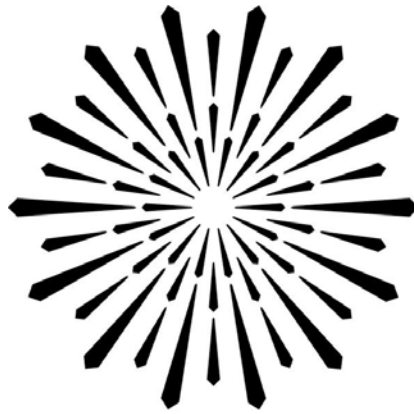


# **OTELLO**



***San Francisco Opera Guild  
2009 Teachers' Guide and Resource Book***



**SAN FRANCISCO  
OPERA GUILD**

**Celebrating 70 Years of Arts Education!!**

**The mission of San Francisco Opera Guild is to provide cultural nourishment to the Northern California community through education, outreach programs, special events and financial support to the**

**San Francisco Opera Association**

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***Otello***

**Madeline H. Russell High School Night**

**Student Dress Rehearsal  
November 5, 2009**

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## ***Dear Educator:***

Thank you for your participation in San Francisco Opera Guild's 2009-2010 education programs! The Opera Guild's Teacher's Guides for the 2009 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 *Otello*.

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

*C.J. Van Pelt*  
Vice President, Education



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OPERA GUILD

*Otello* Teacher's Resource Guide  
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## ***Table of Contents***

<i>Otello</i> .....	page 6
Synopsis.....	page 6
Giuseppe Verdi.....	page 8
Arrigo Boito.....	page 10
William Shakespeare.....	page 11
Source Material for <i>Otello</i> .....	page 12
Venice and Cyprus .....	page 13
What is a Moor? .....	page 14
The Power of the Spoken Word .....	page 15
Curricular Connections.....	page 17
The Five C's: More to the story .....	page 18
Character Creation .....	page 19
Prompts for discussion and activities .....	page 21
Composition and Design .....	page 22
Production Questions and Activities .....	page 23
Opera .....	page 24
A Short Introduction to Opera.....	page 24
Operatic Voices .....	page 26
Opera Glossary .....	page 28
Careers in Opera.....	page 32
The Opera Orchestra .....	page 36
Opera and the California State Frameworks .....	page 37
Audience Etiquette .....	page 38
Bibliography.....	page 39
Teacher Evaluation .....	page 40

# Otello

Giuseppe Verdi and librettist Arrigo Boito adapted Shakespeare's play to *Otello*, an Italian grand opera in four acts that was first performed at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan on February 5, 1887. *Otello* takes place in 15<sup>th</sup> Century Cyprus, during war between the Venetians and the Turks.

## Cast of Characters

<u>Character</u>	<u>Voice Type</u>
Otello, a Moorish general	Tenor
Desdemona, his wife	Soprano
Iago, Otello's ensign	Baritone
Emilia, wife of Iago and maid to Desdemona	Mezzo-soprano
Cassio, Otello's captain	Tenor
Roderigo, a Venetian gentleman	Tenor
Lodovico, ambassador of the Venetian republic	Bass
Montano, former governor of Cyprus	Bass

## Synopsis

### ACT I

On the Island of Cyprus, Venetian officers and the Cypriot townspeople anxiously await the arrival of their commander, the Moor, Otello, whose ship is battling a violent storm. The storm subsides and Otello lands, to the joy of the crowd. Only Iago and Roderigo do not share the general happiness. Iago is bitter because Otello has appointed Cassio, not him, as his lieutenant, and Roderigo is unhappy because he is in love with Desdemona, Otello's wife. Iago plots his revenge. When Cassio appears, Iago and Roderigo encourage him to drink. Roderigo provokes a duel with the drunken Cassio, who accidentally wounds Montano when he tries to separate them. Otello, summoned by the brawling, dismisses Cassio from his service.

Desdemona also arrives, and when all have gone, she and Otello again declare their love.

### ACT II

Iago, now Otello's confidant, continues his plotting. He advises Cassio to ask Desdemona to intercede with Otello for his pardon. The Moor sees Cassio with his wife, and Iago plants the seeds of jealousy, which grow as Desdemona pleads with her husband to forgive their old friend. Iago takes one of Desdemona's handkerchiefs to use as evidence of her infidelity. When he and Otello are alone, Iago reports that he heard Cassio talk in his sleep about Desdemona as if they were lovers. Otello vows vengeance, and Iago swears to assist him and to furnish him with proof.

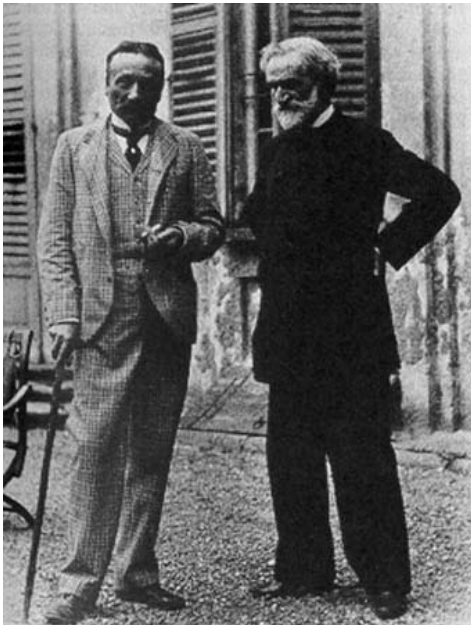
### ACT III

Before Venetian ambassadors arrive, Desdemona again broaches the subject of Cassio and Otello openly accuses her of adultery. Later he spies on a meeting between Iago and Cassio, who displays a handkerchief he has mysteriously found in his room. It is Desdemona's, placed there by Iago. Otello cannot hear the two men's words, but the sight of the handkerchief convinces him. When he receives the ambassadors, Otello cannot restrain his jealous fury and, in front of all, insults his wife and hurls her to the floor. Iago feels that his triumph is near.

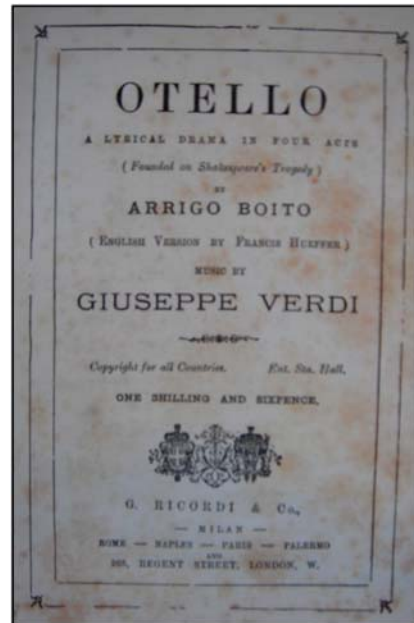
### ACT IV

Desdemona prays and goes to bed. Otello enters and warns her that he has come to kill her. Again she protests her innocence, but he refuses to believe her and strangles her. Desdemona's companion Emilia knocks and then bursts in to tell Otello that Roderigo, who according to Iago's plot was to kill Cassio, has himself been killed. Cassio lives. When Desdemona moans Emilia cries out in horror and others gather, including Iago, whose villainy is revealed. Iago flees, pursued by the others, and Otello kills himself over Desdemona's lifeless body.

Courtesy [www.sfopera.com](http://www.sfopera.com)

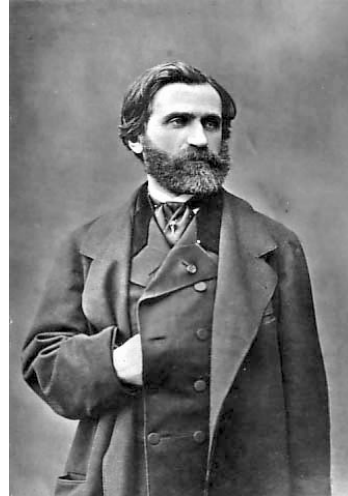


**Arrigo Boito, Giuseppe Verdi...**



**... and their Opera**

Courtesy [www.classical.com](http://www.classical.com)



## Giuseppe Verdi

### Composer

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) was a prominent political and historical figure of his time. In addition to his role in the shaping of Italian history, Verdi was captivated and inspired by stories that had substance, depth, and social relevance; he was careful to choose subject matters that engaged the heart, mind, and spirit equally.

He was born in Le Roncole, Italy (since renamed Roncole Verdi) about 90 miles southeast of Milan. His parents, Carlo and Luigia, both children of landowners, were middle class and tried to expose young Giuseppe to art, education, and culture from an early age. (Later, as a revolutionary, Verdi tried to play down his more privileged upbringing and was quoted in 1863: "I was, am, and will always be a peasant from Roncole.") Verdi began to study music at age four and played the spinet (an early version of the harpsichord) at age seven, whereupon he began to substitute for the local church organist. By age ten he was studying in the nearby town of Busseto, and with hopes set on the Milan Conservatory of Music, Verdi moved to Milan in 1831. He did not get into the Conservatory. Instead he studied privately under the sponsorship of his mentor, Antonio Barezzi. Barezzi's daughter Margherita became Verdi's wife in 1836, the same year he composed his first opera, **Roccester**. Verdi went through many trials and tribulations balancing his work (now Municipal Master of Music for the town of Busseto) and the ill-fated production course of **Roccester** (changing theatres, losing singers, stars falling ill, etc.) which finally was produced under the title, **Oberto**. The professional cast featured soprano Giuseppina Strepponi who became a large part of Verdi's life until the end. Following **Oberto**, Verdi was commissioned to write three more operas in 1837. Luck did not follow him. In the next three years, both his infant children and his wife died. And his third opera failed on opening night. He went to work and composed **Nabucco** which opened to great success in 1842. He began to write Macbeth in 1846-7.

It is not surprising that Verdi is somewhat a household name (and always on the Jeopardy! board when opera is the subject) as he was extremely prolific. In the next eleven years (between 1842 and 1853), he produced 16 operas, and supervised revivals, sometimes composing new music for his existing pieces. His most famous pieces include **Rigoletto** (1851), **Il Trovatore** (1853), and **La Traviata** (1853), often referred to as the "big three." 1859 brought **Un Ballo in Maschera** which, like **Rigoletto**, was considered morally and politically dangerous. Verdi dealt with censorship all his life.

In the 1860's Verdi became very active in the Italian Nationalist movement and in 1861 he agreed to serve as a member of the newly formed Italian parliament. During that time he completed **La Forza del Destino** (1862) and **Don Carlo** (1867). The epic **Aida** followed in 1871.

His last two pieces, **Otello** (1887) and **Falstaff** (1893) were wonderful musical settings of Shakespeare—one, an eerie and rich setting of a brilliant tragedy and the other chronicling the adventures of one of theatre's best-loved buffoons.

Verdi's success launched him socially in Milan and he was in a very unusual position for an artist; he was respected and revered in high society and a very important artist of the people. Financially he was quite shrewd and his artistic success led him to own and manage lands and properties. He negotiated his contracts extremely carefully and kept a tight hold over his intellectual property. He was one of the first to rent out his compositions for performance elsewhere (similar to our modern "royalties"). In addition he made sure to participate in production elements, often making decisions in casting to ensure success of his work.

Politically we mentioned his involvement in Parliament and the shaping of a new improved Italy. He was such a public figure that his name became an acronym for the Nationalist movement. "**Vittorio Emanuel Rei D' Italia**" became a household phrase and the song "Va Pensiero" from **Nabucco** became the anthem of the people. Upon his death in 1901, a huge procession was led through the streets of Milan accompanying Verdi's body to its final resting place. The orchestra and chorus of the famed La Scala Opera in Milan played and sang his music to honor this figure of national pride. Verdi was also active in several philanthropic organizations. He supervised the building of the Villanova sull'Arda Piacenza Hospital and founded the Casa di Riposo, a home for retired musicians in Milan.

Artistically, Verdi was extremely respected for his ability to craft works that engaged both heart and mind. He was very careful to choose source material (existing stories or plays) with a strong dramatic structure. A strong dramatic structure demands characters that are fleshed out with clear objectives and obstacles and well-defined conflict. Like a good playwright, he would divide the action into clear scenes or musical segments and create the melodic and rhythmic shape for each section. He was careful to commission strong librettists to write poetic text that supported his musical structure. After this basic form was in place, he would go back and compose the orchestration and musical details. This is why his compositions are solid and compositionally sound.

His attention to detail in characterization engaged the audiences in a new way. Verdi's characters are troubled, quirky, and realistic. We care about them. The situations tend to be recognizable, not fantastical. This increase in emotional realism is a movement called verismo.



## **Arrigo Boito**

### **Librettist**

Arrigo Boito (February 24, 1842 –June 10, 1918), was an Italian poet, journalist, novelist and composer, best known today for his opera libretti and his own opera, **Mefistofele**.

Born in Padua, the son of an Italian painter of miniatures and Polish countess, Józefina Radolińska, Boito studied music at the Milan Conservatoire, which he finished in 1861. In 1866 he fought under Garibaldi in the Seven Weeks War in which the Kingdom of Italy and Prussia fought against Austria, after which Venice was ceded to Italy.

The premiere of his only finished opera, **Mefistofele**, based on Goethe's **Faust**, took place on 5 March 1868, at La Scala, Milan. The premiere, which he conducted himself, was badly received, provoking riots and duels over its supposed "Wagnerism", and it was closed by the police after two performances. Verdi commented, "He aspires to originality but succeeds only at being strange." Boito withdrew the opera from further performances to rework it, and it had a more successful second premiere, in Bologna on 10 April 1875.

Besides Mefistofele, Boito wrote very little music, completing (but later destroying) another opera, **Ero e Leandro**, and leaving incomplete a further opera, **Nerone**, which he had been working at, on and off, since 1877 and until 1915. Excluding the last act, for which he left only a few sketches, it was finished after his death by Arturo Toscanini and Vincenzo Tommasini and premiered at La Scala, 1924. Boito's literary powers never dried up. As well as writing the libretti for his own operas, Boito wrote them for other composers. As "Tobia Gorrio" (an anagram of his name) he provided the libretto for Amilcare Ponchielli's **La Gioconda**. Boito successfully revised the libretto for Verdi's unwieldy **Simon Boccanegra**, which then premiered to great acclaim in 1881. With that, their mutual friendship and respect blossomed and, though Verdi's projection for an opera based on King Lear never came to anything, Boito provided subtle and resonant libretti for Verdi's last masterpieces, **Otello** (1887) and **Falstaff** (1893). When Verdi died, Boito was there at his bedside.

Boito was director of the Parma Conservatoire from 1889 to 1897. He received the honorary degree of doctor of music from Cambridge University in 1893. He died in Milan and was interred there in the Cimitero Monumentale.



## **William Shakespeare**

### **Playwright**

William Shakespeare (April 23, 1564 –April 23, 1616) was an English poet and playwright, now widely regarded as the greatest writer of the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. He is often called England's national poet and the "Bard of Avon" (or simply "The Bard"). His surviving works consist of 38 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and several other poems. His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright.

Shakespeare was born and raised in Stratford-upon-Avon. At the age of 18 he married Anne Hathaway, who bore him three children: Susanna, and twins Hamnet and Judith. Between 1585 and 1592 he began a successful career in London as an actor, writer, and part-owner of the theatre company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later known as the King's Men). It appears he retired to Stratford around 1613, where he died three years later. Few records of Shakespeare's private life survive and considerable speculation has been poured into this void, including questions concerning his sexuality, religious beliefs, and whether some of the works attributed to him were written by others.

Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1590 and 1613. His early plays were mainly comedies and histories, genres he raised to the peak of sophistication and artistry by the end of the sixteenth century. Next he wrote mainly tragedies until about 1608, producing plays, such as *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, considered some of the finest in the English language. In his last phase, he wrote tragicomedies and collaborated with other playwrights. Many of his plays were published in editions of varying quality and accuracy during his lifetime; and in 1623, two of his former theatrical colleagues published the First Folio, a collected edition of his dramatic works that included all but two of the plays now recognized as Shakespeare's.

Shakespeare was a respected poet and playwright in his own day; but his reputation did not rise to its present heights until the nineteenth century. The Romantics, in particular, acclaimed Shakespeare's genius; and in the nineteenth century, the Victorians hero-worshipped Shakespeare with a reverence that George Bernard Shaw called "bardolatry". In the twentieth century, his work was repeatedly adopted and rediscovered by new movements in scholarship and performance. His plays remain highly popular today, constantly performed and reinterpreted in diverse cultural and political contexts throughout the world.

## ***Source Material for Otello: Everything old is new again...***

Almost every opera or musical came from an existing piece of literature. We call this source material. The source material for Verdi's ***Otello***, most immediately was Shakespeare's ***Othello, the Moor of Venice***, first produced around 1603. Shakespeare's inspiration was an Italian short story called "Un Capitano Moro" (The Moorish captain) written by Cinthio around 1565. This story revolved around four central characters: a Moorish general in the Venetian army; his wife Desdemona; his lieutenant, and his trusted ensign.

But it doesn't stop there... "The Three Apples" is a story from ***One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*** dates back to 800-900 AD. Many think this may be the true source material for Otello. Certainly the themes of mistrust, jealousy, storytelling, doubt and betrayal are evident.



In the story of the ***Three Apples*** Scheherazade relates to the King what can happen when someone acts too quickly before they get all of the facts. As it is told a very powerful Caliph was walking along the banks of the Tigris River with his trusted Ja'far when they came across a basket. The basket was made of strong banana leaves sown together with red thread. The Caliph opened the box and found what was once a lovely young girl dismembered.

The Caliph was enraged by what he had found. He turned to his Ja'far and demanded that the murderer be found. He went out to the town square with some of his guards and made a plea for the killer to come forward. Much to his surprise a young man came forward and said that he had killed the girl.

When before the Caliph the young man told the tale of how he murdered the young girl. The girl had been his wife and a very good one at that, she even bore him three sons. One day she asked her husband for three apples and told him that if she didn't have a taste of an apple she would certainly fall ill. The husband searched all over but found none. While he was searching for the apple his wife indeed became very ill. The young man despaired at the thought that his wife might die but as luck would have it, his gardener just happened to have three apples that he sold to the young man. The young man gave the apples to his ailing wife who looked at them briefly before passing out. The young man then went to work for the day in his shop.

A very ugly slave came by the shop with one of the apples that the young man had bought for his wife. He asked the slave where he got the apple to which the slave replied "My mistress gave it to me. Her pimp of a husband brought it to her." The husband was so furious that he immediately went home and saw that there was an apple missing, when he asked his wife where the apple was she didn't know. He decided right then that the slave had told the truth. He killed her, put her in the box that he had made and then dropped her in the river. When he came home he found his three sons crying. One of his sons spoke up and said that he stole the apple and took it to the market. A very ugly slave stole it from him. He tried to get it back and the slave why he needed it so badly but the slave hit him. In that moment he knew that the slave had lied and he killed his wife for no reason.

-Courtesy [folktales.suite101.com](http://folktales.suite101.com)

# Venice and Cyprus

The setting for Shakespeare's play is both Venice and Cyprus. In Verdi's opera, all the action takes place in Cyprus. Venice is still a major character in the opera however, because it is the Venetian traditions that influence the customs and traditions of most of the characters. For instance, a woman of good manners in 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century Venice, would never marry against her father's will. This shows us something about Desdemona's character; she is a strong woman who knows her own heart and mind.

It is also significant that the main action of both settings take place in Cyprus which is homeland to none of the characters. Othello, of Moorish descent is from a distant land (possibly North Africa which is approximately where "Tunis" is on the map below left), and Iago, Emilia, Desdemona, etc. are also in unknown territory. Also notice that Cyprus is an island which only aids in the feeling of isolation. The lack of a stable homeland for all contributes to a feeling of mistrust and unease. The characters really have no home base or other outlets and must rely upon one another for protection, advice, and news.



On the map on the left you can see where Cyprus is and you can see Italy on the left corner. The map on the right shows you the location of Venice. Imagine taking such a long journey by boat 500 years ago. You can imagine how far away from home and out of their element the characters in Othello feel.

## ***What is a Moor?***

There is no consensus over Othello's racial classification; although normally performed as a black person today, he was frequently performed as an Arab during the nineteenth century. Othello is referred to as a "Moor", a term that technically referred to a Berber and Arab people of North Africa, but which was used more casually during the English Renaissance to refer to dark-skinned people in general, including black people.

E.A.J. Honigmann, the editor of the Arden Shakespeare edition, concludes that Othello's race is ambiguous. Various uses of the word 'black' are insufficient evidence, Honigmann argues, since 'black' could simply mean 'swarthy' to Elizabethans. Moreover, Iago twice uses the word 'Barbary' or 'Barbarian' to refer to Othello, seemingly referring to the Barbary coast inhabited by the "tawny" Moors. Roderigo calls Othello 'the thicklips', which seems to refer to European conceptions of Sub-Saharan African physiognomy, but Honigmann counters that, arguing that because these comments are all insults, they need not be taken literally. Furthermore, Honigmann wonders whether the ambassador of the Arab King of Barbary, who stayed with his retinue in London in 1600 for several months and occasioned much discussion, might have inspired Shakespeare's play, written only a few years afterwards.



***Portrait of Abd el-Ouahed ben Messaoud ben Mohammed Anoun, Moorish ambassador to Queen Elizabeth I in 1600, sometimes claimed as an inspiration for Othello***

*-courtesy: wikipedia.com*

Is race an issue in Othello? Certainly Othello is treated as an outsider by the Venetians, but his race does not hinder him from finding true love, or gaining the respect and stature as Captain and Governor. However, prejudice does influence this story in that Iago is able to easily persuade Brabantio that Othello is an unsuitable match for his daughter by calling him a barbarian. Perhaps it also makes Othello a bit more susceptible to the lies told by Iago. Being an outsider can affect one's sense of self and self-esteem and maybe he is faster to believe that Desdemona is unfaithful because he is so used to substandard treatment.

## *The Power of the Spoken Word*

How powerful are our words? How do stories influence our lives? Desdemona falls in love with Othello after hearing the many tales of his life. In the opera she sings,

*“Oh how sweet to murmur thus together!*

*Do you remember?*

*You used to tell me of your life in exile,  
Of violent deeds and suffering long endured,  
And I would listen, transported by the tales  
That terrified, but thrilled my heart as well.”*

Othello soon answers,

*“Softened was your lovely face by tears,  
Your lips by sighs, when I my story told;  
Upon my darkness shone a radiance,  
Heaven and all the stars in benediction.  
You loved me for the dangers I had passed,  
And I loved you that you did pity them.”*

She repeats,

*“I loved you for the dangers you had passed and you  
loved me that I did pity them.”*

And so we see that Desdemona, by virtue of stories, gives her heart and devotion to Othello, content to risk her father's love and reputation.

And Iago tells stories. Iago fabricates lie upon lie about Desdemona's fidelity to drive Othello into a place of doubt and mistrust. Iago out-stories the story-teller and brings about the demise of the happy couple.

Stories are also used as foreshadowing. Desdemona sings “Salce”, the Willow Song, which tells the story of Barbara, her mother's maid, whose heart was broken by her man. This foretells how Othello will turn on her and finally kill her.

It is an important connection that the original source material for this work was a tale told by Sheherazade, the original story-teller from **Arabian Nights**. This is a theme that passes down through several artistic translations of the work.



*Iago telling Othello lies about Desdemona*

# ***Curricular Connections***



*Desdemona and Emilia by Dante Gabriel Rossetti*

## ***and Activities***

# *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!

# Character Creation

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

**Otello**  
**Iago**  
**Desdemona**  
**Emilia**  
**Cassio**  
**Roderigo**

**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. Verdi begins his opera with a great storm. The citizens are watching Otello's boat come into view and try to dock at Cyprus after his victory over Turkey. Why did he start the opera this way? What might this storm symbolize?
2. Iago is often referred to as "Honest Iago", yet he is the most deceitful character in the opera. How did he get the reputation as an honest man? Is this plot against Otello his first plan of this kind, or is he devious in nature from the beginning?
3. Iago suggests to Brabantio that Otello used witchcraft to beguile his daughter, Desdemona. Then he gets Cassio drunk to start his plan in motion. What else is used to influence people and drive the conflict of the story?
4. What does the handkerchief symbolize?
5. This is a story full of hearsay and assumed truths. What is it about human nature and pride that can allow rumors to have such a strong presence in our lives?
7. How could this have been avoided? Why did Otello believe Iago? Why was it easier for him to believe he was betrayed than that he was truly loved by Desdemona?
8. Did they get what they deserved? Who is the hero and who the victim in this story? Why is this a tragedy?



*The Death of Desdemona by Eugene Ferdinand Victor Delacroix*

# Composition and Design

**Otello** began life as a novel and a play. 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!

**Otello** takes place in Europe in the 1400's. 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?

## ***Production Questions and Activities***

Which department do you think you would like to work with at the opera? You can read up on different jobs and departments on page 32 of this guide!

### **Development**

Which product or company do you think should sponsor *Otello*? 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 *Otello*. 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 *Otello*, what would it look like? Who would it reach? Who would be the “audience”?

### **Marketing**

Create an advertisement for *Otello*. 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!



Courtesy: weprintcolour.com

# 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:

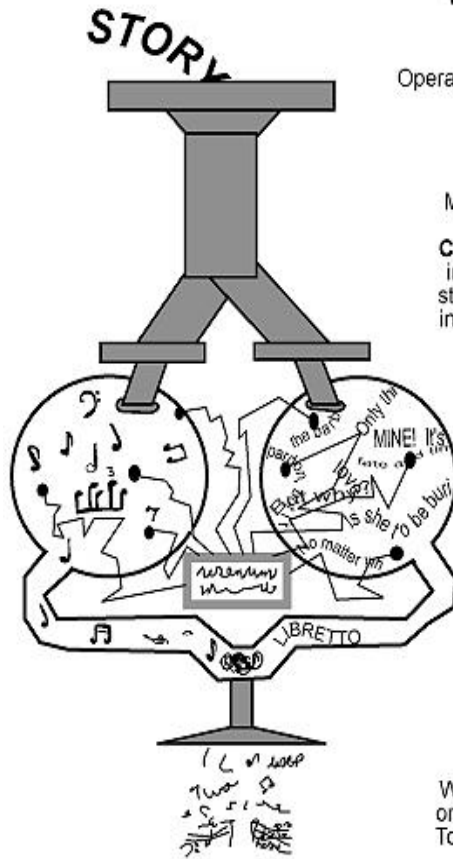
1. The text must be understood; the accompaniment must be very simple and should not distract from the words.
2. The words must be sung with correct and natural declamation, as if they were spoken and not rhyme like songs.
3. The melody must interpret the feeling of the text.

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.

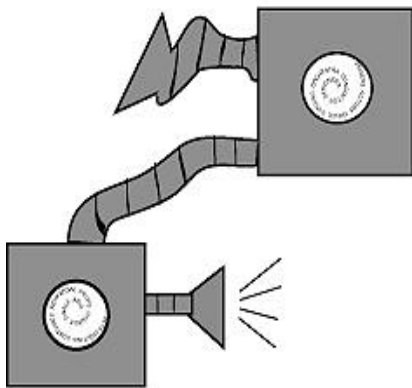
All the music and words of an opera are written down in a book called the **SCORE**. Now that the opera is finished, someone needs to perform it!

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.

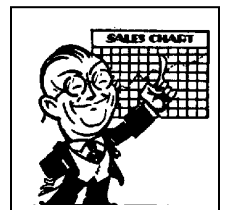
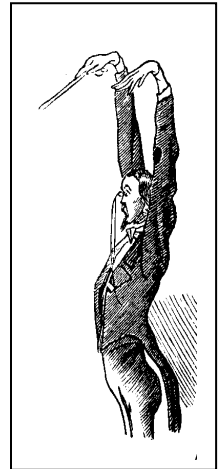
When you attend an opera, you will see and hear the work of the performers: singers, orchestra, chorus, and orchestra, but there are many behind-the-scenes jobs that are necessary to make opera.

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

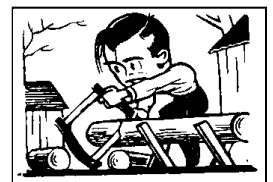


ensuring that opera is part of the arts education in schools, community centers and other venues where people gather to learn. The Education Director creates programs for students and other people in the community, and is responsible for helping teachers bring opera into their classrooms. By being exposed 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.



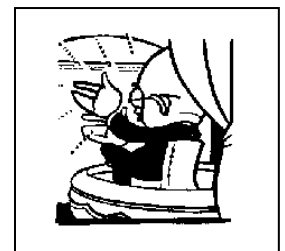
Backstage there are sometimes hundreds of people working to make sure that the people on stage are under the right lighting and have the right props and backdrops. These are the **Stage Crews**; they are responsible for running the show-- making sure everything happens in the right place, at the right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

# 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>1</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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*Cover art:* Charles and Mary Lamb, *Tales from Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus Company, 1901)65

**Guide Created by Caroline Altman  
Director of Education, San Francisco Opera Guild 2009**

**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 Guild 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?

How would you describe your students' initial attitude towards exposure to opera?

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7  
negative/unwilling                      neutral                      positive/excited



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***