

THE ATLANTA OPERA
PRESENTS

The Gershwins'

PORGY AND BESS

George Gershwin,
DuBose & Dorothy Heyward,
and Ira Gershwin

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

THE GERSHWINS' PORGY AND BESS

FIRST PERFORMANCE

September 30, 2013, Colonial Theatre,
Boston, Massachusetts

MUSIC

George Gershwin

LIBRETTO

DuBose & Dorothy Heyward, and Ira Gershwin

CREATIVE

CONDUCTOR

David Charles Abell

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

Francesca Zambello

STAGE DIRECTOR

Garnett Bruce

SCENIC DESIGNER

Peter Davison

COSTUME DESIGNER

Paul Tazewell

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Mark McCullough

ORIGINAL CHOREOGRAPHER

Eric Sean Fogel

ASSOCIATE CHOREOGRAPHER

Eboni Adams

FIGHT DIRECTOR

Michelle Ladd Williams

CAST

PORGY (Mar 7, 8, & 10)

Morris Robinson

PORGY (Mar 13 & 15)

Musa Ngqungwana

BESS

Kristin Lewis

SPORTIN' LIFE

Jermaine Smith

CROWN

Donovan Singletary

JAKE

Reginald Smith Jr.

CLARA

Jacqueline Echols

SERENA

Indra Thomas

MARIA

La'Shelle Allen

THE ATLANTA OPERA

CARL W. KNOBLOCH, JR.

GENERAL & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Tomer Zvulun

MANAGING DIRECTOR

Micah Fortson

CARL & SALLY GABLE MUSIC DIRECTOR

Arthur Fagen

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CHIEF ADVANCEMENT OFFICER

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ASSOCIATE TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

Joshua S. Jansen

AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT & EDUCATION MANAGER

Jessica Kiger

EDUCATION COORDINATOR

Alexandria Sweatt

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Glimmerglass Festival's production of *Porgy and Bess*. (photo: Karli Cadel)

Dear Educators,

Hello, and thank you for joining us for this production of The Gershwins' *Porgy and Bess*. From the extraordinary writing duo of George and Ira Gershwin comes a Depression-era masterpiece rich in timeless tunes, including "Summertime," "I Got Plenty O' Nuttin'," "It Ain't Necessarily So," and "Bess, You Is My Woman Now." Considered the great American opera, *Porgy and Bess* was inspired by Charleston's Cabbage Row, a 1920s community bound by faith, tears, music, and laughter. In a tender love story, *Porgy and Bess* seek harmony in the face of addiction and social injustice.

This educator guide has been developed to help you and your students explore *Porgy and Bess*, as well as to familiarize students with the world of opera (vocabulary, history, etc.). The guide approaches these subjects via a wide range of disciplines, including English Language Arts, Science, Music, Theater and Social Studies. Our goal is to provide you with an innovative, multidisciplinary approach to teaching required skills and curriculum, including connections to the Georgia Standards of Excellence.

In using this guide, we hope you will feel free to adapt pages or activities to best meet the needs of your students. A simple activity may be a perfect launching pad for a higher-level lesson, and a complex lesson

may contain key points onto which younger students can latch. Please make this guide your own!

We value your feedback and will take it into account in planning future education programs. We look forward to hearing from you, your students, administration, and/or parents following the performance. Thank you again for allowing us to share this opera with you. It is our sincere hope that you enjoy the experience and look forward to seeing you and your students at the opera!

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IMPORTANT INFO

- **Final Dress Rehearsal:**
Thursday March 5, 2020 at 7:00pm
- **Performed in English with English Supertitles**
- **Running time is approximately 3 hours, including one intermission.**
- **Contains adult content including simulated violence, sexual themes, and simulated drug use.**
- **Recommended for Grades 7-12**
- **For more information visit:**
atlantaopera.org/porgy-and-bess/

SYNOPSIS

WHAT'S THE OPERA ABOUT?



Glimmerglass Festival's production of *Porgy and Bess*. (photo: Karli Cadel)

Act 1

Scene 1: Catfish Row, a summer evening

An evening in Catfish Row, an African-American tenement on Charleston's waterfront, in the 1930s. Jasbo Brown entertains the community with his piano playing ("Jasbo Brown Blues"). Clara, a young mother, sings a lullaby to her baby ("Summertime") as the workingmen prepare for a game of **craps**. Among the players are Sportin' Life, Jake, Mingo, Jim, and Robbins, who enters the game despite the protestations of his wife, Serena ("Roll Them Bones"). Jake breaks away briefly, takes the baby from his wife Clara, and sings his own lullaby, "A Woman Is a Sometime Thing." Porgy, a disabled beggar, enters on his goat cart to organize the game. As the game begins in earnest, Crown, a strong and brutal **stevedore**, storms in with his woman, Bess. He buys cheap whiskey and some of Sportin' Life's "happy dust." Drunk and agitated, Crown gets into an argument with Robbins; a brawl ensues, and Crown kills Robbins with a cotton hook.

Crown runs, telling Bess to fend for herself until he returns after the heat has died down. Sportin' Life gives her a dose of happy dust and invites her to join him in New York, but she refuses, and he takes off. Fearing the police, the residents of Catfish Row quickly retreat to their homes. Bess, left alone, frantically knocks on doors, seeking shelter. Finally, Porgy opens his door to her, and Bess tentatively enters. Meanwhile, in the courtyard, Serena collapses over the body of her husband.

Scene 2: Serena's Room, the following night

Robbins' body is laid out with a saucer on his chest. Serena sits disconsolately as neighbors, including Porgy and Bess, come in to comfort her and to contribute money for the burial ("Gone, Gone, Gone"). Porgy leads an impassioned plea to fill the saucer with donations (Overflow"). A white detective enters and coldly tells Serena that she must bury her husband the next day, or his body will be given to medical students, for dissection. He suddenly accuses Peter of Robbins's murder. The old man protests his innocence, blurting out that Crown did it; the detective moves on to Porgy but gets no information out of him, and Peter is hauled off as a "material witness."

Serena laments her loss ("My Man's Gone Now"). The undertaker enters. The saucer holds only fifteen dollars of the needed twenty-five, but he agrees to bury Robbins if Serena promises to pay him back. Bess, who has been sitting in silence slightly apart from the rest of those gathered, suddenly begins singing a gospel song. The neighbors join in, welcoming her into the community ("Leaving for the Promised Land").

Act 2

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

Jake and the other fishermen prepare for work ("It Takes A Long Pull to Get There"). Clara begs Jake not to go during hurricane season, but he insists; they desperately need the money. Porgy, content in his new life with Bess, emerges from his home with a new outlook on life ("I Got Plenty of Nothing"). Sportin' Life saunters over to Maria's table; she upbraids him for peddling dope around her shop ("I Hates Your Struttin' Style"). A fraudulent lawyer, Frazier, arrives and sells Porgy a divorce for Bess, even though it turns out that she had not been married to Crown. Archdale, a white

Craps

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

Stevedore

A dock worker or longshoreman who unloads ships.

SYNOPSIS

WHAT'S THE OPERA ABOUT?

lawyer, enters and informs Porgy that Peter will soon be released. A buzzard flies over Catfish Row – a bad omen – and Porgy demands that it leave him and his newfound happiness (“The Buzzard Song”).

As the rest of Catfish Row prepares for the church picnic on nearby Kittiwah Island, Sportin’ Life again offers to take Bess to New York with him; she refuses. He attempts to give her some happy dust, but Porgy forcefully orders him to leave Bess alone. Sportin’ Life leaves, and Porgy and Bess declare their love for each other (“Bess, You Is My Woman Now”). The neighbors, in high spirits, set off for the picnic (“Oh, I Can’t Sit Down”). Maria invites Bess to join them, but Bess demurs; Porgy’s disability prevents him from boarding the boat. Porgy persuades her to go along and have a good time, and he proudly waves her off as the boat departs (“I Got Plenty of Nothing” Reprise).

Scene 2: Kittiwah Island, that evening

Everyone is enjoying the picnic as it winds to a close (“I Ain’t Got No Shame”). Sportin’ Life entertains the crowd with his cynical views on the Bible (“It Ain’t Necessarily So”), but Serena chastises them for

their blasphemy (“Shame on All You Sinners!”). The neighbors gather their belongings and head towards the boat. Bess lags, and suddenly Crown emerges from the bushes. He reminds her that Porgy is “temporary” and laughs off her claims of living decently. Bess pleads with him to let her go (“Oh, What You Want with Bess?”) but Crown refuses. He grabs her, preventing her from boarding the boat, and forcefully kisses her. As the boat whistle sounds again, Bess surrenders, unable to resist.

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

A week later, Jake leaves to go fishing with his crew, one of whom observes that a storm may be coming in. Peter, still unsure of his crime, returns from prison. Meanwhile, Bess lies in Porgy’s room, delirious with fever. Serena prays to remove Bess’s affliction (“Oh, Doctor Jesus”), and promises Porgy that Bess will be well by five o’clock. The day passes, and street vendors hawk their wares (“Vendors’ Trio”).

As the clock chimes five, Bess recovers from her fever. Porgy knows Bess was with Crown, but he doesn’t mind. Bess admits she has promised to return



Glimmerglass Festival's production of *Porgy and Bess*. (photo: Karli Cadel)

to Crown, and though she wants to stay in Catfish Row, she fears she's too weak to resist him. Declaring her love for Porgy, she begs him to protect her; Porgy promises she'll never be afraid again ("I Loves You, Porgy").

As the winds begin to blow, Clara watches the water, fearful for Jake. The sky darkens and the hurricane bell clangs. People hurry inside and Clara collapses, calling her husband's name.

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

The residents of Catfish Row gather in Serena's room for shelter from the hurricane. They drown out the sound of the storm with prayers and hymns ("Oh, Doctor Jesus"), but Sportin' Life mocks their assumption that the storm is a signal of Judgment Day. Clara desperately sings to her baby ("Summertime" Reprise). A knock is heard at the door, and many believe it to be Death ("Oh There's Somebody Knocking at the Door"). Crown enters dramatically, having swum from Kittiwah Island, seeking Bess. The townspeople try to drown out his blaspheming with prayer, but he taunts them with a vulgar song ("A Red-Headed Woman").

Suddenly Clara screams, falling back from the window. Bess rushes over and peers out; Jake's boat is upside down in the river. Clara thrusts her baby at Bess and rushes out. Bess pleads for someone to join Clara, but no one moves. Finally, Crown, looking at the frightened faces around him, taunts the men for their cowardice. He opens the door, shouts at Bess that he will return, and plunges into the storm. The others return to their prayers.

Act 3

Scene 1: Catfish Row, the next night

The storm has passed, and the residents of Catfish Row mourn the loss of Clara, Jake, and Crown ("Clara, Clara, Don't You Be Downhearted"). Sportin' Life hints to Maria that Crown has somehow survived. Bess, now caring for Clara's baby, tenderly sings to him ("Summertime"). As night falls on Catfish Row, Crown stealthily enters and makes his way to Porgy's room. Porgy confronts Crown, and a fight ensues. Ultimately, Porgy prevails, killing Crown. Porgy cries out, "Bess... You've got a man now. You've got Porgy!"

Scene 2: Catfish Row, the next afternoon

The police and the coroner arrive, seeking information about Crown's murder. Serena and her friends deny any knowledge of the crime, so the detective orders Porgy to come and identify the body. Bess is distraught, and Sportin' Life hints that Porgy will either spend years in jail or die by hanging. Offering her more happy dust, Sportin' Life again invites Bess to join him up north ("There's A Boat That's Leaving Soon For New York"). He thrusts another packet of dope at her, but she refuses it and runs inside. Tossing it into her room, he slowly starts off. Suddenly, the door of Porgy's room flies open, and Bess comes out, high on happy dust. Arm in arm, Bess and Sportin' Life swagger out through the gate.

Scene 3: Catfish Row, a week later

On a beautiful morning, Porgy is released from jail, where he has been arrested for contempt of court for refusing to look at Crown's body. He is in high spirits and has brought presents for everyone, including a beautiful red dress for Bess. He doesn't understand why everyone seems so uneasy at his return. Seeing Clara's baby with Serena, he realizes something is wrong ("Oh Bess, Oh Where's my Bess?"). Maria and Serena tell him Bess has run off to New York with Sportin' Life. Porgy calls for his goat cart and resolves to leave Catfish Row to find her. He prays for strength, and begins his long journey ("Oh, Lord, I'm On My Way").



Glimmerglass Festival's production of *Porgy and Bess*. (photo: Karli Cadel)

MEET THE CHARACTERS

CHARACTER	PERFORMED BY	VOICE TYPE	ABOUT
Porgy (“POR-ghee”) A disabled beggar	Morris Robinson; Musa Ngqungwana	bass-baritone	A kind man possessing stoic patience as well as profound devotion, Porgy feels isolated and alone until Bess comes into his life.
Bess A beautiful but troubled woman	Kristin Lewis	soprano	Bess looks forward to a stable future with Porgy, but her addiction and her susceptibility to bad advice will soon wreak havoc on her newfound happiness.
Crown A dockworker, Bess’s lover	Donovan Singletary	baritone	Brutal, with a taste for drink and drugs, Crown relishes violence and won’t easily give up his hold on Bess.
Clara A new mother; Jake’s wife	Jacquelyn Echols	soprano	Clara envisions an idyllic future for her child; her lullaby is the opera’s refrain of hope.
Jake A fisherman, Clara’s husband	Reginald Smith, Jr	baritone	Jake’s aspirations for his family lead him to risk his life at sea.
Serena A pious woman	Indra Thomas	soprano	Serena’s faith inspires the opera’s musical prayers of mourning and healing.
Sportin’ Life A drug dealer	Jermaine Smith	tenor	Sportin’ Life is Catfish Row’s proverbial snake in the grass: He tempts Bess with drugs and wants to lure her away for himself.
Maria Matriarch of Catfish Row	La’Shelle Allen	contralto	The moral center of the community, Maria upholds Catfish Row’s sense of decency—and doesn’t hesitate to pronounce judgment on Bess.
Residents of Catfish Row Other fishermen, dock workers, tradespeople, and laborers	The Atlanta Opera Chorus	sopranos, mezzo-sopranos, tenors, baritones, and basses	The chorus amplifies the opera’s action with their prayers and expressions of mourning and joy.

- Courtesy of The Metropolitan Opera



"The Old Plantation," South Carolina, about 1790. This famous painting shows Gullah slaves dancing and playing musical instruments derived from Africa. (Image: No known copyright restrictions / copyright expired.)

THE REAL LIFE BEHIND THE FICTION: THE GULLAH PEOPLE

BY COURTNEY CLARK, SEATTLE OPERA

In the Sea Islands and coastal plains of South Carolina and Georgia lies a group of African Americans known as the Gullah people. The Gullah people are unique African Americans as a result of heavy African influence on their culture. They speak languages which are known as the Creole language and the Gullah language which is based on different varieties of English and languages of West and Central Africa. Together with their language, the Gullah people are called Geechee.

When composer George Gershwin created the popular opera *Porgy and Bess* in 1935, it received some criticism from African Americans because of its racial, stereotypical theme. Although *Porgy and Bess* is a fictional work, the African American community portrayed in the opera were not, and are still a thriving and viable people. The cultural African identity of the Gullah Geechee living today has been preserved over the course of some 250 years; though modern world resort development, media and tourism are threatening to destroy their way of life.

The Gullah Geechee are believed to be one of the most authentically African-American communities in the U.S. It is said that the Gullah people were able to preserve much of their African heritage due to geography and climate. Once British colonial planters in the American South discovered that African rice would grow in that region, they often sought enslaved Africans from rice-growing regions because of their skills and knowledge

needed to develop and build irrigation, dams and earthworks. Thousands of acres in the Georgia and South Carolina Low Country, and the Sea Islands were developed as African rice fields. African farmers from the "Rice Coast" brought the skills for cultivation and tidal irrigation that made rice farming one of the most successful industries in early America. The Gullah culture is claimed to have developed as a result of the mixed culture of the slaves that were drawn from a variety of coastal African countries. Depending on whether they live on the Mainland or the Sea Island, the South Carolina and Georgia communities distinguish themselves by identifying as either Freshwater Geechee for the Main Landers or Saltwater Geechee for those who live on the Sea Islands.

The following are cultural practices by the Gullah people that are a result of the heavy African influence on their culture.

- Rice dishes know as Red rice okra soup are very much similar with "jollof rice" and okra soup which are popular meals from West Africa.
- The Gullah people have their own version of gumbo which is derived from African delicacies as well.
- Rice farmers from Gullah make use of mortar and pestle. These two tools are similarly used by rice farmers in West Africa.
- The existence of Witches and Wizards are a popular belief in Africa. The Gullah people also believe in the existence of such beings and spirits with their belief in hags and haunts.
- African traditional healers are notorious for the use of ritual objects in protecting their clients against evil forces. The Gullah people also poses their own traditional healers.
- Herbal medicines are very popular amongst the Gullah people just as they are with Africans.
- The Gullah people perform a certain ritual known as "seekin". This ritual is very similar in style to African secret societies coming of age ceremonies.

It is said that George Gershwin visited South Carolina to draw inspiration for the opera *Porgy and Bess* by observing the richness of the cultural traditions of the Gullah people. It is no surprise that this strong cohesive community in South Carolina inspired Gershwin to create a masterpiece.

MEET THE CREATORS

COMPOSER: GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898-1937)

George Gershwin, born in Brooklyn, New York on September 26, 1898, was the second son of Russian immigrants. As a boy, George was anything but studious, and it came as a wonderful surprise to his family that he had secretly been learning to play the piano. In 1914, Gershwin left high school to work as a Tin Pan Alley song plugger and within three years, “When You Want ‘Em, You Can’t Get ‘Em; When You Have ‘Em, You Don’t Want ‘Em,” was published. Though this initial effort created little interest, “Swanee” (lyrics by Irving Caesar) — turned into a smash hit by Al Jolson in 1919 — brought Gershwin his first real fame.

In 1924, when George teamed up with his older brother Ira, “the Gershwins” became the dominant Broadway songwriters, creating infectious rhythm numbers and poignant ballads, fashioning the words to fit the melodies with a “glove-like” fidelity. This extraordinary combination created a succession of musical comedies, including *Lady, Be Good!* (1924), *Oh, Kay!* (1926), *Funny Face* (1927), *Strike Up the Band* (1927 and 1930), *Girl Crazy* (1930), and *Of Thee I Sing* (1931), the first musical comedy to win a Pulitzer Prize. Over the years, Gershwin songs have also been used in numerous films, including *Shall We Dance* (1937), *A Damsel in Distress* (1937), and *An American in Paris* (1951). Later years produced the award-winning “new” stage musicals *My One and Only* (1983) and *Crazy for You* (1992), which ran for four years on Broadway.

In 1926 Gershwin read *Porgy*, DuBose Heyward’s novel of the South Carolina Gullah culture, and immediately recognized it as a perfect vehicle for a “folk opera” using blues and jazz idioms. *Porgy and Bess* (co-written with Heyward and Ira) was Gershwin’s most ambitious undertaking, integrating unforgettable songs with dramatic incident. *Porgy and Bess* previewed in Boston on September 30, 1935 and opened its Broadway run on October 10. The opera had major revivals in 1942, 1952, 1976, and 1983 and has toured the world. It was made into a major motion picture by Samuel Goldwyn in 1959, while Trevor Nunn’s landmark Glyndebourne Opera production was taped for television in 1993.

George Gershwin was at the height of his career in 1937. His symphonic works and three Preludes for piano were becoming part of the standard repertoire

for concerts and recitals, and his show songs had brought him increasing fame and fortune. It was in Hollywood, while working on the score of *The Goldwyn Follies*, that George Gershwin died of a brain tumor; he was not quite 39 years old. Countless people throughout the world, who knew Gershwin only through his work, were stunned by the news as if they had suffered a personal loss. Some years later, the writer John O’Hara summed up their feelings: “George Gershwin died July 11, 1937, but I don’t have to believe it if I don’t want to.”

- Courtesy of Gershwin Enterprises gershwin.com/george

LIBRETTIST: IRA GERSHWIN (1896-1983)

Ira Gershwin, the first lyricist to be awarded a Pulitzer Prize — for *Of Thee I Sing* in 1932 — was born in New York City on December 6, 1896. While attending the College of the City of New York, Ira began demonstrating his lifelong interest in light verse and contributed quatrains and squibs to newspaper columnists. In 1918, while working as the desk attendant in a Turkish bath, he tentatively began a collaboration with his brother George, and their “The Real American Folk Song (Is a Rag)” was heard in Nora Bayes’ *Ladies First*. Not wanting to trade on the success of his already famous brother, Ira adopted the nom de plume of Arthur Francis, combining the names of his youngest brother Arthur and sister Frances. Under this pen name, Ira supplied lyrics for his first Broadway show, *Two Little Girls in Blue* (1921), with music by Vincent Youmans.

By 1924 Ira was ready to begin his successful and lifelong collaboration with George and dropped the pseudonym. The Gershwins created their first joint hit, *Lady, Be Good!*, for Fred and Adele Astaire and followed it with more than 20 scores for stage and screen, including *Oh, Kay!* for Gertrude Lawrence; two versions of *Strike Up The Band* (1927 and 1930); Ethel Merman’s introduction to Broadway, *Girl Crazy* (1930); *Shall We Dance* (1937), one of Hollywood’s stylish pairings of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers; and the triumphant folk opera, *Porgy And Bess*, written with DuBose Heyward. Before and after George’s death in 1937, Ira collaborated with such composers as Harold Arlen (*A Star Is Born*, 1954), Vernon Duke (*Ziegfeld Follies*, 1936), Kurt Weill (*Lady In The Dark*, 1941), Jerome Kern (*Cover Girl*, 1944), Harry Warren (*The Barkleys Of Broadway*, 1949; the final Astaire/Rogers picture), Arthur Schwartz (*Park Avenue*, 1946), and Burton Lane (*Give A Girl A Break*, 1953).

ABOUT THE CREATORS

For his film achievements, Ira Gershwin was nominated three times for an Academy Award: for the songs “They Can’t Take That Away from Me,” “Long Ago (and Far Away)” (his biggest song hit in any one year), and “The Man That Got Away.” In 1966 he received a Doctor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Maryland, confirming the judgment of so many of his literary admirers — writers such as Dashiell Hammett, Lillian Hellman, Dorothy Parker, S. N. Behrman, P. G. Wodehouse, W. H. Auden, Ogden Nash, and Lorenz Hart, to name only a few — that his work was not only of the first rank, but that the Gershwin “standards” set new standards for the American musical theatre. Small wonder that their songs have been taken up by a younger generation delighted by the “new” Gershwin musicals, *My One and Only* (1983) and the 1992 Tony Award winner for best musical, *Crazy for You*.

In the years after George’s death, Ira attended to the Gershwin legacy of songs, show and film scores, and concert works. Ira annotated all the materials that pertained to the careers of his brother and himself before donating them to the Library of Congress to become part of our national heritage. In 1985 the United States Congress recognized this legacy by awarding the Congressional Gold Medal to George and Ira, only the third time in our nation’s history that songwriters had been so honored. On August 17, 1983, Ira Gershwin died at the “Gershwin Plantation,” the Beverly Hills home that he shared with his wife Leonore, to whom he had dedicated his unique collection of lyrics, musings, observations, and anecdotes, the critically acclaimed *Lyrics on Several Occasions* (1959, 1997).

- Courtesy of Gershwin Enterprises gershwin.com/ira

NOVELIST/PLAYWRIGHT/LIBRETTIST: DUBOSE HEYWARD (1885-1940)

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

Heyward and his wife Dorothy spent many years in Charleston observing the lifestyle of the African Americans of that area. He also participated in an amateur Southern traditional singing society open

to anyone whose family had lived on a plantation, whether as owner or slave. In Charleston Heyward found a majority of the inspiration for his book, including what would become the setting (Catfish Row) and the main character (a disabled man named Porgy). Literary critics cast Heyward as an authority on Southern literature. During his time in Charleston, DuBose taught at the Porter Military Academy.

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

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

- Courtesy of Toledo Opera

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

-Stephen Sondheim



FRANCESCA ZAMBELLO PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

An internationally recognized director of opera and theater, Francesca Zambello has staged productions at major theaters and opera houses in Europe and the United States. Collaborating with outstanding artists and designers and promoting emerging talent, she takes a special interest in new music theater works, innovative productions, and in producing theater and opera for wider audiences. Ms. Zambello has been the General Director of The Glimmerglass Festival since 2010, and the Artistic Director of The Washington National Opera at the Kennedy Center since 2012. She also served as the Artistic Advisor to the San Francisco Opera from 2005-2011, and as the Artistic Director of the Skylight Theater from 1987-1992. In her current roles at the Kennedy Center and The Glimmerglass Festival, she is responsible for producing 12 productions annually. She was awarded the *Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres* by the French government. She recently developed and directed the world premiere of Christopher Theofanidis' *Heart of a Soldier* for the San Francisco Opera. Other projects include the first international production of *Carmen* to ever be presented at the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing, the world premiere of *An American Tragedy*, *Cyrano*, and *Les Troyens* for the Metropolitan Opera, *Carmen* and *Don Giovanni* at the Royal Opera House, *Boris Godunov*, *War and Peace*, *Billy Budd*, and *William Tell* at the Paris Opera, and *The Ring* for the San Francisco Opera. She has also served as a guest professor at Yale University and The Juilliard School and lives in New York and London.



DAVID CHARLES ABELL CONDUCTOR

Born in North Carolina, David studied with Leonard Bernstein and Nadia Boulanger, gaining degrees from Yale University and the Juilliard School. Intensive study of viola, piano and composition gave way to a concentration on conducting from the age of fourteen. David's recent projects have included *West Side Story* at Glimmerglass, *Rigoletto* and *Carmen* for the Lyric Opera of Kansas City, *Porgy and Bess* and *Die Fledermaus* at Cincinatti Opera, *Eugene Onegin* at the Hawaii Opera Theatre and Barrie Kosky's production of *Die Zauberflöte* at Opera Philadelphia, as well as Kevin Puts' acclaimed *Silent Night* in Kansas City, Cincinatti and Michigan. In the UK, David also recently conducted his own new critical edition of *Kiss Me, Kate* for Opera North (for whom he has also conducted Rossini's *La gazza ladra*); in 2015, he made his debut with English National Opera for its production of *Sweeney Todd* (starring Bryn Terfel and Emma Thompson), returning in 2017 for an equally-acclaimed *Carousel*. An established name in France, David has appeared regularly at the Théâtre du Châtelet, conducting French premieres of Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Sweeney Todd* and *Into the Woods*, Porter's *Kiss Me Kate* (also in Luxembourg and for Glimmerglass) and Bernstein's *On The Town*. He has conducted many of the top British orchestras, including the London Philharmonic, BBC Symphony Orchestra, City of Birmingham, Bournemouth, Hallé and Royal Scottish National. His Royal Philharmonic Orchestra debut was the internationally-televised Tenth Anniversary Concert of *Les Misérables* (he also conducted 25th Anniversary spectacular at the O2), and he has since appeared with the orchestra in repertoire ranging from Copland to Puccini to Kern.



MORRIS ROBINSON
PORGY

Hailed for his “firm, opulent tone,” (The Classical Review) Morris Robinson is considered one the most interesting and sought-after basses performing today. He was last seen at The Atlanta Opera in *Rigoletto* (2015).



MUSA NGQUNGWANA
PORGY

South African bass-baritone Musa Ngqungwana has been praised by the New York Times for his “rich, glowing voice and elegant legato.”



KRISTIN LEWIS
BESS

Kristin Lewis, a lyrico-spinto soprano, is noted for her well-focused, majestic sound, rich in overtones. She is a native of Little Rock, Arkansas.



JERMAINE SMITH
SPORTIN' LIFE

Jermaine's portrayal of Sportin' Life has graced Paris's Opera-Comique, the Theatre de Caen, the Granada Festival, the Opera de Luxembourg, and the Santa Fe Symphony.



DONOVAN SINGLETARY
CROWN

Bass Baritone Donovan Singletary has been praised by Opera News for his “bright baritone.” He is a Metropolitan Opera National Council Grand Finals Winner, where he was the youngest male competitor to ever win. He also won the Met’s then-General Director, Joseph Volpe Award. He is also a graduate of the prestigious Lindemann Young Artist Development Program at The Metropolitan Opera and Juilliard School.



REGINALD SMITH, JR.
JAKE

Baritone Reginald Smith, Jr. has been lauded as a “passionate performer” (New York Times). He is a native of Atlanta and is a Grand Finals winner of the 2015 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.



JACQUELYN ECHOLS
CLARA

Lyric soprano Jacqueline Echols has been praised for her “dynamic range and vocal acrobatics” (Classical Voice) in theaters across the United States.



INDRA THOMAS
SERENA

Considered one of the foremost Aida’s in the world today, Indra Thomas has performed at many of the world class opera houses and venues, such as the Metropolitan Opera and the Vienna State Opera.

OPERA 101

THE BASICS

Opera is a dramatic story told through song. Considered by many to be the most complete art form, it combines all of the elements of art, words, music, drama and dance. The earliest Italian operas were called by several names, such as “favola in musica” (fable in music) and “drama per musica” (drama by means of music). This last title is very close to the dictionary definition, and is the correct basis for any discussion about opera.

The unique thing about opera is the use of music to convey an entire story/plot. This is based on the feeling that music can communicate people’s reactions and emotions better than words (read or spoken) or pictures. Opera takes any type of dramatic story and makes it more exciting and more believable with the help of music. Many famous stories have been made into operas, including *Cinderella*, *Hansel and Gretel*, and *Romeo and Juliet*.

A BRIEF HISTORY

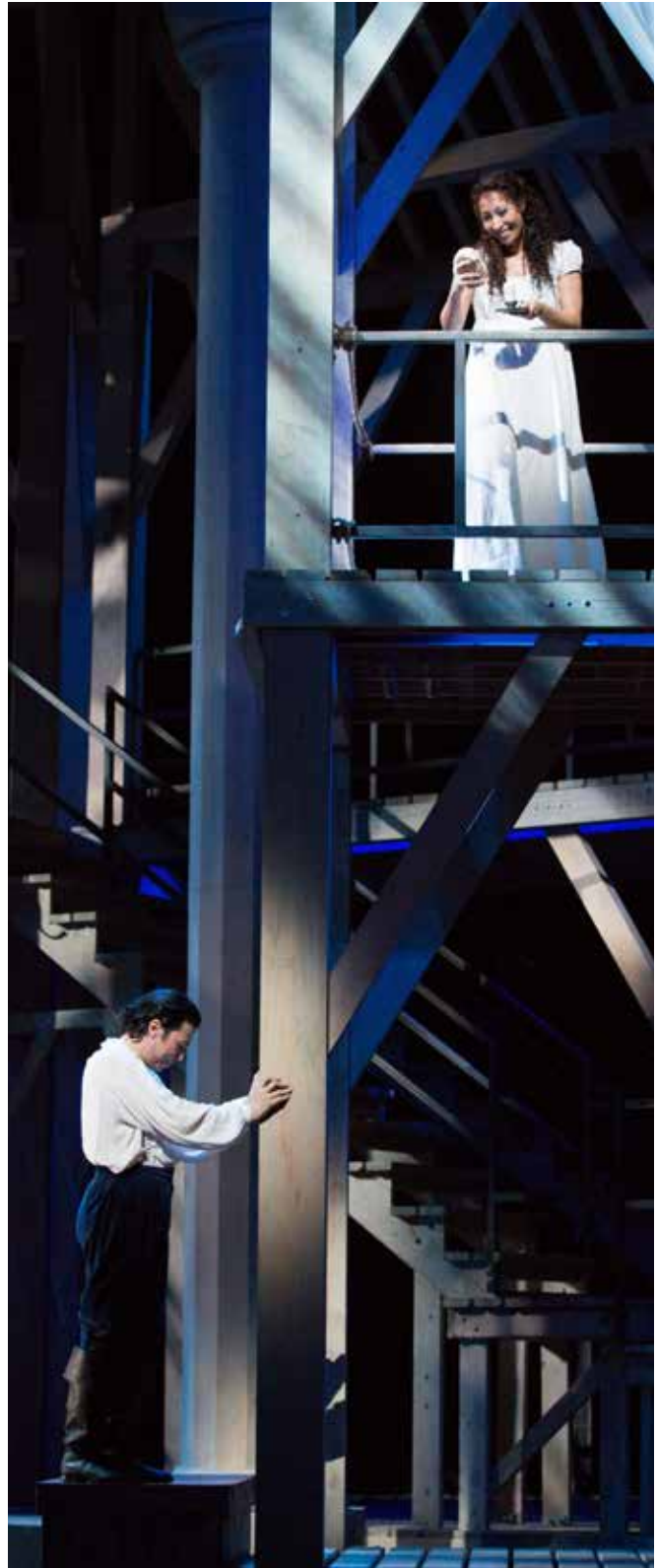
The concept of opera was developing many years before the first opera was written. Its beginning can be traced to the ancient Greeks. They fused poetry and music, creating plays that incorporate song, spoken language and dance, accompanied by string or wind instruments.

In the 1100s the early Christian church set religious stories to music, a style known as liturgical drama. The first true opera, *Daphne* (1597), was composed by Jacopo Peri. It told the story of a Greek mythological character, Daphne, from Ovid’s “Metamorphosis.”

The first great composer of opera was Claudio Monteverdi. Some of his operas are still performed today.

German composer Christoph Gluck’s most famous opera, *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762), marked a shift in importance from the performers to the drama. It also reduced the amount of recitative and laid the foundations for the progression of the art form.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was another prolific composer during this time and many of his operas like *Le nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro* - 1786) and *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute* - 1791) are still frequently performed around the world.



The Atlanta Opera's 2016 mainstage production of *Romeo and Juliet* at The Cobb Energy Centre. (photo: Jeff Roffman)



OPERA AROUND THE WORLD

Italy was the first country where opera became popular. It was the homeland of Jacopo Peri and Claudio Monteverdi. In time, this exciting form of entertainment spread to the rest of Europe. France and Germany joined Italy as the principal opera producers. Eventually, opera came to reflect the stories and musical styles of each of these countries.

The Italians have always been famous for their love of singing, and so in Italian opera there has always been great emphasis placed on the singer and the beautiful sounds of the human voice. It wasn't until the late 19th century and early 20th century with the later works of Verdi and the operas of Puccini that a balance was achieved between the role of the orchestra and that of the singer. These two forces were combined to give a more effective presentation of the story.

The French have favored the pictorial side of drama, and this has led to a continuing emphasis on the visual spectacle, especially with dancing. For example, the Paris opera audience in the 19th century would not accept a work for performance if it did not contain a major ballet. Verdi, an Italian composer, had to add ballets to all of his works to get them performed in Paris.

The Germans have always sought to extract from both the Italian and French traditions, and go beyond both in an attempt to present more than just a story. In fact, one of the greatest German opera composers, Richard Wagner, chose legends or myths for most of his opera plots so that he could communicate ideas as well as a story.

DIFFERENT STYLES OF OPERA

OPERA SERIA Serious opera. These stories are often tragic, and typically involve heroes and kings or ancient myths and gods. *Julius Caesar* (1724) by George Frideric Handel is a classic example of opera seria.

OPERA BUFFA Comic opera, typically sung in Italian. The jokesters in these operas are typically from the working class, such as maids, peasants, or servants, who keep busy getting the best of their employers. *The Italian Girl in Algiers* (1813) by Rossini is an amusing example of opera buffa.

SINGSPIEL or "Sing Play," evolved in German speaking countries out of the comic opera tradition. It includes elements of comic opera, spoken dialogue interjected among the sung phrases, and often, an exotic or fanciful theme. Mozart's *The Magic Flute* (1791) is an example of this style.

BEL CANTO This Italian phrase means "beautiful singing". These operas grew from a style of singing emphasizing long phrases, breath control and flexibility in singing both loudly and softly. *The Barber of Seville* (1816) by Gioachino Rossini is a popular example of bel canto.

GRAND OPERA Spectacular opera. It is performed with elaborate sets and costumes. Many people are needed to make it happen. Grand opera involves royalty, heroism, an elaborate ballet scene, and can often last for several hours. Charles Gounod's *Faust* (1869 version) is an example of grand opera.

MUSIC DRAMA A style of opera that is created by a single artist who writes both the text and the music to advance the drama. This style fuses many art forms, and makes each one as important as the others. *Die Walküre (The Valkyries)* (1870) and other operas by Richard Wagner defined this style.



The Atlanta Opera's 2014 mainstage production of *The Barber of Seville* at The Cobb Energy Centre. (photo: Ken Howard)

TYPES OF OPERATIC VOICES

If you sing in a choir at school or church, you're probably already familiar with the different kinds of voice types. We have the same kinds of voice types in opera, but there are a few differences:

SOPRANOS are the highest female voice type, with a range similar to a violin. In opera, they usually sing roles like the Heroine, Princess, Queen, or Damsel in Distress. Sopranos are usually the female lead in the opera.



Violetta from *La traviata*

MEZZO-SOPRANOS are the middle female voice type. Their sound is darker and warmer than a soprano. They often perform the roles of witches, sisters, maids, and best friends. Mezzos also play young men on occasion, aptly called “pants roles” or “trouser roles,” such as Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel*.



Carmen from *Carmen*

TENORS are the highest male voice type – they often sing roles like the hero, the prince, or the boyfriend. They can sound like a trumpet in both range and color. Tenors can be athletic and energetic as well as sensitive and emotional. They get all the good high notes and a lot of the applause!



Tonio from *Daughter of the Regiment*

BARITONES fit between choir tenors and basses – not as high as the tenors, but not as low as the basses. They can play both good and bad characters: sometimes they're the boyfriends or brothers – or the ringleader for some comedic shenanigans – but in serious operas they can be the bad guys.



The Dutchman from *The Flying Dutchman*

BASSES are the lowest male voice type – they can sound like a bassoon, tuba or low trombone. In a serious opera they can represent age and wisdom (and sometimes evil geniuses), in a comic opera they can make you laugh. Sometimes they steal the show with their super low notes and provide a comforting presence with their warm, rumbly tones.



Don Pasquale from *Don Pasquale*

Think of your favorite story, movie or television show. If that story was turned into an opera, what kind of voice types would be best for each of the characters?

You can hear different kinds of voice types in popular music too. Think about your favorite singers – do they have high voices or low voices? What do you like best about the way they sing?

(photos: Nunnally Rawson, Jeff Roffman, Raftermen)

IMPORTANT JOBS

WHO KEEPS THE OPERA RUNNING?

In addition to the singers and musicians you see on stage and in the orchestra pit, there are many other people who help bring the show to life!

MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR is responsible for the musical excellence of an opera. They ensure the singers understand the music, sing in the appropriate style, and work with the orchestra to make sure everyone is playing correctly together.

STAGE DIRECTOR is responsible for the action on the stage. They work with the designers to create the concept for the production. They help the singers understand why their characters would act in certain ways, and how the characters communicate with each other.

CHOREOGRAPHER creates movement or dancing for operas. They study dance, movement and do research on different historical periods.

PRODUCTION MANAGER helps make the director's and designers' vision a reality by working with the shops that build the scenery and costumes.

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR makes sure that the lighting, scenery, costumes and props are coordinated and that the crews who handle those elements know what needs to be done during the performance.

STAGE MANAGER manages the rehearsal schedule and takes detailed notes about the stage directions, lighting cues and scenery changes. During the performance, they are backstage calling all the technical cues and making sure the show runs smoothly.

SET DESIGNER creates the concept for the physical environment of the opera and works with the director to create the scenery that helps tell the story. They research history, color, space, architecture, and furniture.

LIGHTING DESIGNER helps create the mood of each scene with light, shadow, and color. They also study the music and work with the set designer and the director to decide how light will be used to help tell the story.

COSTUME DESIGNER creates the look of the characters with clothing. They choose the fabrics and supervise the construction of the costumes, or selection of pre-made costumes.



The Stage Manager calls cues by watching monitors of a performance of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* in 2018. (photo: Jeff Roffman)

WIG & MAKE-UP DESIGNER creates the hair and make-up styling for the show in tandem with the costumes and the production design. They are also responsible for any special effects make-up like scars, wounds or blood.

WARDROBE MANAGER makes sure all the costumes are clean and pressed and coordinates all the costume changes. Dressers help the singers put on their complicated costumes and change their costumes during the performance.

PROPERTIES (PROPS) MASTER is responsible for all the objects that the singers touch or move that are not part of their costumes. They do a lot of research to find the perfect period newspaper, set of glasses, bouquet of flowers, or book. They make artificial things look real on stage, like food or drink.

CREW & STAGEHANDS includes carpenters and electricians. They assist with the installation of the set on stage once it has been built. During the performance, they are responsible for set and lighting changes.

HISTORY OF OPERA IN ATLANTA

Opera has been an integral part of Atlanta's cultural fabric since October 1866 when the Ghioni and Sussini Grand Italian Opera Company presented three operas in the city. The performances were well received, and soon after, small touring companies began to bring more full-length operas to Atlanta.

In 1910, New York's Metropolitan Opera brought its tour to Atlanta for the first time. Once a year, for a full week during spring, people flocked to the city to see the Metropolitan Opera's wonderful performances and enjoy the many parties that were hosted throughout the city in celebration of the opera's arrival. Performing at the Auditorium-Armory, the fabulous Fox Theatre, and the Boisfeuillet Jones Atlanta Civic Center, the Metropolitan Opera's annual tour was a major social event. Every night of the week featured the performance of a different opera legend including Enrico Caruso, Birgit Nilsson, Leontyne Price, Frederica



Leontyne Price was one of the first African American featured singers with The Metropolitan Opera Company. This photo appeared in the program for the 1964 tour of *Don Giovanni*, in which she sang the role of Donna Anna. (photo: The Metropolitan Opera Company, *Carmen*, 1964 touring season program book / The Atlanta Opera archives)



The Metropolitan Opera Company's 1961 production of *Turandot* with Birgit Nilsson as Turandot. She sang this role in May that same year at the Fox Theater in Atlanta. (photo: The Metropolitan Opera Company, *Turandot*, 1967 touring season program book / The Atlanta Opera archives)

von Stade, Sherrill Milnes, Marilyn Horne, Plácido Domingo, Beverly Sills, Joan Sutherland, Richard Tucker and Luciano Pavarotti. The Met tour returned to Atlanta until 1986, with the exception of 1931-1939 due to financial complications of the Great Depression.

With the success and popularity of the Met's annual tour came a desire for Atlanta to have its own opera company. In 1979, the Atlanta Civic Opera was born, a result of a merger between the Atlanta Lyric Opera and Georgia Opera. The first artistic director was noted composer Thomas Pasatieri. The company's first popular opera production was *La traviata* on March 28, 1980 at the Fox Theatre. The following December, a festive gala was held in Symphony Hall with such noted artists as Catherine Malfitano, Jerry Hadley and Samuel Ramey. In 1985, the company was renamed The Atlanta Opera.

In the fall of 2007, The Atlanta Opera became the first resident company in the new Cobb Energy Performance Arts Centre. In 2013, the company recruited internationally recognized stage director Tomer Zvulun as its General and Artistic Director. In the 2014-2015 season, the company launched the acclaimed Discoveries series of operas staged in alternative theaters around Atlanta. In the 2016-2017 season, the company expanded its mainstage season from three to four productions at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre. The Opera works with world-renowned singers, conductors, directors, and designers who seek to enhance the art form and make it accessible for a sophisticated, 21st century audience. Today, The Atlanta Opera is one of the finest regional opera companies in the nation and continues to adhere to its original 1979 mission to enrich lives through opera.

Lessons included in the Opera Guide are designed to correlate with Georgia Standards of Excellence in English Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, and Fine Arts.

Music - Responding

Middle School & High School General Music; Chorus;
Band; Orchestra RE.1;
Middle School & High School General Music; Chorus;
Band; Orchestra RE.2

Types of Operatic Voices
Pre-Performance Activities
ELA: Opera Vocabulary
Write a Review
The Science of Sound: Operatic Voices & Resonance

Music - Connecting

Middle School & High School General Music; Chorus;
Band; Orchestra CN.1;
Middle School & High School General Music; Chorus;
Band; Orchestra CN.2

Synopsis
Meet the Creators
Opera 101
Important Jobs at The Opera
Opera in Atlanta
Pre-Performance Activities
Write a Review
ELA: Opera Vocabulary
Timeline Activity

Theatre Arts - Responding

TA.RE.1; TA.RE.2

Types of Operatic Voices
Pre-Performance Activities
ELA: Opera Vocabulary
Write a Review
The Science of Sound: Operatic Voices & Resonance

Theatre Arts - Connecting

TA.CN.1; TA.CN.2

Synopsis
Meet the Creators
Opera 101
Important Jobs at The Opera
Opera in Atlanta
Pre-Performance Activities
Write a Review
Timeline Activity

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

ELA - Reading Literary

ELAGSERL1; ELAGSERL2; ELAGSERL3; ELAGSERL4; ELAGSERL7

Opera 101
Pre-Performance Activities
Opera Vocabulary
The Science of Sound: Operatic Voices & Resonance
The Science of Sound: How Sound is Made

ELA - Writing

ELAGSEW1; ELAGSEW2

Write a Review
Additional Activities

ELA - Speaking and Listening

ELAGSESL1

Pre-Performance Activities
The Science of Sound: Operatic Voices & Resonance
The Science of Sound: How Sound is Made
Additional Activities

SUPPORT

SPECIAL THANKS

The Atlanta Opera would like to thank the following for their generous support of our educational and community engagement programs.



Official Beverage of The Atlanta Opera



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The Zeist Foundation

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THE ATLANTA OPERA

PRE-PERFORMANCE

ACTIVITIES PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE OPERA

Are you worried about how to act or what to wear? You are not the only one! Opera stereotypes can make the art form seem intimidating to lots of people. Having an idea of what to expect at the performance may make it easier to enjoy your experience. Here are some suggestions of things you can do before you visit The Atlanta Opera at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre.

START WITH THE STORY

In simple terms, an opera is a story set to music. Before the performance, review the plot synopsis of *Porgy and Bess*. Ask students to consider the story, characters, and setting of the opera. Use the following questions to lead a class discussion:

- What is this opera about?
- What is the time period?
- Who are the main characters?
- What does the character want?
- What are their relationships to each other?
- What do you expect to see and hear at the opera?

INTRODUCE VOCABULARY TERMS

Refer to the Glossary of Opera Terms. Discuss with the students which of these terms they may hear and/or see during the performance.

DESIGN A PROMOTIONAL POSTER

Create a poster to promote the upcoming performance of *Porgy and Bess*. Display the poster in your school and send samples to The Atlanta Opera at education@atlantaopera.org.



Students at the Cobb Energy Centre for the Atlanta Opera's Student performance of *La Cenerentola*. (photos: Raftermen)

OPERA MYTHS

Many people have preconceived ideas about the opera. Read the truth behind some of the most popular opera myths and see if they answer some of your questions about the opera as well!

MYTH 1: OPERA IS BORING & STUFFY

Not true! Operas tell some of the most interesting, scandalous, and beautiful stories of all time. It is not unusual for operas to include love triangles, murders, fatal illnesses, or messages from beyond the grave.

MYTH 2: OPERA IS SUNG IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE SO I WON'T UNDERSTAND THE STORY

We can help! It is true that many operas are sung in languages other than English. Since many people in our audience do not speak other languages, we project English translations, called "supertitles," on the screen above the stage. This way, you can follow along even if you do not understand the language. You also can read the synopsis of the opera before you arrive. Knowing the story will also help you follow along.

MYTH 3: I NEED TO WEAR A TUXEDO OR A BALL GOWN TO THE OPERA

Some people like to dress up when they go to an opera performance, but there is no dress code. You will see people wearing everything from jeans to ball gowns. Dressing up can be part of the fun of attending an opera performance, but you should wear whatever makes you comfortable. The opera is a place for everybody.

MYTH 4: OPERA SINGERS JUST SCREECH & HIT HIGH NOTES ALL THE TIME

Most of the music we listen to today is electronically reproduced and amplified by speakers. Opera is one of the only places you'll hear singers perform without a microphone. All the sounds you will hear at the opera are natural and coming straight from the singers' throats and the orchestra's instruments to your ears. Opera singers have trained for years to project their sound and make it larger than life. While you may not be accustomed to live, unamplified singing, it can be a wonderful experience if you think about how much skill is required.



Students arriving at the Cobb Energy Centre to see an Atlanta Opera performance. (photo: Raftermen)

Here are a few more tips to make your trip to the opera more comfortable.

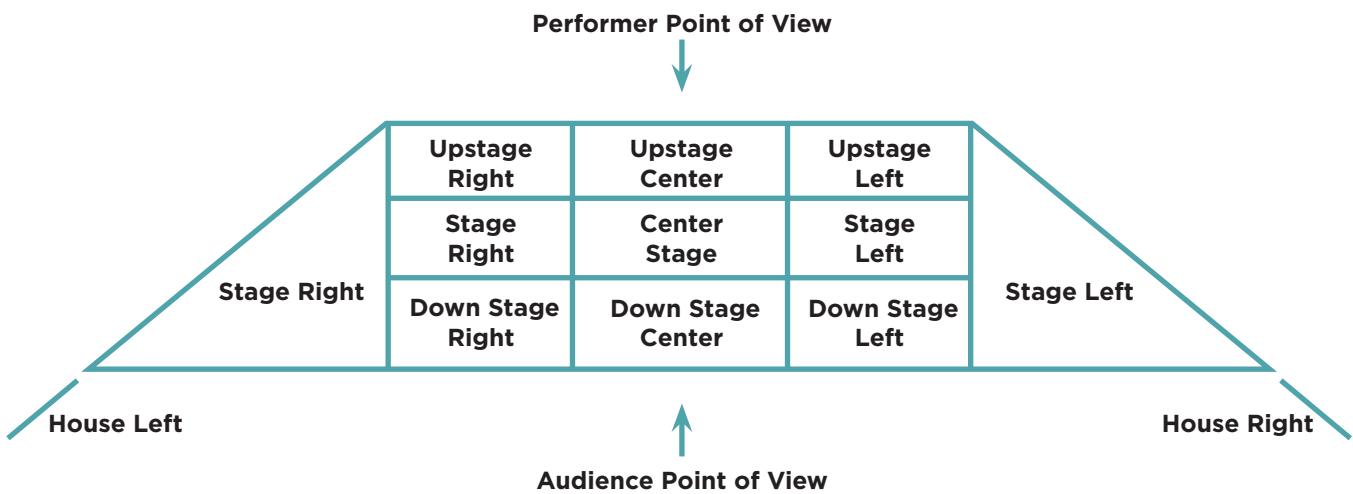
REMEMBER: The opera is a live performance. You can hear the performers on stage, and that means they can hear you too! Please refrain from talking or whispering during the opera. It is distracting to others around you as well as to the singers. Please do not leave your seat during the performance.

Please turn off all cell phones, beeping watches, and anything else that will make noise during the performance.

Please do not take photographs or video or audio recordings of the performance. The light can affect the singers on stage.

If you like what you have seen and heard, let the performers know! It is okay to applaud at the end of songs, called arias, and at the end of a scene. You can even call out "bravo" (to the men on stage), "brava" (to the women) and "bravi" (for all on stage). And of course, a standing ovation is always welcome!

Review the stage diagram below with the students. Draw the diagram on the whiteboard and have students come up and write in each part of the stage.



Long ago, stages used to be raked or slanted toward the audience. If you went away from the audience, or climbed up the incline, it became upstage. Down the incline was downstage. Remember, stage left and stage right are from the actor's perspective when they are on stage, not the audience.

- Ask all of your students to face in the same direction. Facing you or a wall is good.
- Have your students close their eyes and stand with their feet flat on the floor.
- Now, ask them to slowly raise their heels off of the floor and keep them that way.
- This is how it would feel to stand on a raked (or slanted) stage.
- Their heels are upstage, or on the higher part of the stage, near the back, and their toes are facing the audience. Have them imagine they are walking up and down, like they were actually going to points where the floor was higher and lower.
- Have them try to move around a bit and see what it feels like.
- Give them some stage directions to follow.
 - **EXAMPLE:** Cross stage-left or walk downstage, etc.
- Increase the complexity of the stage directions, making them two or more parts.
 - **EXAMPLE:** Walk to stage-right, then cross to up-stage left.
- Have students direct each other, giving simple stage directions.
- Students can create their own scene from the opera, block them and then perform them for the class.

ACT / SCENE

Acts and scenes are ways of categorizing sections of operas. An act is a large-scale division of an opera, and an opera will typically include two to five acts. Acts can be subdivided into scenes, which are often differentiated by a change in setting or characters.

ADAGIO

Literally “at ease,” adagio is a tempo marking that indicates a slow speed. An adagio tempo marking indicates that the performer should play in a slow and leisurely style.

ALLEGRO

Italian for “cheerful” or “joyful,” allegro is the most common tempo marking in Western music, indicating a moderately fast to quick speed.

ARIA

A song for solo voice accompanied by orchestra.

BRAVO

Italian for “nicely done”; shouted by audience members after a performance.

CADENZA

An ornamented musical elaboration played in a free style by a soloist to display his or her virtuosity.

CHORUS

A section of an opera in which a large group of singers performs together, typically with orchestral accompaniment.

CRESCENDO

A gradual raising of volume in music achieved by increasing the dynamic level. When music crescendos, the performers begin at a softer dynamic level and become incrementally louder.

DIMINUENDO

A gradual lowering of volume in music achieved by decreasing the dynamic level. During a diminuendo, the performers begin at a louder dynamic level and become incrementally softer.

DYNAMICS

A musical trait pertaining to loudness and softness. Dynamics encompass a spectrum from **pianissimo** (very soft) to **piano** (soft) to **mezzo piano** (moderately soft), all the way up to **fortissimo** (very loud). Music can shift to another dynamic level either suddenly or gradually, through a **crescendo** or **diminuendo**.

ENSEMBLE

A musical piece for two or more **soloists**, accompanied by orchestra. Types of ensembles include **duets** (for two **soloists**), **trios** (for three **soloists**), and **quartets** (for four **soloists**).

FINALE

The last portion of an act, a finale consists of several musical sections that accompany an escalating dramatic tension. Finales frequently consist of multiple ensembles with different numbers of characters.

FORTE

Meaning “loud” or “strong” in Italian, forte is a dynamic level in music that indicates a loud volume. Adding the suffix “-issimo” to a word serves as an intensifier—since forte means “loud,” fortissimo means “very loud.”

INTERMISSION

A break between acts of an opera.

LEGATO

A type of articulation in which a melody is played with smooth connection between the notes.

LIBRETTO

The text of an opera, including all the words that are said or sung by performers.

MELODY

A succession of pitches that form an understandable unit. The melody of a piece consists of the tune that a listener can hum or sing.

OVERTURE

An instrumental piece that occurs before the first act as an introduction to an opera.

PIANO

Abbreviated p in a musical score, piano indicates a soft dynamic level.

RECITATIVE

Speech-like singing in between musical numbers that advances the plot.

RHYTHM

Refers to the way music unfolds over time; it is a series of durations in a range from long to short. Along with pitch, it is a basic and indispensable parameter of music.

SCORE

The complete musical notation for a piece, the score includes notated lines for all of the different instrumental and vocal parts that unite to constitute a musical composition.

TEMPO

Literally “time” in Italian, tempo refers to the speed of a piece of music.

TIMBRE

Pronounced TAM-bruh, a French word that means “sound color.” It refers to the complex combination of characteristics that give each instrument or voice its unique sound.

Write the letter of the correct match next to each problem.

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| 1. _____ CHORUS | a. A break between acts of an opera. |
| 2. _____ SCENES | b. A type of articulation in which a melody is played with smooth connection between the notes. |
| 3. _____ DYNAMICS | c. The last portion of an act. |
| 4. _____ ADAGIO | d. Refers to the speed of a piece of music. |
| 5. _____ SCORE | e. A way to categorize the sections of operas. |
| 6. _____ INTERMISSION | f. A musical trait pertaining to loudness and softness. |
| 7. _____ ARIA | g. A gradual raising of volume in music achieved by increasing the dynamic level. |
| 8. _____ TIMBRE | h. A song for solo voice accompanied by orchestra. |
| 9. _____ TEMPO | i. A musical piece for two or more soloists, accompanied by orchestra. |
| 10. _____ LEGATO | j. A tempo marking indicating a moderately fast to quick speed. |
| 11. _____ OVERTURE | k. Italian for "nicely done;" shouted by audience members after a performance |
| 12. _____ ALLEGRO | l. Refers to the complex combination of characteristics that give each instrument or voice its unique sound. |
| 13. _____ LIBRETTO | m. Speech-like singing in between musical numbers that advances the plot. |
| 14. _____ RECITATIVE | n. The complete musical notation for a piece. |
| 15. _____ ENSEMBLE | o. The text of an opera. |
| 16. _____ BRAVO | p. Refers to the way music unfolds over time; it is a series of durations in a range from long to short. |
| 17. _____ CRESCENDO | q. An instrumental piece that occurs before the first act as an introduction to an opera. |
| 18. _____ FINALE | r. A section of an opera in which a large group of singers perform together, typically with orchestral accompaniment. |
| 19. _____ DIMINUENDO | s. A gradual lowering of volume in music achieved by decreasing the dynamic level. |
| 20. _____ RHYTHM | t. A tempo marking that indicates that the performer should play in a slow and leisurely style. |

OBJECTIVE: Students will learn about different characteristics through experimenting with vocal interpretations. Students will then analyze character traits of Porgy, Bess, Crown and Sportin' Life from the opera *Porgy and Bess*.

CHARACTERIZING THROUGH VOCALIZATION

When trying to characterize people in books or plays, we not only look at what they say, but we listen to how they say it. Sometimes, the inflection in the voice can change the meaning of a simple sentence. In opera or musical theater, the inflection can be dictated through the musical line: for example, an “ah” sung in a very high register and very loud could be an exclamation of fear or surprise, while the same “ah” sung in a low register and quietly could be a sigh or contentment or sadness.

Step 1 Have students take a simple phrase like “Well, that’s the way it is,” or “I don’t know about that” or a sentence of your choosing and say it with different inflections to change the meaning. Students may refer to the character list on the following page to give them ideas about how to deliver the line. Remember that more than one characteristic can fit an inflection. Go around the room and have each student deliver a line choosing a characteristic and then discuss the different ways to say it.

Step 2 Have students write a brief, 4-8-line dialogue between two characters. (Use simple, emotion-neutral statements such as “Hello. How are you? Some weather we’re having.”). Have pairs of students interpret and deliver this same dialogue. Discuss how each group interpreted and delivered the scene differently. What did the different interpretations tell us about the relationship between the characters, their moods, their characters, etc.?

Keep a list of the different emotions the students demonstrated and discuss how these emotions could help them make judgments about different people’s character.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

When going to see an opera, it is important for the students to know the story before they get to the theater so they can understand what’s going on onstage. Knowing the characters and how they react to one another is an important aspect of understanding a story

Have students read the synopsis of *Porgy and Bess* (page 5) and the meet the characters activity (page 8). Discuss the students’ impressions of the characters and story line. For example, Crown is portrayed as an abusive bully. How do the students think Crown will be portrayed in The Atlanta Opera production? How could the interpretation of Crown change the landscape of the entire opera?

Divide the students into groups and assign each group one of the following characters: Porgy, Bess, Crown and Sportin’ Life. Have each group perform an analysis of their character, including their motivation and predictions on their future.

FOLLOW UP

After attending the opera, have the students revisit their character analyses. Did The Atlanta Opera portray the characters as they had expected? Did the Opera’s production shed new or different light on the individuals?



Glimmerglass Festival’s production of *Porgy and Bess*. (photo: Karli Cadel)

THE ATLANTA OPERA
CHARACTER ANALYSIS
 IT'S ALL IN HOW YOU SAY IT ...

POSITIVE CHARACTER TRAITS LIST

Below is a list of 84 positive character traits that can be used to build character trait vocabulary.

- | | |
|---------------|------------------|
| ACTIVE | GENTLE |
| ADMIRABLE | GOOD-NATURED |
| ADVENTUROUS | GRATEFUL |
| AGREEABLE | HAPPY |
| AMIABLE | HARDWORKING |
| AMUSING | HELPFUL |
| APPRECIATIVE | HEROIC |
| ATHLETIC | HONEST |
| AUTHENTIC | HOPEFUL |
| BENEVOLENT | HUMBLE |
| BRAVE | INNOCENT |
| BRIGHT | INTELLIGENT |
| BRILLIANT | INVENTIVE |
| CALM | JOYFUL |
| CAPABLE | KIND |
| CARING | LIVELY |
| CHARMING | LOVING |
| CHEERFUL | LOYAL |
| CLEAN | NEAT |
| CLEAR-HEADED | NICE |
| CLEVER | OPTIMISTIC |
| COMPASSIONATE | ORGANIZED |
| CONFIDENT | PASSIONATE |
| CONSIDERATE | PATIENT |
| COOPERATIVE | PEACEFUL |
| COURAGEOUS | PLAYFUL |
| COURTEOUS | POLITE |
| CREATIVE | PRINCIPLED |
| CURIOUS | RELIABLE |
| DEDICATED | RESPECTFUL |
| EASYGOING | RESPONSIBLE |
| EDUCATED | SELF-DISCIPLINED |
| ENTHUSIASTIC | SELFLESS |
| ETHICAL | SINCERE |
| EXCITING | SKILLFUL |
| EXTRAORDINARY | STRONG |
| FAIR | SWEET |
| FIRM | THOUGHTFUL |
| FOCUSED | TRUSTWORTHY |
| FORGIVING | UNDERSTANDING |
| FRIENDLY | UNSELFISH |
| GENEROUS | WISE |

NEGATIVE CHARACTER TRAITS LIST

Below is a list of 84 negative character traits that can be used to build character trait vocabulary.

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| AGGRESSIVE | INCONSIDERATE |
| ANGRY | INSINCERE |
| ANXIOUS | INSULTING |
| ARGUMENTATIVE | INTOLERANT |
| ARROGANT | IRRESPONSIBLE |
| BORED | IRRITABLE |
| BOSSY | JEALOUS |
| BRUTAL | LAZY |
| CARELESS | LIAR |
| CHARMLESS | MEAN |
| CLUMSY | MEDDLESOME |
| CONCEITED | MESSY |
| COWARDLY | MISERABLE |
| CRITICAL | MONSTROUS |
| CRUEL | MOODY |
| DANGEROUS | NEGATIVE |
| DECEITFUL | NEGLECTFUL |
| DESTRUCTIVE | OBNOXIOUS |
| DEVIOS | PETTY |
| DIFFICULT | POSSESSIVE |
| DISCOURAGING | POWER-HUNGRY |
| DISCOURTEOUS | PREJUDICED |
| DISHONEST | RESENTFUL |
| DISLOYAL | RUDE |
| DISOBEDIENT | SCORNFUL |
| DISORGANIZED | SELFISH |
| DISRESPECTFUL | SHALLOW |
| DISRUPTIVE | SLOPPY |
| ENVIOS | SNEAKY |
| FEARFUL | SNOBBISH |
| FOOLISH | THOUGHTLESS |
| FORGETFUL | UNAPPRECIATIVE |
| FRIGHTENING | UNCARING |
| GLOOMY | UNCOOPERATIVE |
| GREEDY | UNFORGIVING |
| GRIM | UNFRIENDLY |
| HATEFUL | UNGRATEFUL |
| HAUGHTY | UNHEALTHY |
| HOSTILE | UNRELIABLE |
| IGNORANT | VIOLENT |
| IMPATIENT | WEAK |
| IMPRACTICAL | WICKED |

Reviews of performances are important to every opera company. They help the company know how the performance was enjoyed by audiences, and get other people excited about coming to see the show!

Pretend you are an opera critic. Think about the performance you just saw of *Porgy and Bess* and write your thoughts like you might see in the newspaper or an online review. Remember that a critic reports both the positive and negative features of a production. You might want to focus on one part of the opera that you particularly liked or disliked. Keep in mind that reviews express the opinions of the person who writes the review, and different people will often have different ideas about the same performance! Below are some tips to get you started.

To write your own review, you can focus on two different elements – what you **saw** and what you **heard**.

FACTS & OPINIONS

A review often combines two things – facts and feelings. It is a piece of straight reporting in which the reviewer tells the reader what he or she saw (facts), and an opinion piece in which the reviewer tells the reader what they liked or didn't like about those elements (opinions). Here is an example of a reviewer reporting what they saw:

“The town plaza is suggested by Paul Steinberg’s dizzyingly colorful set, with a mosaic floor and walls and piñatas hanging from above.”

For the first part of your review, briefly describe what you saw on stage – report what the sets, costumes and lights looked like. These are the facts about the show.

Next, give your opinion about whether you liked these choices. Did they help tell the story effectively?

THE ART OF THE ADJECTIVE

Critics need to have a great vocabulary of descriptive words when they write about what they hear so that the people reading their reviews can imagine what it was like to be there. People use lots of different adjectives to describe the voices of opera singers. Here's a review that's chock-full of great adjectives:

“The **light, smoky** baritone of George Gagnidze only hints at Rigoletto’s outsize emotions, and the **sweet, pure** soprano of Lisette Oropesa keeps Gilda **sweet** but **inert**. The **handsome, hyperactive** tenor Vittorio Grigolo has two registers, bellowing and crooning, and the conductor, Marco Armiliato, has his hands full trying to keep up with Mr. Grigolo’s **wayward** tempos.”

Sometimes it is very hard to describe the way music makes us feel. While there are definitely objective facts we can evaluate when we listen to music (qualities like loud or soft, fast or slow) most of the time we listen subjectively. This means that every opinion is valid – you don't have to know anything about opera to be moved by someone's singing or a beautiful instrumental solo.

Write a few sentences about the character you liked best and why. How did the music help tell you who the character was? Think of five adjectives to describe the way that person's voice sounded to you. How did it make you feel to listen to them?

SUM IT ALL UP

In your opinion, what did you like best about the production? What did you think could use some improvement? Would you recommend that other people come see this opera?

Share your critique with us! The Atlanta Opera wants to know what you thought of our performance. If you would like to share your review with us, please send it on!

The Atlanta Opera Education Department, 1575 Northside Dr., NW, Suite 350, Atlanta, GA 30318 or education@atlantaopera.org

CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRAINED VOICE

Singing in Europe and America is now generally divided into two categories: classical and popular. What most people think of as operatic or classical singing developed in Europe hundreds of years ago. This style flourished during the 17th century, as opera became a popular form of entertainment and operatic music increased in complexity. The most recognizable characteristics of a classically trained voice are:

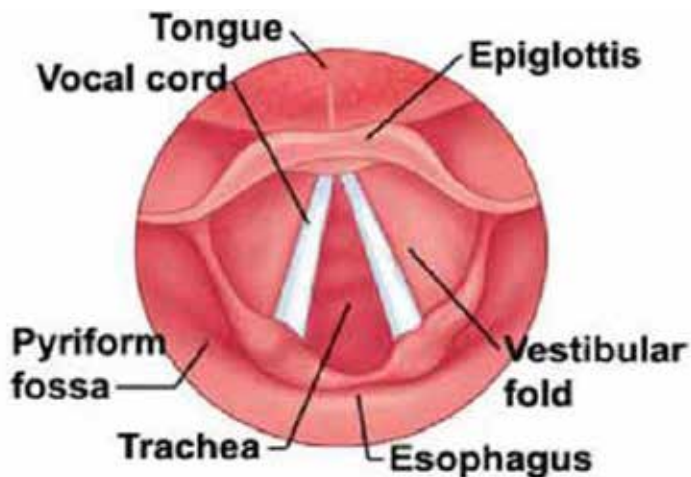
- an extensive range (the ability to sing both high and low)
- varying degrees of volume (loud and soft)
- resonance in the chest and sinus cavities (produces a full or round sound)
- an ability to project or fill a large space without amplification

TRAINING

Very few people are born with the capability to sing this way. Classical singers take voice lessons about once a week and practice every day for many years in order to develop a beautiful operatic sound. In fact, most trained voices are not mature enough to perform leading roles on a big stage until they're at least 25 years old. Compare that with the most popular singers on the radio today who could release their first albums as teenagers!

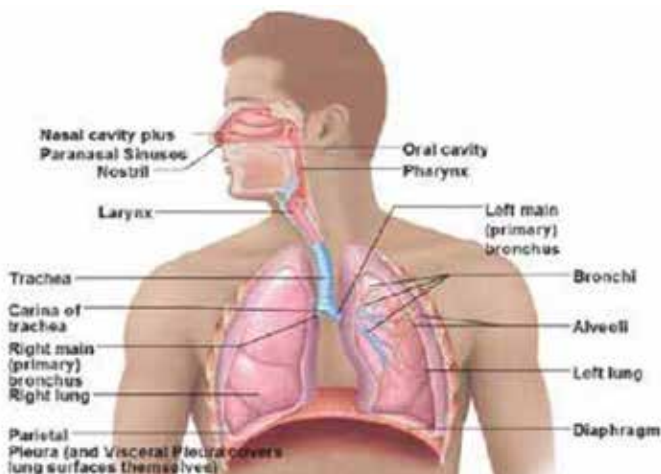
THE VOCAL CORDS

Science tells us that all sound is made by two things vibrating together. The same concept applies when we talk or sing. The sounds we make are really just the vibration of two little muscles called the vocal cords. The vocal cords are held in the larynx, which is sometimes called the voicebox or (in boys) the Adam's Apple. These two little cords of tissue vary in length but are typically 1 - 2 inches long. When you want to say something, your brain tells your vocal cords to pull together until they're touching lightly. Then, air pushes through them, and the vocal cords begin to vibrate, opening and closing very quickly. This vibration creates a sound. The pitches you sing are dependent on the speed at which the cords vibrate. A faster vibration creates a higher pitch. The length of the cords also affects the pitch of the voice. Longer cords make a lower voice.



BREATHING / SUPPORT

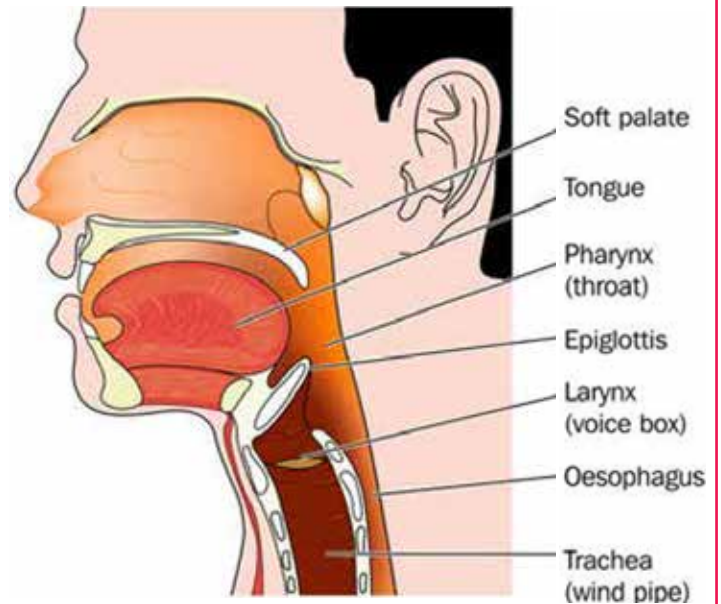
In order to sing long phrases with a lot of volume and a good tone, singers must breathe in a specific manner, making use of the entire torso area (lungs, ribs, diaphragm and viscera). As they breathe in, each part of this network does its job: the lungs fill up with air, which forces the ribs to expand and the diaphragm (a flat muscle below the lungs) to move down. As the diaphragm descends, the viscera (stomach, intestines and other organs) are forced down and out. Singers describe this feeling as fullness in the low stomach or filling an innertube around their waist. Expelling the air, or singing, is essentially a slow and controlled movement of those muscles. If all of the air escapes from the lungs quickly, the tone of the voice will sound breathy and will lack intensity. Successful opera singers must be able to isolate the diaphragm and ribs, controlling the rate at which they return to their original positions. This allows for a consistent stream of air that travels from the lungs, through the larynx and out of the mouth.



RESONANCE

One of the most obvious characteristics of an operatic voice is a full, resonant tone. Singers achieve this by lifting their soft palate. This is a part of the mouth that most people don't ever think about and can be difficult to isolate. Here are some simple exercises to feel where it is and hear the resonance in your voice when you lift it: Start to yawn. Feel that lifting sensation in the back of your mouth? That is the soft palate going up. With a relaxed mouth, slide your tongue along the roof of your mouth, from your teeth back toward your throat. You should feel your tongue go up, then down (that's your hard palate), then back up again. That soft, fleshy area at the very back is your soft palate. Say the word "who" like you would say it in normal conversation. Now, say "hoooo" like a hoot owl. Can you hear the difference?

Say the sentence "How do you do?" as if you were British. Lifting the soft palate is the foundation for the resonance in a singer's voice. With a lot of practice, a singer can lift his or her palate as soon as they begin to sing, without even thinking about it.



The Atlanta Opera's 2019 mainstage production of *La Cenerentola* at The Cobb Energy Centre featured Thomas Glass as Dandini, Emily Fons in the title role, and Santiago Ballerini as Ramiro. (photo: Tim Wilkerson)

YOUR SENSE OF SOUND: ENERGY & EQUIPMENT

Sound is important to human beings because it helps us to communicate with each other. Your sense of sound also helps you to enjoy music like opera. Musicians use sounds to communicate thoughts or feelings. But what is sound exactly? How do we hear it?

THE ENERGY: HOW SOUND IS MADE

Sound is vibrating air. Sounds can vibrate in different patterns. These patterns are called sound waves. The different patterns change the sound we hear. Listen to traffic on a busy street. Noise like this is disorganized sound. Now listen to a piece of music. Music is sound and silence that is organized into patterns.

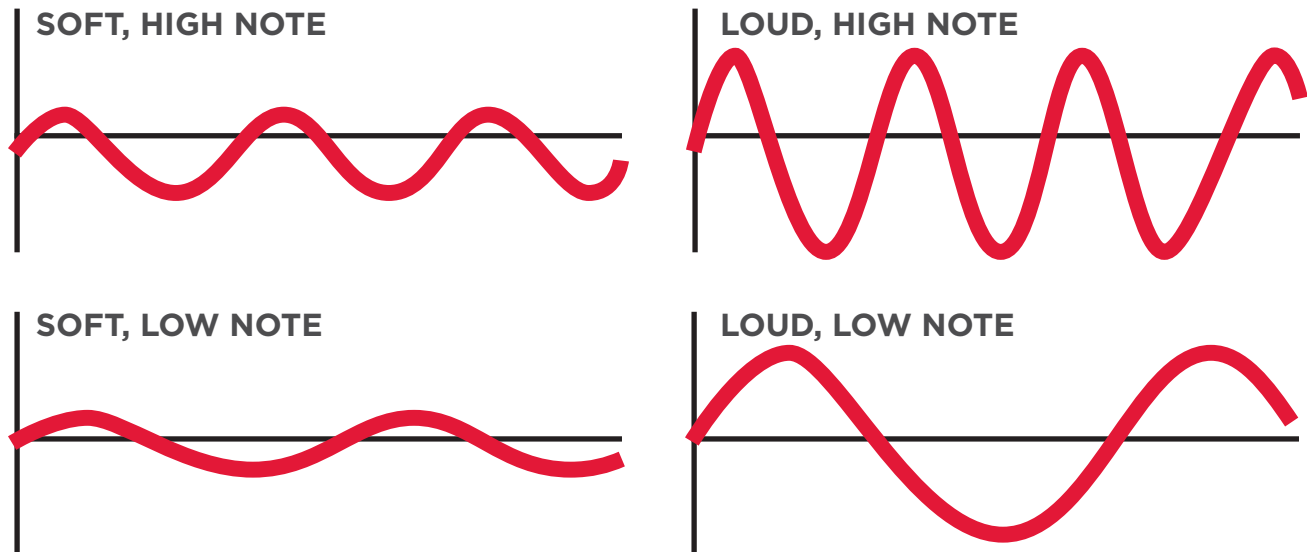
THINK ABOUT IT!

How are the sounds of traffic and music different? How does each sound make you feel? Can traffic sound like music? Can music sound like traffic?

Sound waves can vibrate many times in one second. The number of times a sound wave vibrates in one second is called its frequency. The frequency tells how high or low the sound will be. This is called pitch. High-pitched notes vibrate at a fast rate, so they have a high frequency. Low-pitched notes have a slow frequency. In opera, the highest pitches are usually sung by women. Very low pitches are sung by men.

Just as the speed of the sound wave determines the pitch, the shape of the wave determines how loud or soft the sound will be. This is called volume.

This is what sound waves look like:



TRY THIS!

Stretch a rubber band between your thumb and forefinger on one hand. Pluck it a few times. Can you see and feel the vibrations? What happens if you pluck the rubber band harder? Softer? Change the shape of the rubber band by making it longer and thinner. What do you hear?

In the early decades of the 20th century, African-American culture was at once celebrated and demeaned. Uptown Manhattan was home to the Harlem Renaissance, even as blackface performances on Broadway continued to perpetuate stereotypes. In the American south, “separate but equal” remained the law of the land; meanwhile, white “dialect recitalists” interpreted Gullah stories and the young white ladies of Charleston formed a Society for the Preservation of Spirituals. Against this confusing and contradictory backdrop, four extraordinary artists came together to write the quintessential American opera: DuBose Heyward, descendent of a signer of the Declaration of Independence and son of a “Gullah interpreter;” his wife, Dorothy, a playwright from Wooster, Ohio; George and Ira Gershwin, New York brothers of Russian Jewish descent; and director Rouben Mamoulian, a recent immigrant from what is now Tbilisi.

Morris Gershowitz and Rose Bruskin, Russian Jews who had recently emigrated to America, marry and change their name to Gershwine; a year later, Israel (later Ira) is the first of four children born to the couple. He will be followed by Jacob (later George), Arthur and Frances.

Jacob Gershwine (later George Gershwin) is born in New York City.

Rose Gershwine acquires a piano for the family home; her son George, who had secretly been learning to play a friend’s piano, is given lessons and outgrows one teacher after another.

“Yoo-oo, Just You,” with music by George Gershwin and lyrics by Irving Caesar, is featured in the revue *Hitchy-Koo* of 1918; it is Gershwin’s first song on Broadway. Capitalizing on the craze for “exotic” one-steps (“Hindustan,” “Chinatown, My Chinatown”), Gershwin and Caesar then set out to write a hit tune with an American locale. “Swanee” is a tremendous success; when Al Jolson records the song, it is the number one song in America for nine weeks, selling a million copies in sheet music and an estimated two million records.

DuBose Heyward and Harvey Allen publish *Carolina Chansons, Legends of the Low Country*. Twenty young (white) ladies of Charleston found the Society for the Preservation of Spirituals. Gershwin’s *Blue Monday Blues* appears as part of *George White’s Scandals of 1922*; while not generally well-received, one critic calls it “the first real American opera...set to music in the popular vein, using jazz at only the right moments...and, above all, a new and free ragtime recitative... in it we see the first gleam of a new American musical art.”

DuBose Heyward’s *Porgy*, partially inspired by the story of Samuel Smalls, is published; Cecil B. DeMille purchases the silent-film rights to the novel, but the project is ultimately canceled for financial reasons. Alain Locke publishes *The New Negro Movement*, an anthology of writings associated with what will eventually become known as the Harlem Renaissance. Walter Damrosch conducts the premiere performance of Gershwin’s “Concerto in F” at Carnegie Hall, with the composer at the piano.

Heyward and his wife, Dorothy, adapt *Porgy* for the stage; Rouben Mamoulian directs, and the play runs for 367 performances. “The Jazz Singer,” featuring Al Jolson, is the first movie to use synchronized sound; one critic remarks, “When one hears Jolson’s jazz songs, one realizes that jazz is the new prayer of the American masses, and Al Jolson is their cantor.” *Show Boat*, with a racially mixed cast and chorus, opens on Broadway and runs for 572 performances.

1885

Edwin DuBose Heyward is born in Charleston, South Carolina.

1890

1896

In *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the U.S. Supreme Court upholds state segregation laws under the doctrine “separate but equal.”

1898

1905

DuBose Heyward takes a job on the Charleston waterfront, where he comes in close, regular contact with the Gullah men who work as stevedores on the docks.

1910

1914

George Gershwin drops out of high school to be a piano pounder on Tin Pan Alley.

1918

1920

DuBose Heyward is a co-founder of the Poetry Society of South Carolina. Eugene O’Neill’s playwriting career is launched with *The Emperor Jones*, which tells the story of an African-American convict who escapes to a Caribbean island, where he sets himself up as emperor.

1922

1924

The Rochester American Opera Company, devoted to theatrically vibrant productions of opera in English, is launched, with Mamoulian as co-director. In Charleston, Samuel Smalls, a disabled man known as “Goat Cart Sammy” for his means of locomotion, is charged with aggravated assault. Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue” premieres on a concert, led by Paul Whiteman; the audience includes Leopold Stokowski, Alma Gluck, Mary Garden, Fritz Kreisler, and Sergei Rachmaninoff.

1925

1926

George Gershwin writes to DuBose Heyward to suggest an opera based on *Porgy*.

1927

Gershwin signs a contract with the Metropolitan Opera to write an opera based on Szymon Ansky's *The Dybbuk*; the project is abandoned when it is discovered another composer owns the rights. That same year, stock market prices plummet, launching the Great Depression.

1928

Gershwin meets Maurice Ravel and asks to study with him; Ravel refuses and sends him instead to Nadia Boulanger, who also declines. Later, she tells Time magazine, "I had nothing to offer him. He was already quite well known when he came to my house, and I suggested that he was doing all right and should continue."

1929

The Gershwins and Heyward spend five weeks on Folly Island, South Carolina, to work on *Porgy and Bess*; they travel frequently to nearby James Island, where they spend time with the Gullah community. An all-black *Cavalleria rusticana*, featuring Todd Duncan, is produced by New York's Aeolian Opera. Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein's *Four Saints in Three Acts*, with an all-black cast, opens on Broadway; the conductor, Alexander Smallens, is invited to conduct the premiere of *Porgy and Bess*.

1934

Porgy and Bess opens on Broadway with Todd Duncan and Anne Brown in the title roles; it runs for 124 performances.

1935

When *Porgy and Bess* tours to Washington, D.C., Todd Duncan and Anne Brown refuse to perform unless the National Theatre rescinds its whites only policy. Duncan resists compromises offered by the theater: "Nothing would do, other than black people be allowed to buy tickets for any seat in the house."

1936

Gershwin dies of a brain tumor at the age of 38.

1937

Marian Anderson, protesting the segregated seating policy of Constitution Hall, sings a concert on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

1939

Japan attacks the American fleet at Pearl Harbor; the United States officially enters the Second World War.

1941

A "streamlined" revival of *Porgy and Bess*, with a smaller cast and spoken dialogue replacing recitative, opens at New York's Majestic Theater; after nine months, it goes on tour for 18 months.

1942

Porgy and Bess opens in Nazi-occupied Copenhagen with an all-white cast in blackface; a Nazi publication accuses the company of pandering to a "Communist-Jewish mob," and an SS officer lodges a protest with Denmark's prime minister. Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*, directed by Rouben Mamoulian, opens on Broadway. Oscar Hammerstein II's *Carmen Jones* also opens on Broadway; using Bizet's *Carmen* as a starting point, the story is updated and reimagined for an all-black cast.

1943

Robert Breen organizes the first European tour of *Porgy and Bess* with an all-black cast, with William Warfield and Leontyne Price in the title roles. The production, sponsored by the U.S. State Department, is rapturously received at The Dallas Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago and D.C.'s National Theatre before traveling overseas, with performances in 70 cities across five continents.

1952

Maya Angelou joins Breen's production of *Porgy and Bess*, appearing as a featured dancer in Paris, Venice, Zagreb and Belgrade. In *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the U.S. Supreme Court declares state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students unconstitutional, overturning *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

1954

Marian Anderson is the first black singer to perform at the Metropolitan Opera. Breen's troupe for *Porgy and Bess* is the first American theater group to perform in Russia since the 1917 Bolshevik revolution; Truman Capote accompanies the cast to document the occasion.

1955

A more complete version of the opera, co-produced by Sherwin Goldman and Houston Grand Opera, is launched; it tours the United States, Canada and Europe and wins the Tony Award for "most innovative" revival.

1976

The Metropolitan Opera presents its first production of *Porgy and Bess*.

1985

Tazewell Thompson directs a production of *Porgy and Bess* for New York City Opera, with John DeMain conducting. When the production returns in 2002, its "Live from Lincoln Center" broadcast is nominated for four Emmy Awards.

2000

Francesca Zambello's production of *Porgy and Bess* debuts at Washington National Opera; the production goes on to LA Opera (2007), Lyric Opera of Chicago (2008) and San Francisco Opera (2009).

2005

Make your own timeline!

Draw a vertical line on a piece of paper. Write your birth year at the top and the current year at the bottom. Then, write or draw five important world events that have happened during your lifetime. Answer these questions:

- How have world events during your lifetime affected the way you live?
- How have these events affected the lives of others?
- How do world events affect your life differently than your parents? Your grandparents?

The following discussion topics and activities are designed to build such skills as creative writing, observing, vocabulary development and critical thinking. They can be used independently of each other and are not intended for use in any sequence. You can choose the activities that are most appropriate for your curriculum.

- As the best friend of Porgy and/or Bess, students write a letter offering support, encouragement or guidance as they move to New York. For example, students might write sympathy and advice to Bess as she tries to build a new life, they may write compassion and concern to Porgy as he tries to find Bess in the new city.
- What do you think happens to Porgy at the end of the opera? Write an Act IV to this opera following Porgy, Bess, and Sportin' Life to New York City (or wherever you think they may end up).
- Listen to a selection from the opera *Porgy and Bess* and then one from Miles Davis' jazz album *Porgy and Bess*. Have students compare what they hear in both selections. Discuss as a class or have students fill in a chart.
 - *Porgy and Bess* (selections from Houston Grand Opera recording)
<https://open.spotify.com/album/4dF519F22jcfzttspUaPu>
 - Miles Davis *Porgy and Bess*
<https://open.spotify.com/album/5TZUz4IkduZY8i1cnbaAHz>
- Many contemporaries of *Porgy and Bess* viewed this opera as racist, feeling that it portrayed the black community of Catfish Row in a poor light, drawing on local stereotypes. Debate the validity of this argument as if you were Gershwin's contemporary and again considering the events around the world today.
- Consider the dialect in which *Porgy and Bess* was written. How does it help establish the characters and setting? How might the opera be compromised or improved if the dialect was removed. Do you think that the dialect helped or hindered audience's acceptance of this opera?
- Discuss the timelessness of the opera. Are the events and characters and settings relevant today? If you were to rewrite and modernize this opera, how much would need to change and how?
- The opera was a symbol of resistance to Nazi invaders while at the same time labeled as racist in America. Why do you think people in The United States viewed this opera as racist? Do you agree? What do you think it says about the opera that it can be simultaneously viewed as having such different tones?
- George Gershwin emigrated to The United States from Russia. Do you think his background influenced how he portrayed African-Americans in his opera? Include in-class discussions about the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Immigration Limitations Act of 1924. Why do you think the government reacted this way to immigration? How is this similar or dissimilar to current discussions regarding immigration?
- Discuss conditions facing African-Americans in the 1920s and 1930s (race riots, discrimination, etc.). How do these circumstances show themselves in the opera? How do you imagine American culture at the time influenced mainstream opinions of the opera?
- In the summer of 1934, George Gershwin worked on the opera in Charleston, South Carolina. He drew inspiration from the James Island Gullah community, which he felt had preserved African musical traditions. This research added to the authenticity of his work. Locate James Island, South Carolina on a map. Have the students research the Gullah culture and history. In what ways is the Gullah culture represented in *Porgy and Bess*?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- The Atlanta Opera Website:
<https://www.atlantaopera.org/opera101/>
<https://www.atlantaopera.org/porgy-and-bess>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION:

- *Porgy and Bess*: A Symposium; Singing Porgy and Bess: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHRxpr_tydA
- *Porgy and Bess*: A Symposium; Remarks from tenor George Shirley: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvNlrdOYRGM>
- Behind the Scenes Look: *Porgy and Bess* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2-HIYstyzE>
- <http://gershwin.com/publications/porgy-and-bess/>
- <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Porgy-and-Bess>
- The Complex History and Uneasy Present of *Porgy and Bess*
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/19/arts/music/porgy-bess-gershwin-metropolitan-opera.html>
- <https://www.npr.org/2000/10/08/1112186/porgy-and-bess>
- <https://arts.umich.edu/news-features/confronting-porgy-and-bess/>
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RECORDING SUGGESTIONS:

- <https://open.spotify.com/album/4dF519F22jcfzttspUaPu>
- *Porgy and Bess*: “Summertime” at The Metropolitan Opera -<https://youtu.be/NghjBMn6ZJM->

ARTIST WEBSITES:

- <http://morrisrobinson.com/>
- <https://columbia-artists.com/artists/musa-ngqungwana>
- <https://www.kristin-lewis.com/en/biography/>
- <https://www.reginaldsmithjr.com/>
- <https://www.l2artists.com/jacqueline-echols/>
- <http://indrathomas.com/>