

**OPERA**

**GLOSSARY**

## Glossary

A capella	Singing without accompaniment
Accompaniment	Music played along with a singer or solo instrument. Usually orchestra or piano
Accompanist	The person who plays the instrument that accompanies the singers
Act	One of the main divisions of a play or opera
Actor	A person who usually speaks his or her role in a production
Agent	The character in the story who causes action
Agency	The plot or situation created by the agent
Allegro	A musical term for fast and lively
Alto	The deeper of the two main divisions of women's or boy's voices
Amplify	To make something sound louder
Andante	A musical term meaning in moderately slow time (walking pace)
Antagonist	An adversary, or opponent in an opera, play, etc.
Aria	A solo song in an opera, often very lyrical while conveying the emotions of the character. The action usually stops while an aria is sung
Audience	People who have gather to hear or watch something such as an opera, play, sports event, etc.
Ballet	A form of dance that tells a story
Banda	A small group of instrumentalists who play either on the stage or backstage, not in the pit
Baritone	The middle male voice, between bass and tenor, usually the villain or comic relief in tragic opera
Bass	The lowest male voice, usually the old wise man in Tragic opera or the old fool in Comic opera
Bass Baritone	A rare male voice, with a range between baritone and bass
Basso Buffo	A comic bass, typically a baritone
Bar	A division of music marked by two bar lines, containing a set number of beats
Beat	The basic regular unit of time in a musical composition; also, the hand or baton movement used by the conductor to indicate this unit
Bravo	Literally, "brave, courageous." A form of applause when shouted by members of the audience at the end of an especially pleasing performance. Strictly speaking, bravo is for a single man, brava for a woman, and bravi for more than one performer

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Cadenza	An ornamental passage in which the flow of the piece has been stopped while the singer makes up or improvises flashy vocal aerobics
Choreographer	The person who designs the movement of a dance
Chorus	A group of mixed voices or the musical passage sung by a group
Claque	A group of people hired to sit in the audience and applaud to ensure success or jeer to ensure disaster
Coloratura	A technique of singing many notes on one syllable of text; the passages are usually rapid and demand a great deal of vocal agility and flexibility
Composer	A person who writes music
Concertmaster	The first chair violinist who plays occasional solos and is responsible for coordinating all the stringed instruments. The concertmaster decides on the bowing so that all of the bows moved in unison
Concerto	Italian for “striving together”; usually composed for one or more soloists and orchestra
Conductor	The leader of the band or orchestra who interprets the music and shapes the pace of the work
Contralto	The lowest female voice
Counterpoint	A style of music in which more than one melody can be heard at one time
Counter-tenor	An adult male who sings in the alto, mezzo or soprano range, often through the use of falsetto
Cue	The signal to a singer or orchestra member to start
Curtain Call	Bows at the end of a performance
Diaphragm	The muscle and connective tissue that separates the chest and abdominal cavity. A singer learns to make the diaphragm stretch to let the lungs fill completely with air. Then, tightens the diaphragm to push out the air at the desired volume and speed
Director	A person who manages or supervises an opera, film, play, etc.
Dissonance	A group of notes in traditional Western music which played together sound unsettled or even displeasing
Duet	A song performed by two people
Dynamics	The designation of how loudly or softly music is played or sung
Ensemble	Any extended musical passage performed by four or more singers
Finale	The ending, usually a grand scene involving some recapitulation of the music and action, involving as many members of the cast as possible

## Glossary

Flamenco	The form for poetry, song, dance and music for the gypsies of Spain
Folk music	Music associated with rural peasant cultures, accepted by the community and passed on orally
Form	A definite shape or arrangement of a piece of music
Forte	A musical term meaning loud
Fortissimo	A musical term meaning very loud (louder than forte)
Fugue	A musical form in which a melody, called the subject or theme, is played by one instrument, then taken up by others as the earlier instruments continue
Grand Opera	Opera in the grand manner, signified by grandeur and size in cast, orchestra and sets
Harmony	The relationship of tones that sound simultaneously, or any particular position of pitches sounded simultaneously
Heterophonic	A type of voiced music which is basically non-harmonic
Horizontal	A term used to describe a distinct melody with many accompanying harmonies
Improvise	The invention of music as it is played, usually within the framework of a specific musical form
Incidental music	Music which provides background for a story or play
Instrumentation	The particular combination of instruments used in a piece of music. Example: a string quartet's instrumentation is two violins, one viola, and one cello
Intermezzo	A middle section of a large orchestral work, usually less serious than the piece
Key	The base note of the main scale used in a piece of music. Music in the key of 'G', for example, has the sound of being based on the note G and often returns to G as a home note
Largo	A musical term meaning "slow and dignified"
Leitmotiv	A musical theme used throughout an opera to identify a character or plot situation. Also called a 'signature tune'. It is identified with Wagner's operas in which the device was developed
Libretto	Italian for 'little book,' it is the text or words for an opera
Lyric	A light to medium-weight voice, capable of both sustained, forceful singing and delicate effects
Measure	A group of beats marked off by a bar line; also called 'bar'
Melodic contour	the line of highs and lows that is created by the melody

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Melody	One line of music, the main theme
Mezzo-soprano	The middle female voice, similar to an oboe in range; the sound is darker and often warmer than the soprano; opera often uses the mezzo voice to portray a mother or caretaker, a villainess, or a seductive heroine. One conventional operatic device is using a mezzo to portray a young man (trouser role)
Mode	A scale or selection of notes used as the basis for compositions; implies the expressive character of a piece
Movement	A complete musical section of a larger work, such as a symphony, sonata, suite, or concerto, which can be played by itself
Musical Theater	Music in a theatrical or stage production with music being the primary medium
Opera	A play that is sung. In opera, singing is the way characters express themselves. 'Opera' is the Latin word for 'opus'. Opera involves many different arts; singing, acting, orchestral playing, scenic artistry, costume design, lighting, and dance. Opera is acted out on a stage with performers in costumes, wigs and make-up. Virtually all operatic characters sing their lines, although there are exceptions where a role in an opera will be spoken or performed in pantomime
Opera buffa	Comic opera, often with elements of farce
Operetta	An opera with lighter music usually having spoken dialogue
Opera seria	Opera with dramatic and intense plots
Opus	A musical composition numbered as one of a composer's works (usually in order of publication)
Orchestration	The art of combining various instruments of the orchestra to create a desired sound
Ostinato	From the Italian word for obstinate: A short motif in a melody or rhythm, which is repeated throughout a section or an entire composition
Overture	A composition for orchestra used to introduce a large work of music
Pants role (trouser role)	A male role in an opera or operetta played by a woman (usually a mezzo-soprano)
Piano	1. A large stringed musical instrument with a keyboard which is used as accompaniment with voices in an opera. 2. An Italian word meaning 'soft' or 'quite' which is used to describe a dynamic level in music
Pianissimo	An Italian word which means 'very soft' or 'very quiet' (softer than 'piano')
Presto	Musical term meaning very fast

## Glossary

Prima Donna	'Leading Lady' in opera, or the characteristic of considering oneself the chief soprano
Pentatonic	A compositional device which uses a scale of only five tones to the octave
Pizzicato	A direction in music for an instrument to be plucked with the fingers instead of bowed
Quartet	A musical piece for four voices
Rallentando	A musical direction meaning to slow down
Range	When referring to operatic voices, the highest to the lowest note that a singer can successfully sing
Recitative	A passage of dialogue which is recited more or less like prose speech
Rehearse	To practice
Rhythm	A pattern in time formed by long and short notes or rests, and influenced by accents, harmony, and melody
Rondo	A musical form in which one section keeps returning. For example: ABACADA
Round	A simple musical form, also known as 'canon' or 'catch' in which several voices sing a melody each beginning in succession after a certain interval of time
Scale	A series of notes arranged in descending or ascending order of pitch
Semitone	A half step or half tone, an interval midway between two whole tones
Sharp (#)	Any note a semitone higher than another note.
Score	The pages upon which all the music and words of an opera are written
Soprano	The highest of the female voices
Sonata	A musical composition for one instrument or two, usually with two or three movements
Spinto	A medium to heavy-weight voice, capable of sustained singing over a large orchestra, but also able to sing lyrically when required
Stage manager	The person responsible for controlling the performance
Staging	The presentation of a production on the stage
Symphony	A long elaborate musical composition (usually in several parts) for a full orchestra
Syncopation	A momentary contradiction of regular meter; often described as 'putting the accent on a beat that isn't there'

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Tempo	The speed at which a musical performance is played
Tenor	The highest male singing voice (with the exception of counter-tenor)
Tessitura	The average pitch of a piece. Tessitura encompasses all notes from the lowest to the highest
Timbre	French term meaning 'quality of the sound' (Pronounced tam-ber)
Tone	The sound quality of an instrument or voice. Also an interval equal to two semitones
Tone color	The tonal quality of the sound; they way individual parts are put together
Trio	An extended musical passage performed by three singers
Vibrato	Waver in pitch and volume, the quality that produces warmth of feeling in the human voice
Volume	In regard to opera singing, refers to 'loudness'