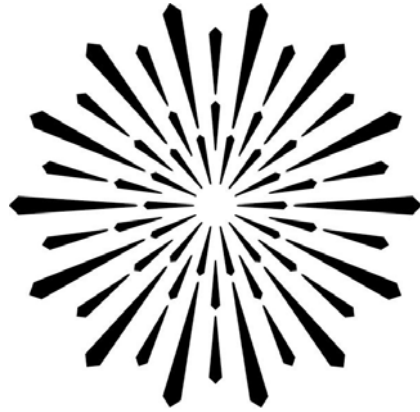


# The Elixir of Love



San Francisco Opera Guild  
2008 Teachers' Guide and Resource Book



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OPERA GUILD**

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## Dear Educator:

Thank you for your participation in San Francisco Opera Guild's 2008-2009 education programs! The Opera Guild's Teacher's Guides for the 2008 Student Dress Rehearsals are publications that you can use as a tool to assist you in preparing your students for their exposure to opera.

Opera is a complete art form and expression of culture. It encompasses music, theatre, dance, design, literature, history, and social movement in one sweep. This guide will provide you with background on the composer, history of the source material for the opera, a synopsis of the story, a bit about the political climate of the time, and extension exercises that can be incorporated into your curriculum.

A table of contents will guide you to the information on areas you wish to cover with your students. In addition there is a guide for opera etiquette so your classes will be familiar with the expectations of an audience member. You will find a collection of assignments and activities that will engage your students in the world of the play and we hope this involvement will excite them further about seeing *The Elixir of Love*.

We are eager to hear your feedback on the opera experience with your students. Please fill out the evaluation form in the back of this guide after your trip to the opera. Please feel free to include suggestions for future guides, activities that were particularly successful, and especially any student work you would like to share. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact us. We hope you and your students enjoy the experiences at the opera!

*Caroline Altman*  
Director of Education

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Vice President, Education



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# The Elixir of Love

*Opera in two acts by Gaetano Donizetti  
Libretto in Italian by Felice Romani*

**Adina**, a wealthy girl  
**Nemorino**, a young peasant  
**Belcore**, a sergeant  
**Dulcamara**, a quack doctor  
**Gianetta**, a peasant girl

Soprano  
Tenor  
Baritone  
Bass  
Soprano

*Italy, 19<sup>th</sup> Century  
First performance: May 12, 1832, Milan*

## Synopsis

### Act 1

The opening of this comic opera finds Nemorino, a poor peasant, in love with Adina, a beautiful landowner, who torments Nemorino with her indifference. When Nemorino hears Adina reading to her workers the story of Tristan and Iseult, he is convinced that a magic potion will gain Adina's love for him. He is afraid she loves the self-important Sergeant Belcore who appears with his regiment and immediately proposes marriage to Adina in front of everyone. The traveling quack salesman, Dulcamara (the self-proclaimed Dr. Encyclopedia), arrives, selling his bottled cure-all to the townspeople. Nemorino innocently asks Dulcamara if he has anything like Iseult's love potion. Dulcamara says he does, selling it to Nemorino at a price matching the contents of Nemorino's pockets. Unknown to Nemorino, the bottle contains only wine. And, in order to make a timely escape, Dulcamara tells Nemorino the potion will not take effect until the next day. Nemorino drinks it, feeling its effects immediately. Emboldened by the 'elixir' Nemorino encounters Adina, and although she teases him mercilessly, the audience senses that the attraction just might be mutual, were it not for the marriage proposal of the impressive and pompous sergeant. In fact, their wedding date had been set for six days hence. Nemorino's confidence that tomorrow he will win Adina by virtue of the elixir, causes him to act indifferently toward her.

This upsets Adina, but she attempts to hide her feelings. Instead, she ups the ante as well by agreeing to Sergeant Belcore's alternate suggestion: that they marry immediately as he has just received orders that the regiment must ship off the next morning. Both Adina and the Sergeant gauge Nemorino's reaction to this news, the Sergeant with resentment, Adina with despair. Nemorino is, of course panicked, and cries out for Doctor Dulcamara to come to his aid.

## **Act 2**

Adina's outdoor wedding party is in full swing. Dr. Dulcamara is there, and performs a song with Adina to entertain the guests. The notary arrives to make the marriage official. Adina is sad to see that Nemorino has not appeared. Everyone goes inside to sign the wedding contract. But Dulcamara stays outside, helping himself to food and drink. Nemorino appears, having seen the notary, realizing that he has lost Adina. He sees the Doctor and frantically begs him for more elixir, of the type that will work immediately. But because Nemorino has no money, the Doctor refuses, disappearing inside. The Sergeant emerges, alone, wondering aloud why Adina has suddenly put off the wedding and the signing of the contract. Nemorino spots his rival, but is powerless to do anything. The Sergeant asks about Nemorino's dejection. When Nemorino says he has no money Belcore immediately suggests that if he joins the army he'll be paid immediately. He produces a contract, which Nemorino signs (with an X) in return for the cash Belcore gives him on the spot. Nemorino privately vows to fly to Dulcamara for more potion, while Belcore muses that he has easily dispatched of his rival by sending him off to war.

Later that evening the women of the village are gossiping that Nemorino is unaware that he has just inherited a large fortune from his deceased uncle. They spot Nemorino, who has clearly spent his military signing bonus, and has bought and consumed a large amount of 'elixir' (wine again) from Dr. Dulcamara. The women approach Nemorino with overly friendly greetings, the likes of which he has never seen. This is proof to Nemorino that this dose of the elixir has worked. Adina sees Nemorino in a jolly mood and, encountering Dr. Dulcamara, wonders what has gotten into him. Dulcamara, unaware that Adina is the object of Nemorino's affection, tells her the story of the smitten bumpkin who spent his last penny on the elixir, and even signed his life away, joining the army for money to get more, so desperate was he to win the love of some unnamed cruel beauty. Adina immediately

realizes Nemorino's sincerity, and regrets teasing him. She falls for Nemorino, basking in the sincerity of his love. Dulcamara interprets this behavior as some sort of condition requiring a cure by one of his potions.

They depart. Nemorino appears alone, pensive, reflecting on a tear he saw in Adina's eye when he was ignoring her earlier. Based on that tear alone, he is sincerely convinced that Adina loves him. She enters, asking him why he has chosen to join the army and leave the town. When Nemorino says he's seeking a better life, Adina responds by telling him he is loved, and that she has purchased his military contract from Sergeant Belcore. She offers the cancelled contract to Nemorino, asking him to take it. He is free now. She says, however, that if he stays, he will no longer be sad. As he takes the contract Adina turns to leave. Nemorino believes she is abandoning him and flies in to a desperate fit, vowing that if he is not loved, if the elixir has not worked, and the Doctor has fooled him, then he might as well go off and die a soldier. Adina stops him and confesses that she loves him. Nemorino is ecstatic. Adina begs him to forgive her for teasing him. He does so with a kiss. The sergeant returns, seeing the two in an embrace. Adina explains that she loves Nemorino. The Sergeant tosses it off, noting that there are plenty of other women in the world. Dulcamara, his bags packed, pops out of a doorway, adding that he will happily provide elixir for the Sergeant's next conquest. A crowd has gathered by now, all agreeing that the elixir has done its job as they bid a fond farewell to the doctor.





Composer: Gaetano Donizetti  
1798-1848

Gaetano Donizetti was born into an impoverished family in the lovely Italian mountain town of Bergamo on November 29, 1797. Because of his interest and talent in music, his father was able to enter him free of charge in the local conservatory, directed by Simon Mayr. In 1815, at the age of 18, Donizetti was sent to study under Padre Mattei, the former teacher of the great composer Rossini, at the Liceo Musicale in Bologna. Upon finishing his training in 1817, Donizetti returned to Bergamo. However, he was not overwhelmed with commissions, and rather than become a teacher as his father proposed, he joined the army in order to continue with his own compositions. He achieved moderate success with his operas, and in 1822 his *Zoraide de Granata* won him an honorable discharge from the service.

With his reputation now established, he was free to devote his time entirely to composing. *Anna Bolena*, which tells the tragic story of Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII's second wife, was written in 1830, and is considered to be his first mature and serious work. In 1832, he wrote *L'Elisir d'Amore*, in a six-week period. The work evolved throughout the rehearsal process, and the censors only gave their approval to the production at the dress

rehearsal, whereas they usually gave it prior to the beginning of the rehearsal period. It was an instant hit, and became one of the most frequently performed operas in Italy between 1838 and 1848. It has proven itself to be one of the finest comedies in the Italian opera buffa repertory.

In 1835, Donizetti made his first trip to Paris. Unfortunately, his *Marino Faliero* was overshadowed by Bellini's *I Puritani*, which had opened in Paris to raves two months earlier. He returned to Naples in September of 1835 for the premiere of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, which was an overwhelming success. Opera after opera flowed from his fertile pen. In 1837, his wife Virginia died in a terrible cholera epidemic. He also lost all three of his young children. From then on his work seemed to take a morbid turn, though he went on to even greater success over the next several years.

1840 saw the premieres of *La Fille du Régiment* in Paris, in which Donizetti used a French libretto for the first time, as well as *Lucrezia Borgia* and *La Favorite*. That same year he was summoned to Vienna by the Emperor, where he produced *Linda di Chamounix* in 1842. The opera was so successful that Donizetti was appointed *maestro di corte*, Court Composer and Master of the Imperial Chapel, positions once held by Mozart.

The premiere of *Don Pasquale* in Paris in 1843 was his last great success. The premiere of *Dom Sébastien* in 1844 was a failure. Donizetti finally realized during the rehearsal period for *Dom Sébastien* in 1844 that the headaches and fevers he had been suffering from were not just due to overwork but signs of a serious illness, and possibly lingering depression following his wife's death. While in Vienna in 1844, he was asked to write an opera for the London Theatre. His refusal of the commission was an admission that weariness and sickness had deprived him of his former facility and speed. In 1845 hallucinations and nervous attacks ended in a paralytic stroke which kept him bedridden for two years. He was diagnosed as suffering from cerebro-spinal syphilis, and his nephew

Andrea committed him to a sanatorium at Ivry. A year and half later he was taken back to Bergamo, but he did not improve, and he died there in 1848.

Donizetti's outstanding talent was his knowledge of the human voice and of instruments. To him, the orchestra was always secondary to the voice. It is Donizetti who is remembered for his humorous and tragic characterizations and the rare creative ability of producing endlessly flowing and graceful melody.





*Librettist: Felice Romani 1788-1865*

**Felice Romani** was an Italian poet and scholar of literature and mythology who wrote many librettos for the opera composers Donizetti and Bellini.

He joined the faculty of the University of Genoa and, while there, translated French literature. With a colleague, he prepared a six-volume dictionary of mythology and antiquities, including the Celtic history in Italy. Romani's expertise in French and antiquity is reflected in the libretti he wrote; the majority are based on French literature and many, such as *Norma*, use mythological sources.

Romani travelled widely in Spain, Greece, Germany, and France. In 1814, he established himself in Milan, where he became friends with important figures in the literary and musical world. He turned down the post of court poet in Vienna, and began instead a career as opera librettist. He wrote two librettos for the composer Johann Simon Mayr, which resulted in his appointment as the librettist for La Scala. Romani became the most highly regarded of all Italian librettists of his age, producing nearly one hundred. In spite of his interest in French literature, he refused to work in Paris.

As a rule, Romani did not create his own stories; he kept up with what was happening in the Paris theatre and adapted plays which were popular there, but this wasn't always a safe strategy, given the vague intellectual property rights legislation of the time. In one case,

Romani prepared a libretto based on the play "Lucrezia Borgia" by Victor Hugo for the opera *Lucrezia Borgia* by Donizetti, but when it was staged in Paris in 1840, Hugo obtained an injunction against further productions. The libretto was then rewritten and retitled *La Rinegata*, with the Italian characters changed to Turks.

Romani wrote the librettos for Bellini's *Il pirata*, *La Straniera*, *Zaira*, *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, *La Sonnambula*, *Norma* and *Beatrice di Tenda*, for Rossini's *Il Turco in Italia* and *Bianca e Falliero*, and Donizetti's *Anna Bolena* and *L'elisir d'amore* (which he adapted from Eugene Scribe's *Le philtre*). He also wrote a libretto (originally for composer Adalbert Gyrowetz) that Verdi used for his early comedy *Un giorno di regno*.

Romani was considered an ideal match for Bellini, who is quoted as having said: "Give me good verses and I will give you good music". Dramatic, even extravagant "situations" expressed in verses "designed to portray the passions in the liveliest manner" was what Bellini was looking for in a libretto, according to a letter to Florimo, August 4, 1834, and he found them in Romani.

But the two had a falling out over missed deadlines for *Beatrice di Tenda*.. After setting *I Puritani* to a libretto by Carlo Pepoli, Bellini was determined not to compose any more Italian operas with anyone but Romani. *I Puritani* was his last opera; he died less than a year after its premiere. Romani mourned him deeply and wrote an obituary in which he expressed his profound regrets over their disagreement.

In 1834 Romani became editor of the *Gazzetta Ufficiale Piemontese* to which he contributed literary criticism. He retained the post, with a break 1849–1854, until his death, in Moneglia, (in the region of Liguria, Italy). A volume of his lyric poems was published in 1841.

Courtesy: wikipedia

# Medicine Shows, Snake Oil and Love Potions: Good for What Ails Ya!

*“Do not place this preparation on any part of the body where you do not wish hair to grow.”*

*Patent medicine label, cited in Pink Pills for Pale People by F.W. Saul*

## **European History**

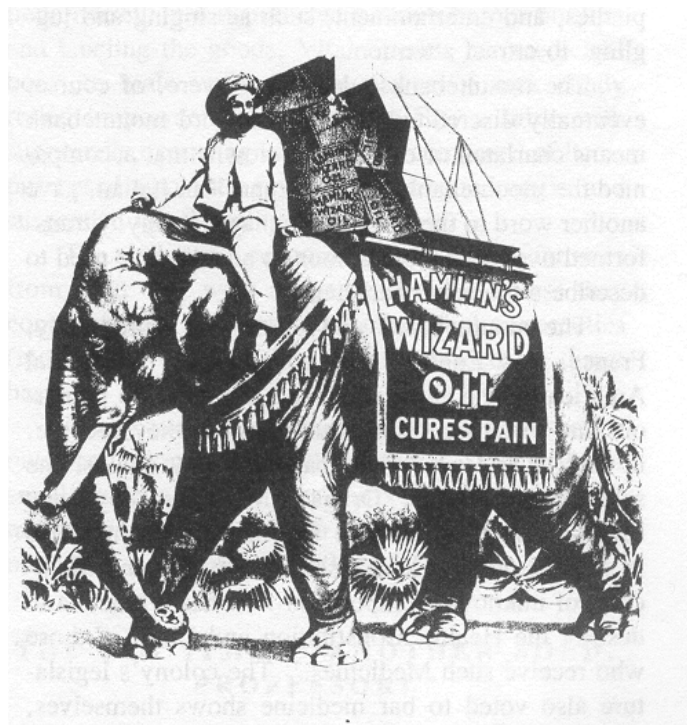
When Dr. Dulcamara rolls into Adina and Nemorino's little town in *The Elixir of Love*, he is following a long tradition of quack medicine salesmen, or “doctors”, as they would have wanted us to call them. Traveling quacks such as Dulcamara roamed around Europe for centuries. Their tradition of coming into small communities with a flashy mix of entertainment, prophesy, folk medicine and claims of “miraculous” cures, actually dates back to the traveling clowns of the Roman theatre. In the Middle Ages, the tradition of traveling theatre troupes continued. These traveling theatre troupes eventually developed into the Italian commedia del arte troupes of 16<sup>th</sup> century Italy. They specialized in presenting earthy, often almost gross physical comedies featuring stock characters like the mischievous (and sometimes downright cruel) servants, Arlecchino (Harlequin) and Arlecchina. The character of Dr. Dulcamara is reminiscent of the commedia characters in his exaggerated and flashy dress, bombastic personality and fast-talking sales pitch.

Quack doctors and their questionable “cures” were so common a part of European culture that they showed up often in theatrical works even before the writing of *The Elixir of Love*. Quacks were satirized by the English playwright, Ben Johnson, in The Alchemist and The Devil is An Ass. In both plays he blasts the quack-science of alchemy and presents us with some of the most outrageous con men in literature. In 1790 Mozart lampooned the “magnetism therapy” of the day in his opera , *Così fan Tutte*.



In Mozart's opera, a doctor is brought in to cure two of the characters by using an actual magnet and an elaborate and impressive series of rituals. Nearly one hundred years later, "Magnetism Therapy" was being practiced in the United States by one Phineas P. Quimby, who believed that "the healer imparted vital electricity to the patient, [through laying on of hands] and, in return, took on the sufferer's own aches and pains, acting like a medical lightning rod."<sup>1</sup>

The tradition of traveling medicine shows and the "doctors" who starred in them continued with the European immigration into the Americas. In the United States, the medicine shows had their heyday towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The shows that traveled throughout the United States were extravagant, romantic, and mixed circus with pseudo-science, carnival with folk medicine. One of the most popular shows at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was Dr. Hamlin's Wizard Oil Show, run by John A. Hamlin, a magician and patent medicine manufacturer. He ran a "classy" show; his performers were decked out in fine clothing and would drop in to sing with local church choirs while on the road.



There were also traveling dentists who did public tooth pulling to the horror and delight of both city and country crowds. Dr. Painless Parker (who legally changed his first name to "Painless" in the mid-1930s for ease of advertising), was one of the best known. He was a trained dentist who graduated from Philadelphia Dental College. He began practicing dentistry in 1893, at the age of 21, in Canada, but by the turn of the century had moved to Brooklyn, New York. He actually did promote dental health through simple actions such as brushing the teeth. (This was at a time when most people did nothing to take care of their teeth, and were resigned to losing most of their teeth by their 40's if not before.) He also promoted the use of local anaesthetics at a time when most dentists put their patients out with ether.

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<sup>1</sup> The Great American Medicine Show, Armstrong and Metzger-Armstrong, pg. 131.

Dr. Parker, however, was a natural salesman and he was naturally lured by the glitz of show business. He and his wife moved to Los Angeles in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and he started a career on the traveling Dental Show circuit that lasted into the 1950's. His "Parker's Dental Circus" featured a tattooed lady and a living skeleton outside the circus tent, as well as a working medical – dental clinic staffed with doctors, dentists, oculists (eye-doctors) and nurses. Dr. Parker himself rode around the main tent on an elephant. During the 1930's Dr. Parker sold his circus, but he continued to practice his public teeth-pulling sessions in San Francisco. His favorite "performance space" was the cable car turnaround at Powell and Market Street in San Francisco. (At one point Dr. Parker's dental license was suspended, and A.P. Giannini, founder of the Bank of America, intervened with the Governor in order to have it restored.) During his latter years, he settled into an apartment on Market Street in San Francisco, and ran a string of dental offices along the West Coast.

As late as 1950, Dudley LeBlanc, a Louisiana state senator, was selling his "Hadacol" via his "Hadacol Show" in the American South. His concoction was composed of vitamin B complex, iron and alcohol, and was supposed to cure everything from arthritis to paralytic strokes to ulcers. The Hadacol theme song was "What Put the Pep into Grandma?" The Hadacol Show had a relatively brief but lucrative run; in a single year LeBlanc brought in 5.5 million dollars.

For all their outlandishness, the medicine shows did provide a huge benefit to American culture. The traveling medicine shows actually provided the starting ground for many a show business career. Some of the better known performers who got their start in the medicine shows include Harry Houdini, George Burns and Gracie Allen, Chico Marx and Hank Williams.



George Burns and Gracie Allen

## ***Patent Medicines in American***

The “cures” sold during medicine shows were often ‘patent’ medicines. ‘Patent’ medicines refers to the patent of the labels, not of the contents which the labels promoted. Advertising is an ancient craft, and one whose basic principles don’t change very much from century to century. Primary among these is that in order for a product to sell, the customer must recognize and trust the appearance. Appealing and instantly recognizable labeling was (and still is) crucial to healthy sales of any product. One of the most famous patent medicines was “Lydia E. Pinkham’s Vegetable Compound.” Early in its history, Lydia Pinkham’s sweet, grandmotherly face was used on the label, and customers came to trust the face as much the “compound” itself. The labeling of patent medicines often created such loyalty amongst its consumers, that even when the truth of the contents was revealed to be worthless (One of the most popular 19<sup>th</sup> century American patent medicines was “Dr. Miles Compound Extract of Tomato”- now known as catsup), or even dangerous, (Sulfanilamide, sold in 1937 as a miracle drug that was supposed to cure meningitis, killed 107 people. The solvent used in the drug was a poison close to anti-freeze.<sup>2</sup>) people still believed the labels rather than the revelations of researchers or journalists.

While some patent medicines were sold through more normal means, such as in pharmacies and through the mail, the medicine shows provided a great marketing opportunity in a time before radio, TV or the Internet. The medicine show “doctors” promised miracles, but instead of claiming sainthood or some other form of spiritual divinity, they claimed medical knowledge so powerful that they could cure pretty much anything.

Dr. Dulcamara’s claims that his “medicine”:

*“ . . . moves all paralytics;  
and stirs the apopleptics,  
the asthmatics, asphitics,  
hysterics and diabetics,  
cures the tympanitis,  
scrofula and rickets,  
and even liver trouble  
so fashionable these days.”  
Wonderful for lice,  
Wonderful for liver,  
Cures the paralytic,  
Heals the apopleptic.”<sup>3</sup>*

are no more far-fetched than claims such as the following, that appeared in an advertisement in the Denver Daily News of January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1892:

### ***“NOW TRY THIS***

*It will cost you nothing and will surely do you good, if you have a cough, cold or any trouble with throat, chest or lungs. Dr. King’s New Discovery for consumption [tuberculosis], coughs and colds is guaranteed to give relief or money will be paid back.”*

Of course, there was no “cure” for tuberculosis at the time, and most of these “medicines” were simply syrups with large doses of alcohol.

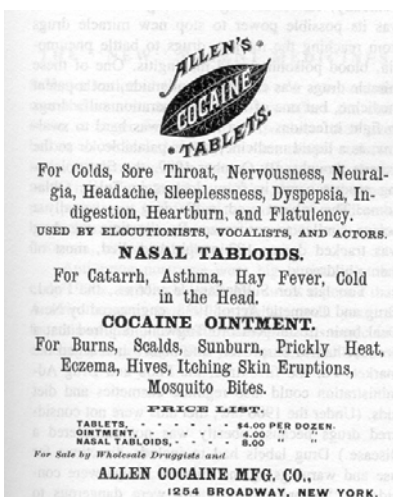
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<sup>2</sup> The Great American Medicine Show, Armstong and Metzger-Armstrong, pg. 171

<sup>3</sup> The Elixir of Love, English translation by William Weaver, Capitol Records 1952

Dr. Dulcamara's wine, passed off as a "curative" is actually not so far from the reality of what was being sold by medicine show doctors at the time. There was, of course, no regulation of the manufacture or sale of medicines at the time, and "medicines," and "curatives" of every imaginable nature were manufactured and sold everywhere by almost anyone. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Collier's Weekly* magazine ran a series of articles on the alcohol content of patent medicines, using the alcohol content of whiskey as the measure for comparison. It turned out that two of the several popular "medicines" tested had an alcohol content of over 20%, one even topping out at 44.3%, not much lower than whiskey's 50%.<sup>4</sup> Even sweet old Lydia E. Pinkham's vegetable based "cure" contained 18% alcohol. Around the same time The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 was enacted to enforce clear and honest labeling of patent medicines.

Dr. Dulcamara's "medicine/curative" is actually quite tame when compared to some of the treatments that were commonly sold as patent medicines in the 19<sup>th</sup> and even the twentieth centuries. There were patent medicines that used other even more dangerous drugs, like morphine, mercury<sup>5</sup> and cocaine (see below).



Over the counter narcotics were legal in 1885.<sup>6</sup>

In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Food and Drug Administration began to do very important work in regulating not only what goes into the treatments that we buy, but also what the labels on those treatments tell us. However, quacks and their quack medicines never completely disappear, so the work of regulating over-the-counter cures (the modern-day equivalent of patent medicines) is really never-ending. As recently as 1990, Walgreen's Pharmacy in San Francisco stocked Lydia E. Pinkham's Tablets, and sweet Lydia's face was still on the label.

It would seem that the medicine show quack has finally faded into the ether of history; there are no "doctors" selling all-curing potions from the back of horse-drawn carriages anymore, and it seems that the government is regulating the actual content of over-the-counter medicines quite thoroughly. Look into

<sup>4</sup> The Great American Medicine Show, Armstong and Metzger-Armstrong , pg. 167

<sup>5</sup> American Health Quackery, J. Young, pg. 34

<sup>6</sup> The Great American Medicine Show, Armstong and Metzger-Armstrong, pg. 169

television and internet advertising though, and you will find modern-day Dr. Dulcamaras at every turn, promising everything from thinner thighs, to lovelier, younger looking skin, to healthier gums, to higher levels of intelligence- if only you will buy and use their particular brand of medicine. The traveling “medicine man” has become an American archetype, just as much as The Cowboy, or The Mountain Man. The product he sells may change from decade to decade, but he always appears promising miracles and a great show to boot. He shows up in our literature and in movies such as The Rain Maker, The Music Man and The Wizard of Oz. The quacks, quack doctors and their medicine shows will probably be with us as long we want to believe in them and their magical cures.

*Carol Weinstein, San Francisco Opera Guild, 2000*



*The Medicine Show, by Paul Rogers  
Big Apple Circus, New York City  
Detail from Season Poster 1996*

## From Page to Stage

*L'elisir d'amore* (*The Elixir of Love*) is a *melodramma giocoso* in two acts by the Italian composer Gaetano Donizetti. Felice Romani wrote the Italian libretto after Eugène Scribe's libretto for Daniel-François-Esprit Auber's *Le philtre* (1831). This opera went on to influence Richard Wagner in his adaptation of *Tristan and Isolde*.

### ***Who are Tristan and Isolt/Isolde/Iseult?***

The legend of **Tristan and Iseult** is an influential romance and tragedy, retold in numerous sources with as many variations. The tragic story of the adulterous love between the Cornish knight Tristan (Tristram) and the Irish princess Iseult (Isolde, Yseult, etc.), the narrative predates and most likely influenced the Arthurian romance of Lancelot and Guinevere, and has had a substantial impact on Western art and literature since it first appeared in the 12th century. While the details of the story differ from one author to another, the overall plot structure remains much the same.



*Tristan and Iseult as depicted by Herbert Draper (1863–1920).*

There are many theories present about the origins of Tristanian legend, but historians disagree over which is the most accurate. There is a "Tristan stone," with its inscription about Drust, but not all historians agree that the Drust referred to is the archetype of Tristan. There are references to March ap Meichion and Trystan in the Welsh Triads, some of the gnomic poetry, *Mabinogion* stories and in the late 11th century *Life of St. Illtud*.

Drystan's name appears as one of Arthur's advisers at the end of *The Dream of Rhonabwy*, an early 13th century tale in the Welsh prose collection known as the *Mabinogion*, and Iseult is listed along with other great men and women of Arthur's court in another, much earlier *Mabinogion* tale, *Culhwch and Olwen*.<sup>[1]</sup>

*L'elisir d'amore* is one of the most frequently performed of all Donizetti's operas and there are a number of recordings. It appears as number twenty on Opera America's list of the 20 most-performed operas in North America. The premiere was at the Teatro della Canobbiana, Milan on May 12, 1832.



Map of Italy and its Regions

# Curricular



# Connections

# The Five C's: More to the story

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?

## In the Classroom

- ☞ Give the students the synopsis in your own words by making copies for them to read, or by having them re-tell the story after they have read it to their classmates.
- ☞ Ask comprehensive questions.
- ☞ Present and discuss composer and librettists.
- ☞ 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.
- ☞ Assign topics for written reports related to the opera. Essays can be written on historical aspects, as well as ethical questions raised by plot or character.
- ☞ Listen to excerpts from the opera. Watch a video of the opera!
- ☞ Have the students watch for references to themes in the opera in their everyday lives. Radio, TV, magazines, and movies often refer back to classics.

## After the Opera

- ☞ Have the students write a review of what you saw. Was the production a good representation of the five C's?
- ☞ Have the students create their own designs for sets, costumes, wigs, make-up, etc.
- ☞ Have them listen to another opera, read the libretto and design it. Stress the importance of historical accuracy.
- ☞ Have your students write a letter to one of the characters giving them advice for the future.
- ☞ Any creations that your students come up with are most welcomed by the Education Department! You may send your creations to:

Director of Education,  
San Francisco Opera Guild,  
War Memorial Opera House,  
301 Van Ness Avenue  
San Francisco, CA 94102

# Character Creation

Think about the characters and the role they play in the story.  
Choose one from the following:

**Adina**  
**Nemorino**  
**Belcore**  
**Dulcamara**  
**Gianetta**

**If you were going to play this character, you would have to discover, create, and imagine the background, personality, physical qualities of him or her. 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. How old are you?
2. Do you have brothers and sisters?
3. What sort of home do you have (a house/apartment/castle/cave?) Describe it.
4. What do you really want in the story? This is called your character's objective.
5. What obstacles stand in your way?

6. What steps in the opera do you take to achieve this objective? What are the results?

7. What obstacles are beyond your control (laws, social status, others' actions)?

8. What are your (character's) greatest strengths?

9. Greatest weaknesses?

10. Can you think of a modern day character that has similar characteristics and traits?

11. If this character were alive today, how would he/she be more or less successful in the world?

12. What different steps would he or she take to achieve an objective?

Get up and walk around the room. How does your character walk? It should be different than you. How does this character sit?

## Prompts for Discussion and Activities

1. The Elixir of Love is an *Opera Giacosa* or *Opera Buffa* which means comic opera. How does this opera differ from other operas you might have seen?
2. If this story were to be told as an *Opera Seria*, or dramatic piece, how might it be changed?
3. In Ancient *Greek* drama, a common device was called *Deus ex machina*, or *God of the machine* in which a God would drop down from the heavens to save the day, or influence the story. Does the Elixir act in the same way? How would this story change if there were no Elixir?
4. Magic potions are frequently used in dramatic and comedic stories: *Alice in Wonderland*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Oklahoma* are just a few. Why?
5. What would have happened if Adina had chosen Belcore?
6. Why do you think we as people are so quick to believe in potions or “fix-it-quick” schemes?
7. If you were Nemorino, how would you try to win Adina’s love?
8. Why does Adina ultimately choose Nemorino? Is this realistic?
9. How would this story have been different if it took place in France? In Japan? In San Mateo?

# Role on the Wall

## Summary of Activity

Students participate in basic character analysis using drawing and writing. This exercise is a basic preparation for understanding and development of characters in creative writing and in performing arts.

Time: 30 – 60 minutes  
Setting: Classroom  
Materials: Chalk and chalkboard, or flipchart and markers  
Pens/ pencils, paper  
Subjects: Writing/ literacy, literature, art

## Objectives

- \* Students will imagine the full life of each character.
- \* Students will identify external and internal elements of each character.
- \* Students will make creative, interpretive choices about the life of each character.
- \* Students will work in pairs, developing skills in creative collaboration.

## Procedure

- \* Prepare the students by using the synopsis and preview tapes and/or other materials to introduce the students to the story of the opera.
- \* Working with the full class, ask the students to choose one character from the opera whom they would like to get to know.
- \* Draw a large, informal outline of the character (like a cookie cutter) on the board/ flipchart, leaving plenty of space inside the character.
- \* Ask the students what they know about the character and write their answers in single words or short phrases either inside or outside the character, according to whether they describe internal or external life. (i.e. “tall” and “poor” would go on the outside, and “lonely”, “dreamer”, and “cold” would go on the inside.)
- \* Ask the students what they can guess about the character, that they might not know already (i.e. what kind of food they like, and where they might go to eat it when they have some money).
- \* Review the information with the students. (You may want to start writing this out in sentence form- the beginnings of a story.)
- \* Break the class up into pairs and have each pair complete the same exercise with the other main characters in the opera.
- \* Pairs share their interpretations with the rest of the class.

## Options for further development:

- \* Students write a short, short story about one character’s day.
- \* Students create a storyboard (see next page) for the story that they have just written.

## Beyond the story. . .

### **Summary of Activity**

Follow up from *Elixir of Love* performance. Students will be able to demonstrate understanding of plot and use of imagination through writing, art and/or dramatic play.

*Objective:* Students will verbally, physically and visually re-interpret the ending of *The Elixir of Love*.

*Procedures:*

#### ❖ **Drama/ Storytelling:**

- Making a scene
  - Pick a scene out of the story (see synopsis.)
  - Choose one student to portray each character.
  - Reread/ paraphrase the scene as a narrator.
  - Encourage the students to act out their part of the scene as it comes along.

#### ❖ **Art and/or Writing:**

- Option 2: What could have been done differently?
  - Ask them:
    - What was the point of no return that led to the ending?
    - What different choices could have been made at that time?
    - How would the story have ended differently?
    - How many people would that have affected?
- Option 1: Ask what happens *after* the very end of the story? How would they continue the story?
  - Ask them to:
    - Tell their ending and/or,
    - Write down their ending and/or,
    - Make a picture for it and/or,
    - Act out the ending.

# Composition and Design

## Be a Composer!

***Elixir of Love*** was inspired by another story. Almost every stage piece (opera, musical, play) started as some other story. This story is called the *source material*. Choose a novel you have read or a good story and think about how you would go about adapting it into an opera or piece of musical theatre. You would have to choose which parts of the drama would be highlighted with which sorts of music. When would there be duets, or trios, or quartets? Or big soaring arias? How would you set your opening scene? Would you have a big chorus to set up the place and time or would it begin in a more quiet way? Write out an outline and try to structure the beginnings of an opera.



## Be a Designer!

***The Elixir of love*** takes place in Italy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The story is tied in to the *setting*. However, the story can be adapted to fit the circumstances of other cultures and time periods. What if the design could be up to you? How would you set this story? What colors would you use? What sort of performance space? What colors would stand out on the set, in the costumes and lighting? Which actors or singers would you cast in each role? What if this were made into a movie? What other choices would be available?

## A Short Introduction to Opera

An **opera**, like a play, is a dramatic form of theatre that includes scenery, props, and costumes. However, in opera, 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 pit.

Opera consists of many dimensions that are combined to make it a unique whole: 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 originated in Florence, Italy, in the late 1500's, with a small group of men who were members of a Camerata (Italian for society). They called themselves the Camerati Bardi or Camerati Fiorentini. The intellectuals, poets, and musicians of the Camerata decided they wanted words to be a featured aspect of music to coordinate thought with emotion. 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:

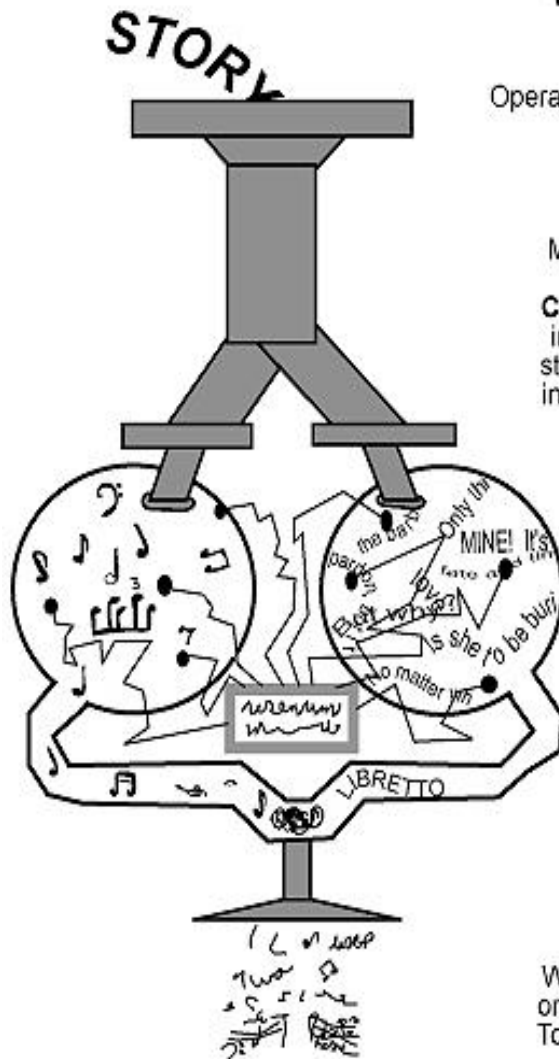
1. The text must be understood; the accompaniment must be very simple and should not distract from the words.
2. The words must be sung with correct and natural declamation, as if they were spoken and not rhyme like songs.
3. The melody must interpret the feeling of the text.

The first significant composer to fully develop the ideas of the Camerata was Jacopo Peri (1561-1633), whose opera *Dafne* was performed in 1594 and was regarded as the first opera. Some purists regard the later *L'Orfeo*, written in 1607 by Claudio Monteverdi as the first real contribution to the art form.

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 for 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 supertitles. Supertitles are the English translation of the libretto, which are projected on the screen above the stage.

Many question the difference between an opera and a musical like *Les Miserables* or *Phantom of the Opera*. There are many differences. One, most operas are through-composed, meaning there is no spoken dialogue while musicals tend to alternate between spoken scenes and songs, using the music to comment upon and augment the dialogue. There are of course exceptions. Many present day musicals are indeed through-composed and are often referred to as "rock operas." Examples include *Rent* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. There are musical differences between the two as well. Operas require classically trained singers who must be able to sing in a distinct style, and typically without amplification, while there is more variety in the voice of a musical theatre performer and they often use microphones.

# What Makes an Opera?



Opera begins with a story. The story is told with two things:

## MUSIC

Music is organized sound and rhythm. **COMPOSERS** write music in the best way to tell the story. They write music for instruments, and music for singers.

## WORDS

Words are written to help tell the story. **LIBRETTISTS** write the words for an opera. **LIBRETTO** means "little book" in Italian. It is the script of an opera.

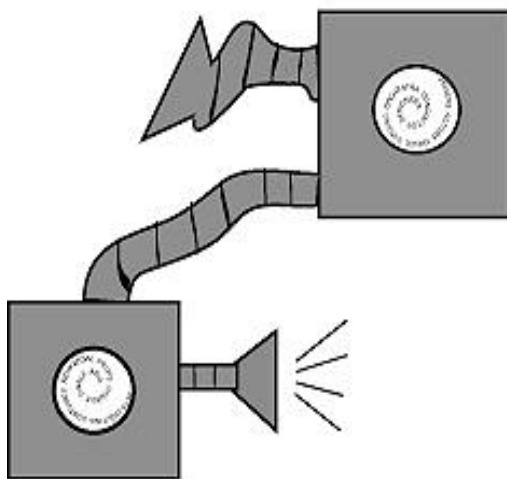
The composer and the librettist work together. They help each other so that the music will fit the words, and the words will fit the music.

All the music and words of an opera are written down in a book called the **SCORE**. Now that the opera is finished, someone needs to perform it!

When a group or company of people get together and put on an opera, their performance is called a **PRODUCTION**. To make a new production of an opera, a company needs:

- singers to perform onstage
- musicians to play in the orchestra
- carpenters to build sets
- costumers to make costumes
- electricians to work and operate lights
- ticket sellers to get an audience

...and much more!



So what really makes an opera? A good story, and a lot of people!!!

# Operatic Voices



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 in a large theatre.

## *How do they do it?*

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 balloon-like 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 chord vibrates 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 or before. Opera students study singing, music history, composition, acting, movement, and theory. In addition to performance skills, they study diction and at least one foreign language. The most popular opera languages are Italian, German, and French. 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 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 for specific roles.

Each person's vocal mechanism is constructed differently. The roles that a singer performs are dependent mostly upon their vocal range, but within the vocal ranges there are many colors and weights of voice that determine which roles he or she can sing safely and

artistically. Vocal color refers to the richness of the sound while vocal weight refers to how powerful a voice sounds.

After the role has been studied intensely and the singer is hired to perform, the singer arrives 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.

## *Six Basic Vocal Categories*

### *Women:*

**Soprano:** The highest female voice, similar to a flute or violin in range and tone color. 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 color. Called an alto in choral arrangements, can play a wide variety of characters including gypsies, mothers, nurses, and even the part of a young man (also called a *trousers role*).

**Contralto:** The lowest female voice, similar to an English horn in range and tone color. Usually plays unique roles including fortune-tellers, witches, and older women.

### *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. A **Countertenor** sings even higher, usually in his falsetto range.

**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. Is occasionally 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 a baritone to sing are low for a tenor. The notes that are low for a baritone maybe be 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.

# Opera Glossary

**Accompaniment** - An instrumental or vocal part designed to support or complement a principal voice, instrument, or group of voices or instruments. In an aria, the voice is the primary focus and the orchestra is the accompaniment.

**Acoustics** - The science of sound. The qualities of sound in an enclosed space.

**Aria** - An extended musical passage performed by one singer. It is used to express feelings or comment on the action and is accompanied by the orchestra. The action usually stops while an aria is sung.

**Ballet** - A form of dance that tells a story.

**Banda** - A small group of instrumentalists who play either on the stage or backstage, not in the pit.

**Bel Canto** - Literally "beautiful singing," bel canto passages are lyrical, and often very florid.

**Bravo** - Literally "brave, courageous." A form of applause when shouted by members of the audience at the end of an especially pleasing performance. Strictly speaking, *bravo* is for a single man, *brava* for a woman, and *bravi* for more than one performer.

**Cabaletta** - The final section of an extended aria or duet, generally short and brilliant, to display the voice and rouse applause.

**Cadenza** - An elaborate unaccompanied passage near the end of an aria designed to show off the voice. Originally used to close a number and improvised on the spot.

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

**Choreography** - A dance or the making of a dance.

**Chorus** - A group of mixed voices, or the musical passage sung by such a group.

**Claque** - A group of people hired to sit in the audience and either applaud enthusiastically to ensure success or whistle or boo to create a disaster. In past years, leading singers were sometimes blackmailed to pay a claque to insure they would not create a disturbance. Even now, one is sometimes used but rarely acknowledged.

**Coloratura** - A kind of vocal music that requires the singer to execute a variety of technically brilliant and difficult passages. These may be fast runs (scales), trills (rapid alternation of two notes), or other devices that embellish the vocal line.

**Composer** - The person who writes the music of an opera or other musical work.

**Comprimario** - A secondary role in an opera.

**Concertmaster** - The "first chair" violinist who plays occasional solos and is responsible for coordinating all of the stringed instruments. The concertmaster decides on the bowing so that all of the bows move in unison.

**Conductor** - The person who leads the orchestra and singers.

**Cover** - A replacement for a role in case of illness, as with an understudy in theater.

**Cue** - Signal to a singer or orchestra member to start.

**Curtain Call** - At the end of a performance all of the members of the cast and the conductor take bows. Sometimes this is done in front of the main curtain, hence the name. Often, however, the bows are taken on the full stage with the curtain open.

**Diva** - Literally “goddess,” it refers to an important female opera star. The masculine form is *divo*.

**Dress (a wig)** - To prepare a wig for wear.

**Dresser** - A member of the backstage staff who helps the artists dress in their costumes. While each of the principal singers usually has his or her own dresser, supers and chorus members share dressers.

**Dress Rehearsal** - The final rehearsal(s), using all of the costumes, lights, etc. While sometimes it is necessary to stop for corrections, an attempt is made to make it as much like a final performance as possible.

**Duet** - A song for two voices.

**Dynamics** - The degree of loudness or softness in the music.

**Encore** - Literally means “again.” It used to be the custom for a singer to repeat a particularly popular aria if the audience called *Encore* loud enough. While this is still done in countries like Italy, it is rare elsewhere.

**Ensemble** - Any extended musical passage performed by more than one player. Very often they are all singing different words and different musical lines. *Duets*, *trios*, and *choruses* are all ensembles.

**Finale** - Literally “the end.” The ending segment/song of an act or scene. It usually involves many singers and is very dramatic.

**Fly, or Fly Tower** - Sufficient space above the stage, i.e., if there is a *fly tower*, pieces of the set are often raised up or *flown* when they are not in use.

**Forte** - Literally “strong.” A dynamic marking meaning loud.

**Impresario** - The general director of an opera company.

**Interlude** - An orchestral selection played between scenes in an opera. It is used to set a mood and even advance the story.

**Intermission** - A break between acts of an opera. The lights go on and the audience is free to move around. Intermissions usually last up to twenty minutes.

**Leitmotiv or motif** - A short musical phrase associated with a particular character or event.

**Libretto** - Literally “little book.” The text of an opera. The libretto is always shorter than a normal play because it takes so much longer to sing a line than to say it. The action is often interrupted for an aria which limits the length of the text even more.

**Librettist** - The person who writes the libretto, often a poet or playwright.

**Maestro** - Literally “master.” Used as a courtesy title for the conductor, whether a man or woman.

**Mark** - To sing very softly or not at full voice. A full-length opera is very hard on a singer’s voice so most mark during rehearsals.

**Melody** - The tune of a piece of music.

**Opera** - A drama set with music. Different than a play or musical for the orchestra is an equal partner with the singers. Literally the word *opera* is the plural of the Latin word *opus*, which means “work.” Like a play, an opera is acted on a stage, with costumes, wigs, scenery, etc. Almost all of it is sung, in contrast to an operetta or musical, where a great deal of the text is spoken.

**Opera Buffa** - A comic opera first developed in the eighteenth century. Each act usually ends with a large ensemble finale.

**Orchestra** - The group of musicians who are led by the conductor and accompany the singers.

**Orchestra Pit** - The sunken area in front of the stage where the orchestra plays.

**Overture** - An orchestral piece several minutes in length played before the beginning of an opera. Usually, but not always, it contains some themes from the music of the opera.

**Patter Song** - A song or aria in which the character sings as many words as possible in the shortest length of time.

**Piano** - Literally “plane.” A dynamic marking meaning soft.

**Prelude** - Usually short in duration and without an ending, a *prelude* leads into an act without pause, as opposed to an *overture* which is longer and can be played as a separate piece.

**Principal** - A leading role or character in the opera.

**Prima Donna** - Literally “first lady.” The leading woman singer 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, demanding and difficult fashion.

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

**Prompt** - To help a singer who has forgotten a line. In some opera houses, the *prompter* sits in a box at the very front of the stage. It is not customary for opera houses in America to use a prompter.

**Props (properties)** - Small items carried or used by singers during a performance, such as fans, letters or a rope.

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

**Recitative** - Sung dialogue that moves the action along by providing information. A recitative (or recit) usually has no recognizable melody and the singing is generally faster with a rhythm more like normal speech. *Recitativo secco* is accompanied only by a keyboard instrument such as a harpsichord, sometimes with added cello or bass.

**Roulade or Run** - A quick succession of notes sung to one syllable.

**Score** - The written music for a piece or group of pieces with separate lines for each instrument and each singer's voice.

**Set** - The decoration on stage that indicates the place and overall world of the opera.

**Sitzprobe** - Literally "sitting rehearsal." It is the first rehearsal of the singers with the orchestra, with the former seated, and no acting.

**Solo** - A piece or portion of music where only one performer has the melody.

**Stage Director** - The person responsible for directing the movement of the characters and creating the story on stage.

**Supernumerary or Super** - An "extra." Someone who is part of a group on stage but does not sing.

**Supertitles** - Translations into English of the original words, projected on a screen above the stage.

**Synopsis** - A short version of the story of the opera, usually one or two pages.

**Tempo** - Literally "time." The speed at which the music is played.

**Trouser role** - A role which depicts a young man or boy, but sung by a woman. Also called a *Pants Role*

**Verismo** - Describes the realistic style of opera that started in Italy at the end of the nineteenth century.



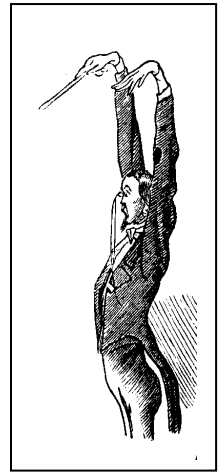
# Careers in Opera

San Francisco Opera, just like many companies, operates like a well-oiled machine: no one department functions alone. Instead, many departments have areas that overlap with one another and it is necessary for each department to do its share of the work in order for all the others to function.

When you attend an opera, you will see and hear the work of the performers: singers, orchestra, chorus, and orchestra, but there are many behind-the-scenes jobs that are necessary to make opera.

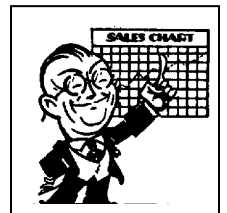
San Francisco Opera is run by the **General Director**. The General Director has the final word on the Company's policies and decisions from artistic to business planning. A General Director needs to travel to other companies in order to stay informed as to what is happening within the opera industry. He or she needs to know which new singers are becoming popular, which sets and costumes are the most striking to rent, and which operas the audience might enjoy. The General Director is the ambassador for the opera company, both within the community and abroad.

At home in San Francisco, the General Director makes decisions about which operas should be part of the season schedule, called the **season repertoire**. Many of these decisions are made along with the **Music Director**. The Music Director in an opera company has the very important job of overseeing all musical aspects associated with the Opera. The Music Director not only needs to make decisions about the season repertoire and stay informed about singers who are performing, but also oversees the orchestra and the chorus. Sometimes the Music Director may act as the **Conductor** to an opera, one of the most important components of a performance.



The **Music Administrator** functions as a researcher, historian and walking human encyclopedia for the company. When we produce a new opera, he is responsible for bringing together the composer and librettist and managing workshops on the piece. When we produce classic operas, he makes recommendations as to which version of the opera we should produce, and oversees orchestration and music library work.

The **Artistic Administrator** works with the Music Director and the General Director in the hiring of singers. The Artistic Administrator deals with individual leading artists and their agents, making sure that they are available to sing with the Company and negotiating a salary and **contract**. Contracts are very important in opera because once the contract has been signed, it legally binds a singer to perform with the Company.



Equally important as all of the artistic decisions, are the business choices that a company makes. The **Managing Director** of a company is the person in charge of the business aspects. San Francisco Opera, like most performing arts groups, is a **non-profit** company. This means that the organization does not exist as a money-making business, but instead is a company that exists to present art, essentially

functioning on a combination of ticket sales and fund-raising. Grand Opera is very expensive to produce. It is impossible to make enough money from ticket sales to cover the actual costs of producing it. Each year, budgets are formed to decide the guidelines that determine where money will be spent, so that no department exceeds the amount of money that the company can afford to spend.

The Senior Director of Finance and Administration, along with the General Director and heads of the various departments, is responsible for making sure that budgets are formed and followed, and for keeping track of finances throughout the year, as well as generally overseeing the business end of the company.

The **Director of Development** and the **Director of Marketing** work with the **Managing Director** to actively keep track of what money is raised. The **Director of Development** heads the **Development Department**. This department raises money through donations, and government grants.

Of course, the other source of income for an opera company comes from **Box Office** sales. The War Memorial Opera House has 3,148 seats and averages more than 75 performances each year - which totals more than 236,100 seats that have to be sold every year! That's a lot of seats!

The **Marketing Department** is the division that makes sure the seats are sold each year. There are many different parts of marketing opera. One is placing advertisements so that people know that the opera is around. Any ads that you see in the newspaper, at bus stops, on television, or hear on the radio, the Marketing Department put there. The Marketing Department works with an outside advertising agency to determine what type of ad will be most successful in reaching the Company's target audience, and to determine the costs of specifically placing ads in newspapers or with radio or television stations.

A department that works closely with Marketing is the **Communications Department**. The Communications Department makes sure that everyone knows what is going on at the Opera. One way to do this is by writing a **press release**. A press release is a news article that explains an event that is happening with the company, such as the opening of a show. Press releases usually contain lots of information about places, times, people and other details that people are interested to know.



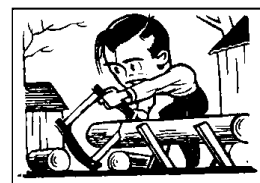
The educational pages on the website are developed and maintained in collaboration with the **Education Director**. This person is responsible for ensuring that opera is part of the arts education in schools, community centers and other venues where people gather to learn. The Education Director creates programs for students and other people in the community, and is responsible for helping teachers bring opera into their classrooms. By being exposed to opera at a younger age, young people have more opportunity to learn about the art form and understand the music and history of opera. By bringing the art of opera out to the community, people of all ages get a chance to experience the thrill of live opera, often for the first time.



Another big part of San Francisco Opera that is not found at all opera companies is the **San Francisco Opera Center**. The Opera Center is dedicated to providing training for young artists and each year auditions young singers to take part in their programs. Once accepted, singers receive quality vocal training and are given exciting performance opportunities that nurture their careers. These opportunities start in the Merola Opera summer training program. The Merola Opera Program is an independent organization that trains young opera singers. Once the singers have completed the Merola program, they may be considered for further training within the San Francisco Opera Center in the Adler Fellows Program.

Before operas may be sold or marketed, they must be created and staged. Each opera has a **Director** who is hired by the opera company. The Director is responsible for making decisions about what the themes will be and how the production will look, from the design of the set to the movement of the singers on stage. In preparing the production, the Director works with the set, lighting, sound, costume, and prop designers, who function as a creative team. Each designer then works with their own **crew**, a team of crafts people who actually **build** the show.

The **Set Designer** is trained in the creative and technical process of designing backdrops, large props and general background pieces for the opera. The Set Designer drafts plans and then a model of the set, which is given to the carpenters and scenic artists who build, paint, and decorate the full-sized set.



The **Lighting Designer** works with the Director to create the lighting for the production. Lighting is central to the mood of the opera; a scene set in bright white light has a different feeling than one set in softer blue lighting, which may denote evening or a romantic scene.

The **Costume Designer** is responsible for working with the rest of the creative team to decide what the dress for the characters will be. In a historically based production, the Costume Designers do background research into the time period to make sure that the dress is as appropriate as the sets are. A team of sewing experts, or **stitchers**, then measures the performers and assembles the costumes.

The **Props Master** is responsible for finding, designing and/or constructing the props that will be used on stage. This can include everything from clothing accessories like purses, to swords, to wall lamps, to giant puppets. The Props Designer also works with a crew of craftspeople who take care of the properties after they have assembled them.



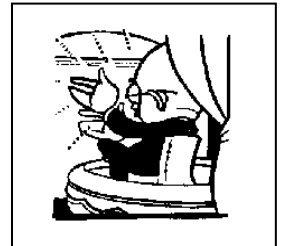
Backstage there are sometimes hundreds of people working to make sure that the people on stage are under the right lighting and have the right props and backdrops. These are the **Stage Crews**; they are responsible for running the show-- making sure everything happens in the right place, at the right time.

The **Stage Manager** is the conductor of movement on and off stage. The Stage Manager runs the show backstage, usually connected to several different areas on a headset. He/She often relies on video monitors, as well as audio communication, to keep on top of what is happening at any moment during the production. In opera, the Stage Manager must know how to read music and follow a **score**, the book containing the music and text for the opera. This way, he or she can follow along with the Conductor and understand where the opera is going, in order to be prepared for the next scene at all times. The Stage Manager's score is usually filled with notes and markings so that they remember all the cues that fill the opera. The people on the other end of headsets attached to the stage manager can range from electricians, to sound specialists, to carpenters who have built the sets, to costume staff waiting to help the artists change in the **wings** (the area off-stage to the sides).



The **Wig and Make-up** crews follow the Director's vision. They make up the singers before each performance and are also always available between scenes to touch up the artists as they come off-stage. They are often the ones responsible for the same artist playing a teenager in the first act, aging to an adult in the second and finishing as an old man in the final act!

Behind the scenes, there is another team of people working to make every opera season happen. These people are the **Volunteers**, and they give their time to the opera without pay, simply because they feel passionately about opera and want to make sure it continues. Volunteers work almost daily with the San Francisco Opera Association, the San Francisco Opera Guild and with Merola Opera.



As you can see, there are a variety of different jobs at the opera - something for everyone - and we can never forget the most important people in making the opera happen - you! The **audience** is responsible for buying tickets and enjoying the performance, as well as providing feedback about whether or not they liked the particular performance so that the company knows if it is pleasing the public or not. Just like all the departments at the opera, the audience is very important because without you, there is no reason for all of it to happen!

# Production Questions and Activities

Which department do you think you would like to work with at the opera?

## **Development**

Which product or company do you think should sponsor *The Elixir of Love*? Write a proposal to the president of the company explaining why you think it would be beneficial for them to give funding to a production of *The Elixir of Love*. Remember to tell the president what benefits there are for her or his company!

## **General Director**

If you were running a company, which aspect do you think would be more important to you, spending money on artistic expenses or maintaining a balanced budget? Do you think one outweighs the other? Write a statement of your philosophy as if you were the General Director and had been asked how you make your decisions.

## **Information Services**

If you were to design a website for *The Elixir of Love*, what would it look like? Who would it reach? Who would be the “audience”?

## **Marketing**

Create an advertisement for *The Elixir of Love*. Decide whether you should put it on TV, radio, newspaper, a bus, etc. Include whatever you feel is the biggest “selling point” of the opera-- what makes it exciting? Why should people come to see it? Write it as a presentation that you might make if you wanted San Francisco Opera to use your ad. Then act it out!

# The Opera Orchestra

*Used by permission of San Diego Opera and Elizabeth Otten*



The Opera Orchestra is an integral part of the opera, and is much like a symphony orchestra. The orchestra is made up of four instrumental families, plus a group of miscellaneous instruments. Within each family, one of the instruments corresponds to each of the four main voice categories. The orchestra is led by the conductor, or *maestro*, who stands in the pit in front and below the stage. The conductor is fully responsible for the progress of the opera. He or she must blend and balance the music at all times, keep proper tempo and regulate the dynamics<sup>7</sup>. The conductor also cues each singer when they are to begin singing. In some opera houses, video screens placed around the stage and auditorium transmit a live picture of the conductor in the pit. This keeps the singers from having to look down into the pit all the time.

While the orchestra may be used simply to accompany a singer or singers, it usually enhances the drama by being an independent and equal partner with the singers. Though it is not visible to many of the audience members, it is an extremely important contributor to the impact of the production.

Musical instruments have been around since prehistoric times, and there is hardly a civilization that did not have, at least, a drum or flute of some sort. Music has been used to accompany performances as long as they have existed. The first operas were usually accompanied by whatever instruments were available and parts were not specifically written for the orchestra. Instead, the instruments *doubled* the voices, that is, they played the same melodies. The composer Monteverdi is often given the honor of having created the beginning of the orchestra as we know it. The musicians of the time were given an indication of chords to be played, called a *figured bass*, and they improvised from that. By the time of Bach and Handel in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were still no prescribed parts for the keyboard instruments. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, at the time of Mozart, most orchestras used a variety of instruments, and parts were especially written for them. Many of the instruments in a modern orchestra started in opera orchestras:

## Opera and the California State Frameworks

**Aesthetic perception:** Opera is a visual and aural experience. The work of the designers, director and conductor all affect the way the work is perceived. Students should be able to discuss the effectiveness of their contributions to the production.

**Creative expression:** Students can create their own opera (with music), telling the same stories in modern setting, or stories relating to their own experiences.

**Arts heritage:** Studying the lives of the composers and others should include the cultural climate of the time and how the individuals were related to it.

**Aesthetic value:** Opera is a form of aesthetic expression which includes all of the arts: visual, musical, dramatic, etc. Students should compare these facets of opera to contemporary counterparts. How does art affect their lives?

### Goals for Music Education

#### Artistic Perception Component

*Goal 1:* Students listen to and analyze music critically, using vocabulary and language of music.

*Goal 2:* Students read and notate music.

#### Creative Expression Component

*Goal 3:* Students sing or perform on instruments a varied repertoire of music.

*Goal 4:* Students improvise melodies, variations, and accompaniments.

*Goal 5:* Students compose and arrange music.

#### Historical and Cultural Context Component

*Goal 6:* Students develop knowledge and skills necessary to understand and perform music from all parts of the world.

*Goal 7:* Students develop knowledge and understanding of the relationship of music to history and culture.

#### Aesthetic Valuing Component

*Goal 8:* Students apply knowledge, skill, and understanding to make critical judgements about and determine the quality of music experiences and performances.

### Goals for Theatre Education

#### Artistic Perception Component

*Goal 1:* Students observe the environment and respond, using movement and voice.

*Goal 2:* Students observe informal productions, theatrical productions, films and electronic media and respond to them, using the vocabulary and language of the theatre.

#### Creative Expression Component

*Goal 3:* Students develop knowledge and skills in acting and directing through their own experience and imagination as well as through their research of literature and history.

*Goal 4:* Students explore the elements and technology of theatrical production through varied media.

*Goal 5:* Students write scripts based on experience, heritage, imagination, literature, and history.

#### Historical and Cultural Context Component

*Goal 6:* Students research relationships between theatre, history, and culture.

*Goal 7:* Students investigate major themes and historical periods and styles of theatre in different cultures.

#### Aesthetic Valuing Component

*Goal 8:* Students develop and use criteria for judging and evaluating informal production, formal productions, film and electronic media.

Bruton, Sheila, (Ed.), et al., (1996), Visual and performing Arts Framework for California Public Schools: Kindergarten through Grade Twelve. California Department of Education, Sacramento, CA



## *Audience Etiquette*

The following list of DO's and DON'TS will help you (and those around you) enjoy the experience of attending the opera:

- ◆ DO dress in whatever you are comfortable. However going to the opera can be an opportunity to get dressed up and snazzy.
- ◆ DO be on time! Latecomers disturb everyone. They will only be seated at suitable breaks and often not until intermission.
- ◆ DO find your seat with the help of your teacher or an usher.
- ◆ DO not block your neighbors—if you are wearing a hat, take it off.
- ◆ DO turn off cell phones, pagers, and all electronic devices (no texting, sorry!)
- ◆ DO NOT take photos (even with your phone).
- ◆ DO NOT chew gum, eat, drink, or talk. Be aware that you are an active participant in the theatre magic.
- ◆ DO get settled and comfortable prior to the performance beginning.
- ◆ DO clap as the lights dim and the conductor appears and bows to the audience.
- ◆ DO have a great time! Laugh when something is funny and applaud after an aria or suitable pause in the action.

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**Guide Prepared by Caroline Altman  
Director of Education, San Francisco Opera Guild  
2008**

**SAN FRANCISCO OPERA GUILD  
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT  
TEACHER EVALUATION FORM**

One of our most valuable tools for assessing the effectiveness of our education programs here at San Francisco Opera is to go to the source and get your input. We would appreciate your taking a few minutes to think about these programs and let us know what you think. Our goal is to continually strive to improve our programs and make it easier for you to bring opera into your classroom. Thank you for your participation and your help!

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

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

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

District: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Alternate  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Principal: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Student Grade  
level: \_\_\_\_\_

Is this your first time participating in San Francisco Opera Guild's Education programs?

If NO, how many years have you been a participant?

If YES, what made you begin to participate this year?

In which program(s) did your students participate?

Is this the first time the majority of your students have been exposed to opera?



Did you use the offered activities in the Teacher's Guide? Were any particularly helpful?

Do you have additional comments/suggestions for the Teacher's Guide?

Do you have additional comments/suggestions for the Student Dress Rehearsals?

Other comments:

***Please mail this form to:  
Caroline Altman, Director of Education  
San Francisco Opera Guild  
301 Van Ness Ave., S.F., CA 94102***