



Teacher's Guide

Flamboyant, dramatic, silly or scheming, the characters from famous operas live exciting lives. Students will meet an assortment of unusual people in *Mozart & Co.*, presented by Central City Opera.

Mozart & Co. provides a lively sampling of the magic of great opera scenes in an interactive school setting. Our goal is to motivate students to explore the ways in which art and music enrich their lives and learning experiences.

Program Objectives

- 1. To introduce the great composers of opera, their music, and the fascinating characters who bring the music to life.**

Mozart & Co. features four scenes from two Mozart operas, as well as music of Puccini, Humperdinck, Nicolai and American composer Henry Mollicone. Colorado composer Samuel Lancaster created an opening number that introduces the company and the concept of opera. From Papageno the bird-catcher to Clara Brown, a freed slave, *Mozart & Co.* shows the variety of people who express their thoughts and feelings through song in operas.

- 2. To show that opera takes its audiences to faraway places and long-ago times, telling a variety of stories along the way.**

Mozart & Co. takes students from the English village of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to the streets of Paris in *La Bohème*, to the imaginary world of *The Magic Flute* and to the Gold and Silver Rush days of Colorado in *Gabriel's Daughter*. Librettists, who write the words to operas, have the world to choose from and can make up original stories or base their works on existing plays, novels, folk tales, poems and even paintings.

- 3. To demonstrate the theatrical aspects of opera through staged scenes and arias, using student volunteers as part of the action.**

Opera singers have to do much more than sing. Stage movement, dancing and acting are all part of opera as well. Students will have an opportunity to volunteer to join in the fun on stage. They will learn how music, words and action all come together to tell stories in a way that is only possible in opera.

- 4. To provide suggested activities for follow-up learning in the classroom.**

The Teacher’s Guide suggests ways to incorporate opera into future lessons.

Included in this Guide:

Program Objectives and Overview	page 1
Class Preparation.....	page 3
<i>Mozart & Co.</i> Background Information.....	page 4
Operatic Misconceptions	page 7
Suggested Student Activities.....	page 8

Additional Resource Guides available:

www.centralcityopera.org/resource-center

Contact us at:

education@centralcityopera.org

303-292-6500

Class Preparation

Mozart & Co. is a very interactive program and was created to include elements of surprise for the audience. The cast asks questions of the audience and sets up each scene through narration. Therefore, we recommend that teachers do not describe the full details of the *Mozart & Co.* program to students prior to their attendance. Rather than prepare students for exactly what will happen during the program, we make the following suggestions:

Tell students they will be seeing a special, live performance where singers and a pianist will involve them in opera, a type of performance they may not have seen before.

Appropriate audience behavior:

- listen quietly
- applaud when scenes are over
- be ready to respond to questions
- volunteer to be part of the action

Things to watch for:

- Clever women who trick a silly old man
- A pair of lovebirds
- A ridiculous disguise
- A woman who wants everyone to notice her

Things to listen for:

- The difference between men's and women's voices
- Rhythm patterns in different songs
- How words and music go together to express emotion and tell a story

Think about:

- What is opera? Cast members will ask this question of the audience. (The simple answer: "telling stories through song." We also give the explanation that Opera is a great artform because it combines ALL the arts – words, music, dance and visual arts).
- What do you think people like about opera?
- What makes opera different from other kinds of entertainment? Plays? Movies? Television? Pop music?

Mozart & Co. Background Information

The cast for the program discusses the composers and sets up each number before it is performed. This background information is included if you wish to discuss composers and the music ahead of time.

The Music:

The introduction was composed for Central City Opera by local Denver composer Samuel Lancaster, who also wrote music for the Colorado Children's Chorale and other area groups. The piece includes introductory material about what opera is, who the singers are, who Mozart is, and includes participation by a student volunteer.

Susanna/Marcellina Duet from *The Marriage of Figaro* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Marcellina is an older woman who wants to marry Figaro (a young man). Susanna is a young woman who is engaged to marry Figaro. When Marcellina and Susanna meet in a doorway, an argument follows about who should enter the room first.

Papageno's Aria from *The Magic Flute* by Mozart. Papageno introduces himself as a simple birdcatcher. He is very birdlike himself.

Papageno/Papagena Duet, from *The Magic Flute* by Mozart. Papageno finds his own special birdwoman named Papagena, and their duet, with its repeated "Pa, pa, pa," sounds like bird calls as they sing about their happy future and all of the little Papagenas and Papagenos they will have. Volunteers selected before the show participate on stage.

Musetta's Waltz from *La Bohème* by Giacomo Puccini. This aria introduces the character of Musetta, a flirtatious, light-hearted woman who has a jealous boyfriend, Marcello. Marcello is a painter, one of the Bohemian artists in Paris. *La Bohème* is the story of these artists and the women they love.

Brother Come and Dance with Me from *Hansel and Gretel* by Engelbert Humperdinck. Hansel and Gretel are hungry and bored. Gretel decides to try to teach Hansel to dance. They dance and quarrel and make up.

Come Here and Kneel from *The Marriage of Figaro* by Mozart. This aria is sung by Susanna, a servant in the household of a rich count. Susanna is going to marry Figaro, but at the moment she is trying to help the young man Cherubino hide by dressing him up in a disguise. *The Marriage of Figaro* is filled with characters who pretend to be someone else, but all the complications are set right by the end. A volunteer selected before the show gets disguised by Susanna.

The Laundry Scene from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* by Otto Nicolai. This comic scene shows how two of the "Merry Wives" trick Sir John Falstaff into hiding in a bag full of laundry that ends

up in the pond. Based on Shakespeare's play, the opera is full of trickery and practical jokes. Volunteers help set the scene.

Glory Day from *Gabriel's Daughter* by Henry Mollicone. Commissioned and premiered by Central City Opera in 2003, this American opera tells the story of Clara Brown, the first African-American female pioneer in Colorado and a prominent citizen of Central City and Denver. *Glory Day* expresses Clara's joy at being freed from slavery and the hope she holds for her future.

The Composers:

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, born in Austria in 1756, charmed the rulers of Europe with his music while he was still a child. He toured Europe with his father when he was six years old. A prodigy on the violin and piano, he became one of the greatest composers of all time. He wrote all kinds of music for orchestras, solo instruments, and for singers. His first opera was written when he was 12 years old. He went on to write operas in both Italian and German, including serious operas, comic operas and "singspiel" operas which include spoken dialogue. *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Così fan tutte* and *Don Giovanni* might be called "gray comedies," according to writer John Louis DiGaetani, because they are "happy yet also sad, and full of questions."

The Magic Flute treats serious questions about life in a light-hearted style. Some of Mozart's operas were not popular when they were first performed in Vienna, but now they are among the most performed operas in the world. *The Marriage of Figaro* was one of the first operas written about real people living at the time the opera was written. Before that operas were usually about mythical or famous historical figures. *The Marriage of Figaro* depicted the lives of both servants and royalty in a sympathetic and comic way, showing that people are alike, no matter what their class or income.

Giacomo Puccini lived in Italy from 1858 to 1924, and wrote operas when the art form was changing to become more realistic. His operas show the lives of real people and the problems they face. *La Bohème* was based on a novel about the lives of poor artists in Paris. Puccini's other famous operas include *Tosca* and *Madame Butterfly*. Though Puccini's characters and plots are realistic, they are also romantic and touching.

Engelbert Humperdinck, a German composer, lived from 1854 to 1921. He studied under and assisted Richard Wagner. *Hansel and Gretel* is based on the well-known Grimm fairy tale. In 1890, Humperdinck's sister Adelheid asked him to compose music for a puppet play she'd written for her children to perform. After the first version, Humperdinck continued improving the music, first as a singspiel (German "song play" which includes spoken dialogue and song), and later a full-scale opera.

Otto Nicolai, a German composer, lived from 1810 to 1849 and wrote five operas. The other operas have been forgotten, but *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, based on the Shakespeare play, is still performed. Produced in 1849, the opera was Nicolai's final work; two months after its

premiere he collapsed and died of a stroke. Nicolai is also credited with founding the Vienna Philharmonic.

American composer **Henry Mollicone** is perhaps best known, both nationally and internationally, for his composition of the one-act cabaret opera, *The Face On The Barroom Floor*, his first commissioned work for Central City Opera. Since its premiere in 1978 it has become one of America's most often performed contemporary operas. Mollicone's second Central City Opera commission, *Gabriel's Daughter* is based on the true story of Clara Brown, the first African-American female pioneer in Colorado. She came to Central City from Kentucky in 1859 when she was about 60 years old, after being freed from slavery. She became a very successful business woman and helped other freed slaves come west. Mollicone lives in California and is a conductor and composer of opera, film and orchestral music.

FAT LADIES, HIGH NOTES, STEROTYPES, MYTHS AND OTHER OPERATIC MISCONCEPTIONS

Questions for class discussion/activities

Is it a stereotype that opera singers are huge women wearing horned helmets?

Webster's New Riverside Dictionary defines a stereotype as "a conventional, formulaic, usually highly simplified opinion, conception or belief." Stereotypes, like prototypes, may be useful for introducing the idea of something, but they are usually too general. Opera singers are people – women and men – of all shapes, sizes and ethnicities with a wide variety of interests and experiences.

Why are opera singers' voices so loud?

Picture your favorite pop singer. As you imagine him or her singing, what is he or she holding in their hand or wearing? That's right, a microphone. Now picture an opera singer. See any microphones around? Opera singers spend years learning singing techniques that help them project their voices and create different sound qualities without the use of a microphone. Picture your pop singer again. How big is the band? Ten, maybe 12 instruments? In an opera, the "band" is an orchestra often as large as 80 or 90 instruments.

Why do opera singers sing so high?

Try this experiment: Imitate a siren with your voice, saying "fee" starting at the highest point you can reach with your voice. Do it a couple of times to get the hang of it. Now say "fah" at the lower point of your siren. Do the two things together a few times (fah-fee-fah-fee, etc.). The high siren should sound much louder than the low siren. High sounds carry much farther without amplification than lower sounds, and so composers of operas often write music so that it will carry over the orchestra.

Opera music is also written to express the intensity (high or low) of action and emotion. Try this: Pretend your dog is lost and you're calling for him? What is the natural direction or pitch of your voice?

Why do people sing in the first place?

Think about one of the happiest times in your life. Remember what it was like trying to tell someone exactly how you felt? Your feelings were so strong that just talking about them didn't really capture how you felt. *That* is why people sing. Music expresses a depth of emotion that words alone just can't convey.

***Opera stories are not usually about everyday events like buying a new toothbrush.
Operas tell stories where the feelings are so big, the characters need to sing!***

Suggested Student Activities

Most of the following activities are appropriate either for the regular classroom or the music class.

Primary Grades

Acting Out: Have the students choose a familiar song that tells a story; assign characters, chorus and "scenery." Act out the story as the song is sung.

Costumes: After discussing the story of an opera or talking about **Mozart & Co.**, ask the students to pick a character from the opera and draw him or her in a costume of the student's own design. Expanded: create paper dolls with costumes for different parts of the story.

Secondary Grades

Arias: Ask students to identify songs they know that show what a character is thinking or feeling - as in an opera aria. (Disney musicals are a good source). Discuss how the song reveals and enhances the character's feelings. (Example: "When will my life begin?" from *Tangled*) You can also play selected songs in class and have students analyze what thoughts or feelings the character is conveying through the song.

Jobs: Many opera characters have interesting jobs. Figaro (*Barber of Seville*) is a barber, Rigoletto is a court jester, Faust is a magician, Papageno (*The Magic Flute*) is a bird-catcher, Escamillo (*Carmen*) is a bullfighter, Tosca is an opera singer, Mimi (*La Bohème*) is a seamstress. Ask students to suggest some modern-day people with interesting jobs who might make good opera characters.

Scene-writing: Ask students to come up with a real-life experience, a news story, or a favorite piece of literature they think might make a good scene in an opera. Have them describe elements of action, strong emotions, interesting characters and setting. This can take the form of either a summary or an actual written scene using conventional play-writing techniques.

Write an opera: This can be an ambitious or fairly cursory project - take it as far as you like. Many schools have had great success with a school-wide or one grade's full production with students writing the script and music, designing sets, costumes and lighting, performing and working on make-up, costume and stage crews. If you are interested in a full-scale project, there are several sources available to aid you, including a summer workshop for educators with graduate credits available. Call or email Education and Community Engagement at Central City Opera, education@centralcityopera.org or 303-331-7026, for more information