



MANITOBA OPERA

THE *MARRIAGE*
OF FIGARO

Study Guide 2015/16 Season



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**For Student Night tickets or more information on student programs,
contact Sophie Waldman at 204-942-7470 or
swaldman@manitobaopera.mb.ca**

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Three Great Resources for Teaching Your Students About Opera

1. Student Night at the Opera

In order to expose student audiences to the glory of opera, Manitoba Opera created Student Night. It's an affordable opportunity for students to watch the dress rehearsal, an exciting look at the art and magic of opera before the curtain goes up on Opening Night. Please note:

- *The Marriage of Figaro* is an opera in four acts, with a running time of approximately three hours.
- 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 choose not to sing in full voice during the dress rehearsal in order to avoid unnecessary strain.
- Tickets to Student Night are \$12 per person and are available to students from schools, post-secondary institutions, private and conservatory music programs, and youth organizations. For more information or to book tickets, contact the Education and Outreach Coordinator at 204-942-7470 or swaldman@manitobaopera.mb.ca.

2. Study Guide

This study guide has been created to assist you in preparing your students for their visit to the opera at the Centennial Concert Hall. Materials in the study guide may be copied and distributed to students.

3. CDs Available for Purchase or Loan

Purchase a *The Marriage of Figaro* CD from our office, or borrow one for a two-week period. Call 204-942-7470 or email swaldman@manitobaopera.mb.ca for more details.

4. Opera in a Trunk

Bring the magic of opera right into the classroom with our Opera in a Trunk. Each trunk includes costumes, props, books, a cd and dvd of the opera, photographs, activities, and a guide for putting it all together. Rental price is \$50 per trunk for a three-week period.

Available trunks:

La Bohème

Aida

The Daughter of the Regiment

The Magic Flute

Carmen

For more information or to book a trunk, contact the Education and Outreach Coordinator at 204-942-7470 or swaldman@manitobaopera.mb.ca.

The Marriage of Figaro:

Good To Know

- *The Marriage of Figaro* (*Le Nozze di Figaro*) is an Italian opera in four acts, composed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart with an Italian libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte.
- Regarded as a cornerstone of the standard operatic repertoire, *The Marriage of Figaro* appears among the top 10 on the Operabase list of the most-performed operas worldwide.
- The world premiere of *The Marriage of Figaro* took place on May 1, 1786 at Burgtheater in Vienna, Austria.
- *The Marriage of Figaro* recounts a single crazy day in the palace of Count Almaviva near Seville, Spain. Figaro, the former barber and now valet to the Count, is just hours away from wedding the lovely Susanna, a maid in the household. But alas, Susanna has caught the attention of the Count's wandering eye. The day is soon turned upside down as clever twists and turns, disguises and comic intrigue ensue.
- *The Marriage of Figaro* is an *opera buffa*, (literally, "comic opera"), a term used mainly for 18th century Italian comic operas.
- *The Marriage of Figaro* is based on the play "*La Folle Journée, ou Le Mariage de Figaro*" (*The Mad Day, or The Marriage of Figaro*) written by Pierre Beaumarchais in 1778. This was the second of three plays in a series he wrote based around the character of Figaro. The first in the series was made into another opera, *The Barber of Seville* by Gioachino Rossini, which premiered in 1816.
- Manitoba Opera has staged *The Marriage of Figaro* three other times in the company's 43-year history - the most recent production took place in 2006.



Gregory Atkinson (Bartolo), Donnalynn Grills (Marcellina), Kristopher Irmiter (Figaro), and Kathleen Brett (Susanna) in Manitoba Opera's 2006 production of *The Marriage of Figaro*.
Photo: R.Tinker

Production Information

THE *MARRIAGE* OF FIGARO

November 21, 24, & 27
(Dress Rehearsal / Student Night: November 19)
Centennial Concert Hall

Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Libretto in Italian by Lorenzo Da Ponte
Premiere Performance: May 1, 1786 at Burgtheater in Vienna, Austria
Approximately three hours in four acts
Sung in Italian with projected English translations

PRINCIPAL CAST (In order of vocal appearance)

Figaro	Bass	GORDON BINTNER
Susanna	Soprano	ANDRIANA CHUCHMAN
Dr. Bartolo	Bass	PETER MCGILLIVRAY
Marcellina	Mezzo-Soprano	DONNALYNN GRILLS
Cherubino	Mezzo-Soprano	ALICIA WOYNARSKI
Count Almaviva	Baritone	DANIEL OKULITCH
Don Basilio/Curzio	Tenor	DAVID MENZIES
Countess Almaviva	Soprano	LARA CIEKIEWICZ
Antonio	Baritone	DAVID WATSON
Barbarina	Soprano	ANNE-MARIE MACINTOSH

Manitoba Opera Chorus
Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra

Conductor	TADEUSZ BIERNACKI
Director	BRENT KRYSA
Sets	PACIFIC OPERA VICTORIA/CALGARY OPERA
Costumes	PACIFIC OPERA VICTORIA/MALABAR LTD (TORONTO)
Lighting designer	BILL WILLIAMS
Stage manager	ROBERT PEL
Assistant stage managers	KATHRYN BALL MATTHEW LAGACÉ
Projected titles	BRENT KRYSA

Synopsis

Synopsis courtesy of Arizona Opera online Opera Resource Center

Act One (A room in the castle of Count Almaviva near Seville, Spain, 1778.)

It is Figaro and Susanna's wedding day. Figaro, the servant of the Count, and Susanna, the maid of the Countess, are measuring the room the Count has given them to use as their bedroom. Susanna dislikes the room, claiming that it is much too close to the rooms of the Count. She then tells Figaro that the Count has his eye on her. The Countess rings and Susanna departs. Figaro resolves that he will thwart his master's plans.

Dr. Bartolo and Marcellina, Bartolo's housekeeper, enter. Figaro is in debt to Marcellina and has promised to marry her if he doesn't repay her. Bartolo rejoices in this opportunity to avenge himself on Figaro, who arranged the elopement of the Count and Rosina (the Countess), whom Bartolo had hoped to marry himself. As Bartolo exits, Susanna enters and has a brief, barbed encounter with Marcellina, who then departs.

Cherubino, the Count's flirtatious page, dashes in. He explains that the Count discovered him with Barbarina, the daughter of the gardener Antonio, and he will be sent away. He states that he is in love with the Countess as well as every other woman in the palace and asks Susanna to give a song to the Countess. They hear the Count approaching, so Cherubino hides behind an armchair. The Count, thinking that he is alone with Susanna, begins making advances to her until he is interrupted by the arrival of Don Basilio, the music teacher. He conceals himself behind the same chair as Cherubino, who has now moved to the other side and covered himself with a blanket. Basilio gossips about the goings-on in the castle including Cherubino's infatuation with the Countess. The Count becomes angry and reveals himself, discovering Cherubino at the same time. Aware that the boy has overheard his own indiscretions, he vents his anger by giving Cherubino a commission in his Regiment, for which he must leave immediately.

Figaro arrives, carrying Susanna's wedding veil and accompanied by villagers who sing the Count's praises. Figaro thanks the Count for renouncing the wedding-night custom, and asks the Count to give Susanna the veil as a symbol of purity. Count Almaviva says he would prefer to postpone the ceremony until he can celebrate the occasion appropriately. After the villagers leave, both Figaro and Susanna try to persuade the Count to allow Cherubino to stay, but to no avail. Figaro then tells Cherubino about the rigors of military life.

Act Two (In the bedroom of the Countess)

The Countess mourns her husband's waning affections towards her. Susanna and Figaro enter and tell the Countess that the Count is trying to seduce Susanna. They devise a plan. The Count will be given a note that says that the Countess is having an affair. While the Count is investigating, Figaro and Susanna will be married quickly. At the same time, they will disguise Cherubino as Susanna and arrange a rendezvous with the Count.

Cherubino arrives and begins trying on his disguise. He sings "Voi che sapete," a love song to the Countess. His commission falls out of his uniform and the Countess notices there is no official seal on it. The Count arrives. Cherubino hides in the dressing room and Susanna hides behind a screen. The Count is suspicious, as he's just received the anonymous letter regarding the Countess' supposed infidelity.

Upon hearing a noise, the Count demands to know who is hiding in the dressing room. When the Countess refuses to tell him, he compels her to accompany him to find a hammer to break down the door.

Cherubino jumps out of the window, leaving Susanna to take his place in the dressing room. The Countess tells Almoviva that it is Cherubino who is in her dressing room. The Count demands that the door be opened and Susanna calmly enters the room.

The Count searches for Cherubino. Finding no one, Almoviva begs for forgiveness. Antonio, the gardener, bursts in complaining that someone has just jumped out of the window and spoiled his flowers. Susanna and the Countess try to convince the Count that Antonio is drunk again but it is Figaro who assumes the blame, saying that it was he who jumped from the window. Antonio produces some papers that Figaro claims were given him by Cherubino to have officially sealed. Marcellina enters with Dr. Bartolo and Basilio to demand justice. Figaro must marry Marcellina or repay his debt. The Count must investigate.

Act Three (A hall in the castle)

The Count reflects on the current situation when Susanna enters. She says she's prepared to meet him later that evening in the garden if he will give her the dowry he had promised. With the dowry, Susanna will be able to pay off Marcellina and marry Figaro. Susanna leaves and meets Figaro and assures him they will win their case. The Count overhears and becomes infuriated that his servants enjoy a happiness that he does not.

Figaro, Marcellina, and Dr. Bartolo join the Count and his notary, Don Curzio, for the judgement: Figaro must marry Marcellina or repay his debt. Figaro protests that he needs the consent of his parents, from whom he was stolen as an infant. Marcellina realizes that Figaro is her long lost son by Dr. Bartolo. As Marcellina and Figaro embrace, it is decided that the wedding will be a double one; Marcellina will marry Dr. Bartolo and Figaro will marry Susanna.

Meanwhile, the Countess is still mourning the loss of her husband's affections. Susanna enters. She tells the Countess of the outcome of Figaro's case and writes a note for Almoviva to wait in the pine grove. They seal the letter with a pin.

Barbarina and the disguised Cherubino, along with other village girls, arrive with flowers for the Countess. The Count enters with Antonio, who reveals that Cherubino was indeed the one who jumped out of the balcony window into his flower bed. The Count wants to punish Cherubino but Barbarina pleads that instead, Cherubino be made her husband. After all, the Count promised her "everything she wanted" in exchange for her affections. The Count agrees.

Figaro enters and the wedding march begins. At the wedding celebration, Susanna passes the note to Almaviva who pricks his finger on the pin. Figaro notices that the Count had received a love letter and is amused by the pin prick. The Count promises splendid entertainment for the evening.

Act Four (The garden of the castle)

Figaro and Marcellina happen upon Barbarina, who is searching for the pin that the Count asked her to return to Susanna. Figaro realizes that it was Susanna who sent the Count the love letter and gives Barbarina one of Marcellina's pins to find out the location of the planned tryst. Figaro complains to Marcellina about Susanna's supposed infidelity and, while Marcellina tries to explain that all is not as it seems, Figaro plans revenge. Both leave.

Barbarina returns, as she has a date with Cherubino, but is frightened by a noise and runs into one of the pavilions. Figaro returns with Bartolo and Basilio as witnesses to his wife's infidelity. Figaro tells them to hide until he gives the signal and then Figaro moves to another part of the garden, still defending the jealousy of men and determining not to trust women.

Marcellina, Susanna, and the Countess enter. Susanna and the Countess have switched clothing. Susanna, aware that Figaro is listening, sings about her approaching happiness with her lover. The Countess (now disguised as Susanna) awaits the planned tryst with the Count. However, Cherubino happens upon her and begins flirting. The Count enters and begins seducing "Susanna." The real Susanna (disguised as the Countess) is confronted by Figaro, who tells her that the Count is with his Susanna. She asks Figaro to be quiet, but forgets to disguise her voice. The truth begins to dawn on Figaro, who then pleads passionate love to the "Countess." A furious Susanna slaps Figaro who tells her that he knew she was in disguise all along. Continuing the prank, Figaro and the "Countess" loudly confess their love and the Count rushes in to catch the two lovers. Basilio, Bartolo, Don Curzio, and Antonio all rush in to investigate the ruckus and the Count denounces his faithless wife. All beg the Count to forgive his wife, but he refuses until the real Countess unveils herself. Almaviva realizes that he has fallen prey to a prank and begs forgiveness. The Countess forgives him and all celebrate the end of a crazy day.



The Marriage of Figaro, 2006, Manitoba Opera.

Photo: R.Tinker

The Marriage of Figaro

Principal Characters

Name	Description	Pronunciation
Count Almaviva	A Spanish noble	all-mah-VEE-vah
Countess Almaviva	His wife	all-mah-VEE-vah
Susanna	The Countess's chambermaid and Figaro's betrothed	soo-ZAHN-nah
Figaro	Count Almaviva's valet	FEE-gah-roh
Cherubino	A page boy	kehr-oo-BEEN-oh
Marcellina	Dr. Bartolo's housekeeper	mar-cheh-LEE-nah
Dr. Bartolo	Doctor from Seville, also a practicing lawyer	BAR-toh-loh
Don Basilio	A music teacher	bah-ZEEL-yoh
Don Curzio	Judge	don CUR-zee-oh
Barbarina	Antonio's daughter	bar-bah-REE-nah
Antonio	The Count's gardener, Susanna's uncle	ahn-TOH-nyoh



The Marriage of Figaro, 2006, Manitoba Opera.
Photo: R.Tinker

The Principal Artists

Figaro

Gordon Bintner

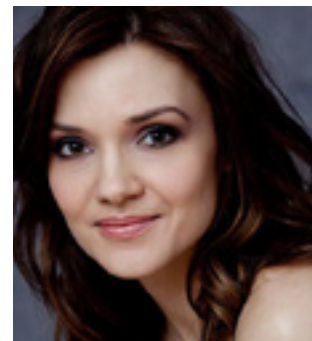
A native of Regina, Saskatchewan, bass-baritone Gordon Bintner is currently a member of the Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio, Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals. Mr. Bintner holds a Master's in Opera and Voice from McGill University and has also studied at Opera NUOVA (Edmonton), the Toronto Summer Music Academy and the Merola Opera Program (San Francisco). He has sung with such companies as l'Opera de Montreal and Canadian Opera Company, and recently made his European singing debut with Angers-Nantes Opéra in Nantes, France. *The Marriage of Figaro* will be his Manitoba Opera debut.



Susanna

Andriana Chuchman

Born in Winnipeg, Ms. Chuchman received her Bachelor's Degree in Voice Performance from the University of Manitoba. Ms. Chuchman was also a member of the San Francisco Opera's prestigious Merola Program and a graduate of the Ryan Opera Center at the Lyric Opera of Chicago. Recent engagements include performances with the Metropolitan Opera, Washington National Opera, Canadian Opera Company, and Lyric Opera of Chicago. This September, she will be making her LA Opera debut as Lauretta in *Gianni Schicchi*, with Plácido Domingo as Gianni Schicchi, and directed by Woody Allen. She last appeared with Manitoba Opera as Pamina in *The Magic Flute* in 2011.



Dr. Bartolo

Peter McGillivray

Born in Saskatchewan and raised in Ontario, baritone Peter McGillivray leapt to international attention in 2005 by winning top prizes both at the Montreal International Musical Competition and at the Queen Sonja Competition in Oslo, Norway. He first attracted the national interest of Canadians both as the winner of the 2003 CBC Young Performers Competition and as member of the Ensemble Studio of the Canadian Opera Company. This past season he was seen on opera stages from coast to coast including Opéra de Québec, Vancouver Opera, Edmonton Opera, Saskatoon Symphony, Calgary Opera, and as Schaunard in Manitoba Opera's 2014 production of *La Bohème*.



The Principal Artists

Count Almaviva

Daniel Okulitch

Canadian bass baritone Daniel Okulitch has garnered acclaim in major baritone roles of Mozart, most notably Don Giovanni and Figaro, which have been seen in cities including New York, Buenos Aires, Los Angeles, Palm Beach, Warsaw, to name a few. He has appeared with companies such as the Metropolitan Opera, Teatro alla Scala, Washington National Opera, l'Opéra de Montréal, and Vancouver Opera. Mr. Okulitch last performed with Manitoba Opera as Schaunard in *La Bohème* in 2005.



Countess Almaviva

Lara Ciekiewicz

Winnipeg soprano Lara Ciekiewicz has sung with companies such as l'Opéra de Montréal, Opera Lyra Ottawa, Toronto Operetta Theatre, and Pacific Opera Victoria. A graduate of l'Atelier lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal, Ms. Ciekiewicz also holds a Masters in Music (Opera) from McGill University and a Bachelor of Arts (Honours, Voice) from the University of Winnipeg. She last appeared with Manitoba Opera as Liù in *Turandot* in April, 2015.



Cherubino

Alicia Woynarski

Originally from Regina, mezzo-soprano Alicia Woynarski graduated from the University of British Columbia with a Master's degree in Vocal Performance. She has sung with companies such as Vancouver Island Opera, European Academy of Music, and Opera NUOVA. She is a recent recipient of a Saskatchewan Arts Board grant (2012 and 2010), a winner of the Vancouver Women's Musical Society Competition, and a winner of the Metropolitan Opera Western Canada District Auditions.



The Principal Artists

Marcellina

Donnalynn Grills

Veteran mezzo-soprano Donnalynn Grills is well known to Winnipeg audiences. Equally at home on the opera and musical theatre stage, Ms. Grills has appeared with the WSO, the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, Little Opera Company, the Winnipeg Philharmonic Choir, Rainbow Stage, Manitoba Theatre Centre, The Little Opera Company, Dry Cold Productions, The Winnipeg G & S Society, and more. She has performed frequently in the Manitoba Opera chorus and was last featured in a principal role as Berta in the 2009 production of *The Barber of Seville*.



Don Basilio/Don Curzio

David Menzies

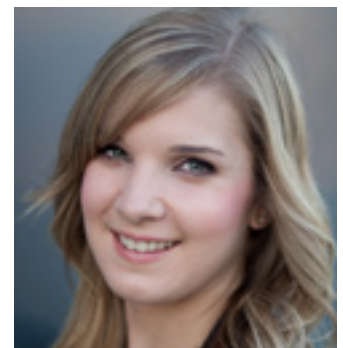
Canadian tenor David Menzies is a past member of the Atelier lyrique at Montreal Opera, was a Fellow at Tanglewood Music Centre, and obtained a Doctorate in Music from McGill University. Mr. Menzies is becoming known for his remarkable performances in a range of music from the baroque to the contemporary, in opera and in concert.



Barbarina

Anne-Marie MacIntosh

Emerging Canadian coloratura soprano Anne-Marie MacIntosh was born and raised in Langley, British Columbia. She currently resides in Winnipeg, where she studies with renowned Canadian coloratura soprano Tracy Dahl. Ms. MacIntosh is a graduate of the University of Manitoba (M.Mus, 2014) and the University of British Columbia (B.Mus, 2012). This year, she has appeared with The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Winnipeg and the Little Opera Company. *The Marriage of Figaro* will be her Manitoba Opera debut.



The Composer

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born: January 27, 1756

Died: December 5, 1791

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born January 27, 1756 in Salzburg, Austria, son of Leopold Mozart, a violinist and composer in the service of the Prince Archbishop. He started music lessons when he was three. By the time he was five years old, Mozart was already composing his own music and playing for empresses, electors and royal families. A child prodigy, Mozart was especially gifted in playing the piano, the harpsichord, and the organ, all the while composing for other instruments and vocal music. He was also fluent in Italian and French, as well as his native German. There is no evidence of his formal schooling and it appears that his father was his tutor in all subjects. His father recognized his son's exceptional talent and was determined to make him famous. A relatively poor family had much to gain financially with a child prodigy among its members.



Mozart c. 1780, detail from portrait by Johann Nepomuk della Croce

At the age of 12, Mozart had composed his first true opera, *La finta semplice* (*The Pretended Simpleton*). The singers refused to perform in a piece conducted by a little boy and there were accusations that the piece was written by his father. The theatre cancelled the contract and refused to pay Mozart his fee. During his teenage years, Mozart toured Europe, before returning home to Salzburg in 1774. In 1777, his parents thought it would be best for Mozart to find work elsewhere. Mozart and his mother moved to Munich, and then to Mannheim before settling in Paris. He returned to Salzburg in 1779 after the death of his mother. During this time, Mozart wrote many sonatas, operas, sacred works, symphonies, concertos, serenades and dramatic music. In 1781, the success of the opera seria, *Idomeneo*, prompted the young composer to take permanent residence in Vienna.

Soon after his next operatic success, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*) in 1782, Mozart married a young woman by the name of Constanze Weber and they lived in Vienna for the rest of their lives. The couple would have six children, only two of which survived infancy. Soon after, Mozart would meet Lorenzo Da Ponte with whom he would collaborate to create his three greatest operas: *Le nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*), *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte*.

Mozart was one of the first self-employed musicians in Vienna. A typical day for Mozart during his early years in Vienna would entail arising at six, composing until nine or 10, giving lessons until about one, giving concerts in the evening, and then composing for a few more hours. He would sleep only five or six hours a night.

The musical scene in Vienna was intense. Mozart was in demand as a guest artist and accompanist. The public also continually craved new compositions, thus Mozart was constantly composing. He would often compose a whole piece in his mind before committing it to paper. He would also carry scraps of paper so he could jot down ideas at any time. Although he had a steady income from new works, ticket sales from concerts, royalties from publishers and fees from lessons, he did not know how to manage his money properly. Mozart and his wife spent lavishly. He dressed like nobility, as he felt his image was essential to his success. He also gave generously to his friends and charity. He never saved money and when emergencies occurred like the illness of wife Constanze, he had to borrow money.

While Mozart had composed several operas over the years, it wasn't until his collaboration with librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte that his operatic career really took off. First, in 1786 when *The Marriage of Figaro* was a great success in its Viennese premiere, and then in 1787 the pair collaborated again on *Don Giovanni*, an opera based on the famous character of Don Juan, an immoral lothario who ruins hearts and lives, and pays the ultimate price.

In 1787, Mozart became the chamber composer of Emperor Joseph II. This was a part-time appointment, but the Emperor hoped it would keep the composer and his talents in Vienna. That same year, Ludwig van Beethoven came to Vienna in the hopes of studying with Mozart, though that unfortunately never came to fruition.

In 1791, Mozart was very productive. In this year he composed some of his greatest works – the opera *The Magic Flute*, for instance, or his great clarinet concerto, his string quartets, and most notably, his unfinished *Requiem*. And then, Mozart became ill and was soon bedridden. On December 5th, 1791, Mozart passed away from his illness. Recent research suggests that Mozart died of rheumatic fever, an illness he had suffered many times in the past.

In his lifetime, Mozart composed over 600 works.

The Librettist

Lorenzo Da Ponte was born March 10, 1749 in Ceneda, in the Republic of Venice (now Vittorio Veneto, Italy). Young Lorenzo took to schooling and, in 1770 took Minor Orders and became a Professor of Literature, and then became an ordained priest in 1773. At this point, Da Ponte began to write poetry, and moved to Venice to live as a teacher of languages. Although Da Ponte was a priest, he was not a very chaste man, and in 1779 was banished from Venice for (allegedly) living in and arranging the entertainments of a brothel.



Da Ponte then moved to Gorizia, Austria, and was engaged as a writer there. Soon after he found work translating libretti at a theatre, and also was introduced to the then-popular composer, Antonio Salieri. With his help, Da Ponte became the librettist of the Italian Theatre in Vienna. He also found a patron, Raimund Wetzlar von Plankenstern, who was also the benefactor of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. As court librettist, Da Ponte would often collaborate with composers such as Mozart and Salieri. All of the librettist's works were adaptations of pre-existing plots, with the exception of a few such as *Così fan tutte*. Many, such as *The Marriage of Figaro*, were adapted and molded to suit the purposes of the composer, occasion and casting needs.

After the death of Austrian Emperor Joseph II in 1790, Da Ponte lost his patron, and was dismissed from the Imperial Service in 1791. As he could still not return to Venice, Da Ponte then travelled to London and, in 1803, became the librettist of the King's Theatre, until he fled to the United States in 1805 due to debt and bankruptcy. In America, Da Ponte first lived in New York, then Pennsylvania, where he ran a grocery store and gave lessons in Italian. Once returned to New York, Da Ponte opened a bookstore, and eventually became the first professor of Italian literature at Columbia College. He introduced opera to New York, and produced a performance of *Don Giovanni* in 1825. He also introduced the music of Gioachino Rossini to America. In 1828, at the then-grand age of 79, Da Ponte became a U.S. citizen, and at 84 he founded the New York Opera Company, which only lasted two seasons before being disbanded (it was, however, the predecessor of both the New York Academy of Music and the New York Metropolitan Opera.)

Da Ponte died August 17, 1838 in New York, and an enormous funeral was held for him in St. Patrick's Cathedral. His collaborations with Mozart still are played around the world to this day.

What is a Libretto?

Libretto means "little book" in Italian. It refers to the written text of an opera set to music by the composer. Today, we commonly refer to an opera as being 'by' the composer of the music, but the text is a vital component and is normally written first. In earlier times it was often regarded as more important than the music, and it was common for audience members to purchase the libretto to read.

Early composers were usually contracted to set music to a pre-existing text. Only later did composers (such as Mozart and Verdi) work in close collaboration with their librettists. A few composers – notably Wagner – wrote their own texts.



Musical Highlights

What to listen for:

- The Overture is the first piece of music you will hear and is most often played with the curtain down. This particular overture is among opera's and Mozart's best. The music sets the tone of the "folle journée" - the "crazy day," to come.
- ACT I: *Non so più cosa son* ("I no longer know who I am") as Cherubino muses about adolescent love.
- ACT I: Figaro's *Non più andrai farfollone amoroso* ("You are no longer an amorous butterfly") as Cherubino goes off to the army. Figaro teases Cherubino about how different things will be from his current life when he's off fighting.
- ACT II: The Countess' lovely *Porgi, Amor* ("Love, grant me comfort"), which opens Act II as she laments the loss of her husband's affection.
- ACT II: Cherubino's *Voi che sapate* ("You who know what love is"), one of Mozart's most popular tunes.
- ACT II finale: The most famous finale of the opera. Over the course of this 20-minute finale, the tension, dramatic confusion, and number of characters on stage build until all nine principals (except Cherubino) are talking all at once about their complicated situations.
- ACT III: The Countess' *Dove sono i bei momenti* ("Where are all the beautiful moments?") is her most moving piece in the opera, in which she sings of her lost love.
- ACT IV: Susanna's *Deh, vieni, non tardar* ("Oh, come, don't be late"). Susanna is in the garden, dressed as the Countess. She knows Figaro is hiding in the bushes and she sings this beautiful song bidding her lover to come to her. Figaro hears but wrongly assumes she is singing to the Count.



The Marriage of Figaro, 2006, Manitoba Opera.

Photo: R.Tinker

Opera Buffa

Opera buffa is an Italian term meaning “comic opera” which is used to describe the Italian comic operas of the early 1700s to mid 1800s, such as Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* and Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville*.

Opera buffa originated in Naples, Italy and developed from the intermezzi (short comic operas that were performed between the acts of more serious, opera seria). Opera seria dealt mainly with subjects of interest to its audience of kings and nobility, and had plots that revolved around gods, wars, and the triumphs and tribulations surrounding royal life. Opera buffa, in contrast, usually involved relatable situations and comic characters derived from *commedia dell’arte*.



Commedia dell’arte (“comedy of professional artists”), is a type of comedy developed in 16th and 17th century Italy, characterized by improvised text based on plot outlines (scenarios), physical comedy, and various stock characters.

Characteristics of Opera Buffa:

- Comic stock characters influenced by *commedia dell’arte*
- Everyday settings and relatable situations
- Simple vocal writing (basso buffo as the associated voice type)
- Patter song: A comic song which is sung at a high speed with a rapid succession of rhythmic patterns in which each syllable of text corresponds to one note. The text is often filled with difficult, tongue-twisting lyrics. Patter songs are frequently reprised (to get the singers to sing them even faster).

A patter song in *The Marriage of Figaro* can be heard in Act I with Bartolo’s *La vendetta*, which contains the tongue-twisting “Se tutto il codice” section near the end.

- Set numbers are linked by recitativo secco: a dialogue that, rather than sung as an aria, is sung with the rhythms of ordinary speech, by using only a few pitches. Accompaniment is by continuo, which is usually a harpsichord.
- Ensemble finale: A long, formally organized conclusion to an opera act which includes all principal characters.

Historical and Literary Background

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During the 1780s, the French playwright Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais wrote three plays about a charming rascal named Figaro, an intelligent and enterprising barber who constantly outwitted his aristocratic employers. When Beaumarchais wrote this witty series of plays, the beginnings of revolution were stirring in France. The rigid class system was a focus of discontent. Though set in Spain rather than France, Beaumarchais' plays about Figaro were frowned upon by government censors because their hero was a somewhat rebellious servant who was far cleverer than his noble master. *The Marriage of Figaro* underwent censorship six times before Beaumarchais could have it performed publicly. King Louis XVI remarked that it was "detestable and unplayable," but artists and intellectuals could see its wit and charm. Another controversial factor was Beaumarchais' portrayal of women as the mental and moral superiors of men. The lovely and intelligent Countess in *The Marriage of Figaro* eventually outsmarts her husband, who is a philandering scoundrel.

Beaumarchais is best known for his plays about Figaro, but he had additional accomplishments in his life that make him as amazing and varied a character as any of those in his plays. He was an excellent musician, a watch-maker, a secret agent for the French government, an architect, an inventor, and an arms dealer, among other professions. He was the harp instructor to the daughters of King Louis XV and maintained a private fleet that helped supply the American rebels in the War of Independence. Beaumarchais was not unlike his famous creation, Figaro, and it is felt that he drew upon his own experiences to produce this wonderful character.

Beaumarchais' *The Marriage of Figaro* is remembered today as an important milestone in the run-up to the French Revolution. It is the opera by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and his brilliant librettist, Lorenzo Da Ponte, that has enshrined *The Marriage of Figaro* as the masterpiece even more exciting, humorous, and true to life than Beaumarchais' original play. Stage director David Farrar once remarked that *The Marriage of Figaro* is sometimes likened to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, revealing the highest and lowest elements of human behavior, its characters emerging from adversity and deception variously wiser and enlightened.

Mozart met the adventurous Da Ponte at the Viennese court where he became a successful writer of poems and opera librettos for a variety of composers, including Mozart. When collaborating with Mozart on *The Marriage of Figaro*, Da Ponte wisely toned down the political passages of the play and, instead, focused on the human elements of the story. The main theme of the opera became love and forgiveness, rather than revolution. The characters became more sympathetic and realistic; some of the aristocrats turned out to be charming and kind, others bumbling and stupid. The same was true of the servants. To complement Da Ponte's words, Mozart wrote music that characterized Figaro and his friends to perfection. For example, the Countess sings two arias that not only express her inner thoughts, but, because of their formal structure and musical style, give her an importance that she lacks in the play.

At its premiere in 1786, *The Marriage of Figaro* was highly successful. Unfortunately, the Austrian emperor was ill at ease with the story's liberal overtones. Rival composers encouraged criticism of the work. There were a total of nine performances in Vienna. Its performance in Prague proved to be more pivotal, leading to the commission of *Don Giovanni*.

The truly great success of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* did not begin until long after the composer's death when his work became more fully appreciated. Today, *The Marriage of Figaro* is considered by many to be the most perfect of Mozart's operas. The fineness of his musical characterizations and the ingenuity of the ensembles confirm his talent as a musical dramatist. He is considered one of the world's greatest musical geniuses not just because of his operas but because he was the master of all musical forms including opera, symphony, concerto, chamber music, solo vocal, instrumental music, and choral works, creating some of the most glorious music known to man. Though he lived barely 36 years and his adult life was filled with frustration and poverty, he left the world a legacy that still astounds, excites and fulfills the senses.



An original poster for *Le Nozze di Figaro* (1786)

A Short Overview of 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 creates a multi-dimensional theatrical experience.

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 the 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.

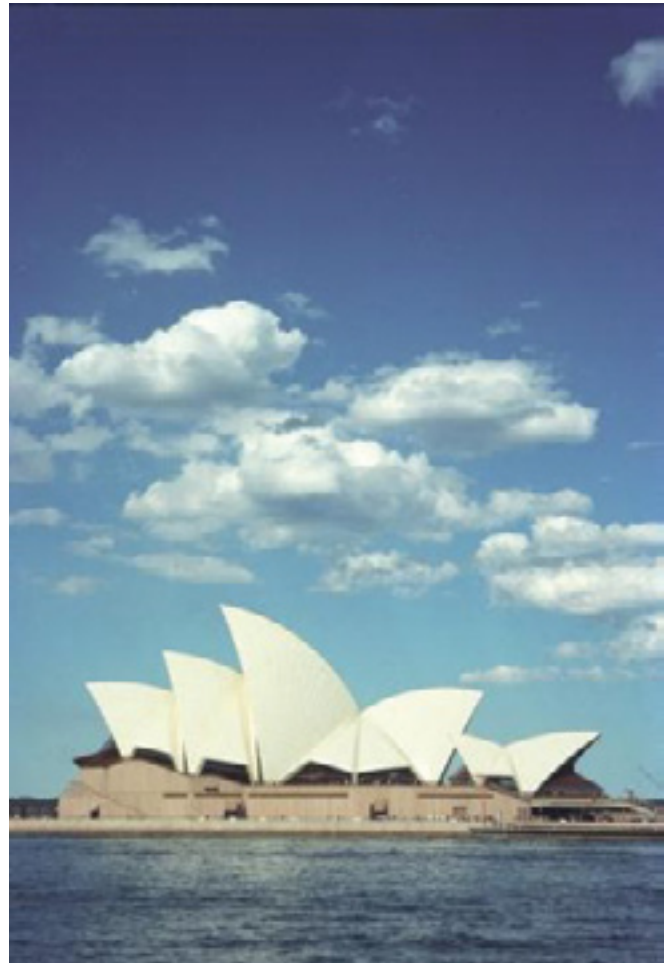
The Camerata laid down three principles for their new art form:

1. The text must be understood; the accompaniment must be very simple and should not distract from the words.
2. The words must be sung with correct and natural declamation, as if they were spoken, and must avoid the rhythms of songs.
3. 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 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 usually focuses on a character's emotions rather than actions. A recitative is sung dialogue or speech that occurs between arias and ensembles. It helps to further the action of the story and shape the relationships between the characters.

The story of the opera is written as a libretto: a text that is set to music. 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



The Sydney Opera House

librettist. 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 - 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 opéra-comique (French). Examples are Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and Bizet's *Carmen*, respectively.



The Metropolitan Opera (1937)

Bringing an Opera to the Stage

Opera combines many great art forms to make something completely different. First and foremost are the performers who portray characters by revealing their thoughts and emotions through the singing voice. The next very important component is a full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singing actors and actresses, helping them to portray the full range of emotions possible in the operatic format. The orchestra performs in an area in front of the singers called the orchestra pit, while the singers perform on the open area called the stage. Wigs, costumes, sets and specialized lighting further enhance these performances, all of which are designed, created, and executed by a team of highly trained artisans.

The creation of an opera begins with a dramatic scenario crafted by a playwright or dramaturg who, alone or with a librettist, fashions the script or libretto that contains the words the artists will sing. Working in tandem, the composer and librettist team up to create a cohesive musical drama in which the music and words work together to express the emotions revealed in the story. Following the completion of their work, the composer and librettist entrust their new work to a conductor who, with a team of assistants (*repetiteurs*), assumes responsibility for the musical preparation of the work. The conductor collaborates with a stage director (responsible for the visual component) in order to bring a performance of the new piece to life on the stage. The stage director and conductor form the creative spearhead for the new composition while assembling a design team which will take charge of the actual physical production.



Wendy Nielsen (Tosca) and Richard Margison (Cavaradossi), *Tosca*, Manitoba Opera, November 2010. Photo: R. Tinker

Set designers, lighting designers, costume designers, wig and makeup designers and even choreographers must all be brought on board to participate in the creation of the new production. The set designer combines the skills of both an artist and an architect using “blueprint” plans to design the actual physical set which will reside on the stage, recreating the physical setting required by the story line. These blueprints are turned over to a team of carpenters who are specially trained in the art of stage carpentry. Following the actual building of the set, painters, following instructions from the set designer’s original plans, paint the set. As the set is assembled on the stage, the lighting designer works with a team of electricians to throw light onto both the stage and the set in an atmospheric, as well as practical way. Using specialized lighting instruments, colored gels and a state-of-the-art computer, the designer, along with the stage director, create a “lighting plot” by writing “lighting cues” which are stored in the computer and used during the actual performance of the opera.

During this production period, the costume designer, in consultation with the stage director, has designed appropriate clothing for the singers to wear. These designs are fashioned into patterns and crafted by a team of skilled artisans called cutters, stitchers, and sewers. Each costume is specially made for each singer using his/her individual measurements. The wig and makeup designer, working with the costume designer, designs and creates wigs which will complement both the costume and the singer, as well as represent historically accurate period fashions.

The principals are the people who have the major roles in an opera. They are professional singers. Principals usually arrive about three weeks before the first performance, with all of their music memorized and a good sense of their character. In rehearsal, they work with the director who helps them block each of the scenes. The director works with the principals to develop their characters and their voice. For the first two weeks they are accompanied by a rehearsal pianist. The week of the show, they move into the Centennial Concert Hall and begin work rehearsing on stage with the orchestra in the pit.



Michel Corbeil (Monostatos), Andriana Chuchman (Pamina),
The Magic Flute, Manitoba Opera, April 2011. Photo: R. Tinker

The Operatic Voice and Professional Singing

Operatic singing, developed in Europe during the 17th century, places intense vocal demands on the singer. Opera singers rarely use microphones, and therefore must project their voices to fill a large theatre and be heard above an orchestra.

An opera singer learns to use his or her body as an amplification device. By controlling the muscles of the diaphragm, the singer can regulate the amount of breath used. The diaphragm expands and contracts, regulating the air that passes through the vocal cords, causing them to vibrate. The speed of this 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 that amplify the sound.

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 contribute. Vocal colour refers to the richness of the sound and vocal weight refers to how powerful a voice sounds.

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 at least one foreign language. After university, their first professional 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. Even well established singers have voice teachers, and often acting coaches, who help them refine their singing techniques.

Physical health is a major priority to a singer. Contrary to popular belief, not all opera singers are overweight. Opera singers once believed that excessive weight gave added volume and richness to the voice. However, now we know 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 tobacco, alcohol, and caffeine.

VOCAL CATEGORIES

Women

SOPRANO: 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: Similar to an oboe in range and tone colour. Called an alto in choral arrangements, this voice can play a wide variety of characters including gypsies, mothers, and young men (trouser role).

CONTRALTO: Similar to an English horn in range and tone colour. Usually play unique roles including fortune-tellers, witches, and older women.

Men

TENOR: Similar to a trumpet in range, tone, color and acoustical "ring." Usually plays the hero or the romantic lead in the opera.

BARITONE: 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: Similar to a trombone or bassoon in tone color. Usually portrays old, wise men, or foolish, comic men.

HIGHER

LOWER

VOCAL COLOURINGS

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.

BASS: the lowest singing range of the male voice.

BASSO BUFFO: a bass singer who specializes in comic characters.

BASSO PROFUNDO: 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: 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: 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 to shortly after the death of Beethoven. 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.



Jeffrey Springer (Turiddu), *Pagliacci*, Manitoba Opera, April 2004. Photo: R.Tinker

COMPOSER: the individual who writes all the music for both voice and instrument.

COMPRIMARIO: a 19th 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.

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 per-

formance 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.



Jeff Mattsey (Don Giovanni) and Stefan Szkafarowsky (Commendatore), *Don Giovanni*, Manitoba Opera, November 2003. Photo: R.Tinker

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.

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 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: an opera about ordinary people, usually, but not always comic. First developed in the 18th century.

OPERA SERIA: a serious opera. The usual characters are gods and goddesses, or ancient heroes.

OPERA-COMIQUE: (singspiel) 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.

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.

SITZPROBE: the rehearsal held on the main stage for the first time. The entire opera is sung through without any costumes or blocking.

SOPRANO: the highest range of the female singing voice.

SOUBRETTE: pert young female character with a light soprano voice.

SPINTO: 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.



Andriana Chuchman (Pamina), *The Magic Flute*, Manitoba Opera, April 2011. Photo: R.Tinker

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 makeup artists to bring his or her vision into reality.

STAGE MANAGER: the person who coordinates and manages elements of the performance.

SUPERNUMERARIES: appear on stage in costume in non-singing and usually, non-speaking roles.

SURTITLES: the English translations of the opera's language, 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.

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 19th century.

Audience Etiquette

The following 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, but this is optional and people attend the opera wearing all varieties of clothing.
- 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 and remember to thank them.
- Remove your hat. This is customary and is respectful to the artists and to people sitting behind you.
- Turn off, tune in. Switch off all electronic devices including cell phones, smart phones, iPods, pagers, and digital watch alarms.
- Leave your camera at home and do not use the camera function on your phone during a performance. This can be very disturbing to the artists and audience members.
- Find the “EXIT” signs. Look for the illuminated signs over the doors. You always want to know where the nearest emergency exit is in a theatre.
- If you think you might need a breath mint or cough drop, unwrap it before the performance.
- Settle in and get comfortable before the performance begins. Read your program. This tells you what performance you’re about to see, who created it, and who’s performing in it. You might like to read a synopsis of the opera before it begins.
- 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 and an opportunity to identify common musical themes that may reoccur during the opera.
- Save all conversations, eating, 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.
- Sit still. Only whisper when it is absolutely necessary, as a whisper is heard all over the theatre, and NEVER stand during the performance, except in the case of an emergency.
- Read the English translations projected above the stage.
- Feel free to laugh when something is funny – this is a performance and you are expected to respond!
- 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.
- Notice repeated words or phrases; they are usually significant.
- Applaud (or shout Bravo!) at the end of an aria or chorus piece to show your enjoyment of it. The end of a piece can be identified by a pause in the music.
- Finally, have fun and enjoy the show!

Manitoba Opera

Manitoba Opera was founded in 1969 by a group of individuals dedicated to presenting the great works of opera to Manitoban audiences. Manitoba Opera is the province's only full-time professional opera company. The company attracts internationally renowned artists, highlights the best local talent, and is supported by the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. Manitoba Opera celebrated its 35th Season in 2007/08 by presenting the world premiere of an opera commissioned by the company, *Transit of Venus*.

Chorus

The Manitoba Opera Chorus, under the direction of Chorus Master Tadeusz Biernacki, is hailed for their excellent singing and acting abilities. The chorus boasts a core of skilled singers who give generously of their time and talents. Some are voice majors at university, a few are singing teachers, but most work in jobs that aren't music related.

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Chorus Master & Assistant Music Director

Michael Blais
Director of Administration

Valorie Block
Event & Sponsorship Manager

Larry Desrochers
General Director & CEO

Livia Dymond
Education & Outreach Coordinator

Sheldon Johnson
Director of Production

Natasha MacDonald-Sawh
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Music Advisor & Principal Conductor

Darlene Ronald
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Monica Wood
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Carmen, Manitoba Opera, April 2010. Photo: R.Tinker

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Student Activities

Curriculum Connections to the Manitoba Curriculum Frameworks for Grade 9 - 12 are provided below each activity. For a more in depth look at the connections, view our Manitoba Curriculum Connections documents on the Manitoba Opera website.

Activity #1: Using the Five C's, Have your Students Analyze the Opera as Drama

CHARACTERS: Are they interesting? Believable? Are their actions, words, thoughts consistent?

CONFLICT: What conflicts are established? How are they resolved?

CLIMAX: To what climax does the conflict lead?

CONCLUSION: How well does the conclusion work? Is it consistent? Satisfying? Believable?

CONTEXT: What are the historical, physical, and emotional settings? Sets and costumes?

- Give students the synopsis to read and have them re-tell the story after they have read it.
- Ask comprehensive questions.
- Present and discuss the composer and librettist.
- Listen to excerpts from the opera. Watch a DVD of the opera. Have students identify and recognize recurring themes.
- Discuss the historical background, emphasizing the visual and performing arts and history-social science frameworks. Discuss the results of certain events. Whom did they affect? How? Why? Did any changes occur as a result?
- Review the glossary of terms.
- Have the students watch for references to themes in the opera in their everyday lives. The internet, radio, TV, magazines, and movies often refer back to classics.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.2.1; 2.1.2; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M2; DR-C1; DR-R3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-M2; M-C2; M-R1

Activity #2: Create a Poster, Set, Costume, Press Release, or Ad

- Choose a time and place to set your production.
- Have the students design a poster for *The Marriage of Figaro* Student Night at the Opera, including such details as the date, the time, and the people involved.
- Have them draw a set for a production of the opera.
- They might also sketch a costume, wig, and makeup for a character in *The Marriage of Figaro*.
- Have the students write a press release about *The Marriage of Figaro* Student Night at the Opera, including the date, the time, the people involved, and why it would be exciting or fun to attend.
- Have the students create an ad for the opera. Include whatever you feel is the biggest “selling point” of the opera - what makes it exciting? Why should people come to see it?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.3.5; 2.3.4; 4.1.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-C2; DR-C3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-C2; M-C3

Activity #3: A Review

Step 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. If you were the stage director, 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.

Step 2 – Class Discussion

Have the whole class examine the poster papers and discuss the different ideas from each group.

Step 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, and revision for consistency of ideas. You might give your students a few samples of reviews for fine arts events – or ask them to bring in some reviews they find themselves. Have the students fill out the review outline, then complete a rough draft.

1. Purpose (why are you writing this and who is your audience?)
2. Plot Synopsis (including who sang what role, etc.)
3. Paragraph 1 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
4. Paragraph 2 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
5. Paragraph 3 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
6. Summary/Closing Paragraph

Step 4 - Peer Conferencing

Students will exchange reviews to critique and edit. Encourage the students to focus on effective coordination of ideas in sentences and the correct use of grammar and punctuation.

Step 5 - Creating the final draft

Have students make the appropriate adjustments to their reviews. You could also have the students type the pieces and organize them into a newspaper.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.1; 1.1.2; 1.2.2; 3.1.3; 3.3.1; 4.1.3; 4.3.1; 4.3.2; 4.3.3; 4.4.1; 4.2.2; 5.2.1; 5.1.1

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-R1; DR-R2; DR-R3; DR-R4

Music Curriculum Connections: M-R1; M-R2; M-R3; M-R4

Activity #4: Have your students act out the story

Have students consider the characters and the role they play in the story. Choose one of the following:

COUNT ALMAVIVA | COUNTESS ALMAVIVA | FIGARO | SUSANNA | CHERUBINO | DR. BARTOLO

If you were going to play this character, you would have to discover, create, and imagine background, personality, and physical qualities. Some clues are provided in the story and the music and some you need to make up yourself.

Pretend you are that character and answer the following questions:

1. What motivates you? How does this affect your actions? What obstacles stand in your way?
2. What steps in the opera do you take to achieve your objectives? What are the results?
3. What obstacles are beyond your control (laws, social status, others' actions)?
4. What are your (character's) greatest strengths? Greatest weaknesses?
5. What is your relationship to the other characters?
6. How is the character's personality expressed through the music of the opera?
7. Can you think of a modern-day character who has similar characteristics and traits?
8. If this character were alive today, how would s/he be more or less successful?
9. What different steps would s/he take to achieve an objective?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.1; 2.1.2; 3.3.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M1; DR-M2; DR-M3

Activity #5: Write a Biography

Have students research and write a biography of the playwright, composer, librettist or one of the characters.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 3.3.1; 3.3.2; 3.3.3; 3.2.2; 3.2.3; 4.3.1; 4.3.2; 4.3.3; 4.2.2; 4.2.3

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-C1

Music Curriculum Connections: M-C1

Activity #6: Create a Journal or Blog from the Point of View of a Character

Have the students choose a point of conflict, and write a journal or blog of those events from a character's point of view.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.2; 1.1.3; 2.3.5; 4.2.2; 4.1.2; 4.1.3; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-R3

Activity #7: Write a Letter from One Character to Another

Have the students choose a moment in the story and have one character write a letter to another. Explore how they would be feeling about the events of the wedding day.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.2; 1.1.3; 2.3.5; 4.2.2; 4.1.2; 4.1.3; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-R3

Activity #8: Cast *The Marriage of Figaro*

Have the students cast modern-day singers or bands as the performers in *The Marriage of Figaro*. Who did you choose? What are their costumes like? What did you base your decisions on?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.3.1; 2.2.1; 2.2.2; 4.1.2; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M1; DR-C3; DR-R3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-C2; M-R4

Activity #9: Research and Report

Have the students study the history and politics of Mozart's time, particularly the year when *The Marriage of Figaro* premiered (1786). What authors were popular? What scientific discoveries were being made? What was the social and political life in Europe at the time (as well as in Canada)?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.2.1; 2.2.2; 3.3.1; 3.3.3; 3.2.2; 3.2.3; 4.3.1; 4.3.2; 4.3.3; 4.2.2; 4.2.3; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-C2

Music Curriculum Connections: M-C2

Activity #10: *The Marriage of Figaro* Mood Board

Often before artists and designers create their work, they make a mood board to set the tone for the piece. This is usually a poster-sized piece of paper covered in images and words, usually from the pages of magazines and newspapers, that together communicates the complex mood of the piece in a way that words can't. It's the same as making a collage, except a mood board is for the purpose of communicating a focused concept.

Have your students go through a stack of old magazines and newspapers to create a mood board for *The Marriage of Figaro*. They can create one each or work together on a large one for the class. Consider elements like colours, textures, phrases, faces, patterns, and images that represent the opera.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.3.5; 2.3.4; 2.2.3; 4.1.1; 4.1.2; 4.1.3; 4.4.1; 5.1.1

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M3; DR-R3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-R2

Activity #11: Musical Interpretation of Literature

Step 1 - Prepare a Musical Outline

Working in small groups, have your students choose a play, novel, or story that they've read and think about how they'd go about adapting it into an opera. Have them write out an outline and try to structure the beginnings of the opera. Which parts of the drama would be highlighted with which types of music? Would they have a large chorus to back up the principal singers or would the opera be more intimate? Which singing voices (soprano, baritone, tenor, etc.) would best suit each character?

Step 2 - Compose and Perform an Overture

How could the elements of music (ie., rhythm, pitch, dynamics, etc.) be used to communicate the mood of the piece within the overture? Which instruments would be used? Allow them some time to work on composing their overture based on their answers to these questions. Students can then perform their overture for the class either as a composed and rehearsed piece, or improvised. Alternatively, they may choose to present their overture by describing the characteristics of the elements of the music within their piece.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.2; 2.3.5; 2.2.1; 3.1.2; 3.1.3; 4.1.2; 4.4.3; 4.4.2; 4.2.5; 5.1.1; 5.1.2; 5.1.4

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-CR2; DR-M1; DR-M2

Music Curriculum Connections: M-CR2; M-CR3; M-M3

Activity #12: Active Listening

Play the first few minutes of *The Marriage of Figaro* CD. Ask your students to listen closely to the music and jot down their thoughts, feelings, and first impressions. Then have your students share their reactions with the classroom. Ask them to listen again and pay close attention to the elements of music (ie. rhythm, pitch, dynamics, etc.) then explore questions such as the following:

- What are the instruments used to make the music?
- How does this music make me feel?
- What is the mood of the piece?
- What type of emotions do the singers bring forth?
- Does the music have a steady beat or pulse?
- What is the size of the ensemble?
- What do the singing voices tell us about those characters?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.1; 1.12; 1.2.2; 2.3.1; 2.2.3; 4.4.3; 5.2.1

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-R1

Music Curriculum Connections: M-R2

Activity #14: Opera Comprehension Tests*The 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. _____ Considered the first opera.
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 is in charge of all the action on the stage.

The Marriage of Figaro

1. Who is the composer? _____
2. The libretto was written by _____
3. When and where did the premiere performance take place? _____
4. When and where does the story of *The Marriage of Figaro* take place? _____
5. Figaro is a _____ (name his profession).
6. In the first act, Figaro's marriage plans are at risk because of his promise to repay a debt to

7. The count orders _____ to join his regiment as punishment.
8. *The Marriage of Figaro* is based on a play written by _____
9. The role of Figaro is sung by a _____ (name the singing voice).
10. The role of Susanna is sung by a _____ (name the singing voice).
11. What language is the opera performed in? _____
12. Who will sing the role of Figaro in Manitoba Opera's production of *The Marriage of Figaro*?

Answer Key

General Opera

1. Opera
2. Bass
3. Overture
4. Orchestra pit or "the pit"
5. *Daphne*
6. Aria
7. Soprano
8. Duet
9. Contralto
10. Libretto
11. Baritone
12. Stage director

The Marriage of Figaro

1. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
2. Lorenzo Da Ponte
3. 1786 in Vienna, Austria
4. 1780s in Seville, Spain
5. Valet
6. Marcellina
7. Cherubino
8. Pierre Beaumarchais
9. Bass
10. Soprano
11. Italian
12. Daniel Okulitch

Manitoba Opera would be pleased to receive a copy of any work related to this opera produced by your students. Please forward to:

Sophie Waldman, Education and Outreach Coordinator
Manitoba Opera, 1060 - 555 Main St., Winnipeg, MB R3B 1C3

or

swaldman@manitobaopera.mb.ca

Winnipeg Public Library

Resources

Books

The Marriage of Figaro: Plays for Performance
[by Pierre Augustin de Beaumarchais]
Chicago: I.R. Dee, c1994.
Call No.: 842.5 BEA

Mozart [by Greta Cencetti]
Columbus, Ohio: Peter Bedrick Books, 2002.
Call No.: J 780.92 MOZART

Mozart and Classical Music
[by Francesco Salvi]
Hauppauge, N.Y.: Barron's Educational Series,
1998, c1997.
Call No.: J 780.92 SAL

Scores

Le nozze di Figaro (The marriage of Figaro):
an opera in four acts/ music by Wolfgang
Amadeus Mozart
G. Schirmer/Hal Leonard, c1957
Call No.: SCORE 782.1 MOZ

Opera's Greatest Hits
London; New York: AmSCO Publications, c2007.
Call No.: SCORE 782.1 OPE 2007

Sound Recordings

Le nozze di Figaro (The marriage of Figaro)/
music by Mozart
Decca Records, p2002.
Call No.: CD OPERA MOZART NOZ

Mozart
Hamburg: Deutsche Grammophon, p2011.
Call No.: CD OPERA MOZART MOZ

The World's Very Best Opera for Kids - in
English!
The Children's Group, p2003.
Call No.: CD JUV WORLDS

DVD Recordings

Le nozze di Figaro [Mozart]
Opus Arte/BBC, c2008.
Call No.: DVD 792.542 NOZ

Le nozze di Figaro [Mozart]
Kultur, [1994]
Call No.: DVD 792.542 NOZ



An anonymous portrait of the child Mozart,
painted in 1763 on commission from Leopold Mozart

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(The Marriage of Figaro)

- The Marriage of Figaro(study guide). Calgary Opera. 25 Mar 2015. <<http://www.calgaryopera.com/education/study-guide>>
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- The Marriage of Figaro (study guide). Kentucky Opera. 05 May 2015. <<http://kyopera.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/KY-Opera-Fidelio-guide.pdf>>
- The Marriage of Figaro (study guide). Virginia Opera. 25 June 2015. <<https://www.vaopera.org/attachments/article/39/The%20Marriage%20of%20Figaro.pdf>>
- Ticket to the Opera [by Phil G. Goulding]. New York: Fawcett Books, 1996.
- Eyewitness Companions Opera [by Alan Riding & Leslie Dunton-Downer]. New York: DK Publishing, 2006.
- The Opera News Book of “Figaro” [Edited by Frank Merklings]. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1967.

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(General)

This study guide was compiled accumulatively and includes information from the following sources accessed at various unknown dates since 2000:

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BehindTheNames.com
Bellevue University
The Billboard Illustrated Encyclopedia of Opera
The Canadian Opera Company
Encyclopedia of Manitoba
Encyclopedia of the Opera by David Ewen
Fort Worth Opera Study Guide
GradeSaver.com
La Scena
Lyric Opera of Kansas City
Manitoba Archives
Metropolitan Opera
musicwithease.com
Music.MSN.com
New York City Opera
Opera America Learning Centre
operabuffa.com; Opera Columbus Study Guide
Opera News
Operas Every Child Should Know
Opera Lyra Ottawa Study Guide
Opera Today
Orchestra London Study Guide
Pacific Opera
San Diego Opera Study Guide
San Francisco Opera Guild Study Guide
schubincave.com
A Season of Opera
Skeletons from the Opera Closet
timelines.com
Tulsa Opera Study Guide
University of Chicago Press
University of Manitoba
University of Texas
University of Waterloo
Rimrock Study Guide
Virginia Opera Study Guide
Winnipeg Free Press
Wikipedia
The World's Great Operas

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