

A General Introduction to Opera



What is an opera?

- Have you ever been to an opera?
- What does an opera involve?
- What does it look and sound like?
- In what languages are operas sung?
- Do you know any famous operas?

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What is an opera?

- Operas are extravagant plays set to music with vibrant costumes and sets
- They incorporate singing, dancing, and acting.
- Operas are often sung in different languages such as French, Italian, and German
- There are many types of voices involved in an opera. Do you know any?



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Types of voices – women

- **Soprano:** the highest female voice
- **Mezzo-soprano:** a female voice whose range lies between that of a soprano and an alto
- **Alto:** the lowest female voice

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Types of voices – men

- **Tenor:** the highest male voice
- **Baritone:** a male voice whose range lies between that of a tenor and a bass
- **Bass:** the lowest male voice

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Your Task

Complete the Opera Voices Worksheet. Try to include as much detail as possible. Once you have written the definitions, listen carefully to the characters' voices in the following video clips to identify what type of voice they have.

Dulcamara & Nemorino

Fake Love Potion Regency video:



Adina & Belcore

Love Rivals Regency video:



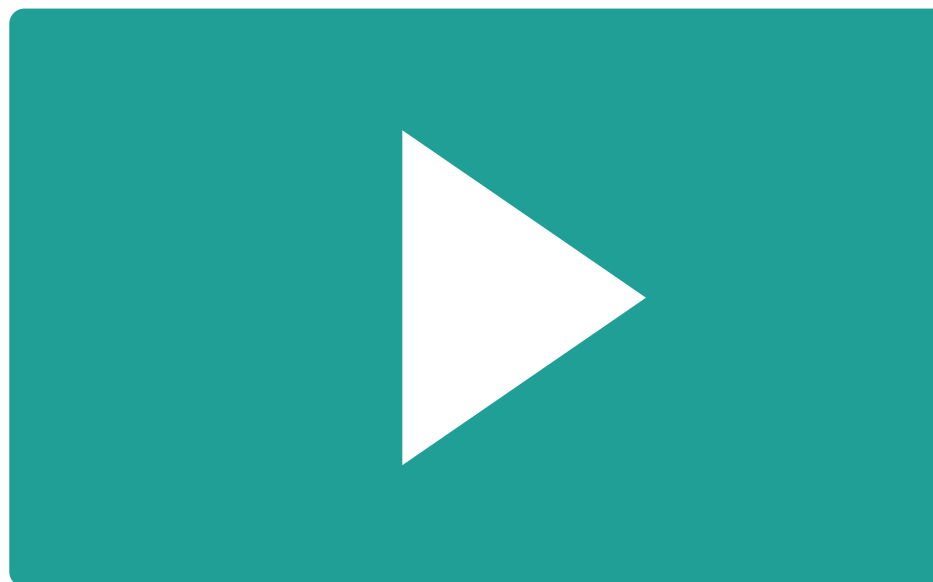
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Aria

A song for a soloist that shows off their technical ability.

Demonstrated at 12.13



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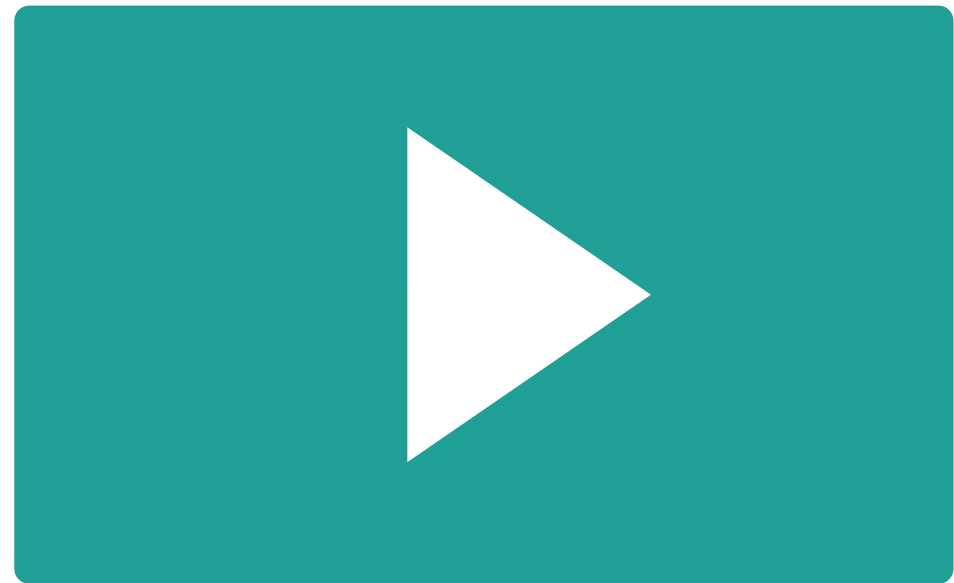


Recitative

Sung speech used to help move the story on more quickly.

The orchestral input is often minimal at this point.

Demonstrated at 18.32



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Melisma

Several notes sung to one syllable.



Musical Analysis Teaching Pack: Lesson 1

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**Themes, Styles,
and Characters**



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Opera Buffa and Opera Seria

There are two specific types of Italian opera: Buffa and Seria.
What do you think the difference is between them?

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Opera Buffa

Buffa is characterized by the following key features:

- Contemporary, everyday settings
- Simple vocal writing
- Clear diction
- Patter
- Only two acts
- Comic scenes
- The use of lower male voices
- Basso Buffo – a specialist in patter who is most involved in the comic action. Leporello in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* is a clear example of this



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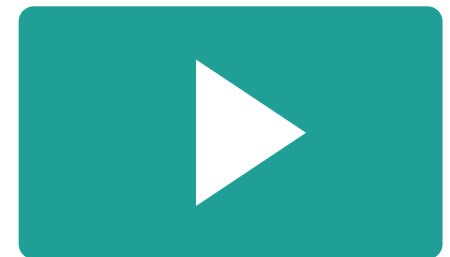
What is Patter?

The key features of patter are:

- Tongue-twisting text – often rhyming and using alliteration
- Performed very quickly!
- The accompaniment is often light and simple so that the words can be the main focus during the performance
- “Modern Major General” from Gilbert and Sullivan’s opera

The Pirates of Penzance is a clear example of this

Let’s take a closer look!

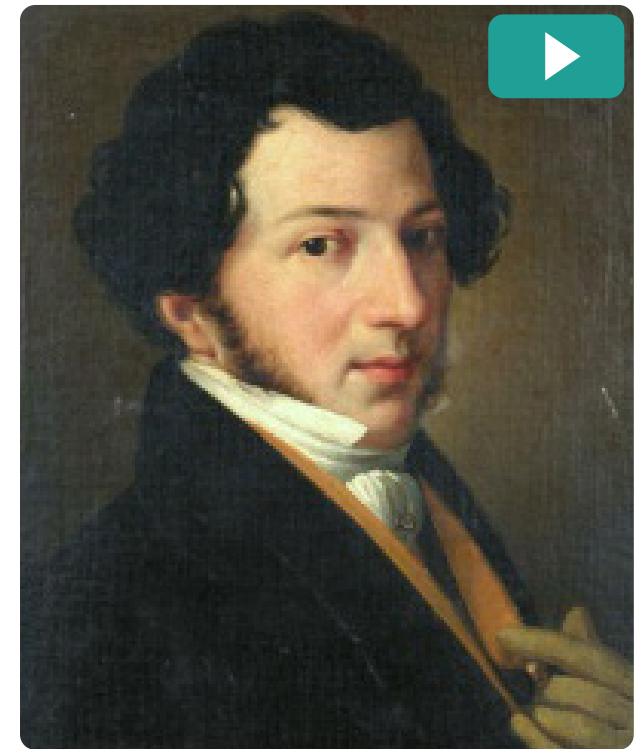


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Gioachino Rossini

Gioachino Rossini was particularly noted for his comic opera style and created a variety including *The Barber of Seville*, *Cinderella* and *The Italian Girl in Algiers*. Let's take a closer look at his works!



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Opera Seria

Seria is characterized by the following key features:

- High vocal male lead
- Serious, historical stories
- High voices in both women and men
- Heavy emphasis on recitative
- Arias which reflected the character's feelings and the singer's vocal capabilities
- Very popular in royal courts – the nobles enjoyed seeing their heroic stature portrayed through the opera characters



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Opera Seria

Handel wrote a dramatic opera seria called *Rinaldo*. The plot centres around the First Crusade and focuses on an epic battle that takes place in Jerusalem. The story is filled with war, love, fantasy, and sorcery!



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Your Task

Complete the Opera Genres worksheet.
Try to include as much detail as possible.

The Life of Donizetti

1797:

Born in Bergamo. His family was very poor and were unable to pay for music lessons. He ended up receiving a scholarship to study with Simon Mayr at the cathedral of Santa Maria Maggiore.

1815:

Continues his studies at the Liceo Filarmonico, a prestigious music school in Northern Italy.

1822:

Begins working with one of the most important producers in Naples: Domenico Barbaja.

1827:

Donizetti's work becomes more widely spread and his popularity in other cities increases.

1828:

Donizetti becomes director of the Royal Theatre of Naples and continues to write operas for many of the other Italian opera houses.

1832:

The Elixir of Love premieres on 12th May at the Teatro alla Cannobiana in Milan.

1834:

The Elixir of Love is performed for the first time in Naples and Berlin. It soon becomes extremely popular globally.

1842-1848:

After suffering a few setbacks in Italy, Donizetti moves to Vienna. Unfortunately, he falls ill and ends up receiving treatment in Paris before finally moving back to Bergamo. He died on 8th April 1848.



Donizetti and *The Elixir of Love*



Your Task

Complete the Donizetti Timeline Worksheet and Match the Operas Worksheet. You may use the internet to help you.

Meet the Characters



NEMORINO

- A peasant
- In love with Adina
- His name means “Little Nobody” in Italian



ADINA

- A rich landowner
- Very flirtatious and clever
- Finally realises she loves Nemorino



DULCAMARA

- A travelling sales person
- Cons villagers into buying potions that will change their lives



BELCORE

- An army sergeant
- Very vain and arrogant
- Wants to marry Adina

The Plot



Nemorino, a poor peasant, is in love with Adina, a beautiful and wealthy landowner. Adina reads the story of *Tristan and Isolde* and discovers that they used a magic love potion. Nemorino believes that he needs one in order to win Adina's heart!

Belcore arrives with his army and is attracted to Adina. He proposes to her, which greatly distresses Nemorino. Dulcamara, a travelling salesman, arrives and promises the villagers that he can provide remedies for any ailment or affliction. Nemorino asks him for a love potion to win Adina's heart. Dulcamara hands the potion over and promises that it will work after 24 hours. Nemorino is unaware that Dulcamara has tricked him and given him wine!

Nemorino drinks the 'potion' and instantly starts to feel more confident. He is rude to Adina and boasts that she will be in love with him shortly. Adina is upset and in her anger agrees to marry Belcore. Nemorino begs her to wait 24 hours, telling her that she will be in love with him after this time, but she refuses to listen. She agrees to marry Belcore immediately as the soldiers have been suddenly called to leave.

The Plot



Nemorino begs Dulcamara for another potion but he has no money. Belcore hears Nemorino's pleas and encourages him to enlist in the army to receive payment. However, Belcore has an ulterior motive and plans to send Nemorino away with the army so that he can marry Adina without any interference. Nemorino reluctantly signs up.

Unbeknown to Nemorino, his uncle has died, leaving him a vast fortune. The news travels quickly around the village and suddenly all of the girls are interested in him. However, Nemorino has not yet been told and he believes it is the effects of the love potion. Adina is confused and annoyed by Nemorino's behaviour, but Dulcamara explains about the love potion and Belcore's "encouragement" to join the army and she soon realises Nemorino's true feelings for her.

Adina pays back Nemorino's recruitment fee to Belcore and releases him from his contract. Both finally confess their true feelings for each other. Belcore is irritated at losing Adina but convinces himself that he will find another woman to replace her soon. Dulcamara is delighted that events have worked out in his favour as he has "proof" that his potions work as they bring love and wealth to the drinker. The village buys many bottles as a result!

The Plot

Let's watch the cast of Scottish Opera's *The Elixir of Love* in action!



Fake Love Potion
A Poor Boy secretly loves a Rich Girl. A glamorous soldier catches her eye and becomes his rival in love. What will it take for the Boy to win her heart?

The Confident Loser
A Dodgy Salesman cons the Boy into buying fake “love” potion that he swears will make him irresistible to the Girl.

Love Rivals
The Boy's newfound confidence puzzles the Girl. His rival still sees him as a loser, but why is the Boy laughing?

Boy Enlists
The Rival wonders why the Girl wants to postpone their wedding. Penniless, the Boy needs to buy more love potion; offering him a cash bonus to enlist in the army, the rival thinks he has got rid of the Boy for good.

Girl Sees the Light
The Dodgy Salesman takes credit for the Boy's universal popularity with the ladies (not knowing the Boy is now rich!) so he tries selling the potion to the Girl. She is not buying any but works out that the Boy did. Now it is clear, he did this for her and she made fun of him. Ashamed, she realises she has been in love with the Boy the whole time!

All's Well That Ends Well
Before leaving town, the Dodgy Salesman advertises his miraculous potion as a cure for everything. However, despite his tricks, everyone is happy and in love - so maybe it is not completely fake after all.

The Plot



Your Task

Cut out the sections of the plot from your Planning the Plot Worksheet and rearrange them into the correct order to tell the story of *The Elixir of Love*.

Tristan and Isolde



Love Potions

- Love potions have been incorporated into stories for many years.
Can you think of any other stories that have used a potion/magical elements to alter a character's life?
- In *The Elixir of Love*, Adina references a love potion which is used in the story of *Tristan and Isolde*
- Richard Wagner, a German composer transformed this story into a full-scale opera. However, unlike *The Elixir of Love* which has many comedic elements, *Tristan and Isolde* is a tragedy

Tristan and Isolde

Adina gathers the villagers together to share the tragic love story of *Tristan and Isolde* with them. At this point she sings the aria “Della crudelle Isotta” (in English, “Of the cruel Isolde”). Although it is a sad story, Adina focuses on the beauty of their love. Let’s take a look at Adina’s lyrics when she discusses the plot of *Tristan and Isolde* with her friend Gianetta:



Tristan burned with love
For the cruel Isolde,
Nor had he any hope
Of ever winning her.
When he sought the favour
Of a wise magician,
Who in a phial gave him
A certain elixir of love,
Whereby the fair Isolde
No more from him could flee.

No sooner he took one taste
From the enchanted phial,
Than Isolde’s rebel heart
At once succumbed to his.
Changed all in a moment
That beauty so cruel
Was Tristan’s beloved,
Lived only for him;
And that first magic drink
He blessed for all his days.

English translation by **WILLIAM FENSE WEAVER**

Tristan and Isolde: The Plot



Princess Isolde is escorted overseas to Ireland by Tristan, to marry King Mark. She discovers that it was Tristan who killed her fiancé during a previous expedition. She becomes so enraged that she asks her maid to concoct a death potion in order to exact her revenge upon him and also to end her own miserable life. However, the maid has other ideas and creates a love potion instead!

Isolde offers the drink under the guise of peace and friendship, although Tristan is aware that she is really trying to kill him. He drinks anyway. Tristan and Isolde ingest the potion and fall madly in love with each other. They are forced to hide their love, but seek each other out each night.

Isolde becomes suspicious of Tristan's friend Melot, who she believes has been spying on them. Suddenly one night, their secret is uncovered when Melot leads the King and the other courtiers to them and announces that they are in love with each other.

Tristan and Isolde: The Plot



The King is enraged and disappointed by Tristan's disloyalty as it was Tristan himself that sought out Isolde to be King Mark's bride. Tristan asks Isolde if she will follow him into death. As she answers, Melot attacks Tristan.

Tristan becomes mortally ill and realises that the only person that can save him is Isolde, with her healing powers. Tristan dies in Isolde's arms as King Mark returns to pardon the couple. Isolde refuses to believe that the King has forgiven them and gives herself up to death to join Tristan in the afterlife.

Tristan and Isolde: The Plot



Tragedy or Comedy

How would you describe the story of *Tristan and Isolde*?

In what way does it differ from the plot of *The Elixir of Love*?

Tristan and Isolde: The Plot



Your Task

Compare and contrast the stories of *Tristan and Isolde* and *The Elixir of Love*. Imagine you are the composer of each opera. How would you use music to depict the concept of a tragedy or a comedy?

Complete the Comedy vs Tragedy Worksheet, looking at the music descriptors on the next slide.

Tristan and Isolde: The Plot



Tonality:

Major – happy, bright, good, in love

Minor – sad, dark, evil

Instrumental Techniques:

Pizzicato – Lightness, happy, bright, cheerful, excited

Tremolando – Agitated, frightened, confused

Glissando – Enlightened, excited, overwhelmed, dreamy

Texture:

Homophonic – Simple, easy, happy

Polyphonic – Busy, complicated, distressed, angry, confused

Tempo:

Adagio – sad, lonely, wistful

Andante – Leisurely, at ease, contented

Allegro – Excited, busy, wild, powerful

Dynamics:

Forte – angry, powerful, determined

Piano – scared, sad, secretive

Harmony:

Dissonance/Discord – angry, agitated, fearful, evil

Harmony/Consonance – happiness, love

Character Analysis



Nemorino

Which words best describe Nemorino's personality?

Character Analysis

- Poor
- Humble
- Financially dependent
- Hopeless romantic
- Optimistic
- Gullible
- Trusting
- The underdog



Character Analysis



Adina

Which words best describe Adina's personality?

Character Analysis

- Wealthy
- Pretentious
- Condescending
- Impatient
- Easily irritated
- Jealous



Character Analysis



Dulcamara

Which words best describe Dulcamara's personality?

Character Analysis

- Show-off
- Loud
- Deceitful
- Opportunistic
- Manipulative



Character Analysis



Belcore

Which words best describe Belcore's personality?

Character Analysis

- Arrogant
- Overpowering
- Strong
- Defiant
- Confident
- Intimidating



Character Analysis



Musical Representation

Donizetti cleverly uses a variety of techniques and instrumentation to represent each character's main personality traits through his music. Can you identify specific instruments or musical concepts that help reinforce each character's personality?

Character Analysis



Your Task

Complete the Character Analysis Worksheet and identify key musical features that help to reinforce each personality.

Character Analysis



Musical Features Guide

Watch a short snippet of each character's songs again. Using the guide below, identify which musical techniques/instruments Donizetti has used to depict specific character traits.

Character Analysis



Tonality:

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Minor – sad, dark, evil

Instrumental Techniques:

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Harmony/Consonance – happiness, love

Musical Analysis Teaching Pack: Lesson 4

Character Analysis



Dulcamara & Nemorino

Fake Love Potion Regency video:



Adina & Belcore

Love Rivals Regency video:



Use of Language



Operatic Languages

Which languages are most commonly used in opera?

Use of Language



Operatic Languages



Carmen by Bizet is sung in French.



The Magic Flute by Mozart is sung in German.



The Barber of Seville by Rossini is sung in Italian.



Peter Grimes by Britten is sung in English.

Use of Language



The Translation Process

Let's have a look at how the Scottish Opera cast cope with the challenges of reverting from an Italian performance to one in English.



Use of Language



Comparison

Let's have a look at two different versions of the same scene from *The Elixir of Love*. One is performed in English and one is performed in its original Italian language.

All's Well That Ends Well:

Italian



English



Use of Language



Operatic Languages

Do you prefer to watch an opera in its original language, or after it has been translated into English? Justify your answer.

Use of Language



Did you know...?

When you watch a live opera in another language – and often when you watch one in English – there are usually screens above or either side of the stage which display surtitles (also called supertitles) in English to allow the audience to understand what is happening in the story.

Use of Language



Use of Language



Your Task

Complete the Find the Language Worksheet. Identify the composer and the language that the opera was originally performed in.

You may use the internet to help you.