



— *Presents* —

.....  
**YOUR  
GUIDE TO**  
.....

***Count Ory***  
.....

Special thanks to:  **Imperial**

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## Education and Activity Guide Overview

This education and activity guide is designed for teachers, students, and those who are interested in engaging with various aspects of the opera both before and after attending the performance.

The first part of this guide is more reading-based, with a detailed overview, synopsis, and conceptual discussion of Edmonton Opera's *Count Ory*. This is essential learning before you proceed to the activities because it places the production within a specific framework. Teachers may distribute the content for students to read as-is, or choose to go over the material with the entire class.

This guide is intended for all grades attending the performance; teachers are encouraged to modify activities to suit the needs of their class.

Please contact us with any questions about this guide at [education@edmontonopera.com](mailto:education@edmontonopera.com). We can provide resources for further discussion, suggestions on how to tailor activities and content for your class, and more.

## Opera 101

Opera is the art form of all art forms — it combines theatre, orchestral music, unamplified live singing, visual design, and much more. Going to the opera is not only a beautiful artistic experience, it can also be a very educational trip.

Opera gives students the opportunity to engage with a variety of historical movements in literature, art, and politics. Each opera sheds light on the era it was composed in and contains themes relevant to today's world.

To make the most of your opera experience, please read the following pointers on opera etiquette before attending the dress rehearsal.

### **Arrive early!**

Your tickets will be available at the auditorium 45 minutes prior to show time. Please allow enough time to seat your group — we suggest 20 minutes. The dress rehearsal for *Count Ory* will begin promptly at 7pm, so allot extra time for ticket pickup, seating, etc. It is also best to have students use the washroom prior to locating your seats within the theatre.

## **Applause is welcome!**

Opera is spectacle. Your presence in the audience is essential to complete the whole experience. Enjoy the performance and respond to what you see. Unlike television or film, every live performance is unique: only you and the performers will share the experience you have in the theatre. Your warmth and good humour are important to them, so when you like something, tell them with your applause.

Applaud after the arias as well as after the performance; you can shout “Bravo!” for a man, “Brava!” for a woman, and “Bravi!” for more than one person, or the whole performance.

## **No cameras or recording devices.**

The artists’ images and performances belong to them and we ask you to respect that by refraining from recording their work in any way.

## **Other pointers:**

- **The performance of *Count Ory* is approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes with one 20-minute intermission.**

- Turn off your cell phones and all electronic devices.
- Keep movement and voices down to a minimum, as this is a live dress rehearsal performance.
- Please stay seated. Once in the theatre it is courteous to remain seated until the end of each act. Please do not leave the theatre unless there is an emergency.
- No food, gum, or drinks of any kind (except water) in the theatre.
- Students are welcome to bring packed food items, but these must not be eaten in the theatre. Food may only be consumed out in the lobby.
- Bottled water is allowed in the theatre.
- Acoustics are very good in the Jubilee auditorium, so any sounds of food being unwrapped, bottles being crushed, etc. will be heard throughout.

## **Keep in mind:**

- Use the bathrooms before the rehearsal begins.
- Be silent if the performance has to stop for a few moments (this is a performance, but also a working rehearsal so it may be necessary to stop at times).
- If you must use the washroom during the performance, please be accompanied by an adult supervisor. The ushers might let you in again when there is an appropriate pause in the action.

# A Brief History of Opera

## Late Renaissance

Florentine Camerata

1570s

This group of intellectuals meets to discuss and guide trends in the arts.

Dafne

1597

First opera composed by Jacopo Peri in Florence, Italy.

## Baroque Period

Monteverdi

1567–1643

Claudio Monteverdi was the best known opera composer of his time.

Handel

1685–1759

Wrote 40 Italian Operas, including *Giulio Cesare* (Julius Caesar) in 1724.

## Classical Period

The Marriage of Figaro

Mozart

1756–1791

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote a number of operas including *Don Giovanni*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, & *The Magic Flute*.

Beethoven

1770–1827

Ludwig van Beethoven wrote his only opera, *Fidelio*, in 1804. The overture underwent three further revisions, and the final version was performed in 1814. Beethoven started out following classical traditions, but ended up ushering in the Romantic period.



## Bel Canto

Donizetti

1797–1848

Gaetano Donizetti's most well-known opera is *Lucia de Lammermoor*, first performed in 1835. Over his life, he wrote about 75 operas.

Rossini

1792–1868

Gioacchino Rossini is best known for his opera *The Barber of Seville*. He enjoyed great popularity in his lifetime, and surprised everyone when he gave up opera after the success of *William Tell* in 1829.

The Barber of Seville

Bellini

1801–1835

Vincenzo Bellini wrote ten operas over eleven years in the bel canto tradition, including *La Sonnambula* (The Sleepwalker).

## Romanticism

Verdi

1813–1901

Giuseppe Verdi is considered by many to be the greatest of Italian opera composers. He was a follower of bel canto principles, and his operas are known for their beautiful melodies and dramatic quality.

La Traviata



Wagner

1813–1883

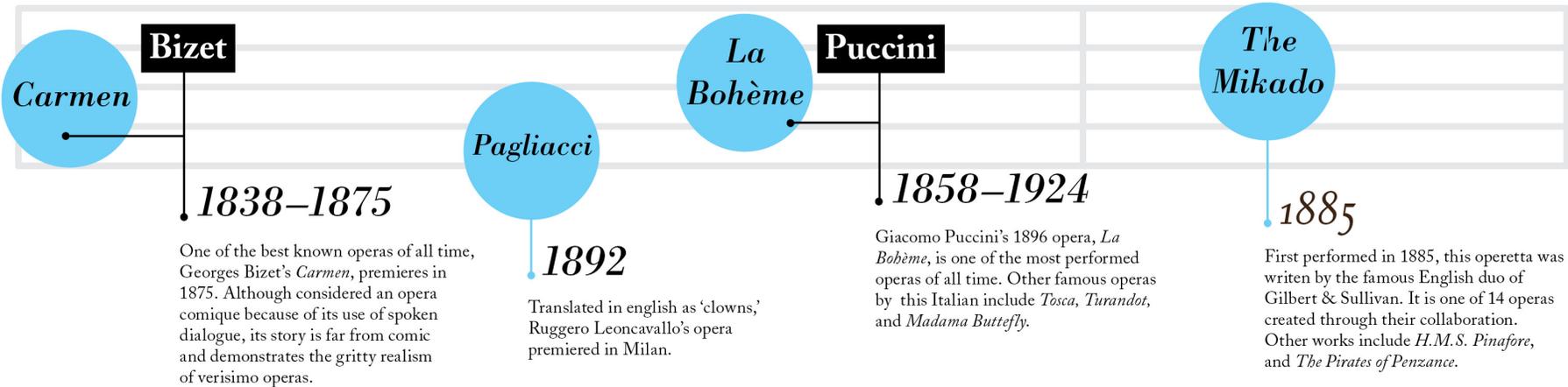
Richard Wagner is known for his innovative music dramas and use of leitmotifs. His most famous works include *Tristan und Isolde*, and the massive *Ring Cycle* which includes four epic operas.

Der Ring des Nibelungen



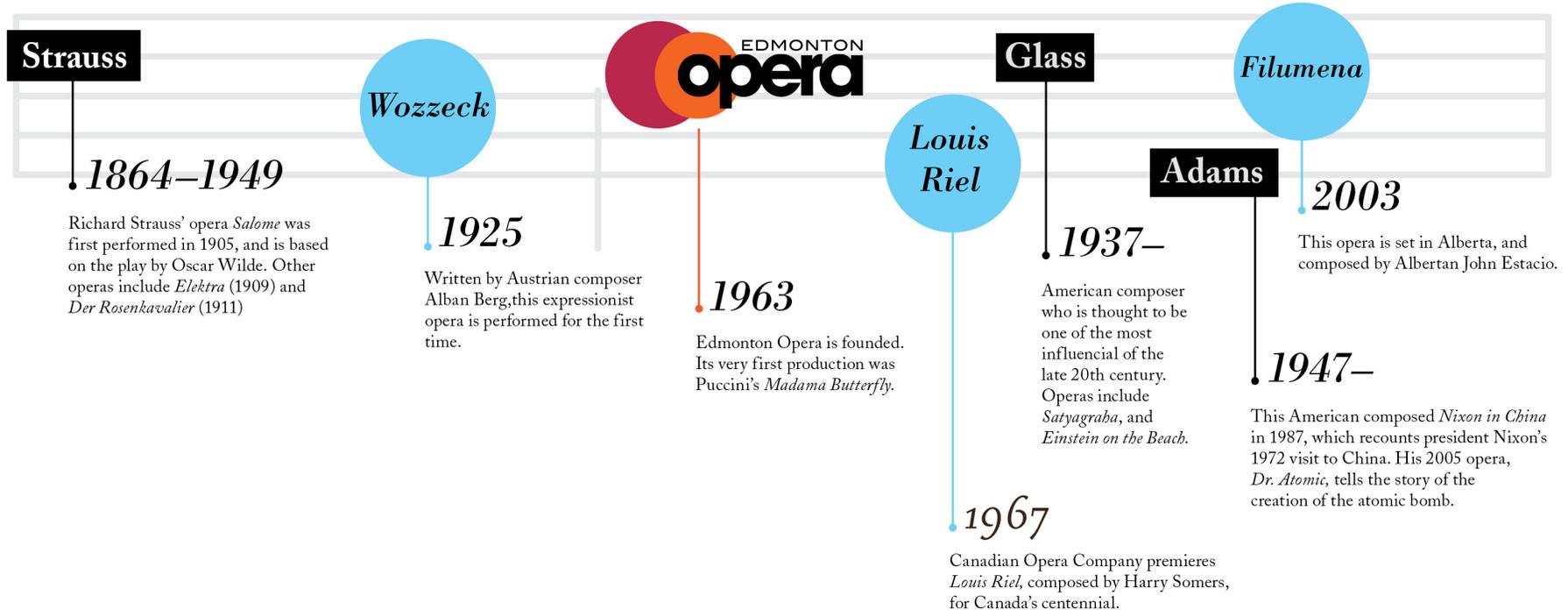
## Verisimo (Realism)

## Operetta



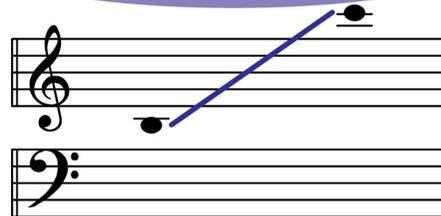
## Early Twentieth Century

## Late Twentieth Century



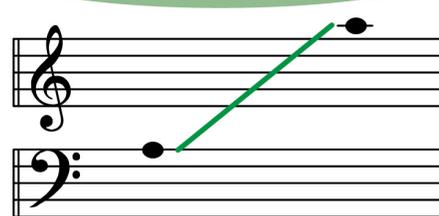
# Vocal Spotlight

## Soprano



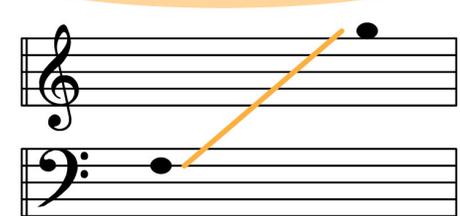
Sopranos are the highest pitched of the female voices. Composers generally write the lead role for this type of voice. Coloratura sopranos shine when singing very high notes and rapid passages. Dramatic sopranos have great intensity and power. Lyric sopranos have exceptionally beautiful voices, and can sustain long passages.

## Mezzo-Soprano



A type of female voice that is lower than the soprano and higher than the contralto. Often played by the character of the young boy, a complex or evil character.

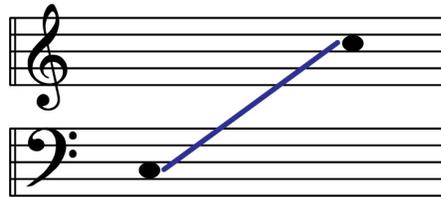
## Contralto



A type of female voice that is the lowest pitched. Their voice is deep and well-rounded. Usually played by the maid, mother or grandmother.

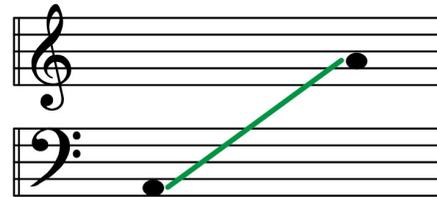
# Vocal Spotlight

## Tenor



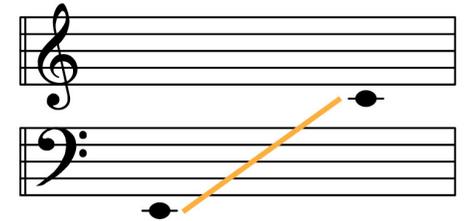
The highest sounding male voice, often the leading role. Much like sopranos, tenors can have lyric or dramatic sound quality. Tenors typically play characters that fall in love with sopranos.

## Baritone



These voices are more mellow and slightly lower than tenors. The roles sung by baritones are usually father figures or middle-aged children, but they often have central roles.

## Bass



Basses are the lowest sounding human voices and they often play roles of wise and older characters in opera, like kings, emperors, or gods. The basso profundo is the lowest of these, and is commonly heard in Russian opera.

## Introduction

*Count Ory* (*Le comte Ory* in French) is a comic opera written by Gioachino Rossini in 1828. Some of the music originates from his opera *Il viaggio a Reims* written three years earlier for the coronation of Charles X. The French libretto was by Eugène Scribe and Charles-Gaspard Delestre-Poirson adapted from a comedy they had first written in 1817.

Rossini composed *Count Ory* at a time when he was trying to establish himself in the French opera scene. He had already achieved major success with works such as *The Barber of Seville* and *Cinderella* in Italian, but he wanted to branch out as a more ‘serious’ composer, which also meant that *Count Ory* was Rossini’s final comedy. Compared to his other works, the opera was not performed as often until the Metropolitan Opera mounted a hugely successful production in 2011. Since then, *Count Ory* has seen an increase in the number of performances around the world.

Edmonton Opera’s new production of *Count Ory* features sets and costumes designed to embrace the larger-than-life and theatrical world of the opera. We hope you enjoy the performance — we welcome you to share your thoughts with us!

## Cast and Characters

- **Count Ory — John Tessier (tenor)**
- **Countess Adele — Caitlin Wood (soprano)**
- **Isolier — Sarah Mesko (mezzo-soprano)**
- **Tutor — Stephen Hegedus (bass-baritone)**
- **Ragonde — Megan Latham (soprano)**
- **Raimbaud — Andrew Love (tenor)**
- **Alice — Whitney Sloan (soprano)**
- **Young Nobleman — Adam Fisher (tenor)**

### Fun fact

The role of Isolier is portrayed by a female singer, which is known as a ‘trouser role’ in opera. The singer dresses and acts like a male character, usually a young boy. Trousing roles are typically sung by mezzo-sopranos. In this opera, Isolier is Count Ory’s Page and they both end up falling in love with the same woman.

## Synopsis

### ACT I

Most of the men in town have left for the Holy Land to fight in the Crusades. The women eagerly await their return, all staying together in the castle. Among these women are Countess Adele and her companion Ragonde.

Count Ory has his eyes on Adele, and decides to make a move on her while the men are away. He disguises himself as a hermit. His friend Raimbaud announces that the hermit will be offering relationship advice to those who seek it. The women, who are lonely in the castle, visit the hermit and get his blessings. Ragonde tells the hermit that Countess Adele is very sad and afflicted by heartache. She then informs the hermit that Adele will come to him shortly, which gets Count Ory very excited. Ory's page Isolier arrives along with his tutor. Isolier does not recognize the Count in his disguise, but the tutor knows something is up, especially since they have been on the hunt for Ory. He leaves to get backup.

While the tutor is away, Isolier confesses to the hermit that he is in love with Countess Adele. The hermit tells Isolier about a plan to enter the castle disguised as a pilgrim. Count Ory, of course, intends to use this plan to get closer to Adele.

Adele arrives and asks the hermit for advice, and is surprised to hear his recommendation. He tells Adele to have an affair.

She reveals that she has feelings for Isolier, but the hermit immediately warns her to stay away from the page. Adele invites the hermit back to her castle, thankful for his

advice. As they make their way inside, the tutor returns with backup and declares that the hermit is a fraud, and is in fact Count Ory in disguise. Everyone is shocked.

They receive news that the men will be home from battle in two days. Count Ory knows he must act fast to get what he wants.

### ACT II

The evening is terribly stormy and all the women are inside the castle. Suddenly, they hear screams from outside the castle. It appears to be a group of pilgrim nuns who are trying to escape the storm. Adele asks them to be let in, and when they enter, the nuns announce that they were being chased by Count Ory. Little do the women know, the nuns are actually Count Ory and his men in disguise.

Ory gets Adele alone and thanks her for welcoming them into the castle. Adele leaves to have a meal prepared for the guests. Elsewhere in the castle, Raimbaud stumbles into the wine cellar. All the men get copiously drunk and become very rowdy.

Isolier realizes what Count Ory is up to and reveals the information to Adele. Together, they decide to trick Ory in return.

It is announced that the men will return that very night, much earlier than expected. Both Isolier and Count Ory hide in Adele's bedroom in the dark. As Ory tries to take advantage of the night and kiss Adele, Isolier makes sure he is thwarted. Before long, trumpets signal the arrival of the men, and Count Ory is caught in the act. He makes a run for it.

## Glossary

**Arias:** Meaning “air” in Italian. Arias are solos that accompany the orchestra, which allow a character to express their feelings and demonstrate their vocal talents.

**Chorus:** A large group of singers, often 40 or more, who appear on stage in a crowd scene. Sometimes the chorus comments on action or contrasts solos.

**Comic Opera:** A piece characterized by light or comic nature.

**Composer:** Writes the music.

**Contralto:** A type of female voice that is the lowest pitched. Their voice is deep and well-rounded. Usually played by the maid, mother or grandmother.

**Baritone:** A type of male voice that is lower than the tenor, but higher than the bass. Usually played by father figures or middle-aged children, or villains.

**Bass:** A type of male voice that is the lowest pitched. It is often played by wise and older characters.

**Ensemble:** A musical number sung by 2 or more people of different ranges. For example, duets, trios, quartets, quintets and sextets.

**Librettist:** Chooses a story, writes or adapts the words.

**Mezzo Soprano:** A type of female voice that is lower than the soprano and higher than the contralto. Often played by the character of the young boy, a complex or evil character.

**Soprano:** Highest pitched female voice. Usually the female lead singer is written as this type of voice. There are 3 types: coloratura, dramatic, and lyric.

**Tenor:** A type of male voice that is the highest pitched. It is often the leading role and they typically fall in love with Sopranos.

**Trouser role:** When a female singer portrays a male character in an opera, usually a young boy



## Composer Biography

Born Feb. 29, 1792, in Pesaro, Italy, Gioachino Rossini grew up in a musical family — his father was a horn player and sometimes professor at the Academia Filharmonica, while his mother actively pursued her operatic career when her husband was jailed for his political convictions.

Rossini wrote nearly 40 operas throughout his career, as well as sacred music, chamber music and cantatas. His composing years span both the classical era and the Romantic period, trends that are reflected in his early and later compositions. At the age of 14, he was accepted into the Academia Filharmonica, where he proved to be a good accompanist and repetiteur. It was at the Academia that he met two influential singers:

Velluti, a castrato and symbolic of the old traditions of opera, and Isabella Colbran, a soprano who would become his wife. After she died in 1845, Rossini married Olympia Pelissier in 1846.

Rossini's work is considered a bridge between the old guard of opera and paving the way for composers such as Wagner, Verdi and Mayerbeer. Rossini thoroughly enjoyed Mozart's work, earning the nickname "the Italian Mozart," but did not think much of Wagner (a feeling that was mutual, although Wagner was apparently quite impressed by Rossini's final opera, Guillaume Tell).

Rossini left the Academia Filharmonica early and accepted work at the Teatro San Moise à Venice, where he wrote four farse (translating literally to 'farce', these were low-budget, chorus-less, 80-minute operas). This exercise allowed him to develop an effective, action-packed structure for his full-length comedies. He was also one of the first composers to write out ornamentation, since bel canto singers were known to take liberties and would render the piece an entirely different composition with their interpretation.

Although his first two-act opera caused some problems with the censors, he soon became a successful composer in Milan, earning military deferment and name recognition. He was especially prolific after signing a contract with Teatro San Carlo, when he produced 18 operas in seven years.

Rossini was soon receiving offers from all over Europe and chose to settle in Paris — a city he loved, with exposure to music from all over the continent and the ability to train some of the finest singers of the

day. Eventually, he was replaced by Verdi and Puccini, although his work was re-popularized in the mid and late-20th century.

Rossini died at the age of 76, in Paris, France. He left money to his hometown of Pesaro, and a music conservatory was built there, dedicated to the genius Italian composer.

## **Important terms**

There are many different kinds of songs in opera. Performers may sing alone, in couples (duets), trios, or larger groups, and there are also moments when no one sings at all – and each composer develops his or her own preferred combinations of these options. The following are the major musical components of an opera:

### **The Overture**

An opera usually begins with an orchestral piece of music called the overture, which functions as an introduction to the opera. The overture generally includes themes that will be heard throughout the opera, and can be anywhere from five to twenty-five minutes long. Before 1800, house lights were not dimmed while the overture played, and audiences would continue to talk, drink, and even play cards. This changed in the nineteenth century when the overture began to take its place as an integral part of the operatic performance. Usually, at the end of the overture, the curtain rises and the story of the opera unfolds through a series of scenes, which are usually organized into acts.

## **Arias (Italian for “air” or song)**

Arias are solos performed to the accompaniment of the orchestra. They allow the character to express his or her feelings and reflect on the events of the drama. The focus of an aria is emotions rather than actions, and provides an opportunity for the singer to demonstrate his or her vocal or artistic skill. Some of the most successful composers of arias, such as Mozart, Verdi and Puccini were able to achieve a remarkable balance between memorable melodies that perfectly suit the human voice, and making the music reflect the drama of the text.

## **Recitatives**

Recitative is a type of singing unique to opera, and is used when characters are conversing, or introducing an aria. The text is delivered quickly in a musical way that imitates speech, and has a very limited melodic range. It has no recognizable melody and its rhythms follow those of the spoken word. Recitative is meant to carry the action forward and can be accompanied either by a full orchestra, or, as is often the case in opera written before 1800, by a harpsichord or keyboard instrument.

## **Interlude**

An interlude (French: entr’acte; German: Zwischenspiel) is an orchestral passage or more elaborate entertainment between acts or scenes, sometimes for dramatic purposes and sometimes designed to allow time for scene changes in a work that is continuous. The word has a wider application, designating either separate instrumental compositions or passages inserted in orchestral works or other

compositions between distinct sections.

## **Ensemble (“together”)**

Ensemble singing is when two or more voices of different ranges perform together. These include duets, trios, quartets, quintets, and sometimes even a sextet! In each of these, the way the composer blends the voices will depend on the dramatic requirements of the plot. In a duet where the characters singing are in love, a composer may show this musically by having each performer sing different music at different times, and gradually bring both lines of music together in harmony as the duet culminates.

## **Chorus**

Most operas include music sung by a large group of singers (sometimes as many as 40 or more) called a chorus. The chorus appears on stage most often in crowd scenes. The chorus can provide a stunning contrast to solo or ensemble singing.

## **Coloratura**

The elaborate ornamentation of a vocal melody, especially in operatic singing by a soprano.

## **Bel canto**

Tradition of Italian music that literally translates to ‘beautiful singing’. This style features fast-paced music, quick changes between high and low register for the singers, and an effusive score overall. Rossini was a master of bel canto operas.

## Activity – Creative Concept!

### Pre-performance activity

One very important facet of every production is the design of the show. Each production has a dedicated team of designers – both costume and scenery – working with the director to make their vision come to fruition. In this activity, students will create costumes and set ideas for what they think the opera should look like. They can pull inspiration from the production that they saw, other productions, and, most importantly, their own imaginations.

### Option A: Younger students

Read the overview and synopsis of *Count Ory* as a class. Now, students must generate ideas to design this production!

1. Divide students into small groups, and give each group two large sheets of butcher paper. Students will trace two students on the paper, and then draw costumes on their silhouettes. Choice of which two characters they want to design costumes for is up to the students.
2. In these groups, students can also then design a scenic concept – what does the set look like in Act One? Does it change during Act Two?

### Option B: Older Students

A Vision Board is used to show a unifying idea for a creative project. Often, directors will use a vision board to focus their vision for a production. It features specific elements such as costumes, set design, and props.

Establish your setting:

- Do you want it to be set in the time/place that the opera was originally written for, or in another time and place?
- Have a good reason for changing the setting – make it appropriate for the story and music of the opera. Do the themes present remind you of a specific time period? Do you envision the opera having simpler or more complex costumes? Don't just change the period because you can – consider what costumes you might like them to wear and where the story might take place. If you pick an appropriate historical event to centre those details around, it will help unify the details of your production.

### Costume Design

- Research what kinds of clothing people wore in the period/location that you chose to set the opera in. What did those of lower social class wear? What would royalty wear? What accessories might each character have? How would you distinguish major and minor characters of the opera?
- Consider the colours that you would want most

represented in the opera – what were the colours of wealthy people in the setting of the opera? What colours best reflect any relevant themes present in the opera? Is it a bright, hopeful story? Or dark and bleak? Create some colour swatches to use as inspiration for your vision board.

- Based off your research, create some costumes for your production – pull multiple images from magazines, Internet searches, etc. to create your own costumes. Don't just use other productions costumes – create your own. Draw something, use the multiple images to make a collage of what looks you want for each character, etc.

#### Props Design

- What supplies do the characters in the opera need? Do they need swords, brooms, lanterns, axes, etc.? What should those look like to reflect the style of the setting? Create a properties list and some sketches.

#### Set Design

- Research the prominent architectural styles of the period/setting that you chose. What kind of houses did people live in? Were the housing styles different between low and high social classes? What would the royalty/upper class of the period have lived in?
- Consider the main locations of the opera. How might these places look?
- What building materials might the people of the

period have had? What should your set be made out of, or made to look like?

- What decorations might you need for the set? Do you need curtains, vases, flowers, torches, etc.?
- Using your research, create set designs for the main scenes of the opera. As with the costume design, use images from magazines and Internet searches to pull inspiration from. Make a collage of the images collected, or your own original sketch.

## Activity – Poster Design!

### Pre-performance activity

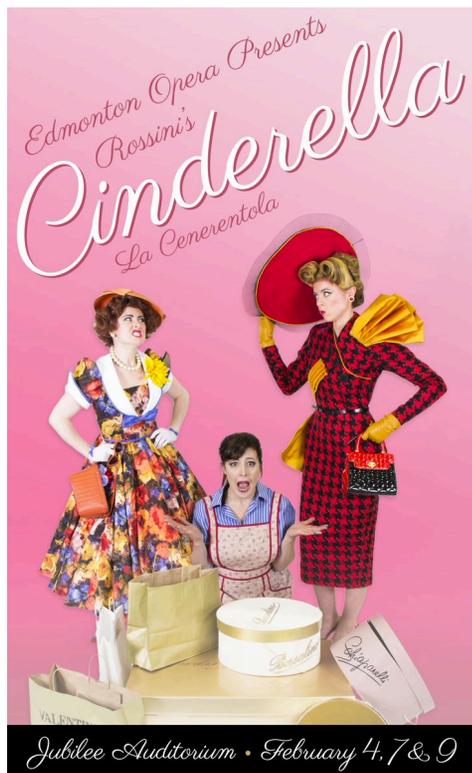
In this activity, you will design a poster for Edmonton Opera's *Count Ory*.

When creating an image to represent an opera you must consider the time period, setting, themes, characters, and plot. The designer must also keep in mind our audience that we are trying to appeal to and what types of media we will use to reach them.

After researching, it is important to sketch and brainstorm your ideas. It can be helpful to make a collage or mood board of different visuals and ideas that you would like to incorporate into the final image. Other important factors include the hierarchy of information (what is the most important information

and how will you show that importance – size of type, colour, location, etc.), typography, colour (contrast, significance of colour), composition (placement, size and shape), and form among others. How would you illustrate *Count Ory*? Is your image a literal or symbolic portrayal?

So now that you have some of the basics, design a poster! Be sure to read the content of this guide to learn more about the opera – this will inform your poster design. Use this example of our *Cinderella* poster for inspiration!



## Activity – Character reflections

Post-performance activity

Students will try to further understand the characters of *Count Ory* by doing an in depth character study. Guide the students through the following discussion questions to understand their character's motivations, strengths, struggles, etc.

Have students consider the characters and the role they play in the story. Divide the students into groups, and have each student choose a character to research. Students will need to create a series of journal entries that reflect conflicts present throughout the story of the opera. They can write all of their entries on one character, or write a few entries for multiple characters.

COUNT ORY | ADELE | ISOLIER

Foundations:

- How old are you? Where are you from? Where do you live now? Do you have any family that we know of? What are your friends/family like?
- What is your relationship with the other characters in the opera like? How would your friends/family describe you in three words? (Think of mental, physiological, and physical characteristics)
- What is your best quality? What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

Getting deeper:

- What are your dreams and goals? What drives you to try to reach those goals? How does this affect the choices your character makes in the story? What steps in the opera do you take to achieve your objective?
- What obstacles stand in your way? Are there any obstacles that are beyond your control? How will you overcome those challenges? What are the outcomes of your choices?
- Looking back from the end-point of the opera, would you have done anything differently?

Today:

- Are there any characters in modern-day television, literature, movies, theatre, etc., that remind you of the character that you chose? Are there any characters with similar characteristics or traits?
- If your character were alive today, how would they be more or less successful? What might they have done differently to achieve their objectives?

## Activity — Design a program

Pre-performance activity

At each performance of *Count Ory*, Edmonton Opera distributes a program (also referred to as a playbill) that contains some useful content about the opera

for audiences to read before the performance, during intermission, and even afterwards at home. In this activity, students will design their own mini-version of the *Count Ory* program.

Some elements typically found in an opera program are:

- Composer/librettist biography
- Cast and production team list
- Synopsis
- Program notes (a production history, thematic evaluation of the opera, historical context, etc.)
- Artists' biographies

A major part of building the program is research. Very few of these elements have to be written by students themselves, it is more a matter of researching online and compiling the required content. For example, the Edmonton Opera website contains information like a cast list, synopsis, and composer/artist biographies can be found through Google.

You can see an electronic version of our Don Giovanni program here for reference: [https://issuu.com/suggitt/docs/eo\\_dongiovanni](https://issuu.com/suggitt/docs/eo_dongiovanni)

## Activity – Listening Guide

This activity will encourage students to listen to musical clips from *Count Ory* and learn how to interpret and make an informed opinion about what they hear. Before listening, introduce the synopsis, characters and story behind the story to give background to the music. Using the YouTube links below, play each piece and encourage students to describe, discuss, and interpret what they hear.

“J’entends d’ici le bruit des armes”: <https://youtu.be/RQy5G1NGvYO>

Ensemble Piece: <https://youtu.be/D4EZZLLA1UU>

“Vous que l’on dit sensible”: <https://youtu.be/eWB7N4VJKI1>

Part one: Identify the female (soprano, mezzo-soprano, contralto) and male vocal voices (tenor, baritone, bass), if applicable. Using any of the musical vocabulary listed below encourage students to describe what they hear: instrumentation, voice, libretto and music.

**Harmony/ Rhythm/ Style/ Libretto/ Satire/ Humour/  
Instruments/ Voices/ Melody/ Aria/ Recitative/  
Chorus/ Duet/ Trio/ Quartet/ Transition/ Contrast/  
Complex/ Tone/ Tension/ Resolution/ Balance/  
Variety/ Repetition/ Loud/ Soft/ High/ Low/ Tempo/  
Quick/ Slow**

Part two: Discuss students’ descriptions as a group. Consider the following questions: How do these characteristics combine to create music? How do you think the time period and cultural context influence the music? Is the music and libretto still relevant today? Why do you think Rossini’s music has remained popular worldwide?

Part three: Interpret what they hear by making connections to personal experiences and their imagination. Brainstorm on the board and as a group the ideas, moods, and images that students can associate to the music. How does the music make you feel? What does it remind you of?

Part four: Encourage students to share why they like or dislike the piece using vocabulary and interpretations from parts one through three. Discuss student’s different preferences and viewpoints and emphasize the importance of respecting other opinions.

For further questions about this education and activity guide, please contact us at:  
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