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- Abandon** 1. A term to describe singing or playing of a wild, uncontrolled nature, as often found in opera, modern music and bad student recitals.
2. The best thing to do to musicians performing in this manner.
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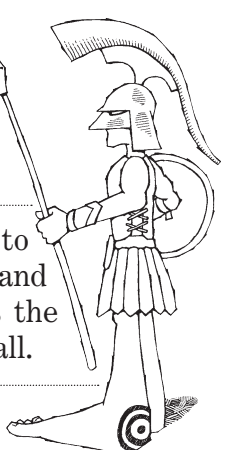
- Abduction** 1. A common operatic plot device (Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*, Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* and others) in which a singer is forcibly removed from the scene.
2. An event some opera- or concertgoers think should happen more often — especially if kidnapping is the only way to get some really lousy performer off the stage.
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- Accent** 1. A musical or rhythmic stress, as on the first beat of a bar.
2. What many musicians speak with.
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Accidentals Wrong notes. Notes of pitches other than those indicated by the key signature. In other words, the polite term for mistakes, made by either the performer or composer. Confusingly, some accidentals are done on purpose.

Achilles An ancient Greek hero, betrothed to Iphigenia (in Gluck's *Iphigenia in Aulis* and others). Unfaithful at first, he later rescues the heroine — proving he's not such a heel after all.

Acoustics The science of sound, and the study



of how music misbehaves in various physical environments. Most useful as a scapegoat to explain why the performer(s) sound bad — “How can anyone perform in a space like this?” and so on.

Action In a piano, the term used to describe the behavior of the mechanism that produces the sound. The action may be considered “light,” “heavy,” “stiff” and so on. Also, the term a pianist might use to describe activities that are more recreational in nature. This sort of action might be considered “slow,” “hot,” “lucky” and so on.

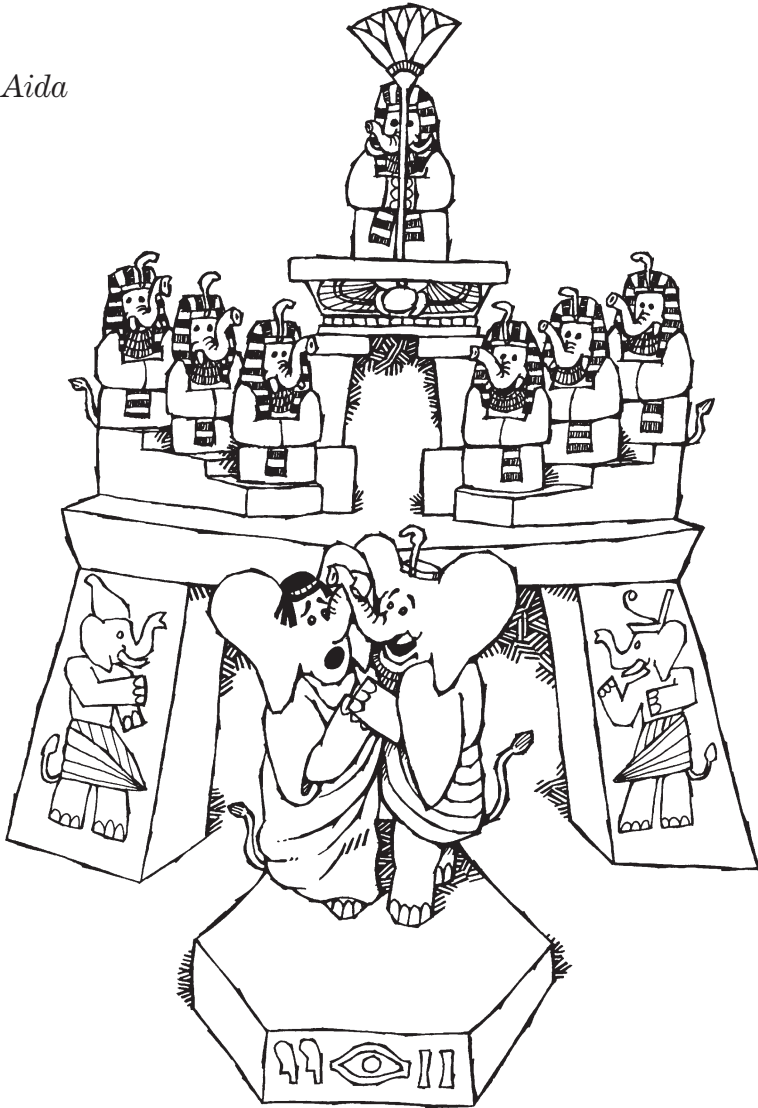
Addio Italian for “goodbye.” A term often found in operatic arias (*Addio alla madre*, from Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana*; *Addio, fiorito asil*, Pinkerton’s farewell from Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*; *O terra, addio*, from Verdi’s *Aida* and so on). Sung at great length by performers before they actually leave. Sometimes this takes forever.

Ad libitum From the Latin “at liberty,” a style of music improvised or delivered freely, at the discretion of the performer. Often displayed by soloists in cadenzas and the repeat sections of *da capo* arias. Not to be confused with “add Librium,” a medicinal prescription often advisable (for conductors and other listeners) at such times.

Affections 1. The feelings or emotions of music. In the late Baroque, these were codified into a doctrine of compositional technique.
2. Emotions often on display in musical performances, between soloists and instrumentalists, among chorus members and so on. Often likely to prove awkward and inconvenient when they sour.

Aida A big, splashy opera by Giuseppe Verdi — you know, the one with the elephants. Commissioned in 1870 by the Khedive of Egypt to open the Suez Canal,

Aida



Aida was not actually performed until a year after the party was over, thereby helping to maintain the long tradition of musicians never being ready on time.

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- Air 1.** A simple tune, often for a singer.
2. What the singer must have before performing such a tune.
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3. In the plural (airs), what the singer puts on after performing such a tune particularly well.

Alberich A misshapen, ugly Nibelung dwarf, one of the central characters in Wagner's *Ring* cycle. (In three of the four operas, anyway. He gets to sit out *Die Walküre*.) He later turns into a toad, which generally improves his looks.

Aleatoric music Any form of music composition (but especially in modern music) that relies on elements of chance for its production — such as provided by the tossing of coins, throwing of dice or disbursement of artistic grants.

Altered chord Any chord (also called a chromatic chord) that contains notes other than those found in the diatonic scale of the appropriate key. In other words, a chord with wrong notes in it. Occurs frequently in jazz music, modern music and any music involving amateurs and/or small children.

Alto A medium vocal range, lying between tenor and soprano. (A dangerous place to be.) Usually sung by women (see Contralto) but sometimes by men (see Counter-tenor).

Amen The final word of hymns, psalms and many other religious pieces of music (originally from the Hebrew term meaning “so be it” or “you don’t say?”). A traditional expression of praise and thanksgiving, the musical and liturgical equivalent of saying “Enough already. Let’s just go home.” Much more often to be heard from audience members grateful at finally being allowed to leave.

Anacrusis An unstressed note at the beginning of a musical phrase. Also called a pickup note. Not to be confused with anacrisis, a term that might apply when
