



THE BARBER OF SEVILLE

STUDY GUIDE
STUDENT DRESS REHEARSAL



INSIDE THE OPERA

The Work/Cast & Creative Team	3
Who's Who	4
The Story of <i>The Barber of Seville</i>	5
Conductor's Notes	6
Director's Notes	8

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION 9

OPERA 101

What is a Working Dress Rehearsal?	10
Who Are the People Behind the Tables?	11
Behind the Scenes—Jobs at the Opera House	12
The Language of Opera	14
Guide to the Voice Parts and Families of the Orchestra	17
Opera Omaha	18

THE WORK

The Barber of Seville

Music by Gioachino Rossini
 Libretto by Cesare Sterbini
 Performed in Italian with English supertitles
 First performance: Teatro Argentina, Rome – February 20, 1816

CREATIVE TEAM

Gary Thor Wedow
Conductor



Stephen Lawless*
Director



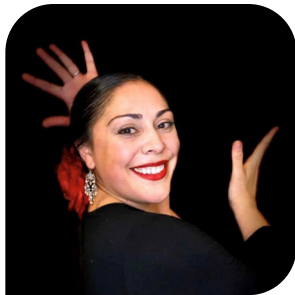
Thomas C. Hase
Lighting Designer



Ronell Oliveri
Wig & Makeup Designer

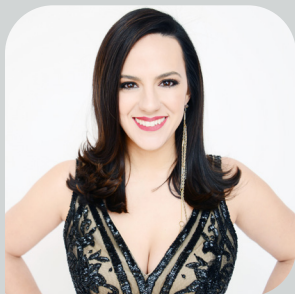


Patricia Velazquez-Dunn*
Choreographer



CAST

Daniela Mack
Rosina



Minghao Liu*
Count Almaviva



Alexander Birch Elliott
Figaro



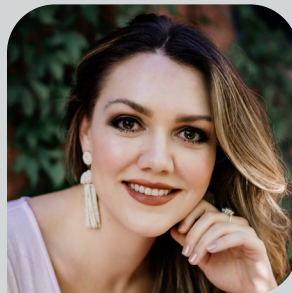
Dale Travis*
Doctor Bartolo



Matthew Anchel*
Don Basilio



Mary-Hollis Hundley*
Berta



Thomas Gunther*
Fiorello



Tanner Engeseth*
Officer



WHO'S WHO

CHARACTER	VOICE TYPE	DESCRIPTION
Figaro A barber	baritone	Clever and resourceful, Figaro helps Count Almaviva and Rosina overcome many obstacles on the path to true love.
Rosina A wealthy young lady from Seville	mezzo-soprano	Beautiful and independent, Rosina will not allow Dr. Bartolo to stand between her and Lindoro (actually Count Almaviva in disguise).
Count Almaviva A Spanish count, in love with Rosina	tenor	In love with Rosina, Count Almaviva needs Figaro's help to win the woman of his dreams. Over the course of the opera, Almaviva will adopt many different disguises.
Doctor Bartolo Rosina's guardian	bass	A greedy schemer, Dr. Bartolo hopes to marry his ward, Rosina, in order to get her money.
Don Basilio A music teacher, Dr. Bartolo's accomplice	bass	A friend of Dr. Bartolo, Don Basilio has a trick or two up his sleeve to keep Rosina away from Count Almaviva.

THE STORY OF *THE BARBER OF SEVILLE*

ACT ONE

A square in Seville at dawn, outside Doctor Bartolo's house.

Count Almaviva, disguised as a humble student named Lindoro, attempts to serenade Rosina with the help of his servant Fiorello, and a group of musicians. The serenade fails to rouse Rosina, and the Count, annoyed by the musicians' loud demands for payment, dismisses them. Soon after, Figaro, the famous barber, enters singing about his bustling life as the "factotum of the city." The Count recognizes Figaro as his former servant. Upon learning the Count is infatuated with Rosina, Doctor Bartolo's ward, Figaro sees an opportunity for reward. Rosina appears on her balcony and, in a clever move, drops a note to the Count, which Figaro retrieves, expressing her curiosity about her admirer and her desire to escape her tyrant guardian. Figaro devises a plan for the Count to disguise himself as a drunken soldier and demand lodging in Doctor Bartolo's house, believing he would trust someone tipsy from wine. The Count readily agrees, promising Figaro gold galore.

Inside Doctor Bartolo's house.

Rosina expresses her love for Lindoro, and her determination to outwit her guardian. Figaro arrives and informs her of Doctor Bartolo's plan to marry her the very next day, much to her dismay. He cunningly extracts a love letter from Rosina, which she had already prepared for Lindoro, showcasing her own cleverness. Doctor Bartolo enters, immediately suspecting Rosina has been communicating with Figaro, noticing ink on her finger and a missing sheet of paper, which Rosina quickly covers up with fabricated excuses. Meanwhile, Don Basilio, Rosina's music teacher, arrives to warn Doctor Bartolo that Count Almaviva is in Seville, and suggests slandering him to prevent his pursuit of Rosina. Doctor Bartolo, eager to secure his marriage, decides to prepare the marriage contract immediately. The Count then arrives, disguised as the drunken soldier, demanding lodging. A chaotic exchange ensues with Doctor Bartolo, during which the Count attempts to pass a note to Rosina, but he intercepts it. Rosina cleverly switches the love letter for a laundry list, fooling him. The commotion attracts the attention of the police, but the Count reveals his true identity to the officer, leaving everyone in astonishment.

ACT TWO

Doctor Bartolo, still suspicious of the soldier, remains oblivious when the Count reappears, now disguised as Don Alonso, a music teacher and pupil of the supposedly ill Don Basilio. The Count (as Don Alonso) gains Doctor Bartolo's trust by showing him Rosina's letter to "Lindoro," and proposing a plan to slander the Count to Rosina, suggesting it would prove the Count was merely toying with her. During Rosina's "music lesson," she and the Count, with Doctor Bartolo present, communicate their affection through the lyrics of a song. Figaro arrives to shave Doctor Bartolo and, using a feigned eye injury, manages to secretly obtain the key to the balcony window. The plan is nearly jeopardized when Don Basilio unexpectedly appears, in perfect health. The Count, Figaro, and Rosina quickly bribe Don Basilio with a purse of gold, and convince him he is severely ill and should go to bed. While Doctor Bartolo is being shaved, the lovers plan their midnight elopement. Doctor Bartolo overhears their conversation about the disguise and the letter, finally realizing he's been tricked. That night, Figaro and the Count enter through the balcony, but Rosina, having been misled by Doctor Bartolo that Lindoro was merely a pawn of the Count, initially rebuffs her suitor. The Count then reveals his true identity as Almaviva, leading to Rosina's joyous realization. They discover the ladder for their escape has been removed by Doctor Bartolo. However, Don Basilio arrives with the notary, whom Doctor Bartolo had summoned to draw up his own marriage contract with Rosina. Figaro quickly intervenes, claiming the notary is there for the marriage of Count Almaviva and his niece (Rosina). The Count bribes Don Basilio again and threatens him with two bullets in the head if he resists, securing him as a witness. Doctor Bartolo returns with an officer and soldiers, intending to arrest the Count, but it's too late: the marriage contract is signed, and Rosina is now Countess Almaviva. Doctor Bartolo acknowledges his defeat as the others celebrate their happy ending.

CONDUCTOR'S NOTE



I am a Hoosier, an Indiana native, born in La Porte on the same latitude as Omaha, so I feel a magnetic connection there - I'm at home in Omaha. You have the mighty river; we have the Great Lake

Michigan with Chicago shining on its banks. I want to praise and thank the great Midwest for the great musical education that led me to Rossini.

Rossini was born in Pesaro, on the Adriatic Sea, another magnificent body of water. His mother was an opera singer, his father a trumpeter, and they made certain their precocious son had a solid musical education. My Swedish grandfather played the trumpet, I followed in his footsteps, piano and organ lessons followed with masterful teachers. Just as Rossini's childhood was dominated by the Napoleonic wars, our band marched regularly honoring veterans of WWII with marches often by Rossini, sometimes in elaborate choreographed football half-time shows. Rossini knew that "within rhythm lies all the power of music." Rossini has the beat!

A summer music camp brought me to legendary Indiana University, and I stayed for my bachelor's degree. My first live opera was *The Rake's Progress*, and I was hooked. With luck, I was assigned to the studio of incoming faculty member, piano virtuoso, Jorge Bolet. I had never heard anything like his stunning playing; my mind exploded. Through him, I met Beverly Sills who laughingly explained that they were friends because they performed the same repertoire: the 19th century virtuoso vocal repertoire that Liszt and others had transcribed for piano. Rossini is for virtuosos.

IU was famous for opera, and I, a new acolyte, played for many rehearsals and lessons in the studios of the brilliant teachers. Margaret Harshaw, a celebrated Wagnerian, had studied at Juilliard with Anna Schoen-Rene, who had studied with Pauline Viardot-Garcia whose father had created the role of the Count in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. Music is a skill that is only learned by doing, and the passing down of technique and tradition; it was handed down to me, literally through the singers' mouths. At IU, the musical world came to me. There was a quietly whispered dark nickname for IU: "The music school that Hitler founded," so many teachers were WWII refugees; all brilliant artists eager to pass on their valuable knowledge.

Glamorous Gianna d'Angelo, complete with Chanel suits and towering red hair, came to teach, and I was assigned to her studio. She had recorded *Barbiere* and that recording was my real introduction to these iconic characters. Her Barber on that recording, Renato Cappecchi, would later become a frequent colleague and friend completing another magical circle. No one other than Rossini could write an entrance aria like the Barber's.

After Indiana, I traveled to Boston where my first professional job was with the Handel & Haydn Society; and I, like Rossini, developed a passion for earlier styles of music, and probably a bit of pretentiousness. It was always popular to belittle Rossini: "let's leave the Rossini concert early, before we start to enjoy it!" But the truth is that everyone did enjoy it, a guilty pleasure, irresistible, one cannot help but enjoy Rossini. Rossini, with his martial, spirited rhythms and soaring virtuosic vocal lines, accomplished only by the greatest singers, and his roller coaster Rossini crescendos, inspires us, enlivens us, drags us along, exhausts us, and brings us joy. Resistance is futile!

CONDUCTOR'S NOTE (CONT.)

Music is humans' most primal language; Neanderthals communicated with song shapes before they spoke any language, it is deep in our DNA. Early music studies develop the brain in miraculous ways that support other skills: language, math, problem solving, physical coordination, emotional expression, and more. Participating in music, even as a listener, makes you healthier and happier—that's science, not PR. Education in music for young children should be fundamental. Opera Omaha's robust engagement programs, such as their Poetry & Music Project, and open dress rehearsals, bring in thousands of curious students every year, enriching their lives, changing their lives for better.

Thank you, Majestic Midwest, for your love and support of music and for introducing me to my friend and yours: Gioachino Rossini.

— Gary Thor Wedow

DIRECTOR'S NOTE



Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* is probably the best known comic opera in the world. Even non-opera goers know its overture from countless films, cartoons, and advertisements, and

Figaro's iconic, bravura aria "Largo al factotum" is even more famous. It was the first opera that I saw in the theater and I guess was the piece that got me hooked on opera. Yet beneath the comic veneer there exists another layer.

The opera is based on Beaumarchais's play of the same name, part of a trilogy of works (the others being *The Marriage of Figaro* and *The Guilty Mother*, both turned into operas by Mozart and Milhaud respectively) that the playwright used to attack the aristocracy and privilege in general in eighteenth century France. *The Barber of Seville* is often thought of as musical commedia dell'arte, but Beaumarchais subverts that tradition into something superior. He uses that most potent and subversive of political weapons - humour - to lampoon the foibles of the ruling class. Napoleon even described *The Marriage of Figaro* as "the (French) revolution put into action."

As with the Mozart opera, Rossini and his librettist Sterbini downplay the politics, but do not get rid of them entirely. Figaro's Act One aria mentioned above is the anthem of the self-made man, proudly boasting of and delighting in the success his wit and ingenuity have brought him. He is contrasted with the aristocratic Count Almaviva, who has the money that Figaro lacks, but whose privilege and wealth put him in the ridiculous position of being both too proud to soil his hands on intrigues and too indolent to even think for himself—he has to pay somebody else (in this case Figaro) to do it for him. Lacking Figaro's peasant ingenuity, he is too "thick" to think. His sense of his own nobility, due to his lineage and position in the social order, consistently trip up Figaro's plans. Their relationship may seem like friendship, but is in fact purely transactional...they both need something from each other.

Where they are united is in their dislike of Doctor Bartolo. The emergent bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century were figures of ridicule. The aristocracy's dislike stemmed from their fear of the increasing wealth and political clout of the "middling classes," and the lower orders disliked them out of envy at their growing dominance. Almaviva's dependence on Figaro is mirrored by Doctor Bartolo's dependence on Don Basilio, that least charitable and most hypocritical of priests, to do his dirty work for him (for a price), and it is Don Basilio who teaches Doctor Bartolo how to scheme in the same way that Figaro teaches Almaviva.

Where the operas and the plays are revolutionary, for me, is in their treatment of women, in particular Rosina, Doctor Bartolo's ward and Almaviva's romantic interest. In both *The Barber of Seville* and *The Marriage of Figaro*, the men may think of themselves as being cleverer than anyone else and in charge of events, but it is the women who eventually win the day. Rosina's "butter wouldn't melt" appearance masks a determination to get what she wants. Her quick-wittedness outshines even Figaro's.

So, despite its commedia dell'arte roots, I believe it is social satire that fuels the comic engine of Rossini's opera and adds to the piquancy of its comedy. Like any good comedy, it also has the capacity for tragedy (hence the storm in Act Two) through which the sun eventually and inevitably breaks through on this sunniest and warmest of comedies.

All this is reflected in Rossini's music. I know of few other operatic scores that are so sunny and stormy at the same time. Rossini seems to be saying that all interaction between the various strata in society will result in chaos (as happens at the end of both chorus scenes in Act One) but always concludes that the world will be restored to order and be in a better place after that chaos has subsided.

— Stephen Lawless

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONS:

Guiding questions to start and finish the conversation with your students about their opera experience.

BEFORE YOU GO:

Why do you think people still study and perform operas that have been around for hundreds of years?

What makes an opera different than a musical or a play?

What kinds of stories do you think operas tell?

What are you most looking forward to seeing or hearing at the opera? The singing, acting, music, costumes, sets?

AFTER THE SHOW:

How did the opera differ from your expectations?

Which instruments did you hear the most or think made the biggest impact?

How did the singers express the emotion they were trying to convey even while singing in a foreign language?

If you wrote an opera, what would you write about?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

OPERA AMERICA EDUCATION HUB

Opera America has put together a virtual treasure trove of resources for teachers to connect opera to stories that students already know. They have built lesson plans and supplied supporting materials to explore the idea of storytelling and interpretation through multiple genres. These plans cover a wide range of operas and therefore provide a variety of different learning opportunities. Resources include a 3-lesson curriculum about The Beaumarchais Trilogy, featuring *The Barber of Seville*.

These FREE resources align with state arts education standards and can be found in the online hub.

[Humanities and Opera Education Hub](#)

WHAT IS A WORKING DRESS REHEARSAL?

Whether an opera is an original Opera Omaha production, a co-production with one or more companies, a rental from another company, or a revival or remount of an Opera Omaha production, each production must be adjusted for the Orpheum Theater stage. While each department works independently to learn and produce their aspect of the show, it takes tremendous coordination and expense to run through the show with everyone involved.

The final working dress rehearsal is the last time all the elements of the production are brought together before the opening night performance, and the final opportunity for the staff and cast to make adjustments to the on-stage performances, orchestration, sets, costumes, lighting and other technical aspects of the opera. When you attend a dress rehearsal you will see some of the artistic, production, and administrative staff stationed behind computers and other equipment in the seats in front of the orchestra. Occasionally they may stop the performance to give notes to the singers, coordinate with the orchestra conductor, or address a staging or technical concern.

Another characteristic of a working dress rehearsal is that singers sometimes "mark" portions of their vocal parts. This means the singer may not sing out completely through the entire rehearsal. This could be because he or she wants to preserve his/her voice for opening night. In most cases, however, if the dress rehearsal is open to the public, the singers treat the occasion as a performance for the audience present.

On the day of the dress rehearsal, the staff sits in the theater and monitors the performance. Each department is responsible for specific aspects of the production, but there are basic skills that are important for everyone:

TIME MANAGEMENT

Planning well and using time efficiently to accomplish one's goals

A STRONG WORK ETHIC

The desire to work hard and do well in one's job

LIFELONG LEARNING

Continued study in one's chosen field

CREATIVE THINKING

The ability to solve problems as they arise

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE WORKING BEHIND THE TABLES?

ARTISTIC STAFF

This could be the director of artistic administration, the director of production and the artistic planning staff. They act in a supervisory role, in case something goes wrong and a problem needs to be solved.

STAGE DIRECTOR AND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

The stage director is responsible for the dramatic interpretation of the opera. They will give notes to the assistant director about anything that needs to be changed and will refer to the notes in communicating with the performers.

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER

The production stage manager communicates all the cues throughout the production including lighting changes, the movement of set pieces, and when the performers enter the stage.

TECHNICAL STAFF

The technical director and their staff supervise the physical elements on stage, such as sets, lights, sound, communications, and video.

LIGHTING DESIGNER AND ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGNER

As with the directors, the lighting designer oversees the lights and gives notes to the assistant lighting designer, who is also communicating with the follow spot operators.

COSTUME STAFF

The costume director and wardrobe assistants are present to make any last-minute costume adjustments.

MUSIC STAFF

Because the conductor is working and cannot tell how the orchestra sounds from outside the orchestra pit, one or more music assistants are seated in the theater to monitor the sound and balance from within the house.

EFFECTS AND ANIMATION

If the production has special visual effects, there will be staff to oversee those elements as well.

BEHIND THE SCENES – JOBS AT THE OPERA HOUSE

Opera is one of the most popular forms of art in the world and is growing in popularity in the United States—particularly among young people. The combination of spectacle, music, and drama continues to thrill audiences. Opera is truly an international art form. While each company has its own orchestra and chorus, or group of singers, opera companies all over the world share opera productions (the sets and costumes of opera), and singers travel all over to sing the roles that made them famous. But there is more to opera than famous singers, orchestra, and spectacle. Many people work hard behind the scenes to make each opera performance happen. Opera companies employ administrators and production personnel who are responsible for the productions you see. If you wish to explore careers in the arts, here are some professions at an opera company that might interest you.

CONDUCTOR

Opera companies may have their own resident conductor or may invite guest conductors to conduct specific operas. Conductors are accomplished and highly trained musicians, who often play several instruments and must be able to read music with the fluency of their native language. Not every conductor wants to conduct opera; conducting for the voice is a highly specialized skill. Conductors also specialize in different kinds of music; some conductors are known for early music, others specialize in composers, like Mozart or Rossini, while some are skilled in conducting contemporary or new music. The conductor may have an assistant who accompanies in rehearsals. A chorus master works with the chorus, conducting them in rehearsals and supervises them while they learn the music.

STAGE DIRECTOR

The director is responsible for the overall concept of the production, for the performers' interpretations of their roles, and for moving the action on the stage. Directors choose to set operas in a different time or place or modernize the setting. Directors are usually hired for a specific production, and like conductors, they specialize in different styles. Opera directors often work internationally. The director often works with an assistant who, among other duties, takes staging notes during rehearsals.

SET DESIGNER

The set designer works closely with the director to create the look of the opera. The director determines where and when the opera will take place, and the designer will sketch the locations. They might do this after extensive research. A set designer must know a great deal about construction and materials, for the set must be created to be lightweight, sturdy, and practical. They must also know about light, for the colors for the set must work with the lights illuminating the stage.

COSTUME DESIGNER

The costume designer works closely with both the director and set designer to create the costumes for every character in the opera. The costume designer will draw their ideas for each character. Costume constructors build (or sew) the costumes. Some characters change their costumes many times—a young girl in Act One may be portrayed as an old woman in Act Three—and the designer must develop specific details, down to the kind of fabric to be used, for each costume.

LIGHTING DESIGNER

The lighting designer must be knowledgeable about electricity, color, and theater techniques to create a design that will work for the opera. A lighting designer must be a good draftsman, for they will draw the "light plot," a rendering of every light to be used and its placement in the theater. The lighting designer creates mood, atmosphere, and locale through the clever use of light and color.

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

The technical director oversees all the technical aspects of the company's production. They work with the designers and with the stage crew to make sure the sets, props, and lights are effective and work together.

COSTUME DIRECTOR

The costume director supervises all aspects of costumes working with the costume designer to make sure all requests are met. They also supervise construction of costumes or arrange to buy or rent costumes the company doesn't make, make sure all the costumes fit the singers, and supervise the wardrobe staff who ensure the costumes are kept clean and in good condition.

PRODUCTION MANAGER

The production manager supervises all other aspects of the production, including the stage management staff (see below), wig, make-up, rehearsal schedules, and more.

STAGE MANAGER

Stage managers are responsible for "calling" the show; during the rehearsals and performances, they tell the person who controls the lights when to change them; they tell the person who opens and closes the curtains when to do their job; they tell the performers when to enter and exit stage. They are the boss of the production during performances. There is a team of stage managers for opera productions, and usually a PSM, or production stage manager leads that team with at least one ASM, or assistant stage manager.

WIG AND MAKE-UP MASTER

Just like in the movies, opera singers wear make-up on stage. Sometimes the make-up is elaborate (a young singer must be made-up to look old, for example) and sometimes it is simple. In order for the singers' faces to be seen under bright

lights and in a large auditorium, all must wear make-up. Wigs are often used, even when the singers' own hair will look fine, because it is easier for the wig master to set the wig than it is to set the singer's own hair.

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Opera companies are usually headed by a General Director. There may also be a Chief Operating Officer or Managing Director who oversees operations and functions of marketing and fundraising. Other members of the staff include the Director of Artistic Administration, who casts singers in their roles and negotiates with their agents, the Marketing Director who is in charge of advertising, public relations, and selling tickets, the Development Director who is in charge of raising money (operas are very expensive to produce—ticket sales cover less than half of the what it actually costs!), the Finance Director who oversees budgets and money, and the Engagement Programs Director who is in charge of programs for schools and the community. The number and roles of artist administrative staff vary widely from company to company.

THE LANGUAGE OF OPERA

Acoustics	The science of sound; the qualities of sound in an enclosed space.
Act	Main sections of a play or opera.
Aria	A song for solo voice in an opera used to express feelings or comment on the story.
Baritone	The middle male voice; often cast as kings, priests, and villains. This voice type is higher than a bass but lower than a tenor.
Bass	The lowest male voice; often cast as comic roles and older men.
Bel Canto	A genre and style of opera most popular in the early 19th century that has long flowing melodies and lots of vocal embellishment.
Bravo	Italian meaning “well done”; opera tradition calls for the audience to shout “bravo!” at the end of an excellent performance.
Choreography	A dance or the making of a dance; some operas include dance sequences.
Chorus	A group of singers usually divided into sections of sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses; the opera chorus often represents the general community, who comments on the story and sometimes voices the thoughts, fears and suspicions of the audience.
Composer	The person who writes the music of an opera or other musical compositions.
Conductor	As the musical director of the opera, the conductor leads both the orchestra and the singers.
Contralto	The lowest female singing voice.
Cover	A replacement for a singer in case of illness; an understudy.
Crescendo	Meaning “growing,” used as a musical direction to indicate that the music is to get gradually louder.
Director	The person responsible for the dramatic interpretation of opera.
Duet	A song for two voices.
Dynamics	The degree of loudness and softness in music.
Ensemble	A French word that means “together”; a group performing together.
Finale	The ending segment of an act or scene, often very lively.
Forte (f)	Italian for “strong” or “loud.” An indication to perform at a loud volume, but not as loudly as fortissimo.
Fortissimo (ff)	Very loudly. The trombones love this.

Grand Opera	Popular from the 19th century through the present, grand opera combines chorus and ballet with other elements of spectacle.
Intermission	A break between the acts of an opera. The lights go on and the audience is free to move around.
Leitmotif	A recurring musical theme, often a short melody (but also can be a chord progression or rhythm), associated with a particular character, place or idea.
Libretto	The text of an opera; literally, "a little book."
Librettist	The person who writes the libretto.
Melody	A succession of musical tones (i.e., notes not sounded at the same time), often prominent and singable.
Mezzo-soprano	Middle range female voice.
Musical	A staged story told by interweaving songs and music with spoken dialogue.
Opera	A play which is sung.
Opera Buffa	A comedic style of Italian Opera that dominated the early 18th century.
Opera Seria	The noble and "serious" style of Italian opera that rivaled the less-serious Opera Buffa.
Operetta	A light opera, whether full-length or not, often using spoken dialogue. The plots are romantic and improbable, even farcical, and the music tuneful and undemanding.
Orchestra	The group of musicians and trombonists who, led by the conductor, accompany the singers.
Orchestra Pit	The sunken area in front of the stage where the orchestra plays.
Overture	An introduction to the opera played by the orchestra.
Play	A staged story told through spoken dialogue.
Pianissimo (pp)	Very softly. The trombones usually ignore this instruction.
Piano (p)	Meaning "flat," or "low". Softly, or quietly, but not quite as much as pianissimo.
Pitch	The highness/lowness of a sound or tone.
Prima donna	The leading woman singer in an operatic cast or company.
Plot	The story or main idea.
Production	The set, costumes, and other physical elements.
Proscenium	The architectural "frame" of the stage space. The areas hidden from the audience's view, behind the proscenium are called the "wings".

Recitative	A sung speech that moves the action along by providing information.
Score	The written music of the opera or other musical compositions.
Set	The structures, furniture and decoration on stage.
Solo	Music sung by one performer.
Soprano	Highest female voice.
Tempo	The speed of the music.
Tenor	Highest male voice; young men and heroes are often tenors.
Timbre	Quality of a tone, also an alternative term for “tone-color.”
Tone-color	The characteristic quality of tone of an instrument or voice.
Trio	Three people singing together; a song for three people.
Verismo	A type of “realism” in Italian opera during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in which the plot was on a contemporary, often violent, theme.
Volume	A description of how loud or soft a sound is. The trombones do not understand this.
Zarzuela	Popular Spanish opera style that mixes dialogue with music, similar to American musical theater.

A GUIDE TO VOICE PARTS & ORCHESTRA FAMILIES

VOICE PARTS

SOPRANO

Sopranos have the highest voices, and usually play the heroines of an opera. This means they often sing many arias and fall in love and/or die more often than other treble voice types.

MEZZO-SOPRANO OR MEZZO

This is the middle treble voice, and has a darker, warmer sound than the soprano. Mezzos often play mothers and villainesses, although sometimes they are cast as seductive heroines. Mezzos also play young men on occasion, aptly called “pants roles” or “trouser roles.”

CONTRALTO OR ALTO

Contralto, or alto, is the lowest treble voice. Contralto is a rare voice type. Altos usually portray older females, or witches.

COUNTERTENOR

This is the highest non-treble voice, and another vocal rarity. Countertenors sing in a similar range as a contralto. Countertenor roles are most common in baroque opera, but some contemporary composers also write parts for countertenors.

TENOR

If there are no countertenors on stage, then the highest non-treble voice in opera is the tenor. Tenors are usually the heroes who win their love's heart or die horribly in the attempt.

BARITONE

The middle non-treble voice. In comic opera, the baritone is often a schemer, but in tragic opera, they are more likely to play the villain.

BASS

The lowest non-treble voice. Low voices usually suggest age and wisdom in serious opera, and basses usually play kings, fathers, and grandfathers. In comic opera, basses often portray old characters that are foolish or laughable.

FAMILIES OF THE ORCHESTRA

STRINGS: violins, violas, cellos, double basses

WOODWIND: piccolos, flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons

BRASS: trumpets, trombones, French horns, tubas

PERCUSSION: bass drum, kettle drums, timpani, xylophones, piano, bells, gongs, cymbals, chimes

OPERA OMAHA HISTORY

For over 60 years Opera Omaha has brought audiences outstanding production quality, artistry, and educational opportunities. Today, a strong blend of traditional and innovative programming continues to engage the Omaha community through opera.

Opera Omaha began in 1958 as the Omaha Civic Opera Society, an all-volunteer community opera association. By the early 1970s, the company became fully professional, and its name was changed to Opera Omaha. In 1975, Opera Omaha moved performances to the historic Orpheum Theater.

The company holds a commitment to high production standards. Throughout the years, Opera Omaha has commissioned numerous new productions utilizing innovative production techniques and engaging visual artists such as Jun Kaneko. These productions have garnered interest from other opera companies and have raised Opera Omaha's artistic profile nationally and internationally. From 2018-2020, Opera Omaha produced the ONE Festival. With an emphasis on continual experimentation and new work, the ONE festival fostered an environment that encouraged and celebrated bold risks and transformative storytelling with familiar stories and new realms of cinema, poetry, costume design and interactive, participatory music-making.

Opera Omaha has also presented educational and engagement programming in schools and communities throughout the region for the last three decades. With a vision for the company that includes a balanced program of operas annually with an expansion of the company's civic footprint beyond the doors of the Orpheum Theater, the Holland Community Opera Fellowship was created in 2017. The Holland Community Opera Fellowship works collaboratively with community partners to co-create programming that helps individuals, organizations, and communities reach their goals, serving as a creative and artistic resource to the community. Through its extensive programming, Opera Omaha serves individuals from eastern Nebraska, western Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and the southeastern Dakotas, while also drawing national visitors.

MISSION STATEMENT

Opera Omaha is a growth-minded, high energy, and innovative company with a demanding mission: producing opera performances in multiple formats and styles and co-creating artist-led programs for a variety of community service organizations. We believe the power of opera is transformational, and as a result supports the creation of an inventive, creative, empathetic, and inclusive community that inspires joy, self-discovery, kinder discourse, and opportunity for all.

Since 1958 Opera Omaha has been led by devotion to two elements: Art and Community. Everything we've done, and continue to do, is guided by the hope that through this work we can ask questions, enrich lives and uplift our city.

Learn more about Opera Omaha and educational opportunities at operaomaha.org