

Opera On Wheels

Teacher's Guide

Contents:

- 1. Introduction Letter**
- 2. Opera Vocabulary**
- 3. Operatic Voice**
- 4. History of Opera**
 - a. Definition of Opera**
 - b. Origins of Opera**
 - c. Opera vs. Musical Theatre**
- 5. What to Wear at an Opera**
 - a. Opera Glasses**
- 6. Opera Glass Project**
- 7. Classroom Ideas**
- 8. Opera Time Line**
- 9. You Be The Editor**
- 10. Resources**

Introduction to Use of Teacher's Packet

This packet contains material that can be used to enhance your student's understanding of opera so that when Opera On Wheels comes to your school your students will be ready to gain the full potential of the presentation. The packet includes web based resources for opera lesson plans, crossword puzzle builders, and ideas for class room activities. Also, there is a brief history of opera. If you desire more information on any of the topics covered in our packet there are web links at the end that allow for further exploration.

We are excited to be partnering with you in presenting the joys of opera to your students. Thank you for taking the time to prepare your students for our arrival. We have found in the past that those who have an understanding of opera before we come have gained the most from our presentation. We hope that you find the materials in this packet useful.

As part of the assessment for our program, we ask that you would fill out the evaluation form located on our website at <http://www.uwec.edu/mus-the/opera/index.htm> after we have performed at your school. This will help us to improve our program to fit your school's needs in the future. Also, we love to hear responses, receive drawings, etc. from students who have seen Opera On Wheels. We have provided work sheets in this packet that you may use if you like, but feel free to follow whatever format you wish.

Thank you for inviting us to your school and allowing us to present Opera On Wheels to your students. We look forward to working with you soon.

Erin Weaver
Student of Music and Theater
Student coordinator, Opera On Wheels
University of Wisconsin Eau Claire

Opera Vocabulary

- **Accelerando:** The speeding up of the tempo in a particular song in an opera
- **Act:** Part of the opera that has its own structure
- **Alto: (Contralto)** The lowest female voice
- **Aria:** A song sung by one person. The aria often steps away from the plot of the piece and tells you the feelings of an individual
- **Baritone:** The middle male voice
- **Bass:** The lowest male voice
- **Bel Canto:** (Beautiful Singing) A style of singing opera which stresses the ability to sing evenly and purely with precision, yet have vocal agility. It is characterized by ornate vocal runs and smooth, fast movement between notes.

- **Costume:** Clothing worn by a singer to portray his or her character
- **Composer:** The person who writes and arranges the music in an opera
- **Conductor:** Person who leads the orchestra
- **Crescendo:** Part of a song where the music gets gradually louder
- **Designer:** The person who designs the lighting, costuming, and scenery
- **Duet:** A song sung by two singers
- **Ensemble:** Two or more singers singing together and communicating their feelings about a situation at the same time
- **Finale:** The last song in an opera or act
- **Libretto:** The words of an opera
- **Melody:** Consecutive musical notes that create a tune

- **Mezzo-Soprano:** The middle female voice
- **Opera:** A play that is set to music and uses singing instead of speaking to convey its message
- **Orchestra:** The group of musicians that play various instruments in the opera
- **Recitative:** A musical selection in an opera that mimics the free rhythm of speech with a little melody added. It is often used to explain what is happening in the opera
- **Rehearsal:** Time where the orchestra and singers get together and practice the opera before performing
- **Props:** Any item on stage that gets handled by a performer
- **Score:** The notes and words of the opera

- **Set:** The scenery that is on stage to set the location of the opera
- **Soprano:** The highest female voice
- **Tenor:** The highest male voice
- **Trio:** A song sung by three singers
- **Vibrato:** The slight, rapid waver in pitch that enhances the volume and depth of voice or instrument

THE OPERATIC VOICE

- **SOPRANO:** the highest female voice
- **MEZZO-SOPRANO:** the middle female voice
- **CONTRALTO:** the lowest female voice
- **TENOR:** the highest male voice
- **BARITONE:** the middle male voice
- **BASS:** the lowest male voice

Each of the above voices may be characterized by the vocal qualities below

- **COLORATURA:** a voice with the ability to move between notes quickly and ornately; usually has an extended upper range
- **LYRIC:** the most common voice quality, light voice capable of sustained, but not forceful singing; known for its beauty.
- **SPINTO:** combination of lyric beauty and forceful power of the dramatic voice; medium to heavy voice capable of sustained forceful singing.
- **DRAMATIC:** the heaviest and most powerful voice; able to sustain a forceful voice over a full orchestra

How is the Operatic Voice Different?

The operatic voice is carefully trained in classical techniques which allow the singer to use breath support and resonance chambers (both in the head and chest) to be able to uphold the voice in a healthy manner. Breath support is important because it allows the singer to control how quickly the air moves from their lungs. This control gives the operatic singer the ability to sustain notes for a long period of time. Vibrato also increases the capability of a singer to hold long notes. An opera singer has an extensive range. Also, the volume of the voice is increased to make itself heard over the orchestra without the use of microphones.

Definition of Opera

The word “opera” originated from the Latin word “opus” or “work.” A work is any creative piece a person invents such as a poem, drawing, song, etc. The word “opera” literally means “works” in Latin, so an opera is the combination of many works. An opera combines a story line with song, orchestration, costumes, lighting, scenery, and occasionally dancing. An opera can be a comedy, tragedy, or drama. Since there is no dialogue the orchestra and singers must work hard to convey the emotion of the moment.

Origins of Opera

The first opera was written about 400 years ago in Florence, Italy in 1597 by Jacopo Peri entitled Daphne. During the Renaissance there was a desire to renew Greek thought. The records of ancient Greek plays indicated that they used music in their productions. Composers began experimenting with the use of music to accompany the words of their performers. This eventually evolved into singing the words, or what we call recitative. Plays that were sung grew in popularity and spread from Italy to all areas of Europe and eventually the world. Opera has been written in many languages and is still a popular art form today.

Opera vs. Musical Theatre

The major difference between opera and musical theatre is the use of amplification and microphones in the latter. Opera singers do not use any sort of amplification for their voice. Their voices are powerful enough to penetrate the orchestra and still be heard by the audience. This is acquired by a slightly different technique than Broadway singing.

Many people believe that the difference between musical theatre and opera is that opera is entirely sung and musical theatre is a mixture of dialogue and song. This is true the majority of the time; however, there are exceptions to both cases. The opera The Magic Flute by Mozart mixes dialogue with song and the musical The Phantom of the Opera by Andrew Lloyd Weber is a Broadway production that is sung entirely.

Besides these few examples, opera and musical theatre are very similar.

What to Wear at an Opera?

When opera originated the elite upper class were those who could afford attending an opera. Because of this opera is known for its high fashion. Though many still dress up for an opera, fancy attire has become less of an issue. The opening night of an opera often requires evening dresses and tuxedos; however, on other nights the clothing worn by the audience varies from business to casual. Still, the trend is to dress up for the opera.



Opera Glasses

Opera glasses are a lot like binoculars and are used for similar purposes. In large opera houses the actors on stage and the conductor are far away. Opera glasses were invented to assist the audience in their ability to see the emotion of the singer or the movements of the conductor from far away. Since it was often the wealthy who attended operas in the past, many opera glasses were encrusted with gold, jewels, and other precious metals. Though they may not be quite as fancy, opera glasses are still in use today.



Make Your Own Opera Glasses!

-Takes approximately 30 minutes.

What you will need for each student:

- 2 Toilet paper rolls
- Elmer's Glue
- Popsicle Stick
- Tissue Paper
- Sequins
- Construction Paper
- Glitter
- Beads
- Crayons/Marker

Preparation:

- Cut pieces of construction paper or tissue paper the length and width of two toilet paper rolls.
- Glue or staple toilet paper rolls together (Optional)

Procedure:

- Glue construction paper onto toilet paper rolls.
- Glue popsicle stick onto back side of toilet paper rolls. (You may need to secure it with another piece of paper over the top of it)
- Decorate the opera glasses with sequins, tissue paper, glitter, beads, crayons, markers, etc.



Classroom Ideas

- Compare musical theatre, modern music, and opera
 - Discuss Opera Etiquette; Dress up for the opera
 - Discuss the History of Opera
 - Make Opera Glasses (project included in packet)
 - Opera Bingo
 - Opera Jeopardy
- ❖ For more Opera classroom ideas and Opera lesson plans go to:
<http://www.teachopera.net>
- ❖ To make your own crossword puzzles and word searches go to
<http://www.crosswordpuzzlegames.com/create.html> or
<http://puzzlemaker.com/code/BuildWordSearch.asp>

Opera Timeline! (K-2)

Draw 3 pictures that tell about events in the opera you just saw.



Beginning

Middle

End

RESOURCES

On The Web

Opera Lesson Plans
<http://www.teachopera.net>

Opera World
<http://www.operaworld.com>

OPERA America
<http://www.operaamerica.org>

Opera Myths
<http://www.operaprovidence.org/opera%20101/opera%20myths.htm>

Opera Etiquette
http://www.houstongrandopera.org/performances/audience_tips.aspx

Crossword Puzzle Games
<http://www.crosswordpuzzlegames.com/create.html>

REFERENCE

Brief History of Opera
artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2374/2374_aida_operahistory.pdf

Cincinnati Opera
<http://www.cincinnatiopera.org>

Collector's Guide to Opera Glasses
http://www.gilai.com/books/articles/opera_glasses.html

Crossword Puzzle Games
<http://www.crosswordpuzzlegames.com/create.html>

Discovery School
<http://puzzlemaker.com/code/BuildWordSearch.asp>

Opera Etiquette
<http://www.operacolorado.org/education/index.aspx?pageID=121>

Walsh, Joseph and Candy Leibundguth. Virginia Opera *The New Adventures of Alice in Opera Land* Teachers Guide.

