



Opera Up Close YouTube Playlist

bit.ly/operaupcloseCCO

All answers to the “what language are they singing?” questions are at the bottom of this list.

1. “What Happens Just Before Show Time At The Met Opera”

<https://youtu.be/GdUScE7VZq8>

The American Ballet Theater shows us what happens before their performance of WHIPPED CREAM at the Met. Notice how many people it takes to put on a show! Make sure to read all the fun pop-up text as the camera zooms through the opera house. Pay close attention to the wigs and makeup, scene shop, and wardrobe (costume) departments. Did you know that wigs and facial hair are made out of real human hair? WOW! And look at how big that stage is. It’s so big that a set as big as a building can fit on it. What’s your favorite thing or person that you spot backstage?

2. COLORATURA SOPRANO - The Queen of the Night from THE MAGIC FLUTE – *Diana Damrau*

<https://youtu.be/YuBeBiqKSGQ>

You will hear a wonderful example of “coloratura soprano” singing in this video. A coloratura soprano sings high, light, and fast notes and has the highest voice of all sopranos and treble voices. This is German soprano Diana Damrau as The Queen of the Night in Mozart’s THE MAGIC FLUTE. Notice how her upper body fully engages (moves) when she sings the high and fast notes. Can you sing this high? What language is Diana Damrau singing?

3. LYRIC SOPRANO - Mimi from LA BOHÈME – *Angel Blue*

https://youtu.be/XacspEL_3Zk

Another kind of soprano is a “lyric soprano.” A lyric soprano sings high notes, too, but these voices are not comfortable singing as high for as long of a time period as coloratura sopranos, and the color of the voice is different. A lyric soprano has a warm, full sound and sings long, “legato” (smooth) musical phrases with longer notes. This is American soprano Angel Blue as the character Mimi from Puccini’s LA BOHÈME. What language is Angel Blue singing? Is she happy or sad? Maybe a bit of both.

4. LYRIC SOPRANO - Mimi from LA BOHÈME – *Mirella Freni*

https://youtu.be/yTagFD_pkNo

For students in grades 5 and older, we’ve included this video of the great Italian lyric soprano, Mirella Freni, singing the same “aria” (song) as Angel Blue in the previous video. Why? Because this is a movie version of the opera, not a performance on a stage. How is the acting style different? Mirella Freni is singing to a pre-recorded track, so what we hear is not actually what she is doing when she’s acting in the movie. How does her singing seem different from Angel Blue, who is singing full-out onstage? This movie was directed by

Franco Zeffirelli in 1965. He went on to design and direct a production of LA BOHÈME for the Metropolitan Opera in 1981 – and that production is the one that Angel Blue is performing in the previous video, although not in 1981. Famous productions like this one can be “remounted” (put on again) over and over with different singers and production personnel. Do you see any similarities in the set design or costumes?

5. **MEZZO-SOPRANO - Ježibaba from RUSALKA - *Jamie Barton***

<https://youtu.be/SvMl6-cLiwg>

Another female voice type is “mezzo-soprano.” Literally meaning “half” or “moderately” soprano, a mezzo-soprano has a lower voice than a soprano. Just like sopranos, there are many different types of mezzo-sopranos with a variety of vocal qualities and colors. This video is from Dvořák’s RUSALKA, an opera based upon the same story that the movie THE LITTLE MERMAID. Ježibaba is the witch. Listen to the “timbre” (color) of Jamie Barton’s voice, and notice the other actors on stage with her. What are they doing? What language is she singing?

6. **MEZZO-SOPRANO and LYRIC SOPRANO - Duet from Act I - HANSEL AND GRETEL - *Tara Erraught and Lisette Oropesa***

https://youtu.be/fX-qQh_PQ0

This is an example of a “duet” when two people are singing at the same time. One of these singers – the person with the dress on – is a lyric soprano. That is Gretel. Gretel’s brother Hansel is actually played by a female singer with a low voice, a mezzo-soprano. Sometimes mezzo-sopranos play boy characters because the “timbre” (color) of their voice most closely matches the color of a boy’s voice. If a man played the role of Hansel, he would sound more like Hansel’s dad. When mezzo-sopranos play male characters, it is called a “pants role.” Can you hear the difference between the two voices? In this duet, Gretel is teaching Hansel a fun dance. Try to follow along with Gretel’s instructions.

7. **MEZZO SOPRANO - Orfeo from ORFEO ED EURIDICE - *Stephanie Blythe***

<https://youtu.be/3mR9S0cbw5Q>

This is another example of a “pants role” in which a mezzo-soprano plays the part of a grown-up man, not a boy. This happened a lot in operas written hundreds of years ago, like during the Baroque Period (1580-1750), but composers such as Mozart and Gluck also wrote pants roles during the Classical Period (1750-1820). ORFEO ED EURIDICE, an opera by the composer Gluck, is based on the Greek myth of Orpheus, a musician whose wife Euridice is trapped in the underworld. Orpheus goes on an adventure to rescue her. You’ll see a lot of interesting ballet dancing in the beginning of this video. Opera often uses dance to help tell the story. These dancers represent the wind. Listen to this mezzo-soprano, Stephanie Blythe, sing the low notes. Notice what her makeup looks like and how she moves her body. How do these elements help to portray the character of Orpheus?

8. **COUNTERTENOR - “Che farò senza Euridice” from ORFEO ED EURIDICE - *Phillipe Jaroussky***

<https://youtu.be/Z8dlevs0VIU>

The countertenor voice is the highest male voice, and it is very rare. This is French countertenor Phillipe Jaroussky singing an “aria” (song) from the same opera as the one in the previous video, ORFEO ED EURIDICE. However, this is a video of a recording session. Listen to the “timbre” (color) of Phillipe’s voice. Countertenor voices can often be described as high and very bright. This sound is produced in the falsetto register of the male voice. You may not realize it, but you’ve probably heard a countertenor in pop music before. Have you heard of Justin Timberlake or Frankie Valli? They both sing in the countertenor range.

Something else to notice - this is a recording session and not a performance, so what's different from the other opera videos you have seen? For example, look at what the musicians are wearing, and observe how Phillippe almost conducts himself while he is singing. What else is different?

9. TENOR - "Ah mes amis" from THE DAUGHTER OF THE REGIMENT - *Lawrence Brownlee*
<https://youtu.be/clQjnJqNuU8>

The "tenor" voice is one of the highest male voices. This video is a concert presentation of an "aria" (solo song) from Donizetti's opera THE DAUGHTER OF THE REGIMENT (LA FILLE DU REGIMENT). What are some differences between a concert presentation and a fully staged opera, like in the previous videos in this playlist? American tenor Lawrence Brownlee is one of the best in the biz! His voice could be considered the tenor equivalent of the coloratura soprano voice, singing high and fast. He is singing the role of Tonio, a man who is in love with Marie, the "daughter of the regiment." Tonio tries to convince Marie's adoptive dads (yes, the whole regiment adopted her) that he is good enough to join the regiment. You can listen to the whole video or jump to 2:39 and listen to the end. What language is Lawrence Brownlee singing? Count the number of high C's (a REALLY high note!) that he sings during the last couple minutes of the aria.

10. TENOR - "Nessun dorma" from TURANDOT - *Luciano Pavarotti*
<https://youtu.be/N6wFxG2q8-w>

One of the most famous "tenors" of all time is Italian tenor Luciano Pavarotti. He lived from 1935 to 2007. This is from a concert in 1987 in Madison Square Garden in New York City. That's where the New York Knicks (basketball) and New York Rangers (hockey) play and where rock and pop concerts happen on a regular basis. Pavarotti is performing one of the most recognizable opera arias of all time, "Nessun dorma" from Puccini's TURANDOT. In this "aria" (song), the character Calaf is sure that he will win the heart of the beautiful princess Turandot. Fun fact - the conductor in this video, Emerson Buckley, conducted operas at Central City Opera in the 1950s and 60s, including the very first performance of THE BALLAD OF BABY DOE in 1956. He was Pavarotti's favorite conductor. Have you ever seen an audience so excited about opera singing as the audience in this video?

11. BARITONE - Count Almaviva from THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO - *Rod Gilfrey*
<https://youtu.be/fNXUWX3UUj4>

The "baritone" voice is the middle voice of the male voice types. Baritones are like the mezzo-sopranos of male voices - they are warm, full, and sit in the middle of the male vocal range. American baritone Rod Gilfrey is singing an "accompanied recitative" and "aria" from Mozart's THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO. "Recitative" is sung speech - in some operas, a lot of the information that the audience needs to know is delivered through recitative. "Accompanied recitative" is when the orchestra plays along with the singer - but not like in a solo song. In accompanied recitative, the orchestra acts like another character, reacting to what the singer is saying, or sometimes causing the singer to change their mind. In this scene, Count Almaviva is trying to figure out why someone is playing a trick on him. What emotions do you think he is feeling? What language is Rod Gilfrey singing? Listen carefully - can you tell when the aria begins? Hint - the orchestra and the singer really go together at that point. Try clapping along with the beat!

12. BARITONE - Papageno in THE MAGIC FLUTE - *Roderick Williams*
<https://youtu.be/U6S9cQNbENI>

A very famous "baritone" opera character is Papageno from Mozart's THE MAGIC FLUTE. Remember The Queen of the Night from the second video in our playlist? This aria is from the same opera as that one!

Papageno is a bird catcher in this fantastical opera story, and in this aria (song), he tells us about himself while he tries to catch a bird. In this video, British baritone Roderick Williams plays the part of Papageno. What language is he singing? Watch him closely – do you think he’s really playing that wooden flute-like instrument, or is he pretending? Also, watch the puppeteer. Lots of different art forms are represented in opera: music, drama, visual art, dance, and in this opera, puppetry!

13. BASS – Sarastro in THE MAGIC FLUTE – *René Pape*

<https://youtu.be/oePONOPAlys>

The lowest male voice type is the “bass.” Basses sing very low notes, which means that their voice box – the “larynx” – is the largest of all the voice types. Think of the string family (violin, viola, cello, double bass). If an instrument is larger than its relatives, is it higher or lower? The answer is LOWER. So, a large larynx equals a lower voice. German bass René Pape sings the role of Sarastro in Mozart’s THE MAGIC FLUTE, along with a chorus. Listen to the low notes he sings, but also listen for his breaths. He doesn’t take very many! How long can YOU sing a musical phrase before you take a breath? While René sings, trace his musical phrase with your finger in the air. This will help you see how long his phrases are before he breathes. Amazing!

14. BASS – Kōbun Chino Otagawa in THE (R)EVOLUTION OF STEVE JOBS – *Adam Lau*

<https://youtu.be/K3q4I6PgxRo>

Finally, some modern American opera! THE (R)EVOLUTION OF STEVE JOBS was composed by Mason Bates with a “libretto” (words) by Mark Campbell. Its world premiere was in 2017 at Santa Fe Opera. In this “aria” (song), American bass Adam Lau plays the character of Kōbun Chino Otagawa, Steve Jobs’ mentor. He is encouraging Steve to simplify his life. (Steve Jobs was the founder of Apple and creator of Macintosh.) Can you name some ways that this style of music is different from the music in the previous bass video example, Sarastro from THE MAGIC FLUTE? Both videos feature a chorus – in which video is the chorus more noticeable, and why?

15. BONUS – Mezzo-Soprano Megan Marino on Why She Loves Opera

<https://youtu.be/bFes0--TWPY>

Italian-American mezzo-soprano Megan Marino has performed with Central City Opera, and in this video, she shares why she loves opera. Look at how she is transformed into many different characters with wigs, makeup and costumes!

What do you think about this grand art form called opera, now that you’ve seen many examples of great opera singing from many different voices? Do you want to see more, or perhaps see a full-length opera? Central City Opera presents opera performances every summer in Central City, Colorado, high up in the mountains about 40 miles west of Denver. Check out www.centralcityopera.org for more information about our summer festival.

ANSWERS to “What language are they singing?”

Operas are written in almost every language, but because opera got its start in Europe, the European languages of Italian, German, and French are the most common in operatic repertoire.

Video #2: Diana Damrau as The Queen of the Night is singing in **German**, which is her native language.

Video #3: Angel Blue as Mimi is singing in **Italian**.

Video #4: Mirella Freni as Mimi is singing in **Italian**, her native language.

Video #5: Jamie Barton as Ježibaba is singing in **Czech**.

Video #6: Tara Erraught and Lisette Oropesa as Hansel and Gretel are singing in **English**. This is an English translation of the original German text.

Video #7: Stephanie Blythe as Orfeo is singing in **Italian**.

Video #8: Phillippe Jaroussky is singing one of Orfeo’s arias in **Italian**.

Video #9: Lawrence Brownlee is singing one of Tonio’s arias in **French**.

Video #10: Luciano Pavarotti is singing one of Calaf’s arias in **Italian**.

Video #11: Rod Gilfrey as the Count is singing in **Italian**.

Video #12: Roderick Williams as Papageno is singing in **German**.

Video #13: René Pape as Sarastro is singing in **English**. This is an English translation of the original German text.

Video #14: Adam Lau as Kōbun Chino Otagawa is singing in **English**.

Learn more about Central City Opera at www.centralcityopera.org