

Opera Basics

What is an opera?

An opera is a play with music. Opera combines music, drama, costumes, scenery and sometimes dance. The characters sing their lines instead of speaking them, while an orchestra plays along. In some operas, the characters talk between the songs. Opera is unique because the singers not only perform the music, but must act out the story at the same time.

What does the word "opera" mean?

The word "opera" is Italian for "work" and comes from the phrase "opera in musica," meaning "works (or plays) in music."

Who writes the music and the words?

The composer writes the music. The words to an opera are called the *libretto*, which means "little book." Sometimes the composer will also write the *libretto*, but it is usually written by a *librettist*. The job of the librettist is to turn a story into words that can be sung and spoken.

Where do opera stories come from?

Librettists get their stories from different places such as fairy tales, novels, Bible stories, myths and people in history.

What language is used in opera?

An opera can be sung in the language in which it was written, or translated into the language of the audience. Many opera houses use *surtitles* (also called *supertitles*), which is a translation that is shown on a screen above the stage during performance.

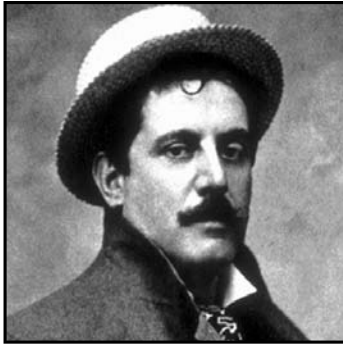
What is voice projection?

Voice projection is the ability to make even the quietest singing heard in the back of the auditorium. Since opera singers do not use microphones, this is a very important skill that requires years of training.

About the Opera

Gianni Schicchi is the only comic opera ever written by Puccini. It is the last and most successful opera of Puccini's trilogy of short, one-act operas. The other two operas in the trilogy are *Il Tabarro* (The Cloak) and *Suor Angelica* (Sister Angelica).

About the Composer



Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924) was the last of the great Italian opera composers. He created some of the most popular operas ever written: *La Boheme*, *Madame Butterfly*, *Tosca* and *Turandot*. Puccini's works are remembered and loved for their unforgettable, emotional melodies.

Puccini was born into a family of musicians, going back four generations. His first musical training was on the organ, and when he was 19 he became a church organist. After hearing a performance of Verdi's *Aida*, he decided to devote himself entirely to opera. Puccini's family did not have much money (his father died when he was very young), but because of his hard-working mother and some help from his uncle, Puccini was able to attend the Milan Conservatory, where he studied composition.

Puccini did not live to complete his final opera, *Turandot*. The last two scenes were eventually written by another composer. At its first performance in 1926, the conductor stopped before the last two scenes, laid down his baton and said to the audience, "Here death stopped Puccini's hand." The performance was over and the audience left in silence.

About the Music: O mio babbino caro (arrangement on pages 30–31)

O mio babbino caro is one of Puccini's most beautiful and well-known melodies. Lauretta sings this aria to her father. She is asking for his consent to marry Rinuccio:

*Oh, my dearest daddy,
My handsome boyfriend makes me happy.
I want to go to Porta Rossa¹ to buy a ring.
Yes, I want to go.
And if it's useless to love him,
I'll go to the Ponte Vecchio²
And throw myself into the Arno River.
I'm tortured and tormented.
Dear God, I could die!
Daddy, have pity on me.*



Ponte Vecchio, Florence

¹ Porta Rossa—a marketplace in Florence, Italy

² Ponte Vecchio—a bridge in Florence, Italy

The Magic Flute Scramble

Unscramble the letters to spell words that complete each sentence.

Then unscramble the circled letters to discover the mystery word.

Hint: The Magic Flute was composed by _____.

1. Mozart was born in ____ ____, Austria. **(BZAGSLRU)**
2. ____ goes to rescue Pamina. **(OMTANI)**
3. The Queen gives Tamino a ____ flute for his journey. **(CGMIA)**
4. *The Magic Flute* is a ____ ____ *singspiel*. **(EMNRAG)**
5. The birdcatcher's name is ____ _____. **(APOPANEG)**
6. Tamino must pass the tests of silence, fire and ____ _____. **(RATWE)**

Mystery Word:



Queen of the Night

Overture

(from *William Tell*)

Gioachino Rossini
Arr. Carol Matz

Lively

1 3 3 4 2

mp

1 2

1 3 5

5

3 1 3 2

f

1 2 1 3 5 1 3 5

9

1 3 2

1 3 5

13

1