

Voice Types in Opera

In many of Central City Opera's educational programs, we spend some time explaining the different voice types – and therefore character types – in opera. Usually in opera, a voice type (soprano, mezzo soprano, tenor, baritone, or bass) has as much to do with the SOUND as with the CHARACTER that the singer portrays. Composers will assign different voice types to characters so that there is a wide variety of vocal colors onstage to give the audience more information about the characters in the story.

SOPRANO:

"Sopranos get to be the heroine or the princess or the opera star." – Eureka Street*

"Sopranos always get to play the smart, sophisticated, sweet and supreme characters!"

– The Great Opera Mix-up*

A soprano is a woman's voice type. There are many different kinds of sopranos within the general category: coloratura, lyric, and spinto are a few.

Coloratura soprano: Diana Damrau as The Queen of the Night in *The Magic Flute* (Mozart):

<https://youtu.be/dpVV9jShEzU>

Lyric soprano: Mirella Freni as Mimi in *La bohème* (Puccini): https://youtu.be/yTagFD_pkNo

Spinto soprano: Leontyne Price as Aida in *Aida* (Verdi): <https://youtu.be/laV6sqFUTQ4?t=1m10s>

MEZZO SOPRANO:

"There are also mezzos with a lower, more exciting woman's voice... We get to be magical or mythical characters and sometimes... we get to be boys." – Eureka Street

"Mezzos play magnificent, magical, mysterious, and miffed characters." – The Great Opera Mix-up

A mezzo soprano is a woman's voice type. Just like with sopranos, there are different kinds of mezzo sopranos: coloratura, lyric, and dramatic.

Coloratura mezzo soprano: Joyce DiDonato as Rosina in *The Barber of Seville* (Rossini):

<https://youtu.be/ysGFMx6NOEY>

Lyric mezzo soprano: Frederica Von Stade as Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro* (Mozart):

<https://youtu.be/51ff-NAT3yQ>

Dramatic mezzo soprano: Elina Garanca as Carmen in *Carmen* (Bizet):

<https://youtu.be/K2snTkaD64U>

Turn the page for more voice types!

TENOR:

"Where's the tenor who's in love with me?" – Soprano, Eureka Street

"We couldn't afford a tenor." – Baritone, Eureka Street

A tenor is a man's voice type. Central City Opera doesn't feature a tenor in our elementary school operas, but we do have a tenor in our opera for middle and high school grades, *En Mis Palabras*. Oftentimes, tenors play the love interest or, as a character tenor, the "funny" or "creepy" guy in opera. Just like with the other voices types, there are several different types of tenors.

Light-lyric tenor (similar to coloratura soprano, but a man's voice: Juan Diego Florez as Tonio in *The Daughter of the Regiment* (Donizetti): <https://youtu.be/si4LEZLu8FM> or Lawrence Brownlee singing the same aria on a concert: <https://youtu.be/cIQjnJqNuU8>

Lyric tenor: Luciano Pavarotti as Rodolfo in *La bohème* (Puccini): <https://youtu.be/eZ9-Ch0ip-M>

Spinto tenor: Placido Domingo as Ernani in *Ernani* (Verdi): <https://youtu.be/qKDzEEVkOy0>

Character tenor: Ragnar Ulfung as Monastatos in *The Magic Flute* (Mozart):

<https://youtu.be/FO1vledMOmc>

BARITONE/BASS-BARITONE/BASS:

"There are baritones with low voices like me...We get to be brave and brawny characters like matadors and soldiers and lumberjacks." – Eureka Street

"Baritones always play the brave, brilliant, brawny, and bighearted characters." – The Great Opera Mix-up

A baritone, bass-baritone, and bass are men's voice types. Some examples:

Baritone: Thomas Hampson as the Count in *The Marriage of Figaro* (Mozart):

<https://youtu.be/2SbyvZT8ZIQ>

Bass-baritone: Samuel Ramey as the title character in *Mefistofele* (Boito):

<https://youtu.be/OetQJS3agLw>

Bass: Kurl Moll as Sarastro in *The Magic Flute* (Mozart):

<https://youtu.be/wmalWEInFH0?t=1m18s>