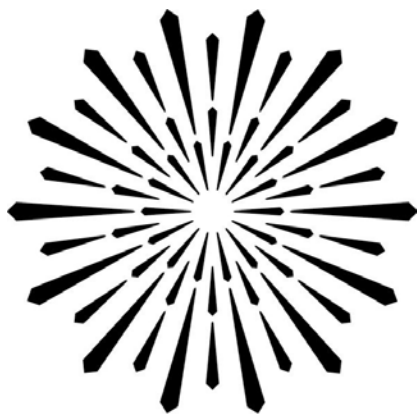


Porgy and Bess



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



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OPERA GUILD**

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Porgy and Bess

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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 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 *Porgy and Bess*.

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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Porgy and Bess

Characters

PORGY, a cripple
CROWN, a stevedore*
BESS, his girl
JAKE, a fisherman
CLARA, his wife
MARIA, keeper of the cook-shop
MINGO
ROBBINS, an inhabitant of Catfish Row
SERENA, his wife
SPORTIN' LIFE, a dope peddler **
PETER, the honeyman
LILY, Peter's wife
UNDERTAKER

Voice Type

Bass-Baritone
Baritone
Soprano
Baritone
Soprano
Contralto
Tenor
Tenor
Soprano
Tenor
Tenor
Soprano
Baritone

SETTING: Catfish Row, Charleston, South Carolina, the 1920's

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

Scene 1: Catfish Row, a summer evening

The opera begins with a short introduction which segues into an evening in Catfish Row. Jasbo Brown entertains the community with his piano playing. Clara sings a lullaby to her baby (*Summertime*) as the working men prepare for a game of craps***. Clara's husband, Jake, tries his own lullaby (*A Woman is a Sometime Thing*) with little effect. Porgy, a cripple and a beggar, enters on his goat cart to organize the game. Crown, a lowlife, and his woman Bess enter, and the game begins. Sportin' Life, the local supplier of cocaine and bootleg alcohol, also joins in. One by one, the players get crapped out, leaving only Robbins and Crown, who have become extremely drunk. When Robbins wins, Crown starts a fight, and kills Robbins. Crown runs, telling Bess to fend for herself. All the residents reject her, except Porgy, who shelters her.

Scene 2: Serena's Room, the following night

The mourners sing a spiritual to Robbins (*Gone, Gone, Gone*). To raise money for his burial, a saucer is placed on his chest for the mourners' donations (*Overflow*). A white detective enters, in a speaking voice telling Serena (Robbins' wife) that she must bury her husband soon, or his body will be given to medical students. He arrests Peter (a bystander), whom he will force to testify against Crown. Serena laments her loss in *My Man's Gone Now*. The undertaker enters, and agrees to bury Robbins as long as Serena promises to pay him back. Bess and the chorus finish the act with *Leavin' for the Promise' Lan'*.

* a stevedore is a dock worker or longshoreman who unloads ships

** a drug dealer

*** a dice game played against other players or the bank. Name comes from the French, "Crapaud", which means "toad"

ACT II

Scene 1: Catfish Row, a month later, in the morning

Jake and the other fishermen prepare for work (*It take a long pull to get there*). Clara asks Jake not to go, and to come to a picnic, but he tells her that they desperately need the money. This causes Porgy to sing from his window about his outlook on life (*I got plenty o' nuttin'*). Sportin' Life waltzes around, selling cocaine, but soon incurs the wrath of Maria (*I hates yo' struttin' style*). A fraudulent lawyer, Frazier, arrives and farcically divorces Bess from Crown. Archdale, a white lawman, enters and informs Porgy that Peter will soon be released. The bad omen of a buzzard flies over Catfish Row, causing Porgy to sing *Buzzard keep on flyin' over*.

As the rest of Catfish Row prepares for the picnic, Sportin' Life asks Bess to start a new life with him in New York; she refuses. Bess and Porgy are now left alone, and express their love for each other (*Bess, you is my woman now*). The chorus re-enters in high spirits as they prepare to leave for the picnic (*Oh, I can't sit down*). Bess leaves Porgy behind as they go off to the picnic. Porgy reprises *I got plenty o' nuttin'* in high spirits.

Scene 2: Kittiwah Island, that evening

The chorus enjoys themselves at the picnic (*I ain't got no shame doin' what I like to do!*). Sportin' Life presents the chorus his cynical views on the Bible (*It ain't necessarily so*), causing Serena to chastise them (*Shame on all you sinners!*). Crown enters to talk to Bess, and he reminds her that Porgy is "temporary." Bess wants to leave Crown forever (*Oh, what you want wid Bess?*) but Crown makes her follow him into hiding in the woods.

Scene 3: Catfish Row, a week later, just before dawn

Jake leaves to go fishing with his crew, and Peter returns from prison. Bess is lying in Porgy's room, sick with a fever. Serena prays to remove Bess's affliction (*Oh, doctor Jesus*). The Strawberry Woman and the Crab Man sing their calls on the street, and Bess soon recovers from her fever. Bess talks with Porgy about her sins (*I wants to stay here*) before exclaiming *I loves you, Porgy*. Porgy promises to protect her from Crown. The scene ends with the hurricane bell signaling an approaching storm.

Scene 4: Serena's Room, dawn of the next day

The residents of Catfish Row drown out the sound of the storm with prayer. A knock is heard at the door, and the chorus believes it to be Death (*Oh there's somebody knocking at the door*). Crown enters dramatically, seeking Bess. The chorus tries praying to make Crown leave, causing him to goad them with the un-Christian *A red-headed woman make a choo-choo jump its track*. Clara sees Jake's boat turn over in the river, and she runs out to try and save him. Crown says that Porgy is not a real man, as he cannot go out to rescue her from the storm. Crown goes himself, and the chorus finishes its prayer. Clara dies in the storm, and Bess will now care for her baby.

ACT III

Scene 1: Catfish Row, the next night

The chorus mourns Clara and Jake (*Clara, Clara, don't you be downhearted*). Crown enters to claim Bess, and a fight ensues, which ends with Porgy killing Crown. Porgy exclaims to Bess, *You've got a man now. You've got Porgy!*

Scene 2: Catfish Row, the next afternoon

A detective enters and talks with Serena and Maria about the murders of Crown and Robbins. They deny knowledge of Crown's murder, causing the detective to question an apprehensive Porgy. He asks Porgy to come and identify Crown's body. Sportin' Life tells Porgy that corpses bleed in the presence of their murderers, and the detective will use this to hang Porgy. Porgy refuses to identify the body, and is arrested for contempt of court. Sportin' Life forces Bess to take cocaine, and then tells her that Porgy will be locked up for a long time. He tells her that she should start a new life with him in New York with the dazzling *There's a boat dat's leavin' soon for New York*. She shuts the door on his face, but he knows that doubt at Porgy's return will make her follow him.

Scene 3 - Catfish Row, a week later

Porgy is released from jail and returns to Catfish Row richer, after playing craps with his cellmates with his "lucky bones", as he calls his dice. He gives gifts to the residents, and does not understand why they all seem so downhearted. He sees Clara's baby is now with Serena and madly asks where Bess is. Maria and Serena tell him that Bess has run off with Sportin' Life to New York. All three sing the trio *O Bess, oh where's my Bess*. Porgy calls for his goat cart, and leaves for New York to find Bess in the closing song *Oh Lawd, I'm on my way*.

Catfish (Cabbage) Row, Charleston



photo courtesy: filmssc.com

From Page to Stage

Novelist/Playwright/Librettist: DuBose Heyward (1885-1940)



Dorothy and DuBose Heyward in 1927

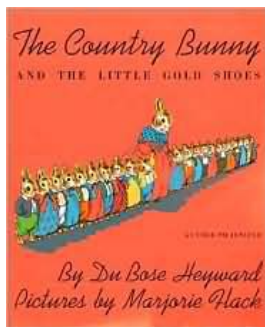
Porgy and Bess first began as the novel, *Porgy*, written by DuBose Heyward in 1925. A descendant of Thomas Heyward, Jr., who was a signer of the United States Declaration of Independence as a representative of South Carolina, DuBose became a Charleston insurance and real-estate salesman with a long-standing and serious interest in literature. He became financially independent and abandoned his business to devote full time to writing.

Heyward and his wife Dorothy spent many years in Charleston observing the lifestyle of the African Americans of that area. He also participated in an amateur Southern traditional singing society open to anyone whose family had lived on a plantation, whether as owner or slave. In Charleston Heyward found a majority of the inspiration for his book, including what would become the setting (Catfish Row) and the main character (a disabled man named Porgy). Literary critics cast Heyward as an authority on Southern literature. During his time in Charleston, DuBose taught at the Porter Military Academy.

The non-musical play, *Porgy*, adapted by DuBose and Dorothy opened on Broadway in 1927, eight years before the opera *Porgy and Bess*. It was a considerable success—more so at the time than the Gershwin opera. It was the play that was used as the opera's libretto. The novel differs greatly from the play, especially in the ending. The plotline of the opera follows the play almost exactly. Large sections of dialogue from the play were set to music for the recitatives in the opera.

The novel *Porgy* became a bestseller. Heyward continued to explore writing with another novel set in Catfish Row, *Mamba's Daughters* (1929), which he and Dorothy again adapted as a play. His novella *Star Spangled Virgin* was about the breakdown of the small farming economy of an island in the Virgin Islands.

He also wrote the screenplay for the adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* (1933). His work included a collection of poems, *Jasbo Brown and selected poems* published in 1931 and a children's book, *The Country Bunny and the Little Gold Shoes* published in 1939.



"DuBose Heyward has gone largely unrecognized as the author of the finest set of lyrics in the history of the American musical theater - namely, those of Porgy and Bess. There are two reasons for this, and they are connected. First, he was primarily a poet and novelist, and his only song lyrics were those that he wrote for Porgy. Second, some of them were written in collaboration with Ira Gershwin, a full-time lyricist, whose reputation in the musical theater was firmly established before the opera was written. But most of the lyrics in Porgy - and all of the distinguished ones - are by Heyward. I admire his theater songs for their deeply felt poetic style and their insight into character. It's a pity he didn't write any others. His work is sung, but he is unsung."

-Stephen Sondheim



George Gershwin DuBose Heyward Ira Gershwin
-courtesy of the Ira and Leonore Gershwin trusts

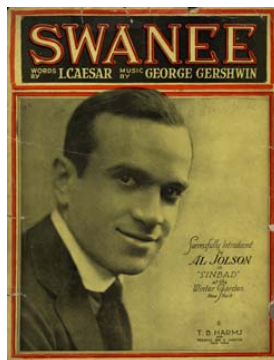


at Work



Composer: George Gershwin 1898-1937

George Gershwin was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1898, the second of four children from a close-knit immigrant family. He began his musical career as a song-plugger on Tin Pan Alley (*what's Tin Pan Alley, you ask? Tin Pan Alley is the name given to the collection of New York City-centered music publishers and songwriters who dominated the popular music of the United States in the late 19th and early 20th century*) but was soon writing his own pieces. Gershwin's first published song, "When You Want 'Em, You Can't Get 'Em," earned him five dollars. Soon after, however, he met a young lyricist named Irving Caesar. Together they composed a number of songs including "Swanee," which sold more than a million copies.



In the same year as "Swanee," Gershwin collaborated on his first complete Broadway musical, *La, La, Lucille*.

In 1924, George collaborated with his brother, lyricist Ira Gershwin, on a musical comedy, *Lady, Be Good*. It included such standards as "Fascinating Rhythm" and "The Man I Love."

It was the beginning of a partnership that would continue for the rest of the composer's life. Together they wrote many more successful musicals including *Oh Kay!* and *Funny Face*, starring Fred Astaire and his sister, Adele. While continuing to compose popular music for the stage, Gershwin began to make his mark as a serious composer. This is not a surprise as George began to study piano as a child and worked with teachers who were prominent classical musicians of the time.

When he was 25 years old, his jazz-influenced *Rhapsody in Blue* premiered in New York's Aeolian Hall. Gershwin followed this success with his orchestral works *Piano Concerto in F*, *Second Rhapsody*, and *An American in Paris*.

Gershwin also experimented with some new ideas in Broadway musicals. *Strike Up The Band*, *Of Thee I Sing* (the first musical comedy ever to win a Pulitzer Prize) and *Let 'Em Eat Cake* were innovative works dealing with social issues of the time.

Finally, in 1935 he presented a folk opera, *Porgy and Bess*. Now recognized as one of the major works of American opera, it included such memorable songs as "It Ain't Necessarily So," "I Loves You, Porgy," and "Summertime."

In 1936, after many successes on Broadway, brothers George and Ira decided to return to Hollywood. Again they teamed up with Fred Astaire, who was now paired with Ginger Rogers. They made the musical film, *Shall We Dance*, which included such hits as "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off" and "They Can't Take That Away From Me." Soon after came *A Damsel in Distress*, in which Astaire appeared with Joan Fontaine. Gershwin had plans to return to New York to work on writing serious music. He planned a string quartet, a ballet and another opera, but these pieces were never written. After becoming ill while working on the Goldwyn Follies, George Gershwin died of a brain tumor at the age of 38. Today he remains one of America's most beloved popular musicians and composers.



George Gershwin in 1937



Brothers at work



Ira Gershwin

Lyricist Ira Gershwin (1896–1983)

While his younger brother, George began composing and working in Tin Pan Alley from the age of sixteen, Ira worked at a number of jobs including as a cashier in his father's Turkish baths. It was not until 1921 that Ira became involved in the music business. Alex Aarons signed Ira to write the music for his next show, *Two Little Girls in Blue* (written under the pseudonym "Arthur Francis"). Gershwin's lyrics were well received and allowed him to successfully enter the theatre world with just one show.

It was not until 1924 that Ira and George Gershwin teamed up to write the music for their first Broadway hit *Lady, Be Good!* Once the brothers joined together, their combined talents became one of the most influential forces in the history of American Musical Theatre.

Together, they wrote the music for more than two dozen scores for Broadway and Hollywood. Following his brother's death, Ira waited nearly three years before writing again.

After this interlude, he teamed up with such accomplished composers as Jerome Kern, Kurt Weill, and Harold Arlen. Over the next fourteen years, Ira Gershwin continued to write the lyrics for films and Broadway.

His critically acclaimed book *Lyrics on Several Occasions* of 1959, an amalgam of autobiography and annotated anthology, is an important source for studying the art of the lyricist in the golden age of American popular song.

American Music and the Gershwins

The Gershowitz family, before the birth of sons, Israel and Jacob (Ira and George), immigrated to New York from St. Petersburg, Russia in the early 1890's. The family officially changed the name to Gershwin when George began to work professionally in the music world. As immigrants who had to make do in a new world and prove themselves, George and Ira are definitely prime examples of the blossoming of the American Dream.

The work of Ira and George Gershwin runs deep in the American consciousness. The opening clarinet glissando from George's *Rhapsody in Blue*, the taxi horn theme from his *An American in Paris* and the brothers' songs – "I Got Rhythm", "Embraceable You", "The Man I Love", "Someone to Watch Over Me", "Fascinating Rhythm", and many others – are instantly recognizable.

Ira Gershwin was a joyous listener to the sounds of the modern world. "He had a sharp eye and ear for the minutiae of living." He noted in a diary: "Heard in a day: An elevator's purr, telephone's ring, telephone's buzz, a baby's moans, a shout of delight, a screech from a 'flat wheel', car honks, a hoarse voice, a tinkle, a match scratch on sandpaper, a deep resounding boom of dynamiting in the impending subway, iron hooks on the gutter." [1] In 1987, Ira's widow, Leonore Gershwin, established the Ira Gershwin Literacy Center at University Settlement, a century-old institution at 185 Eldridge Street on the Lower East Side, New York City. The Center is designed to give English-language programs to primarily Hispanic and Chinese Americans. Ira and George spent many after-school hours at the Settlement.

The George and Ira Gershwin Collection is at the Library of Congress Music Division.

In 2007, the Library of Congress named its Prize for Popular Song for the Gershwin brothers. Recognizing the profound and positive effect of popular music on the world's culture, the prize will be given annually to a composer or performer whose lifetime contributions exemplify the standard of excellence associated with the Gershwins. On March 1, 2007, the Library of Congress announced that Paul Simon, one of America's most respected songwriters and musicians, was the first recipient of the annual Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song. The second Gershwin Prize for Popular Song was awarded to Stevie Wonder by U.S. President Barack Obama on February 25, 2009.

1. Rosenberg

The Origins of *Porgy and Bess*: Making of an American Opera



The Metropolitan Opera

In 1930 Gershwin received a commission from the Metropolitan Opera to write a grand opera, one distinctly American. He was free to select the libretto. While Gershwin was impressed with the Met's offer, he knew that the venue would present some formidable problems: He wanted to do *Porgy* and it would require an all-Negro cast. The Met's doors were closed to Negro performers; not one was on its roster. For three years, Gershwin delayed the decision while he searched for another story. Nothing suited his needs like the *Porgy* story, and neither he nor Heyward wanted it done in blackface, as was the practice of that time. The composers of *Show Boat*, Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II, made an attractive offer to Heyward for the musical rights--the famous Al Jolson was to play *Porgy*. Kern, Hammerstein, and Jolson planned to turn the book into a musical comedy using a cast in blackface. The pressure forced both Gershwin and Heyward, who intuitively knew the potential of *Porgy*, to announce in October of 1933 the composition of a folk opera based on the Heyward book to be performed on Broadway with an all-Negro cast. It would be produced by the Theatre Guild, which had produced the Heywards' highly successful stage play. Neither Heyward nor Gershwin could imagine fully the challenges and exhilaration the task would provide.

Heyward converted the stage version of *Porgy* into a libretto in late 1933 and early 1934, sending the typescript to Gershwin scene by scene. According to Joseph Swain, Gershwin spent eleven months composing the music, from February 1934 to January 1935, and nine more months orchestrating it. The collaboration between Heyward and George Gershwin (and later Gershwin's brother Ira) was a harmonious one. Heyward provided plot, dialogue, and even some lyrics: "Summertime," "My Man's Gone Now," and "A Woman is a Sometime Thing" have sources in the play text. When Heyward eventually had trouble coming up with lyrics that fit certain scenes in the opera, Ira Gershwin became the versifier and polisher. The several musical styles evident in *Porgy and Bess* derive from this two- and three-sided collaboration.

-from The Complicated Life of Porgy and Bess by James Standifer

The Original Bess: Making of an American Opera

Anne Brown, Who Was Gershwin's Bess, Dies at 96

By DOUGLAS MARTIN

Published: March 18, 2009, New York Times

Anne Brown, a penetratingly pure soprano who literally put the Bess in "Porgy and Bess" by inspiring George Gershwin to expand the character's part in a folk opera that was originally to be called "Porgy," died Friday in Oslo. She was 96. Her daughter Paula Schjelderup announced the death.



Anne Brown with Todd Duncan in a 1942 production of "Porgy and Bess."



Ms. Brown in 1998

Ángel Franco/The New York Times

"Porgy and Bess" burst onto the American scene in 1935 as a sophisticated musical treatment of poor blacks. Critics could not make out whether it was a musical comedy, a jazz drama, a folk opera or something quite different. Time told: it became part of the standard operatic repertory, including that of the Metropolitan Opera.

Drawing from the gritty experiences of South Carolina blacks, "Porgy and Bess" introduced songs that came to be lodged in American culture. Ms. Brown was the first person Gershwin heard singing the part of Bess, a morally challenged but achingly human character who was relatively minor in the original 1925 DuBose Heyward novel and the 1927 hit stage play by DuBose and Dorothy Heyward.

As he composed the opera, often with Ms. Brown at his side, Gershwin added more and more music for her. Her voice was also the first he heard singing several other parts in the opera. "Porgy and Bess" went on to be produced on countless amateur and professional stages all over the world.

Because Gershwin died at 38 in 1937, Ms. Brown was the only Bess he ever knew. Her own story has an operatic flavor. She grew up in a protective middle-class home with crystal chandeliers and music; her father later worried about her going to New York, where she was accepted at Juilliard, much less playing the part of a tawdry woman like Bess. She was lauded for her talent, but as a child was rejected from a Baltimore Catholic elementary school because she was African-American.

Even after winning the Margaret McGill prize as the best singer at Juilliard, she had no hope of reaching the top tiers of opera. Not until 1955 did the Met feature a black singer, Marian Anderson. Ms. Brown ultimately moved to Oslo. "To put it bluntly, I was fed up with racial prejudice," she said in an interview with The New York Times in 1998.

Anne Wiggins Brown was born in Baltimore on Aug. 9, 1912. Her father, a surgeon, was the grandson of slaves, and her mother was a music lover who played the piano daily. Family legend had it that Ms. Brown could sing a perfect scale when she was 9 months old, The Washington Post reported in 1994.

After attending what was then Morgan College, Ms. Brown was rejected by the Peabody Institute in Baltimore, a leading conservatory. She was encouraged by the wife of the owner of The Baltimore Sun to apply to Juilliard. She had earned an undergraduate degree and was in her second year of graduate studies at Juilliard when she read that Gershwin was writing his opera. She wrote to ask for an interview. His secretary called to ask her to go to his apartment, with lots of music. She brought music by Brahms, Schubert and other classical composers, which Gershwin played as she sang, she recalled in numerous interviews. When he asked her to sing a Negro spiritual, she balked. She considered the request racial stereotyping, but finally sang "A City Called Heaven" without accompaniment.

Gershwin was quiet after she finished. He finally told her that it was the most beautiful spiritual he ever heard. They hugged.

Soon, Gershwin telephoned to say, "I've finished up to page 33 or so," and asked her to come over to sing it. Finally, in the last days of rehearsals, Gershwin took her to a restaurant to have an orange juice and told her he was expanding the title of the opera to include Bess, her part. Ms. Brown talked Gershwin into letting Bess sing "Summertime" in the third act, reprising the song the character Clara sings earlier.

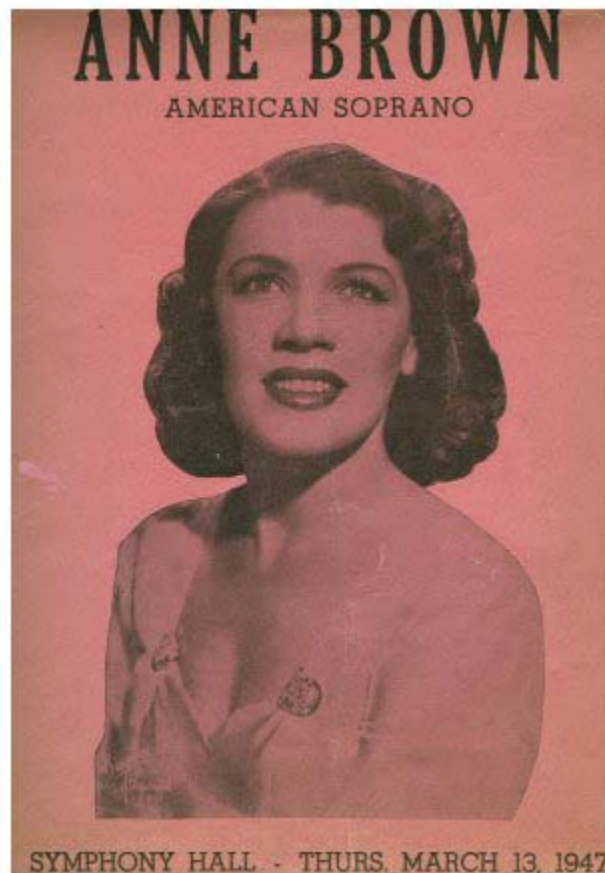
Although the show received mixed reviews in October 1935, Ms. Brown was praised. Olin Downes in The Times said her work was "a high point of interpretation." She went on to appear in the Broadway play "Mamba's Daughters" (1939), a revival of "Porgy" in 1942 and the Gershwin movie biography "Rhapsody in Blue" (1945), playing herself. She performed extensively in Europe, South America and elsewhere, and taught voice for many years in a drama school in Oslo; one of her students was Liv Ullmann. Her own singing career was cut short by a lung illness in the 1950s.

In 1948, Ms. Brown made a concert tour of European capitals and settled in Oslo, where she became a Norwegian citizen and married Thorleif Schjelderup, who won third place in ski jumping at the 1948 Winter Olympics. The marriage ended in divorce, as did two previous marriages. Ms. Brown is survived by her daughters Paula and Vaar Schjelderup; four grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

In 1998, Ms. Brown received the George Peabody Medal for Outstanding Contributions to Music in America from the Peabody Institute, which has operated as a division of Johns Hopkins University since 1977.

In the interview with *The Times*, Ms. Brown suggested she had been born 30 years too soon. “If I had been born even 20 years later I might have sung at the Metropolitan Opera,” she mused. “I might have marched for civil rights. I would have been here for that. I would certainly not have lived in Norway, and my life would have been very different.”

With bright eyes, she added, “Of course, I would not have met Mr. Gershwin, and that would have been a shame.”



Courtesy Operachic.typepad.com

The Real Porgy

[DuBose Heyward], in his youth had worked as a cotton checker with the Gullah stevedores on the waterfront; they often came to him with their problems. Hardly a block away from where he lived on Church Street in downtown Charleston was a decaying pair of buildings inhabited by [African Americans] behind which was an inner court. It was a noisy, overcrowded, troublesome place, which drew the police frequently to settle altercations. Ground-floor shopkeepers put their vegetable stands on the street, and for that reason the place was familiarly known as Cabbage Row.

Heyward passed it every morning on his way to work on Broad Street, a few blocks away, where his insurance business was located. On one of these March mornings, with his wife away in New York, he stopped off at his sister's house on the same street to have breakfast with her. While eating, he browsed through the day's edition of the *Charleston News and Courier*. An item in the police blotter caught his eye. It read:

Samuel Smalls, who is a cripple and is familiar to King Street, with his goat and cart, was held for the June term of Court of Sessions on an aggravated assault charge. It is alleged that on Saturday night he attempted to shoot Maggie Barnes at number four Romney Street. His shots went wide of the mark. Smalls was up on a similar charge some months ago and was given a suspended sentence. Smalls had attempted to escape in his wagon and was run down and captured by the police patrol.

"Just think of that old wreck having enough manhood to do a think like that," Heyward said to his sister, and he clipped out the item and put it in his wallet...

...Several Charlestonians remembered [Smalls], although with less than fondness.

"He was neither very virtuous nor very villainous," one recalled. If anything stood out about him it was the acrid smell of goat. On one of his arrests they picked him up as a complete unit—goat, cart, and Sammy—and set him before the judge, who didn't quite know what to do with him. He was a nuisance in the jail, so he was usually released. Local interest in him grew years after Porgy appeared, but by then he was gone from view, and efforts were made to discover his history. A surviving wife was located, and a grave that might have been his; a few stepped forward to say they were his relatives.

And Cabbage Row, which soon enough became established as the model for the Catfish Row of the novel, play, and opera, also aroused much interest.

-from The Life and Times of Porgy and Bess by Hollis Alpert (pgs. 19-21)

The People of Catfish/Cabbage Row

From www.gullah.sc



Gullah In South Carolina

www.Gullah.sc is South Carolina's premier web site to learn about Gullah people, language, traditions, and tourism events. Gullah is the language spoken by the Lowcountry's first black inhabitants. The language and culture still thrive today in and around the Lowcountry, especially the areas of Charleston and Beaufort, South Carolina. In the Low Country there are a number of tours that offer visitors the ability to learn all about the Gullah traditions, authentic arts and crafts, Gullah presentations, music, and to learn more about the Gullah history, and the the rich and varied contributions made by Black Charlestonians.



Gullah : People, Heritage, and Lifestyles

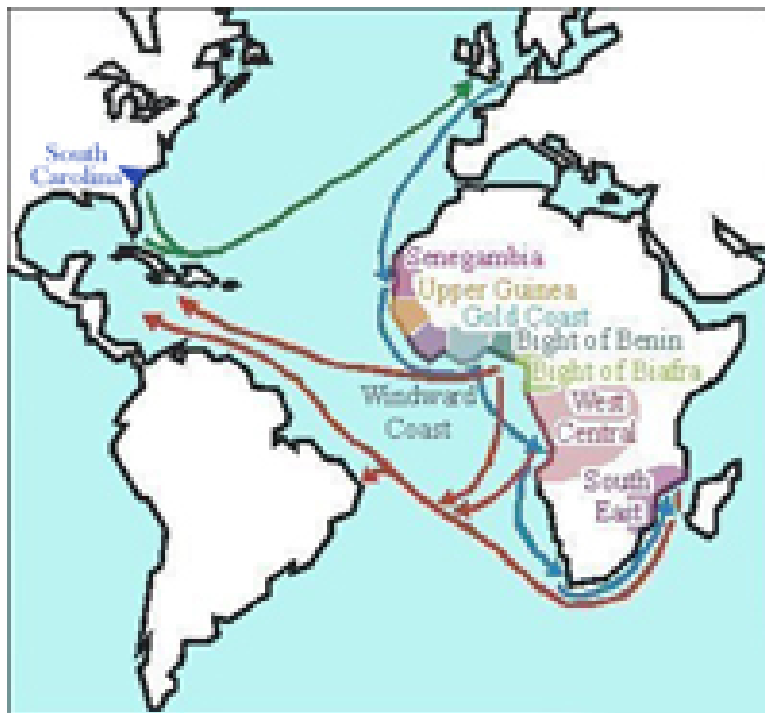
The Gullah are African Americans who live in the Low Country of South Carolina, which includes both the coastal plain and the Sea Islands. Historically, the Gullah region once extended north to the Cape Fear area on the coast of North Carolina and south to the vicinity of Jacksonville on the coast of Florida. Today the Gullah area is confined to the South Carolina and Georgia Low Country. The Gullah people are also called Geechee.



The Gullah are known for preserving their African linguistic and cultural heritage. They speak an English-based creole language containing many African loanwords and significant influences from African languages in grammar and sentence structure. The Gullah language is related to Jamaican Creole, Bahamian Dialect, and the Krio language of Sierra Leone in West Africa. Gullah storytelling, food, music, folk beliefs, crafts, farming and fishing traditions.

"Gullah" and "Geechee"

The name "Gullah" may derive from Angola, a country in southwestern Africa where many of the Gullahs' ancestors originated. Some scholars have also suggested it comes from Gola, an ethnic group living on the border area between Sierra Leone and Liberia in West Africa. The name "Geechee" may come from Kissi (pronounced "Geezee"), a tribe living in the border area between Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.



African Roots

Most of the Gullahs' ancestors were brought to the South Carolina through the port of Charleston. Charleston was the most important port in North America for the Atlantic slave trade, and almost half of the enslaved Africans brought into what is now the United States came through the port of Charleston.

The largest group of Africans brought into Charleston and Savannah came from the West African rice-growing region that stretches from what are now Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Liberia. South Carolina and Georgia rice planters once called this region the "Rice Coast". The second-largest group of Africans brought through Charleston came from Angola in Southern Africa, but smaller numbers also came from the Gold Coast (modern Ghana) and the West Indies.

Origin of Gullah Culture

The Gullah have been able to preserve so much of their African cultural heritage because of geography and climate. By the mid-1700s, the South Carolina Low Country was covered by thousands of acres of rice fields; and African farmers from the "Rice Coast" brought the skills that made rice one of the most successful industries in early America. But the semi-tropical climate that made the Low Country such an excellent place for rice production, also made it vulnerable to the spread of malaria and yellow fever. These tropical diseases were carried by mosquitoes brought aboard the slave ships from Africa. Mosquitoes bred in the swamps and inundated rice fields of the Low Country, and malaria and yellow fever soon became endemic.

Africans more resistant to tropical fevers than the European slave owners. More Africans were brought into the Low Country as the rice industry expanded, and by about 1708 South Carolina had a black majority. Fearing disease, many white planters left the Low Country during the rainy spring and summer months when fever ran rampant, leaving their overseers in charge of the plantations. Having much less contact with white colonists than slaves in white majority colonies, the Gullahs were able to preserve their African language, culture, and community life.



Gullah customs and traditions

African influences are found in every aspect of the Gullahs' traditional way of life: Gullah word "Guber" for peanut derives straight from Kongo(Congo) word "N'guba" Gullah rice dishes called "red rice" and "okra soup" are similar to West African "jollof rice" and "okra soup". Jollof rice is a style of cooking brought by the Wolof and Mandé peoples of West Africa.

The Gullah version of "gumbo" has its roots in African cooking. "Gumbo" is derived from a word in the Umbundu language of Angola, meaning "okra."

Gullah People and the Civil War period

When the Civil War began, the Union rushed to blockade the Confederate shipping. Many White planters on the Sea Islands, fearing an invasion by the US naval forces, abandoned their plantations and fled to the mainland. When Union forces arrived on the Sea Islands in 1861, they found the Gullah people eager for their freedom, and eager as well to defend it. Many Gullahs served with distinction in the Union Army's First South Carolina Volunteers. The Sea Islands were the first place in the South where slaves were freed. Long before the War ended, Quaker missionaries from Pennsylvania came down to start schools for the newly freed slaves. Penn Center, now a Gullah community organization on Saint Helena Island, South Carolina, began as the very first school for freed slaves.

After the Civil War, the Gullahs' isolation from the outside world increased in some respects. The rice planters on the mainland gradually abandoned their plantations and moved away. A series of hurricanes devastated the crops in the 1890s. Left alone in remote rural areas in the Low Country, the Gullahs continued to practice their traditional culture with little influence from the outside world well into the 20th Century.

Gullah People and Modern times

Over the years, the Gullahs have attracted many historians, linguists, folklorists, and anthropologists interested in their rich cultural heritage. Many academic books on that subject have been published. The Gullah have also become a symbol of cultural pride for blacks throughout the United States and a subject of general interest in the media. This has given rise to countless newspaper and magazine articles, documentary films, and children's books on Gullah culture and to a number of popular novels set in the Gullah region.

Cultural survival

Far from being near extinction, Gullah culture has proven to be particularly resilient. Gullah traditions are still strong in urban areas of the Low Country, like Charleston. Many Gullahs migrated to New York starting at the beginning of the 20th century, and these urban migrants have not lost their identity. Gullahs have their own neighborhood churches and sometimes send their children back to rural communities in South Carolina during the summer months to be reared by grandparents, uncles and aunts. Gullah people living in New York also frequently return to the low country to retire.



Racial Controversy and Changing Times

Porgy and Bess reflects the odyssey of the African American in American culture.

--Lawrence Levine

Porgy and Bess belongs in a museum and no self-respecting African American should want to see it, or be seen in it.

--Harold Cruse

-from *The Complicated Life of Porgy and Bess* by James Standifer

Porgy and Bess came on the scene when racial segregation was still widely practiced throughout the United States and main stream theatre, music, and art mostly represented the white European sensibilities.

Heyward's novel, *Porgy*, was seen as a glimpse into the exotic world of another culture. Many felt that his humanist treatment of African American culture helped the cause of racial integration because it led to deeper understanding of the African American experience of the time.

Critics of the work felt that the novel, play, and opera, representing a population rampant with drugs, crime, poverty, and prostitution, only reinforced negative stereotypes that would lead to deeper prejudice and conflict.

Yet this became a rare opportunity for African American singers to take the main stage. (*Four Saints in Three Acts* by Virgil Thomson & Gertrude Stein (1934) had an all-black cast.) Gershwin's music, a wildly diverse mixture of traditional classical, modern experimental for the time, and jazz—a style coming from the Black community itself—became a vehicle for many cultural changes. With the emergence of the Harlem renaissance (the flowering of African American cultural and intellectual life during the 1920s and 1930s, particularly in New York City), Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* fit right into the cultural awakening and new appreciation of the African American experience.

Today life is different in the United States. Although racism and bigotry still exist in our country, we have come a long way toward integration, especially in the arts. So the question arises: Is *Porgy and Bess* still relevant and appropriate? If this piece were written today, representing only the poor and seedy side of Black America, it would not be produced because it shows a society that is no longer representative of what we, as Americans strive for. However, looked at as an historical piece, representative of the views and cultural standards of the time, it is a lesson, a landmark from which have grown, and a humanist story with some of the most unforgettable music of all time.

This work, using multicultural musical elements, created in this country, by immigrants, about immigrants, helping us chart our amazing growth as a nation, is the earliest artistic representation of our foundation that we have.

Everybody's singing...

Summertime,
An' the livin' is easy
Fish are jumpin'
An' the cotton is high

Oh yo' daddy's rich
An' yo' mamma's good lookin'
So hush little baby
Don' yo' cry

One of these mornin's
You're goin' to rise up singin'
Then you'll spread yo' wings
An' you'll take the sky

But till that mornin'
There's a-nothin' can harm you
With daddy an' mammy standin' by

Summertime,
An' the livin' is easy
Fish are jumpin'
An' the cotton is high

Yo' daddy's rich
An' yo' mamma's good lookin'
So hush little baby
Don' yo' cry

“**Summertime**” is the name of an aria from *Porgy and Bess*. The lyrics are by DuBose and Dorothy Heyward, and Ira Gershwin. The song soon became a popular jazz standard. George Gershwin is said to have based this song on a Ukrainian lullaby, *Oi Khodyt Son Kolo Vikon* (A Dream Passes By The Windows), which he heard in a New York City performance by Oleksander Koshetz’s Ukrainian National Chorus.

Gershwin began composing the song in December 1933, attempting to create his own spiritual in the style of the African American folk music of the period. It is sung multiple times throughout *Porgy and Bess*, first by Clara in Act I as a lullaby and soon after as counterpoint to the craps game scene, in Act II in a reprise by Clara, and in Act III by Bess, singing to Clara's baby.

Courtesy wikipedia

Curricular Connections



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:

Porgy

Bess

Sportin' Life

Clara

Jake

Serena

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. Study the lyrics to *Summertime*. Why do you think this has become such a well known and widely heard song? What is it about the simplicity of lyrics and mood they create that is touching to the heart and soul? Listen to a recording of the song. How does the melody express the lyrics? Pick a simple subject and write a short poem trying to focus on how the subject makes you feel. How would you set it to music? Choose one instrument as accompaniment. How does the sound of this instrument help express the subject of the poem?
2. If this story were to be created today, what changes would be made to express our current culture?
3. *Porgy and Bess* does not have a clear ending. We never know if Porgy finds Bess. Write an ending. What happens in New York?
4. Think about patterns of migration. What cultural contributions have been made in your community from the various cultures that make it up?
5. Read about the Gullah people, and using straw, reeds, or strips of paper, start a basket-making art project.
7. DuBose Heyward took a section of his neighborhood and fictionalized it. He turned Sam Smalls into Porgy and turned Cabbage Row into Catfish Row. Think about your neighborhood. How would you adapt the places you visit and people you see everyday and put them into a story. Pick one neighbor or one business in your community and write a short story about them using your imagination.
8. Read about Soprano Anna Brown. Look up other artists who were breaking racial and stereotypical ground during their lives. Write about the artistic journey of that person.
9. It has been said that art really helps lead political and cultural progress. How does *Porgy and Bess* fit into this statement?

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.

Composition and Design

Be a Composer!

Porgy and Bess 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!

Porgy and Bess takes place in South Carolina in the 1920'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 of this guide!

Development

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

Marketing

Create an advertisement for *Porgy and Bess*. 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!

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:

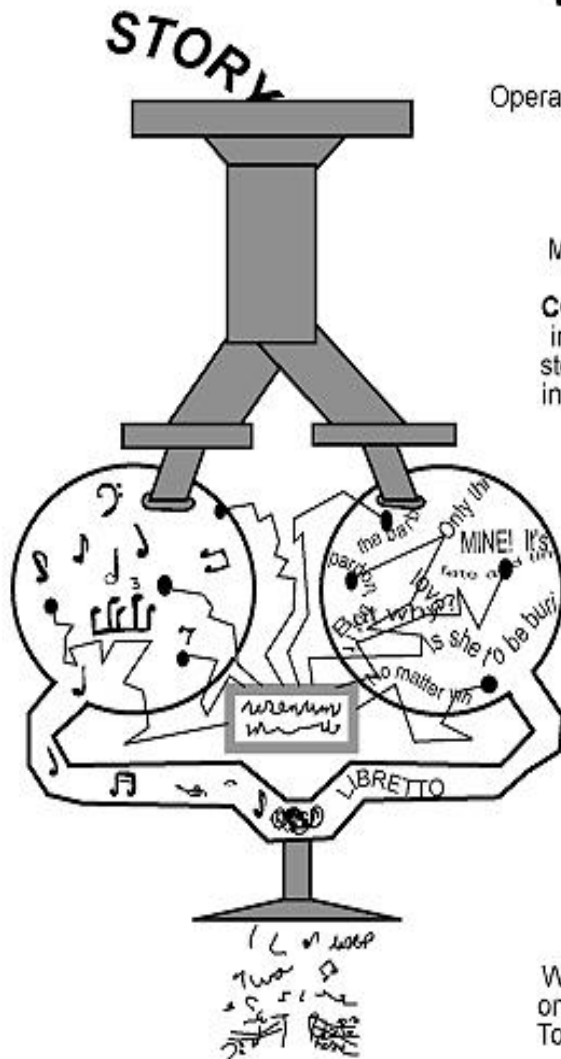
1. The text must be understood; the accompaniment must be very simple and should not distract from the words.
2. The words must be sung with correct and natural declamation, as if they were spoken and not rhyme like songs.
3. The melody must interpret the feeling of the text.

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.

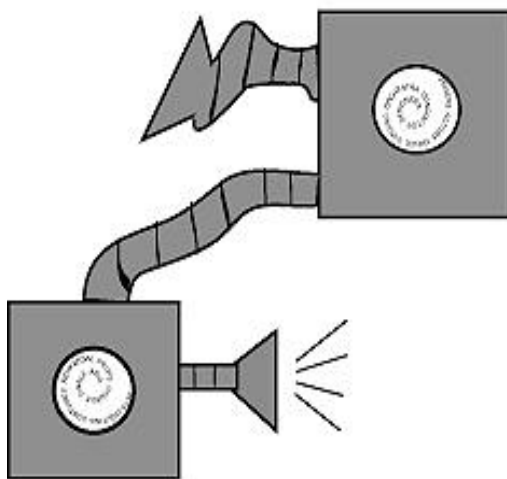
The composer and the librettist work together. They help each other so that the music will fit the words, and the words will fit the music.

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 17th 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.

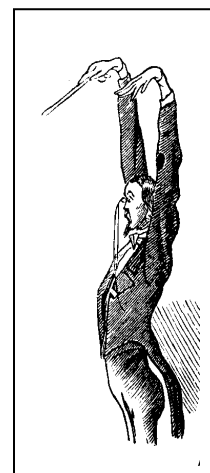


Careers in Opera

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.

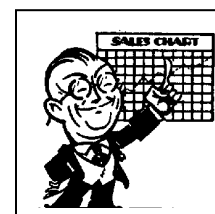
San Francisco Opera is run by the **General Director**. The General Director has the final word on the Company's policies and decisions from artistic to business planning. A General Director needs to travel to other companies in order to stay informed as to what is happening within the opera industry. 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 dynamics¹. 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 18th century, there were still no prescribed parts for the keyboard instruments. In the late 18th 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: Porgy and Bess

Production shot from *Porgy and Bess*, 1935. Copyprint. Rouben Mamoulian Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

**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: _____

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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***