorium and front of the theatre excluding the stage and backstage areas.

**Impresario** – the proprietor, manager, or conductor of an opera or concert company; one who puts on or sponsors an entertainment; manager, producer.

**Interlude**- a short piece of instrumental music played between scenes and acts.

**Intermission**- a break between acts of an opera. The lights go on and the audience is free to move around.

**Librettist**- the writer of the opera's text. The librettist for *Otello* was Arrigo Boito.

**Libretto**- Italian for "little book." It is the text or story of the opera.

**Lyric**- used to describe a light to medium weight voice with an innocent quality, capable of both sustained, forceful singing and delicate effects.

**Maestro**- means "master" in Italian. Used as a courtesy title for the conductor (male or female).

**Mark**- to sing, but not at full voice. A full-length opera is very hard on a singer's voice so most performers mark during rehearsals. During the Dress Rehearsal singers try to sing at full voice for part if not all of the rehearsal.

**Mezzo-soprano**- the middle singing range for a female voice

**Motif or Leitmotif**- a recurring musical theme used to identify an emotion, person, place, or object.

**Opera**- a dramatic presentation which is set to music. Almost all of it is sung, and the orchestra is an equal partner with the singers. Like a play, an opera is acted on stage with costumes, scenery, makeup, etc. Opera is the plural form of the Latin word opus, which means "work."

**Opera buffa** (Italian)- an opera about ordinary people, usually, but not always comic. First developed in the eighteenth century.

**Opera seria** (Italian)- a serious style of opera. The usual characters are gods and goddesses, or ancient heroes.

**Opera-comique** (French) or Singspiel (German)- a form of opera which contains spoken dialogue.

**Operetta**- lighthearted opera with spoken dialogue, such as a musical.

**Orchestra**- an ensemble, led by a conductor, that is comprised of string, woodwind, brass and percussion instruments.

**Orchestra pit**- sunken area in front of the stage where the orchestra sits.

**Overture**- an orchestral introduction to the opera played before the curtain rises. Usually longer than a prelude and can be played as a separate piece.

**Pitch**- how high or low a note sounds.

**Prelude**- a short introduction that leads into an act without pause.

**Prima Donna**- literally, "first lady" in Italian. The leading woman in an opera. Because of the way some of them behaved in the past, it often refers to someone who is acting in a superior and demanding fashion. The term for a leading man is primo uomo.

**Principal**- a major singing role, or the singer who performs such a role.

**Production**- the combination of sets, costumes, props, and lights etc.

**Props**- objects carried or used on stage by the performers.

**Proscenium**- the front opening of the stage which frames the action.

**Quartet**- four singers or the music that is written for four singers. Also quintet, sextet, etc

**Raked Stage**- a stage that slants downwards towards the audience.

**Recitative**- lines of dialogue that are sung, usually with no recognizable melody. It is used to advance the plot.

**Rehearsal**- a working session in which the singers prepare for public performance.

**Score**- the written music of an opera or other musical work.

**Serenade**- a piece of music honouring someone or something, an extension of the traditional performance of a lover beneath the window of his mistress.

**Soprano**- the highest range of the female singing voice. Sally Dibblee (Desdemona) is an example of this vocal range.

**Soubrette** (French)- pert young female character with a light soprano voice.

**Spinto** (Italian)- a lyric voice that has the power and incisiveness for dramatic climaxes.

**Stage Areas**- refers to the various sections of the stage as seen by those on stage. See diagram in Workshop #1.

**Stage Director**- the person in charge of the action on stage. He or she shows the singers, chorus and cast where and when to move and helps them create their characters. The stage director develops a concept for how the entire performance should look and feel. He or she works closely with the stage managers, lighting designer, set designers, costume designer and wig and make-up artists to make his or her vision into reality.

**Stage Manager**- the person who coordinates and manages elements of the performance.

**Supernumeraries** (Supers)- appear on stage in costume in non-singing and usually, non-speaking roles.

**Surtitles**- the English translations of the opera's language, in this production Italian, that are projected above the stage during a performance to help the audience follow the story. Much like subtitles in a foreign film.

**Synopsis**- a short summary of the story of the opera.

**Tableau**- occurs at the end of a scene or act, when all cast members on stage freeze in position and remain that way until the curtain closes. It looks as though that moment has been captured in a photograph.

**Tempo**- speed of the music.

**Tenor**- the highest natural adult male voice. Mark Lundberg (Otello) is an example of this kind of singing voice.

**Trill**- very quick alternation between two adjacent notes. See coloratura.

**Trio**- an ensemble of three singers or the music that is written for three singers.

**Trouser role**-the role of an adolescent boy or young man, written for and sung by a woman, often a mezzo-soprano. Also known as a pants role.

**Verismo**- describes a realistic style of opera that started in Italy at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.





## Workshop #1– Stage Business

### **Objectives:**

Students will be able to express and apply their knowledge of the areas of the stage through writing and movement.

Students will investigate the historical background of stage positioning.

### **Pre-class:**

Tape a massive grid to the floor of the space you are working in. This can be used to physically point out the areas of the stage as well as be used for the game (“Director Says”).

### **Activity #1: Group Discussion**

Have a group discussion with your class regarding why individuals might need to assign names for the different areas of the theatre, questioning the purpose that it serves.

### **Activity #2: Historical Significance of the Stage**

Explain briefly the historical significance for the set-up of the theatre. Include such points as how the stage was originally raked so that the back portion of the stage was higher than the front portion. This was done because the audience’s seats were not raised as they usually are today. It enabled those individuals sitting in the back row of the theatre to see the players clearly. As a result the back of the stage is called up stage and the front of the stage is referred to as down stage.

You may also choose to discuss which areas of the stage are most important. For example, the strongest entrance is from stage left.

Distribute the “Stage Facts” on the next page, so that students can refer to it as you physically go to the taped area that you are explaining. You may choose to have them draw and copy the areas of the stage for themselves.

### **Activity #3: “Director Says” Game**

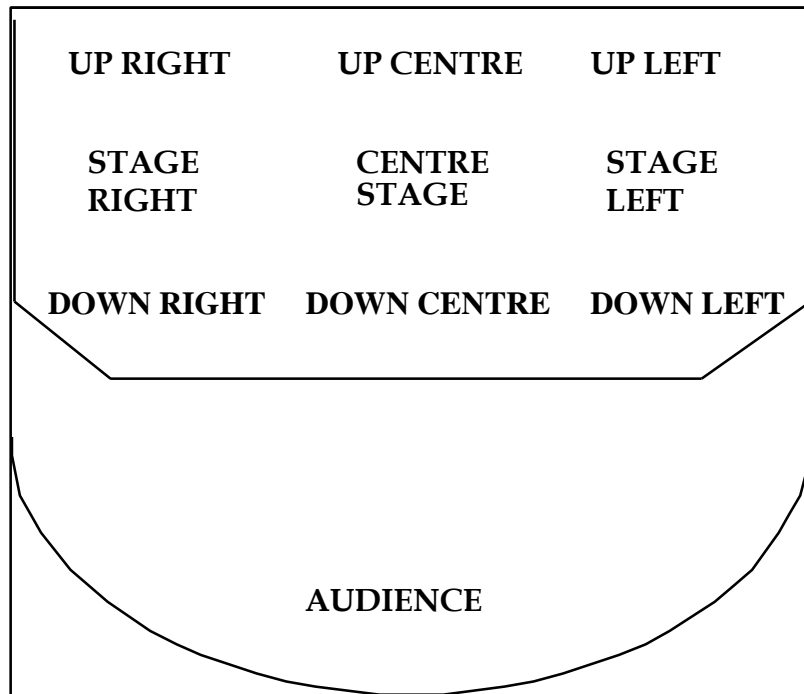
The teacher designates one of the students as the director, or for the first round you can be the director. The remaining students are the performers.

The director gives out the directions: “Move upstage”, “Move stage right,” “Move to up centre,” etc. The director may give out directions to the entire group at once, small groups, or individuals e.g.: “All performers with red socks go to stage left.”

Students are out if they move in any direction other than the one the director gives. The director gives out directions more rapidly, and any performer who moves in the wrong direction or hesitates is out. You may need to have a judge.

## Stage Facts

Opera singers are required to act as well as sing and therefore they must understand the stage set-up. In rehearsals, the director will indicate to the singers what they should be doing and where they should do it. To do this they use a special vocabulary. Take a look at the diagram below in order to understand the different areas of the stage.



## Workshop #2

### Objectives:

Student will be able to express their knowledge of the storyline of *Otello* through verbal and written expression. Students will be able to express their knowledge of character through writing a character sketch.

### Activity #1: Story of *Otello*

Have the students read a version of *Otello*. You can use the synopsis found in the Study Guide or most CD versions include a synopsis and often the libretto. You can choose to read it aloud to the students or have them read it silently. Have the students discuss what happens to the characters and why they think each character behaved the way they did. Do they think a similar story could be told in modern times or can they think of contemporary stories that have a similar theme?

For a more dramatic approach, read the libretto as a reader's theatre, having students take turns speaking the different roles. If done in this manner, ask the students to put emotion into their voices and encourage exaggeration. You might have to start them off, but this will provide an interesting way of reading the story.

Another approach is to convert the synopsis into an improvised play. Have students create the dialogue between characters at key points in the story.

Incorporate the music. Have the students discuss what they hear. Some discussion topics include:

- What mood does the music create?
- What does the music say about the character?
- How does it say it?
- What emotions are conveyed through the music?

### Activity #2: Sharing with a group

After viewing the Dress Rehearsal, have the students discuss what they saw. To help focus conversations, get the students to create a list of qualities that they feel are key to understanding *Otello* and its characters.

### Activity #3: Creating a journal from point of view of a character

Allow students to pick a specific moment in the opera, preferably a point of conflict for the character. Have the students write a journal of those events from the point of view of their character. Explain to the students that they are to take on the persona of that character and should refer to the character through personal pronouns. Also, remind students that they are only to express information that their character would know.

### Character Profile

Name and role

---

---

Physical Characteristics (their style and physical attributes)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Psychological Characteristics (mental aspects of character, how do they think about things?)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Emotional Characteristics (are they generally cheerful, sad, snobby, “off-balance” etc.?)

---

---

---

---

---

---

Family

Career/Income (if applicable)

---

---

---

Interests and Hobbies

---

---

---

Other interesting facts

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Workshop #3 - Writing a Review of *Otello*

### Objectives:

Students will be able to write clear and well-supported expository essays.

Students will utilize observation and critical thinking skills based on real-life, real-time experiences.

Students can submit their writing for publication (school newspaper) or you can send the reviews to Manitoba Opera. We would love to hear what the students thought.

### Activity #1- Think-Group-Share

Individually students will write, in point form, the answers to the following questions:

1. What did you like about the opera? What did you dislike?
2. What did you think about the sets, props and costumes?
3. Would you have done something differently? Why?
4. What were you expecting? Did it live up to your expectations?
5. What did you think of the singers' portrayal of their characters?

Break the students into groups to discuss their feelings and reactions to the production. Have the students write on poster papers their answers or important points of their discussion. Encourage the students to go beyond the questions posed. Place their poster papers on the walls.

### Activity #2- Gallery Walk

Have the groups travel around the room to examine the discussion poster papers. During the walk, students must write down one thing that surprised them, one thing that they didn't think of, and one thing that they would like explained. Once this is done, have a large group discussion about the different ideas that they encountered on their walk.

### Activity #3- Outlining your review

Go over the essential aspects of a review including:

- a clearly stated purpose
- a coherent comparison/contrast organizational pattern
- a summary paragraph
- capturing the interest of the reader
- precise nouns
- revision for consistency of ideas

You might give your students a few samples of reviews for fine arts events from the newspaper as examples - or ask them to bring in some reviews they find themselves. Have the students fill out the "Review Outline" worksheet. Once this has been completed, students may write their rough draft.

### Activity #4- Peer Conferencing

Students will exchange reviews to critique and edit. Have the students use the "Peer Evaluation" worksheet to help guide them. Encourage the students to focus on effective coordination of ideas in sentences and the correct use of grammar and punctuation.

### Activity #5- Creating the final draft

Have students make the appropriate adjustments to their reviews. You could also have the students type the pieces up and organize them into a newspaper. Also have the students complete the "Self-evaluation" worksheet. Include this in the total mark.

## Review Outline

Purpose (why are you writing this and who is your audience?)

---

---

---

---

---

Plot Synopsis (including who sang what role, etc.)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Paragraph #1 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Paragraph #2 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

---

---

---

---

---

---

Paragraph #3 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Summary/Closing Paragraph

---

---

---

---



## Optional Activity/Approach

Be a music critic in the late 1800's. Students imagine they are living at the time of the first performance of *Otello*, in 1887.

### **Activity #1 – Historical Research**

Students will need to learn about the historical context in Europe in the 1880's. This will include understanding the political situation (e.g., Italy and its role in Europe) and social norms, including the differences among classes.

### **Activity #2 – Writing the review**

Students may want to create a periodical from the time in which their review will be published. The review itself could incorporate quotes and/or headlines from actual historical reviews. The students' reviews can follow a similar outline to that for the activity above, but they must remember the time period in which they are pretending to write.

As with the previous activity, peer and self-evaluations of the reviews can be completed, using the outlines in the following pages.

Manitoba Opera would love to receive a copy of any reviews or newspapers produced by the students.

# Peer Evaluation

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of peer evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Reviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Review Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Scale: 5-Outstanding 4-Above Average 3-Average 2-Needs improvement 1-Unclear  
0-Has not been done

Process & Product Assessment:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Purpose of the piece clearly identified
- \_\_\_\_\_ Reader clearly taken into account (background, word choice)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Engaging to the reader (was it interesting to read?)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Complete sentence structure (grammar, spelling and punctuation)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Varied length and types of sentences used
- \_\_\_\_\_ Strong word choices (adjectives, adverbs and nouns)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Originality and creativity
- \_\_\_\_\_ Attention to detail and support of beliefs with examples

Total:            /40

Comments and Questions:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Other Activities

- Study the history and politics of Verdi's time, particularly the year when *Otello* premiered (1887); what authors were popular, what scientific discoveries were being made; what was the social and political life in Canada at the time (as well as in Europe).
- Create a poster or short biography about Verdi. This could include a review of his most commonly performed operas.
- Write a story about your visit to Manitoba Opera, write us a letter, or draw a picture to illustrate your memories from the experience.

# Opera Comprehension Test

## General Opera

1. \_\_\_\_\_ A theatrical production incorporating both vocal and instrumental music, drama, and sometimes dance.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ The lowest male vocal range.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ An instrumental introduction to an opera.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ The area where the orchestra is seated.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ The female vocal range lying between soprano and contralto.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ A song for solo voice in an opera.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ The highest female vocal range.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ A song for two voices.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ The lowest female vocal range.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ The Italian word meaning "little book."
11. \_\_\_\_\_ The middle male vocal range.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ He/she has the artistic view for the performance of the opera.

## *Otello*

1. The opera *Otello* takes place in \_\_\_\_\_ (give the location and approximate date).
2. *Otello* is a \_\_\_\_\_ (name his profession).
3. In the first act, Iago feels slighted because Cassio has been promoted above his own rank by *Otello*. What does he promise to do to get revenge on *Otello*? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. *Otello* was composed by \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The libretto (words) for *Otello* were written by \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The role of *Otello* is sung by a \_\_\_\_\_ (vocal category).
7. The role of *Desdemona* is sung by a \_\_\_\_\_ (vocal category).

## Answers

### General Opera

1. opera
2. bass
3. overture
4. pit
5. mezzo-soprano
6. aria
7. soprano
8. duet
9. contralto
10. libretto
11. baritone
12. director

### Otello

1. A coastal city on the island of Cyprus in the late 1400's.
2. General in the Venetian army and governor of the island.
3. He promises to help Rodrigo win over Desdemona.
4. Giuseppe Verdi
5. Arrigo Boito
6. Tenor
7. Soprano

## Teacher's Evaluation Sheet

Your comments and suggestions are greatly appreciated. Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire and return it to the address below. Thank you for your comments and suggestions.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade(s) you teach: \_\_\_\_\_

Subjects: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you attended other performing arts events with your students in the past year?

Yes  No

If yes, what were they? \_\_\_\_\_

How did you find out about Manitoba Opera's Student Dress Rehearsal?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Were you able to apply the Teacher's Study Guide in your classroom activities prior to coming to the opera?

Yes  No

If not, please elaborate: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If so, which sections of the Study Guide did you find most useful?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How appropriate was the information provided in the Study Guide?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What would you add/delete? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Did you spend classroom time discussing the performance after your students attended the opera?

Yes  No

Do you have any comments about the performance itself?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to receive information on our future Student Dress Rehearsals?  Yes  No

How would you like to receive information?

Fax  Email  Letters  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Further comments and suggestions \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to:

**Education & Outreach Coordinator**

105-555 Main Street

Winnipeg, MB R3B 1C3

Fax: (204) 949-0377