

The title "RIGOLETTO" is rendered in a large, white, stylized serif font with vertical lines through the letters. Above the letter 'O' is a small graphic of a golden horn and a white mask. The title is set against a black background with a faint, light-colored diamond-shaped grid pattern.

RIGOLETTO

Study Guide
2012/13 Season

**Manitoba Opera gratefully acknowledges our
Rigoletto partners:**

Student Night at the Opera Sponsor



Projected Translation Sponsor



Education, Outreach and Audience Development Sponsors



1060 - 555 Main Street

lower level, Centennial Concert Hall

Winnipeg, MB, R3B 1C3

(204) 942-7470

www.manitobaopera.mb.ca

**For Student Night tickets or more information on student programs,
contact Livia Dymond at (204) 942-7470 or ldymond@manitobaopera.mb.ca**

Join our e-newsletter for exclusive behind-the-scenes content:
Go to www.manitobaopera.mb.ca and click "Join Our Mailing List"

Contents

	Three Great Resources for Teaching Your Students About Opera	4
the production	<i>Rigoletto</i> : Good to Know	5
	Production Information	6
	Synopsis	7
	The Principal Characters	8
	The Principal Artists	9
	The Composer	10
	The Librettist	11
	The Music	12
related topics of study	The Story Behind <i>Rigoletto</i>	13
	The Italian Renaissance	14
	Court Jesters	15
	What to Listen For	16
	“La donna è mobile”	17
bringing an opera to the stage	A Short Overview of Opera	18
	Bringing an Opera to the Stage	20
	The Operatic Voice and Professional Singing	22
	Glossary: Important Words in Opera	23
	Audience Etiquette	27
	Manitoba Opera	28
	Student Activities	29
	Winnipeg Public Library Resources	36

Rigoletto

Three Great Resources for Teaching Your Students About Opera

1. Student Night

In order to expose student audiences to the glory of opera, Manitoba Opera created Student Night. It's an affordable opportunity for students to watch the dress rehearsal, an exciting look at the art and magic of opera before the curtain goes up on Opening Night, when tension is high and anything can happen. Please note:

- *Rigoletto* is an opera in three acts, with a running time of approximately three hours.
- The dress rehearsal is the last opportunity the singers will have on stage to work with the orchestra before Opening Night. Since vocal demands are so great on opera singers, some choose not to sing in full voice during the dress rehearsal in order to avoid unnecessary strain.

2. The Study Guide

This study guide has been created to assist you in preparing your students for their visit to the opera at the Centennial Concert Hall. It is our hope that you will be able to add this to your existing curriculum in order to expand your students' understanding of opera, literature, history, and fine art.

Materials in the study guide may be copied and distributed to students. Some students may wish to go over the information at home if there is insufficient time to discuss in class.

3. Opera in a Trunk

Bring the magic of opera right into the classroom with our Opera in a Trunk. We provide you with all the tools you need – the music, costumes, props, story line, etc. – to recreate some of the world's greatest operas with your class.

- Contact Livia Dymond for more details on how to order our Opera in a Trunk for *The Daughter of the Regiment*, *The Magic Flute*, or *Carmen* complete with costumes, props, CDs, DVDs and activities for experiencing the opera in the classroom. Check back later in the season for our *Aida* trunk.

Rigoletto: Good To Know

- *Rigoletto* is considered by many to be the first of the operatic masterpieces of Verdi's middle-to-late career, and is one of the most-performed operas in the world today.
- *Rigoletto* is a tragic opera with a dark story and haunting melodies.
- The title role is considered one of the most demanding (both musically and dramatically) in the operatic repertoire for a baritone.
- Verdi composed the opera, originally titled *La Maledizione* (The Curse), in only six weeks as a commission for the Teatro La Fenice, in Venice. After some delays, it was an instant hit with audiences.
- Not all reviews were favourable, however. After the London premiere in 1853, *The Times of London* called *Rigoletto* "the most uninspired, the barest, and the most destitute of ingenious contrivance. To enter into an analysis would be a loss of time and space."
- *Rigoletto* is based on a play (*Le roi s'amuse*) by Victor Hugo in which the major characters are historical: Francis I of France, a contemporary of Henry VIII, and his jester Triboulet. The Italian censors found the libretto so shocking that they demanded important changes, particularly the story's unflattering portrait of King Francis I, which they feared would provoke subversive behavior. To fictionalize the story, the locale was moved to Italy, the King was reduced in rank to a duke, and the jester's name was changed to Rigoletto (from the French *rigoler*, "to laugh").
- *Le roi s'amuse* ("The King Amuses Himself") opened in Paris two decades before Verdi's opera, in 1832. It played for one night, and was promptly banned as obscene and politically subversive.
- Many opera companies, such as L.A. Opera, update the opera's sets and costumes so that the action takes place in a modern milieu. In the production in Los Angeles, the Duke of Mantua was turned into the head of a production company, while Rigoletto became a Hollywood agent and the assassin a stuntman.
- The last time Manitoba Opera staged *Rigoletto* was in 2004. Although the cast was entirely different, it was conducted by Tyrone Paterson who will conduct the 2012 production as well.



Todd Thomas as Rigoletto, Palm Beach Opera, 2008.

Production Information

Rigoletto

November 24, 27, 30

(Dress Rehearsal / Student Night: November 22)

Centennial Concert Hall

Music by Giuseppe Verdi

Libretto in Italian by Francesco Maria Piave

Based on Victor Hugo's *Le roi s'amuse*

Premiere Performance: La Fenice in Venice on March 11, 1851

Approximately three hours in four acts, with three intermissions.

Sung in Italian with projected English translations.

PRINCIPAL CAST

RIGOLETTTO	Todd Thomas	<i>Baritone</i>
GILDA	Tracy Dahl	<i>Soprano</i>
THE DUKE OF MANTUA	David Pomeroy	<i>Tenor</i>
MADDALENA	Lauren Segal	<i>Mezzo-soprano</i>
COUNT MONTERONE	Peter Volpe	<i>Bass</i>
SPARAFUCILE	Peter Volpe	<i>Bass</i>
COUNT CEPRANO	Howard Rempel	<i>Bass</i>
COUNTESS CEPRANO	Kathryn Patrick	<i>Mezzo-soprano</i>
GIOVANNA	Dawn Bruch	<i>Mezzo-soprano</i>
BORSA	James McLennan	<i>Tenor</i>
MARULLO	Mel Braun	<i>Baritone</i>

Manitoba Opera Chorus

Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra

Conductor	Tyrone Paterson
Director	Rob Herriot
Scenery and props provided by:	New Orleans Opera (TBC)
Costumes provided by	Malabar Ltd. (Toronto)
Lighting designer	Bill Williams
Stage manager	Evan Klassen
Assistant stage managers	Kathryn Ball, Candace Maxwell
Projected Titles by	Sheldon Johnson

Synopsis

Please note: Rigoletto is a three-act opera though Manitoba Opera's production will be staged in four acts (see intermissions within the synopsis below.)

ACT I

Mantua, 1500s. At his palace, the Duke lightheartedly boasts to his courtiers of amorous conquests, escorting Countess Ceprano, his latest prize, to a private chamber as his hunchback jester, Rigoletto, makes fun of her husband. Marullo announces that Rigoletto is suspected of keeping a mistress, and Ceprano plots with the courtiers to punish the hated buffoon. Attention is diverted when Monterone, an elderly nobleman, enters to denounce the Duke for seducing his daughter. Ridiculed by Rigoletto and placed under arrest, Monterone pronounces a curse on both the Duke and his jester. [Intermission]

On his way home that night, Rigoletto broods on Monterone's curse. Rejecting the services offered by Sparafucile, a professional assassin, he notes that the word can be as deadly as the dagger. Greeted by his daughter, Gilda, whom he keeps hidden from the world, he reminisces about his late wife, then warns the governess, Giovanna, to admit no one. But as Rigoletto leaves, the Duke slips into the garden, tossing a purse to Giovanna to keep her quiet. The nobleman declares his love to Gilda, who has noticed him in church. He tells her he is a poor student named Gualtier Maldè, but at the sound of footsteps he rushes away. Tenderly repeating his name, Gilda retires. Meanwhile, the courtiers stop Rigoletto outside his house and ask him to help abduct Ceprano's wife, who lives across the way. The jester is duped into wearing a blindfold and holding a ladder against his own garden wall. The courtiers break into his home and carry off Gilda. Rigoletto, hearing her cry for help, tears off his blindfold and rushes into the house, discovering only her scarf. He remembers Monterone's curse. [Intermission]

ACT II

In his palace, the Duke is distraught over the disappearance of Gilda. When his courtiers return, saying it is they who have taken her and that she is now in his bedchamber, he joyfully rushes off to the conquest. Soon Rigoletto enters, warily looking for Gilda; the courtiers bar his way, though they are astonished to learn the girl is not his mistress but his daughter. The jester reviles them, then embraces the disheveled Gilda as she runs in to tell of her courtship and abduction. As Monterone is led to the dungeon, Rigoletto vows to avenge them both. [Intermission]

ACT III

At night, outside Sparafucile's run-down inn on the outskirts of town, Rigoletto and Gilda watch as the Duke flirts with the assassin's sister and accomplice, Maddalena. Rigoletto sends his daughter off to disguise herself as a boy for her escape to Verona, then pays Sparafucile to murder the Duke. As a storm rages, Gilda returns to hear Maddalena persuade her brother to kill not the Duke but the next visitor to the inn instead. Resolving to sacrifice herself for the Duke, despite his betrayal, Gilda enters the inn and is stabbed. Rigoletto comes back to claim the body and gloats over the sack Sparafucile gives him, only to hear his supposed victim singing in the distance. Frantically cutting open the sack, he finds Gilda, who dies asking forgiveness. Monterone's curse is fulfilled.

- courtesy of Opera News



Rigoletto Principal Characters

Rigoletto

Rigoletto is the court jester for the Duke of Mantua. He's also a homely hunchback who makes fun of other nobleman for the Duke's amusement. Despite his appearance, however, he's a strongwilled man and passionate about protecting his daughter's innocence, especially since the death of his loving wife.

Gilda

Gilda is Rigoletto's only daughter. She is very beautiful and overprotected. She's not as innocent as she seems, however.

The Duke of Mantua

The sneaky, womanizing Duke is the top dog at his court. He's handsome and charming, and uses it to his advantage to seduce women, sometimes even right in front of their husbands.

Count Ceprano

A nobleman

Countess Ceprano

Count Ceprano's wife

Count Monterone

Nobleman and enemy of the Duke

Sparafucile

A deadly assassin for hire

Maddalena

Sparafucile's sister and one of the many objects of the Duke's affection



Manitoba Opera's 2004 production of *Rigoletto*.

The Principal Artists

Todd Thomas *Rigoletto*

"...sings with such finesse and acts with such depth..." - *Des Moines Register*

American baritone Todd Thomas is recognized by operatic companies and critics alike as a true Verdi baritone. Mr. Thomas enjoys international acclaim among European, and American audiences, and throughout Asia, having appeared with such companies as Metropolitan Opera, New York City Opera, and Seattle Opera.

www.toddthomasbaritone.com



Tracy Dahl *Gilda*

"...a voice filled with sunshine, rainbows and laser light" - *Opera Magazine*

The Winnipeg-based coloratura soprano has sung with the likes of Placido Domingo and graced the stages of some of the most famous opera companies around the world such as Metropolitan Opera, La Scala and the Canadian Opera Company.



David Pomeroy *The Duke of Mantua*

"...a powerful, agile tenor. ...heartfelt." - *New York Times*

Canadian David Pomeroy has established himself as a leading young lyric tenor. He is a regular presence with companies throughout North America including the Canadian Opera Company, Vancouver Opera, and the Metropolitan Opera.

www.davidpomeroy.ca



Lauren Segal *Maddalena*

"...sensational with a rich... voice that will take her far." - *PaulaCitron.ca*

South African-Canadian mezzo-soprano Lauren Segal is an alumna of the esteemed Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio and has since gone on to perform with such companies as l'Opera de Montreal, Calgary Opera, Pacific Opera Victoria, and Opera Hamilton.

www.laurensegal.com



The Composer

Giuseppe Verdi

Born: October 10, 1813

Died: January 27, 1901

Giuseppe Verdi dominated Italian opera for half a century with 28 operas that include some of the best known in the repertoire. He was not only a very popular and successful composer, but an astute businessman and producer, an active and committed farmer, a hero of the Italian nationalist movement, a member of the first Italian Parliament, and a generous philanthropist.

Verdi was born Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi in the small village of Roncole, about 65 miles southeast of Milan in the province of Parma in Italy. He was born the same year as the German composer Richard Wagner, to whom he loathed to be compared.

Young Verdi showed an early interest in music and was encouraged by his father, who bought an old spinet piano and sent him to the church organist for lessons. When Verdi was 10, his father sent him to the nearby city of Busseto for further musical training. He stayed in the home of Antonio Barezzi, a local merchant and music enthusiast and gave singing and piano lessons to Barezzi's daughter Margherita, whom he would later marry. At age 20, he left Busseto to further his studies in Milan.

In 1836, having returned to Busseto, Verdi accepted the position of town music master and married Margherita Barezzi. It was during this period that he composed his first opera, *Rocester*, which he later renamed *Oberto, conte di San Bonifacio*. The opera was successful enough to persuade the impresario at La Scala to offer Verdi a contract to write more operas.

The Verdis' daughter Virginia was born in 1837, but died the following year. In 1839 Giuseppe and Margherita moved back to Milan with their little son, Icilio Romano, who died shortly after. While Verdi was working on his next opera, a comedy called *Un Giorno di Regno*, his wife died. The deaths of his entire young family within such a short time left him devastated. Although he completed *Un Giorno di Regno*, it was a failure, and Verdi resolved never to compose again.

It took two years for Merelli to persuade Verdi to compose another opera, *Nabucco*. Verdi became a celebrity overnight. The opera's Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves, "Va, pensiero" was sung in the streets of Milan and became an unofficial Italian national anthem. During this period came his "big three," the three operas that are his most popular. *Rigoletto* premiered in 1851 in Venice; *Il trovatore* was launched in Rome in 1853, followed six weeks later by *La traviata* in Venice.

Verdi's biggest operas remain as popular today as when they first appeared; they form the core of the current standard repertoire.

Verdi suffered a stroke on January 21, 1901, and died six days later. He was buried in Milan at the Casa di Riposo. His funeral was a national event, and thousands lined the streets, singing "Va, pensiero," the famous chorus from *Nabucco*. Among the mourners were such great composers as Rossini, Donizetti, and Puccini.



The Librettist

Francesco Maria Piave

Born: May 18, 1810

Died: March 5, 1876

Francesco Maria Piave was an Italian opera librettist who was born in Murano, Venice, during the brief Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy. His career spanned over 20 years working with many of the significant composers of his day. In addition to Giuseppe Verdi, for whom he was to write 10 librettos, other composers include Giovanni Pacini, Saverio Mercadante, Federico Ricci, and Michael Balfe.



Piave was not only a librettist, but a journalist and translator. He was resident poet and stage manager at La Fenice in Venice and later at La Scala in Milan. His expertise as a stage manager and tact as a negotiator served Verdi well over the years, although Verdi bullied him mercilessly. For example, during the efforts to have *Rigoletto* approved by the censors, Verdi goaded Piave to make every effort to get the subject approved: "Turn Venice upside down to make the censors permit this subject."

But the librettist became Verdi's lifelong friend and collaborator. Like Verdi, Piave was an ardent Italian patriot, and in 1848, during Milan's "Cinque Giornate," when Radetsky's Austrian troops retreated from the city, Verdi's letter to Piave in Venice was addressed to "Citizen Piave."

Piave would have also prepared the libretto for *Aida*, the commission for which Verdi accepted in 1870, had he not suffered a stroke, which left him paralyzed and unable to speak. Verdi helped to support his wife and daughter - by proposing that "an album of pieces by famous composers be compiled and sold for Piave's benefit" - and paid for his funeral when he died nine years later in Milan at age 65.

What is a Libretto?

Libretto means "little book" in Italian. It refers to the written text of an opera set to music by the composer. Today, we commonly refer to an opera as being 'by' the composer of the music, but the text is a vital component and is normally written first. In earlier times it was often regarded as more important than the music, and it was common for audience members to purchase the libretto to read.

Early composers were usually contracted to set music to a pre-existing text. Only later did composers (such as Mozart and Verdi) work in close collaboration with their librettists. A few composers – notably Wagner – wrote their own texts.



The Music of *Rigoletto*

Verdi himself called *Rigoletto* “revolutionary” in form and style and considered it his best opera. With *Rigoletto* he departed from the traditions of 18th and 19th century Italian opera and focused on the interaction between characters, creating a continuous dramatic whole rather than a series of story-telling bits interrupted by songs that did more to show off the singer’s talents than to advance the drama.

Rather than solo arias, Verdi wrote much of *Rigoletto* as duets, again spotlighting the relations between characters and reinforcing the tight connection between the drama and the music.

This doesn’t mean there aren’t a few hit songs that can be performed in recital as well as on the opera stage. Gilda’s “Caro nome” is a lovely aria, in which she rhapsodizes on the beloved (though fictional) name of the man she has fallen for.

The Duke’s “La donna è mobile” is also a recital favourite, an unforgettable tune that is familiar even to people who know little of opera. This flippant little ditty takes on a horrible irony within the opera, as it is the cue to Rigoletto that the body he is dragging triumphantly toward the river is not that of the Duke. The Russian composer Igor Stravinsky said that “La donna è mobile” contains more substance and true invention than all of Wagner’s massive four-opera *Ring Cycle*.

Verdi knew he had a hit on his hands with this song, so much so that to ensure it wasn’t pirated before the opera’s premiere, he didn’t allow tenor Raffaele Mirate, who played the Duke, to see the song until the dress rehearsal.

The other great masterpiece in the opera is the magnificent quartet, with the Duke, Maddalena, Gilda, and Rigoletto expressing their individual emotions of passion, amusement, grief, and rage. Victor Hugo, author of the play on which the opera was based, said of the Quartet, “This is marvellous, simply marvellous! Ah, if I only could in my play make four people talk simultaneously in a way that the public would understand the words and varying sentiments.”

Verdi, himself said: “I never expect to do better than the Quartet. Many consider it the finest piece of ensemble writing in all of opera.”

Over the course of his long career Verdi moved away from the traditional “number opera” (an opera with a lot of individual musical “numbers” such as solos, duets, and trios) to a coherent “through-composed” whole, where the dramatic texture takes precedence over show-stopping numbers. *Rigoletto* is an early step in this process; Verdi’s last three operas, *Aida*, *Otello*, and *Falstaff*, are in the more modern through-composed idiom. Richard Wagner, born the same year as Verdi, followed a similar development as a composer. Through-composed operas with their tighter dramatic construction became prevalent in the 20th century in the hands of composers such as Richard Strauss and Benjamin Britten.

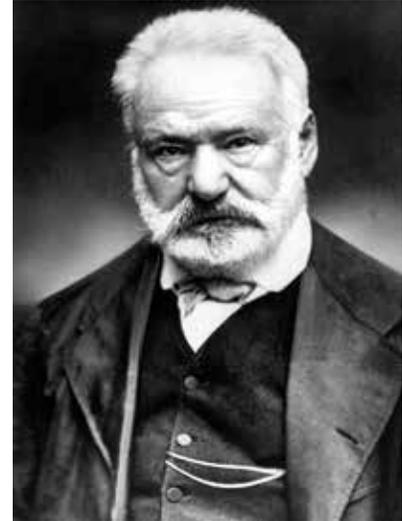
- Courtesy of Al Reimer and the Royal Opera House.



Tracy Dahl in the title role in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, 2003. Photo: R.Tinker
Ms. Dahl will be singing the role of Gilda in *Rigoletto*.

The Story Behind *Rigoletto*

The story of *Rigoletto* is based on a play called *Le roi s'amuse*, by French poet, novelist and, dramatist, Victor Hugo (1802-1885). Hugo is best-known for writing the novel *Les Misérables* and *Notre-Dame de Paris* (known in English as *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*). *Le roi s'amuse*, or *The King Amuses Himself* (1832), was based on the extravagant court of King Francis I of France.



Victor Hugo

Francis I was born in 1494 and reigned as King of France from 1515 until his death in 1547. He was famous for his lavish court life and his romantic escapades. He was also a patron of the arts and helped Renaissance art spread from Italy to France. Although the plot for *Le roi s'amuse* is a *fictional* account of Francis' life, the depiction of the King and his court was based on historical facts as far as Hugo understood them through his extensive research. In *Le roi s'amuse*, the King's jester is named Triboulet, and his cruel mockery of courtiers for the king's pleasure returns to haunt him as the courtiers take revenge on him by kidnapping Triboulet's daughter, Blanche, and essentially giving her to the King. Triboulet is heartbroken by the loss of his daughter and attempts to kill the king, but succeeds only in accidentally killing Blanche, who has fallen in love with the lustful king and purposefully traded places with him to spare his life.



King Francis I of France

Although *Le roi s'amuse* depicts the life of Francis I, censors of the time of its publication believed that it also contained references to France's current politics, criticizing the ruling class, in particular King Louis-Philippe of France. The play was banned following its first performance. The lawsuit that Hugo brought forward to permit the performance of the play propelled him into celebrity as a defender of freedom of speech in France. He lost the suit however, and the play was banned for another 50 years. When Verdi based his opera *Rigoletto* on Hugo's play, Austrian authorities in Venice did not like the fact that King Francis was depicted as an immoral and cynical womanizer. Verdi was forced to move the action from France to Mantua, in order to be permitted to have his opera produced.

The Italian Renaissance

Rigoletto is set in the 16th century in Mantua, Italy, during the Italian Renaissance. The Italian Renaissance was a period of great cultural change and achievement that began in Italy around the end of the 13th century and lasted until the 17th century. The Renaissance had a profound impact on European and world history. Although primarily spoken of as an artistic period, the Renaissance reflected a set of ideas which would also influence areas such as literature, science, and philosophy.

During this period, people started looking to the classical world (ancient Greece and Rome) with much admiration. They considered the classical world to have been a time of greatness, and that the fall of the Roman Empire (c. 476 A.D.) led Europe into a period of decline which they called the “Dark Ages.” Beginning in Florence, many Italians thought that by reviving the ideas, art, and architecture from antiquity, they could bring about a “rebirth” of greatness in their own cities. The result was the Renaissance, which means “rebirth.”

Science and Technology

During the Renaissance, people began to question received wisdom (particularly that of the medieval Church) and began to use experimentation and observation to solve earthly problems. Scientists like Francis Bacon, Galileo, Rene Descartes, and Isaac Newton made discoveries that would change the world. Renaissance artist Leonardo Da Vinci created detailed scientific “studies” of objects ranging from flying machines to submarines. Likewise, the scientist and mathematician Galileo investigated numerous natural laws. He proved that all objects fall at the same rate of acceleration. He also built a powerful telescope and used it to show that the Earth and other planets revolved around the sun and not, as religious authorities argued, the other way around.

Another important technological development of the Renaissance was the invention of the mechanical movable-type printing press in the middle of the 15th century by German inventor, Johannes Gutenberg. As a result, literature became more easily and cheaply distributed which allowed new ideas to spread quickly all across Europe.

Other important Renaissance inventions include the microscope, eyeglasses, the mechanical clock, the flushing toilet, the wrench, the screwdriver, wallpaper, and the submarine.

Art & Architecture

During the Renaissance, art was everywhere. Patrons such as Florence’s Medici family sponsored projects large and small to gain respect as a patron of the arts and successful artists became celebrities in their own right.

Art became more realistic during this period, with artists focusing on proportion and perspective. Artists often depicted the beauty of nature and the human form in their works and developed new techniques in painting light and shadows.

Leonardo Da Vinci is considered the most well known Renaissance artist. He is most famous for having painted *The Last Supper* and *The Mona Lisa*. Other notable Renaissance artists include Michelangelo, Raphael, Botticelli, and Donatello.



The Mona Lisa

Court Jesters

Rigoletto is the Duke of Mantua's court jester. A court jester (also known as a fool, buffoon, or clown) was a person employed to tell jokes and provide entertainment, usually for a monarch or courtier. Although jesters were at the height of their popularity during medieval and Renaissance Europe, the tradition dates as far back as Ancient Egypt.

Jesters were often accomplished musicians, articulate and well educated, and sometimes boasted excellent acrobatic skills. They were one of the few people in the court who were permitted to freely speak their mind as their comments would be taken as jokes due to their role as 'licenced fool.' Very often their performances had political or social overtones. They would use humour to mock, jibe, or joke about the lords, ladies and nobles of the court as well as comment on the general problems of society. Although they had to be careful not to overstep their boundaries. If they took a joke too far, they could be punished by the monarch, sometimes resulting in death.

Jesters typically wore brightly coloured clothing and eccentric hats. A floppy three pointed hat with jingle bells on each tip, called a Fool's hat, was a distinctive element of their dress. The three points of the hat represented a donkey's ears, nose, and tail worn by jesters in earlier times. Often they would also carry a prop stick or sceptre, known as a *marotte*, which is taken from the french word meaning *a fool's bauble*. This tall stick would typically have a miniature head carved on it which reflected the costume of the jester who carried it.



'Keying Up-the Court Jester', 1875, painting by William Merritt Chase



'The Court Jester', 1883, painting by Cesare Augusto Detti

What to Listen For

ACT I

In the palace ballroom, the Duke of Mantua boasts, to his guests, of his romantic conquests (**Questa o quella**), and expresses his desire for the beautiful Countess Ceprano. His hunchbacked jester, Rigoletto, taunts Count Ceprano. The angered Count schemes to abduct the woman believed to be Rigoletto's mistress. When Monterone, an elderly noble, denounces the Duke for seducing his daughter, he is mocked by Rigoletto. As Monterone is led away, he curses the jester.

Troubled by the curse, Rigoletto hurries home to his daughter, Gilda. He is stopped by Sparafucile, an assassin, who offers his services. Rigoletto dismisses him, reflecting that his own tongue is as devastating as the assassin's knife (**Pari siamo**). His mood softens when he is greeted by Gilda. She embraces her father and asks about her mother, who died long ago. Rigoletto replies that his wife was an angel (**Ah, Deh non parlare al misero**), adding that now Gilda is everything to him. Afraid for his daughter's safety, he warns her nurse, Giovanna, to admit no one to the house, but the Duke himself slips past the jester. Removing Giovanna with a bribe, he declares his love for Gilda (**E il sol dell'anima**), claiming he is a poor student. Hearing footsteps, Gilda begs him to leave. Alone, she savors her lover's name (**Caro nome**). Meanwhile, the vengeful courtiers stop Rigoletto to enlist his aid in abducting Ceprano's wife. The jester is blindfolded and, in confusion, holds their ladder against his own garden wall. The courtiers break in and seize Gilda. Realizing the abduction is taking far too long, he tears off the blindfold to find himself alone. Finding his daughter's room empty, he cries out in anguish, remembering Monterone's curse (**Ah! la maledizione!**)



Gaétan Laperrière as the title role in Manitoba Opera's 2004 production of *Rigoletto*.

ACT II

The Duke enters, despondent at the disappearance of the beautiful Gilda (**Parmi veder le lagrime**). His courtiers return to tell him the girl has been brought to his quarters. Overjoyed, the Duke rushes to her. Rigoletto enters in search of Gilda, who, he confesses to the astonished courtiers, is his daughter. Still, they bar his way despite his protests (**Cortigiani, vil razza dannata**). Gilda appears and runs to her father, who orders the others to leave. Alone, she tells him of the Duke's deception (**Tutte le feste al tempio**). As Monterone is led to prison, Rigoletto swears vengeance for them both (**Si vendetta**).

ACT II

Rigoletto and Gilda stand outside the inn where Sparafucile, with the aid of Maddalena, dispatches his victims. The jester forces Gilda to watch the Duke, disguised as a soldier, swear his love to Maddalena. The soldier laughs at the fickleness of woman (**La donna è mobile**), and the jester consoles his daughter (quartet: **Bella figlia dell'amore**). Ordering Gilda to go home, Rigoletto pays Sparafucile to murder the Duke and departs. Gilda returns, overhearing Maddalena urge her brother to spare the soldier and kill Rigoletto instead. Sparafucile refuses, but agrees to kill a stranger if one comes to the inn. Gilda decides to sacrifice herself and knocks on the door. Rigoletto returns for the Duke's corpse, gloating over the sack which Sparafucile gives him. Hearing the Duke's voice in the distance, he frantically rips open the sack and finds his daughter's body. Asking forgiveness, she dies. Rigoletto screams that Monterone's curse has been fulfilled.

- courtesy of Cleveland Opera

“La donna è mobile”

“La donna è mobile” (“Woman is flighty”) is Verdi’s most famous tenor aria and one of the most famous opera arias of all time.

The Duke of Mantua sings this song in Act III of *Rigoletto*, as he is disguised as a soldier. It first comes across as light hearted and comical as he is singing about how women are fickle (‘mobile’) and yet it is the womanizing Duke himself who is ‘mobile.’ However, the song takes on a horrible irony during the reprise, later in the act, as it is the cue to Rigoletto that the body he is dragging triumphantly toward the river is not that of the Duke.

This aria is often recognizable to people who may have never attended the opera as it has frequently been heard in pop culture. It has been parodied on television in episodes of “Seinfeld” and “The Simpsons.” The melody itself is also popular among English soccer league supporters, who have particular lyrics set to the melody.

Original Italian

La donna è mobile.
Qual piuma al vento,
muta d'accento e di pensiero.
Sempre un amabile,
leggiadro viso,
in pianto o in riso, è menzognero.

Refrain

La donna è mobile.
Qual piuma al vento,
muta d'accento e di pensier!
e di pensier!
e di pensier!

È sempre misero
chi a lei s'affida,
chi le confida mal cauto il core!
Pur mai non sentesi
felice appieno
chi su quel seno non liba amore!

Refrain

La donna è mobile.
Qual piuma al vento,
muta d'accento e di pensier!
e di pensier!
e di pensier!

English Translation

Woman is flighty
Like a feather in the wind,
she changes in voice and in thought,
always a lovely,
pretty face,
in tears or in laughter, she's untrue.

Refrain

Woman is flighty.
like a feather in the wind,
she changes in voice and in thought,
and in thought!
and in thought!

Always miserable
is he who trusts her,
he who confides in her his unwary heart!
Yet one never feels
fully happy
who from that bosom does not drink love!

Refrain

Woman is flighty.
Like a feather in the wind,
she changes her words,
and her thoughts!
and her thoughts!

A Short Overview of Opera

An opera, like a play, is a dramatic form of theatre that includes scenery, props and costumes. In opera, however, 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 orchestra pit.

Opera consists of many dimensions: 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 creates a multi-dimensional theatrical experience.

Opera has its roots in Greek drama and originated in Florence, Italy, in the late 1500's, with a small group of men who were members of the Camerata (Italian for society). The intellectuals, poets and musicians of the Camerata decided they wanted words to be a featured aspect of music. 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 must avoid the rhythms of 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*, based on a Greek myth, was performed in 1594 and is regarded as the first opera.

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 usually focuses on a character's emotions rather than actions. A recitative is sung dialogue or speech that occurs between arias and ensembles. It helps to further the action of the story and shape the relationships between the characters.

The story of the opera is written as a libretto: a text that is set to music. Composers write the score or the music for the opera. Sometimes



The Sydney Opera House

the composer will also write the text of the opera, but most often they work with a librettist. 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 surtitles - the English translation of the libretto, which are projected onto a screen above the stage.

There are several differences between opera and musicals like *Phantom of the Opera*. One significant difference is the 'partnership' found between the music and the drama in an opera. While musicals use songs to help tell a story, in an opera, the music contributes to the drama, it does not only accompany it.

The musical style is another important difference between the two art forms; opera is usually classical and complex, while musicals feature pop songs and sometimes rock and roll. Also, singers in musicals have microphones hidden in their costumes or wigs to amplify their voices. The voices of opera singers are so strong no amplification is needed, even in a large venue. Furthermore, operas are almost completely sung while the use of spoken words are more common to musicals. There are some operas with spoken words and these are called singspiels (German) and opéra-comique (French). Examples are Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and Bizet's *Carmen*, respectively.



The Metropolitan Opera (1937)

Bringing an Opera to the Stage

Opera combines many great art forms to make something completely different. First and foremost are the performers who portray characters by revealing their thoughts and emotions through the singing voice. The next very important component is a full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singing actors and actresses, helping them to portray the full range of emotions possible in the operatic format. The orchestra performs in an area in front of the singers called the orchestra pit, while the singers perform on the open area called the stage. Wigs, costumes, sets and specialized lighting further enhance these performances, all of which are designed, created, and executed by a team of highly trained artisans.

The creation of an opera begins with a dramatic scenario crafted by a playwright or dramaturg who, alone or with a librettist, fashions the script or libretto that contains the words the artists will sing. Working in tandem, the composer and librettist team up to create a cohesive musical drama in which the music and words work together to express the emotions revealed in the story. Following the completion of their work, the composer and librettist entrust their new work to a conductor who, with a team of assistants (repetiteurs), assumes responsibility for the musical preparation of the work. The conductor collaborates with a stage director (responsible for the visual component) in order to bring a performance of the new piece to life on the stage. The stage director and conductor form the creative spearhead for the new composition while assembling a design team which will take charge of the actual physical production.



Wendy Nielsen (Tosca) and Richard Margison (Cavaradossi), *Tosca*, Manitoba Opera, November 2010. Photo: R. Tinker

Set designers, lighting designers, costume designers, wig and makeup designers and even choreographers must all be brought on board to participate in the creation of the new production. The set designer combines the skills of both an artist and an architect using “blueprint” plans to design the actual physical set which will reside on the stage, recreating the physical setting required by the story line. These blueprints are turned over to a team of carpenters who are specially trained in the art of stage carpentry. Following the actual building of the set, painters, following instructions from the set designers’ original plans, paint the set. As the set is assembled on the stage, the lighting designer works with a team of electricians to throw light onto both the stage and the set in an atmospheric, as well as practical way. Using specialized lighting instruments, colored gels and a state-of-the-art computer, the designer, along with the stage director, create a “lighting plot” by writing “lighting cues” which are stored in the computer and used during the actual performance of the opera.

During this production period, the costume designer, in consultation with the stage director, has designed appropriate clothing for the singers to wear. These designs are fashioned into patterns and crafted by a team of highly skilled artisans called cutters, stitchers, and sewers. Each costume is specially made for each singer using his/her individual measurements. The wig and makeup designer, working with the costume designer, designs and creates wigs which will complement both the costume and the singer, as well as represent historically accurate period fashions.

The principals are the people who have the major roles in an opera. They are professional singers. Principals usually arrive about three weeks before the first performance, with all of their music memorized and a good sense of their character. In rehearsal, they work with the director who helps them block each of the scenes. The director works with the principals to develop their characters and their voice. For the first two weeks they are accompanied by a rehearsal pianist. The week of the show, they move into the Concert Hall and begin work rehearsing on stage with the orchestra in the pit.



Michel Corbeil (Monostatos), Andriana Chuchman (Pamina),
The Magic Flute, Manitoba Opera, April 2011. Photo: R. Tinker

The Operatic Voice and Professional Singing

Operatic singing, developed in Europe during the 17th century, places intense vocal demands on the singer. Opera singers rarely use microphones, and therefore must project their voices to fill a large theatre and be heard above an orchestra.

An opera singer learns to use his or her body as an amplification device. By controlling the muscles of the diaphragm, the singer can regulate the amount of breath used. The diaphragm expands and contracts, regulating the air that passes through the vocal cords, causing them to vibrate. The speed of this 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 that amplify the sound.

Each person's vocal tract is constructed differently. The roles that a singer performs are dependent mostly upon their vocal range, but within the vocal ranges, there are many colours and weights of voice that contribute. Vocal colour refers to the richness of the sound and vocal weight refers to how powerful a voice sounds.

Many singers begin their operatic training in university. Opera students study singing, music history, composition and vocal pedagogy (voice teaching). In addition to music classes, they study diction and often at least one foreign language. After university, their first professional roles are usually small parts, but if they continue to study and train, they may move on to 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. Even well established singers have voice teachers, and often acting coaches, who help them refine their singing techniques.

Physical health is a major priority to a singer. Contrary to popular belief, not all opera singers are overweight. Opera singers once believed that excessive weight gave added volume and richness to the voice. However, now we know that physical fitness can give similar benefits to a voice. Plus, the overall health benefits of being in shape overshadow any loss of vocal power. Most singers, like professional athletes, try to avoid tobacco, alcohol, and caffeine.

VOCAL CATEGORIES

Women

SOPRANO: Similar to a flute in range and tone colour. Usually plays the heroine in the opera since a high, bright sound can easily suggest youth and innocence.

MEZZO-SOPRANO: Similar to an oboe in range and tone colour. Called an alto in choral arrangements, this voice can play a wide variety of characters including gypsies, mothers, and young men (trouser role).

CONTRALTO: Similar to an English horn in range and tone colour. Usually play unique roles including fortune-tellers, witches, and older women.

Men

TENOR: Similar to a trumpet in range, tone, color and acoustical "ring." Usually plays the hero or the romantic lead in the opera.

BARITONE: Similar to a French horn in tone color. Often plays the leader of mischief in comic opera or the villain in tragic opera, sometimes even the hero.

BASS: Similar to a trombone or bassoon in tone color. Usually portrays old, wise men, or foolish, comic men.

HIGHER

LOWER

VOCAL COLOURINGS

COLORATURA: A light, bright voice that has the ability to sing many notes quickly, usually with an extended upper range.

LYRIC: A light to medium weight voice, often singing beautiful sweeping melodies.

DRAMATIC: Dark, heavy and powerful voice, capable of sustained and forceful singing.

Glossary: Important Words in Opera

ACT: a section of the opera that is then divided into scenes.

ARIA: means “air” in Italian. This is a piece of music written for a one singer (soloist), usually with instrumental accompaniment.

ASIDE: a secret comment from an actor directly to the audience that the other characters cannot hear.

BARITONE: the middle singing range of the male voice.

BASS: the lowest singing range of the male voice.

BASSO BUFFO: a bass singer who specializes in comic characters.

BASSO PROFUNDO: the most serious bass voice.

BATON: short stick that the conductor uses to lead the orchestra.

BEL CANTO: Italian phrase literally meaning “beautiful singing.” A traditional Italian style of singing emphasizing tone, phrasing, coloratura passages, and technique. Also refers to the operas written in this style.

BLOCKING: directions given to the performers for movement on stage.

BRAVO: a form of appreciation shouted by audience members at the end of a particularly pleasing performance. Technically, bravo refers to a male performer, brava refers to a female performer and bravi refers to many performers.

BUFFO: from the Italian for “buffoon.” A singer of comic roles (basso-buffo) or a comic opera (opera-buffa.)

CADENZA: a passage of singing, often at the end of an aria, which shows off the singer’s vocal ability.

CASTRATO: a castrated male prized for his high singing voice.

CHOREOGRAPHER: the person who designs the steps of a dance.

CHORUS: a group of singers of all vocal ranges, singing together to support the vocal leads.

CLASSICAL: the period in music which comes after the Baroque and before the Romantic, roughly from the birth of Mozart to shortly after the death of Beethoven. It represents the greatest standardization in orchestral form and tonality.

COLORATURA: elaborate ornamentation of music written for a singer using many fast notes and trills. Also used to describe a singer who sings this type of music.



Jeffrey Springer (Turiddu), *Pagliacci*, Manitoba Opera, April 2004. Photo: R.Tinker

COMPOSER: the individual who writes all the music for both voice and instrument.

COMPRIMARIO: a nineteenth century term referring to secondary or supporting roles such as confidantes, messengers, and matchmakers.

CONTRALTO: the lowest female voice range.

CONDUCTOR: the person responsible for the musical interpretation and coordination of the performance. The conductor controls the tempo, the dynamic level, and the balance between singers and orchestra. You will see this person standing in the orchestra pit conducting the musicians and the singers.

COUNTERTENOR: a male singer with the highest male voice range, generally singing within the female contralto or mezzo-soprano range.

CRESCENDO: a build in the volume or dynamic of the music.

CUE: a signal to enter or exit from the stage, to move or to change lighting or scenery; or a signal given by the conductor to the musicians.



Jeff Mattsey (Don Giovanni) and Stefan Szkafarowsky (Commendatore), *Don Giovanni*, Manitoba Opera, November 2003. Photo: R.Tinker

CURTAIN CALL: occurs at the end of the performance when all the cast members and the conductor take bows. This can occur in front of the curtain or on the open stage.

DESIGNER: a production can have two or three designers: a lighting designer, a costume designer, a set designer, or someone who is both costume and set designer. They work closely with the stage director to give the production a distinctive look.

DIVA: literally *goddess* in Italian. An important female opera star. The masculine form is *divo*.

DRESS REHEARSAL: the final rehearsal before opening night, includes costumes, lights, makeup, etc. Sometimes it is necessary to stop for adjustments, but an attempt is made to make it as much like a regular performance as possible.

DUET: music that is written for two people to sing together.

ENCORE: a piece that is performed after the last scheduled piece of a concert. An encore is usually performed because the audience wants to hear more music even though the concert is over.

ENSEMBLE: a part of the opera written for a group of two or more singers. This may or may not include the chorus.

FALSETTO: the upper part of a voice in which the vocal cords do not vibrate completely. Usually used by males to imitate a female voice.

FINALE: the last musical number of an opera or an act.

GRAND OPERA: spectacular French opera of the Romantic period, lavishly staged, with a historically based plot, a huge cast, an unusually large orchestra, and ballet. It also refers to opera without spoken dialogue.

HELDEN: German prefix meaning “heroic.” Can also apply to other voices, but usually used in “heldentenor.”

HOUSE: the auditorium and front of the theatre excluding the stage and backstage areas.

IMPRESARIO: the proprietor, manager, or conductor of an opera or concert company; one who puts on or sponsors an entertainment manager, producer.

INTERLUDE: a short piece of instrumental music played between scenes and acts.

INTERMISSION: a break between acts of an opera. The lights go on and the audience is free to move around.

LIBRETTIST: the writer of the opera's text.

LIBRETTO: Italian for *little book*. It is the text or story of the opera.

LYRIC: used to describe a light-to-medium-weight voice with an innocent quality, capable of both sustained, forceful singing and delicate effects.

MAESTRO: means "master" in Italian. Used as a courtesy title for the conductor (male or female).

MARK: to sing, but not at full voice. A full-length opera is very hard on a singer's voice, so most performers mark during rehearsals. During the dress rehearsal singers try to sing at full voice for part, if not all, of the rehearsal.

MEZZO-SOPRANO: the middle singing range for a female voice.

MOTIF OR LEITMOTIF: a recurring musical theme used to identify an emotion, person, place, or object.

OPERA: a dramatic presentation which is set to music. Almost all of it is sung, and the orchestra is an equal partner with the singers. Like a play, an opera is acted on stage with costumes, scenery, makeup, etc. Opera is the plural form of the Latin word *opus*, which means "work."

OPERA BUFFA: an opera about ordinary people, usually, but not always comic. First developed in the 18th century.

OPERA SERIA: a serious opera. The usual characters are gods and goddesses, or ancient heroes.

OPERA-COMIQUE: (*singspiel*) a form of opera which contains spoken dialogue.

OPERETTA: lighthearted opera with spoken dialogue, such as a musical.

ORCHESTRA: an ensemble, led by a conductor, that is comprised of string, woodwind, brass and percussion instruments.

ORCHESTRA PIT: sunken area in front of the stage where the orchestra sits.

OVERTURE: an orchestral introduction to the opera played before the curtain rises. Usually longer than a prelude and can be played as a separate piece.

PITCH: how high or low a note sounds.

PRELUDE: a short introduction that leads into an act without pause.

PRIMA DONNA: literally *first lady* in Italian. The leading woman 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 and demanding fashion. The term for a leading man is *primo uomo*.

PRINCIPAL: a major singing role, or the singer who performs such a role.

PRODUCTION: the combination of sets, costumes, props, and lights, etc.

PROPS: objects carried or used on stage by the performers.

PROSCENIUM: the front opening of the stage which frames the action.

QUARTET: four singers or the music that is written for four singers.

RAKED STAGE: a stage that slants downwards towards the audience.

RECITATIVE: lines of dialogue that are sung, usually with no recognizable melody. It is used to advance the plot.

REHEARSAL: a working session in which the singers prepare for public performance.

SCORE: the written music of an opera or other musical work.

SERENADE: a piece of music honouring someone or something, an extension of the traditional performance of a lover beneath the window of his mistress.

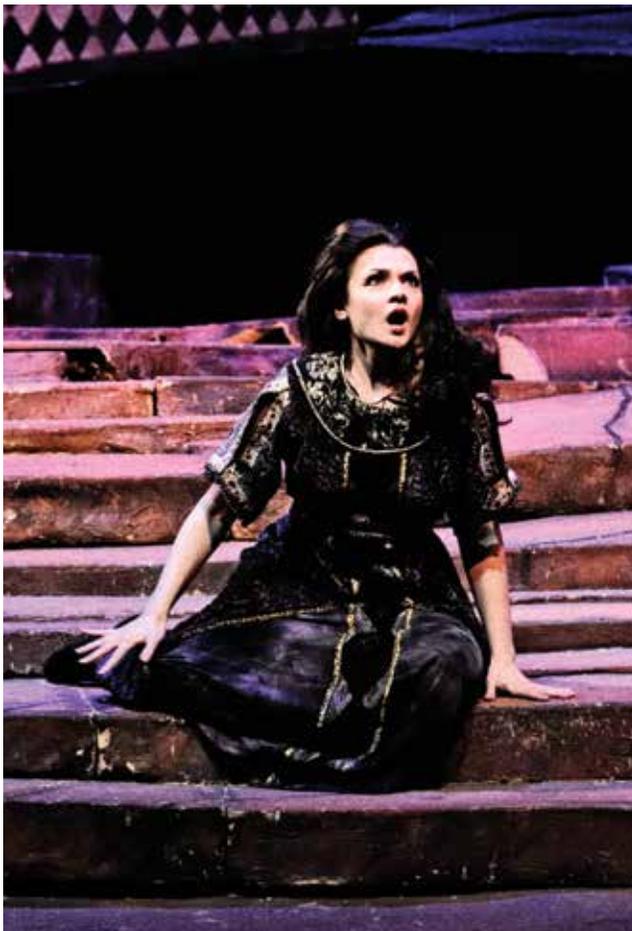
SITZPROBE: the rehearsal held on to the main stage for the first time. The entire opera is sung through without any costumes or blocking.

SOPRANO: the highest range of the female singing voice.

SOUBRETTE: pert young female character with a light soprano voice.

SPINTO: a lyric voice that has the power and incisiveness for dramatic climaxes.

STAGE AREAS: refers to the various sections of the stage as seen by those on stage.



Andriana Chuchman (Pamina), *The Magic Flute*, Manitoba Opera, April 2011. Photo: R.Tinker

STAGE DIRECTOR: the person in charge of the action on stage. He or she shows the singers, chorus and cast where and when to move and helps them create their characters. The stage director develops a concept for how the entire performance should look and feel. He or she works closely with the stage managers, lighting designer, set designers, costume designer, and wig and makeup artists to bring his or her vision into reality.

STAGE MANAGER: the person who coordinates and manages elements of the performance.

SUPERNUMERARIES: appear on stage in costume in non-singing and usually, non-speaking roles.

SURTITLES: the English translations of the opera's language, in this production Italian, that are projected above the stage during a performance to help the audience follow the story, much like subtitles in a foreign film.

SYNOPSIS: a short summary of the story of the opera.

TABLEAU: occurs at the end of a scene or act, when all cast members on stage freeze in position and remain that way until the curtain closes. It looks as though that moment has been captured in a photograph.

TEMPO: speed of the music.

TENOR: the highest natural adult male voice.

TRILL: very quick alternation between two adjacent notes. See coloratura.

TRIO: an ensemble of three singers or the music that is written for three singers.

TROUSER ROLE: the role of an adolescent boy or young man, written for and sung by a woman, often a mezzo-soprano. Also known as a pants role.

VERISMO: describes a realistic style of opera that started in Italy at the end of the 19th century.

Audience Etiquette

The following will help you (and those around you) enjoy the experience of a night at the opera:

- Dress to be comfortable. Many people enjoy dressing up in formal attire, but this is optional and people attend the opera wearing all varieties of clothing.
- Arrive on time. Latecomers disturb the singers and others in the audience. Latecomers will only be seated at suitable breaks - often not until intermission.
- Find your seat with the help of your teacher or an usher and remember to thank them.
- Remove your hat. This is customary and is respectful to the artists and to people sitting behind you.
- Turn off, tune in. Switch off all electronic devices including cell phones, smart phones, iPods, pagers, and digital watch alarms.
- Leave your camera at home and do not use the camera function on your phone during a performance. This can be very disturbing to the artists and audience members.
- Find the "EXIT" signs. Look for the illuminated signs over the doors. You always want to know where the nearest emergency exit is in a theatre.
- If you think you might need a breath mint or cough drop, unwrap it before the performance.
- Settle in and get comfortable before the performance begins. Read your program. This tells you what performance you're about to see, who created it, and who's performing in it. You might like to read a synopsis of the opera before it begins.
- Clap as the lights are dimmed and the conductor appears and bows to the audience. Watch as the conductor then turns to the orchestra and takes up his or her baton to signal the beginning of the opera.
- Listen to the prelude or overture before the curtain rises. It is part of the performance and an opportunity to identify common musical themes that may reoccur during the opera.
- Save all conversations, eating, drinking, and chewing gum, for the intermission. Talking and eating can be disruptive to other audience members and distracts from your ability to be absorbed by the show. The audience is critical to the success of the show – without you, there can be no performance.
- Sit still. Only whisper when it is absolutely necessary, as a whisper is heard all over the theatre, and NEVER stand during the performance, except in the case of an emergency.
- Read the English translations projected above the stage.
- Feel free to laugh when something is funny – this is a performance and you are expected to respond!
- Listen for subtleties in the music. The tempo, volume and complexity of the music and singing often depict the "feeling" or "sense" of the action or character.
- Notice repeated words or phrases; they are usually significant.
- Applaud (or shout Bravo!) at the end of an aria or chorus piece to show your enjoyment of it. The end of a piece can be identified by a pause in the music.
- Finally, have fun and enjoy the show!

Manitoba Opera

Manitoba Opera was founded in 1969 by a group of individuals dedicated to presenting the great works of opera to Manitoban audiences, Manitoba Opera is the province's only full-time professional opera company. The company attracts great international artists, highlights the best local talent, and is supported by the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra under the direction of internationally renowned conductors. Manitoba Opera celebrated its 35th Season in 2007/08 by presenting the world premiere of an opera commissioned by the company, *Transit of Venus*.

Chorus

The Manitoba Opera Chorus, under the direction of Chorus Master Tadeusz Biernacki, is hailed for their excellent singing and acting abilities. The chorus boasts a core of skilled singers who give generously of their time and talents. Some are voice majors at university, a few are singing teachers, but most work in jobs that aren't music related.



Carmen, Manitoba Opera, April 2010. Photo: R.Tinker

Staff

Kate Armstrong
Development Coordinator

Tadeusz Biernacki
Chorus Master & Assistant Music Director

Michael Blais
Box Office Coordinator

Larry Desrochers
General Director & CEO

Livia Dymond
Education & Outreach Coordinator

Sheldon Johnson
Director of Production

Tyrone Paterson
Music Advisor & Principal Conductor

Darlene Ronald
Director of Marketing

2012/13 Board of Trustees

Jennifer Snyder, chair

Wayne Benson

Dr. Robert Biscontri

Peter George

Elba Haid

Peter Heavysege

Dr. Anthony Iacopino

Sue Jurkovic

Chris Mainella

Luisa Matheson

Melanie Sifton

Carolyn Taubensee

Robert Vineberg

Student Activities

Activity #1: 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?

- Give students the synopsis to read and have them re-tell the story after they have read it.
- Ask comprehensive questions.
- Present and discuss the composer and librettist.
- Listen to excerpts from the opera. Watch a DVD of the opera. Have students identify and recognize recurring themes.
- 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.
- Have the students watch for references to themes in the opera in their everyday lives. The internet, radio, TV, magazines, and movies often refer back to classics.

Activity #2: Create a Poster, Set, Costume, Press Release, or Ad

- Choose a time and place to set your production.
- Have the students design a poster for *Rigoletto* Student Night at the Opera, including such details as the date, the time, and the people involved.
- Have them draw a set for a production of the opera.
- They might also sketch a costume, wig, and makeup for a character in *Rigoletto*.
- Have the students write a press release about *Rigoletto* Student Night at the Opera, including the date, the time, the people involved, and why it would be exciting or fun to attend.
- Have the students create an ad for the opera. Include whatever you feel is the biggest “selling point” of the opera - what makes it exciting? Why should people come to see it?

Activity #3: A Review

Step 1 – Think-Group-Share

Individually, students will write, in point form, the answers to the following questions:

1. What did you like about the opera? What did you dislike?
2. What did you think about the sets, props, and costumes?
3. If you were the stage director, would you have done something differently? Why?
4. What were you expecting? Did it live up to your expectations?
5. What did you think of the singers' portrayal of their characters?

Break the students into groups to discuss their feelings and reactions to the production. Have the students write on poster papers their answers or important points of their discussion. Encourage the students to go beyond the questions posed.

Step 2 – Class Discussion

Have the whole class examine the poster papers and discuss the different ideas from each group.

Step 3 – Outlining your review

Go over the essential aspects of a review including: a clearly stated purpose, a coherent comparison/contrast organizational pattern, a summary paragraph capturing the interest of the reader, precise nouns, revision for consistency of ideas. You might give your students a few samples of reviews for fine arts events – or ask them to bring in some reviews they find themselves. Have the students fill out the review outline, then complete a rough draft.

1. Purpose (why are you writing this and who is your audience?)
2. Plot Synopsis (including who sang what role, etc.)
3. Paragraph 1 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
4. Paragraph 2 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
5. Paragraph 3 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
6. Summary/Closing Paragraph

Step 4 - Peer Conferencing

Students will exchange reviews to critique and edit. Encourage the students to focus on effective coordination of ideas in sentences and the correct use of grammar and punctuation.

Step 5 - Creating the final draft

Have students make the appropriate adjustments to their reviews. You could also have the students type the pieces and organize them into a newspaper.

Activity #4: Have your students act out the story

Have students consider the characters and the role they play in the story. Choose one of the following:

RIGOLETTO | GILDA | DUKE OF MANTUA | SPARAFUCILE | MADDALENA

If you were going to play this character, you would have to discover, create, and imagine background, personality, and physical qualities. 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. What motivates you? How does this affect your actions? What obstacles stand in your way?
2. What steps in the opera do you take to achieve your objectives? What are the results?
3. What obstacles are beyond your control (laws, social status, others' actions)?
4. What are your (character's) greatest strengths? Greatest weaknesses?
5. What is your relationship to the other characters?
6. How is the character's personality expressed through the music of the opera?
7. Can you think of a modern-day character who has similar characteristics and traits?
8. If this character were alive today, how would s/he be more or less successful?
9. What different steps would s/he take to achieve an objective?

Activity #5: Write a Biography

Have students research and write a biography of the playwright, composer, librettist or one of the characters.

Activity #6: Create a Journal or Blog from the Point of View of a Character

Have the students choose a point of conflict, and write a journal or blog of those events from a character's point of view. What does Rigoletto think of life as a court jester? What does Count Monterone hope to accomplish by putting a curse on Rigoletto? Why does Gilda ask for her father's forgiveness in her final moments?

Activity #7: Write a Letter from One Character to Another

Have the students choose a moment in the story and have one character write a letter to another, giving them advice for the future. Ethical questions raised by the plot or characters can be addressed.

Activity #8: Cast *Rigoletto*

Have the students cast modern-day singers or bands as the performers in *Rigoletto*. Who did you choose? What are their costumes like? What did you base your decisions on?

Activity #9: Tweet About *Rigoletto*

Have the students tweet about *Rigoletto* Student Night by writing out a twitter in 140 characters. Have students read their tweet aloud to the class and post them to Manitoba Opera's Facebook wall. Try to be clever, funny, or start a conversation.

Activity #10: Italian Renaissance

Have students research the history of the Italian Renaissance. Consider questions like: What advancements were made in the areas of science and discovery, literature, art, music? Who were the major thinkers, artists, and rulers of the time? What were some of the aspects of court life in Italy?

Activity #11: *Rigoletto* Mood Board

Often before artists and designers create their work, they make a mood board to set the tone for the piece. This is usually a poster-sized piece of paper covered in images and words, usually torn from the pages of magazines and newspapers, that together communicates the complex mood of the piece in a way that words can't. It's the same as making a collage, except a mood board is for the purpose of communicating a focused concept.

Have your students go through a stack of old magazines and newspapers to create a mood board for *Rigoletto*. They can create one each or work together on a large one for the class. Consider elements like colours, textures, phrases, faces, patterns, and images that represent the opera.

Activity #12: Opera Comprehension Tests

The Opera

1. _____ A theatrical production incorporating both vocal and instrumental music, drama, and sometimes dance.
2. _____ The lowest male vocal range.
3. _____ An instrumental introduction to an opera.
4. _____ The area where the orchestra is seated.
5. _____ Considered the first opera.
6. _____ A song for solo voice in an opera.
7. _____ The highest female vocal range.
8. _____ A song for two voices.
9. _____ The lowest female vocal range.
10. _____ The Italian word meaning "little book."
11. _____ The middle male vocal range.
12. _____ He/she is in charge of all the action on the stage.

Rigoletto

1. The opera *Rigoletto* is set in _____ (name of the country).
2. What is the profession of the main character, Rigoletto? _____
3. In the opening scene, the Duke of Mantua flirts with _____ .
4. Who puts a curse on Rigoletto? _____
5. Who does Rigoletto eventually pay to murder the Duke of Mantua? _____
6. The curse on Rigoletto is fulfilled when _____ is killed instead of the Duke.
7. The opera *Rigoletto* is based on a play by which French author? _____
8. Who is the composer? _____
9. Who is the librettist? _____
10. Who will sing the lead role in Manitoba Opera's production of *Rigoletto*? _____

Answer Key

General Opera

1. Opera
2. Bass
3. Overture
4. Orchestra pit or “the pit”
5. Daphne
6. Aria
7. Soprano
8. Duet
9. Contralto
10. Libretto
11. Baritone
12. Stage director

Rigoletto

1. Italy
2. Court jester
3. Countess Ceprano
4. Count Monterone
5. Sparafucile
6. Gilda
7. Victor Hugo
8. Giuseppe Verdi
9. Francesco Maria Piave
10. Todd Thomas

Manitoba Opera would be pleased to receive a copy of any work related to this opera produced by your students. Please forward to:

Education and Outreach Coordinator, Manitoba Opera, 1060 - 555 Main Street,
Winnipeg, MB R3B 1C3

or

ldymond@manitobaopera.mb.ca

Winnipeg Public Library

Resources

Books

Verdi's Rigoletto [by Giuseppe Verdi]
New York: Dover Publications, 1983
Call No.: 782.12 VER

Verdi with a vengeance: An energetic guide to the life and complete works of the king of opera [by William Berger]
New York: Vintage Books, 2000.
Call No.: 782.1092 VERDI

The New Grove masters of Italian opera: Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Verdi, Puccini [by Philip Gossett et al.]
New York: Norton, c1983.
Call No.: 782.1092 NEW

The Italian Renaissance [by Karen Osman]
San Diego: Lucent Books, 1996.
Call No.: J 945.05 OSM

Verdi [by Julian Budden]
London: Dent, c1985
Call No.: 780.92 VERDI

Verdi: a life in the theatre [by Charles Osborne]
London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, c1987
Call No.: B VERDI

Scores

Rigoletto / music by Giuseppe Verdi ; libretto by Francesco Maria Piave; English version by Ruth and Thomas Martin.
New York: G. Schirmer, c1957.
Call No.: SCORE 782.1 VER

Sound Recordings

Rigoletto [Verdi]
Decca, c1985, p1971
Call No.: CD OPERA VERDI RIG

Rigoletto: Scenes and Arias [Verdi]
London Records, 1988
Call No.: CD OPERA VERDI RIG

Rigoletto [Verdi]
Opera D'Oro, 2011
Call No.: CD OPERA VERDI RIG

Verdi [Verdi]
Philips/Sugar, p2000
Call No.: CD OPERA VERDI OPE

DVD Recordings

The Rigoletto Story
Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, c2004
Call No.: DVD 792.542 RIG



Gaétan Laperrière as Rigoletto and Agathe Martel as Gilda in Manitoba Opera's 2004 production of *Rigoletto*.

Works Cited

(Rigoletto)

Rigoletto (study guide). Pacific Opera Victoria. 2 Aug 2012.

< http://www.pov.bc.ca/pdfs/rigoletto_study_guide.pdf>

Rigoletto (study guide). Canadian Opera Company. 2 Aug 2012.

< http://issuu.com/canadianopera/docs/rigoletto_study_guide_final >

“Synopsis of Rigoletto”. The Metropolitan Opera. 2 Aug 2012.

<<http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/history/stories/synopsis.aspx?id=134>>

“Jester.” Wikipedia. 2 Aug 2012.

< <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jester>>

“Discover Rigoletto’s world.” Cleveland Opera. 8 Aug 2012. < <http://www.edenvalleyenterprises.org/blhrc/educational/rigolett/index.html>>

“The Renaissance Connection. Allentown Art Museum. October 1 2012. < <http://www.renaissanceconnection.org> >

Fools Are Everywhere: The Court Jester Around the World. Otto, Beatrice K. University of Chicago Press, 2001.

The Italian Renaissance [by Karen Osman]. San Diego: Lucent Books, 1996.

Works Cited (General)

This study guide was compiled accumulatively and includes information from the following sources accessed at various unknown dates since 2000:

ClassicalMusic.about.com
BehindTheNames.com
Bellevue University
The Billboard Illustrated Encyclopedia of Opera
The Canadian Opera Company
Encyclopedia of Manitoba
Encyclopedia of the Opera by David Ewen
Fort Worth Opera Study Guide
GradeSaver.com
La Scena
Lyric Opera of Kansas City
Manitoba Archives
Metropolitan Opera
musicwithease.com
Music.MSN.com
New York City Opera
Opera America Learning Centre
operabuffa.com; Opera Columbus Study Guide
Opera News
Operas Every Child Should Know
Opera Lyra Ottawa Study Guide
Opera Today
Orchestra London Study Guide
Pacific Opera
San Diego Opera Study Guide
San Francisco Opera Guild Study Guide
schubincave.com
A Season of Opera
Skeletons from the Opera Closet
timelines.com
Tulsa Opera Study Guide
University of Chicago Press
University of Manitoba
University of Texas
University of Waterloo
Rimrock Study Guide
Virginia Opera Study Guide
Winnipeg Free Press
Wikipedia
The World's Great Operas