

Education Guide for

# *The Merry Widow*

**Music by Franz Lehár**

**Libretto by Viktor Léon and Leo Stein  
after “L’attaché d’ambassade” by Henri Meilhac**

**A masterpiece of operetta literature, *The Merry Widow* has cast an enduring spell over the public since its premiere on December 30, 1905.**

**Written at a time when operettas were past their zenith and beginning to wane in popularity, *The Merry Widow* breathed new life into the genre and began a new era for the Viennese style waltz-operetta. Enjoy the show!**

**Education Guide compiled by Opera on the James Education Department  
[www.operaonthejames.org](http://www.operaonthejames.org) 434-528-3397**

# STUDY GUIDE FOR *THE MERRY WIDOW* by Franz Lehár

**Opera on the James** is proud to share opera with students and educators at the theater, in schools and Professional Development Days. This Study Guide is made possible by grants and donations from many different sources. Please join us in thanking them by visiting the final page of this Guide.

## Contents

This Study Guide is intended to give teachers and students background information which will better prepare students planning to attend the Final Orchestra Dress rehearsal of *The Merry Widow* and thus maximize their appreciation of the opera.

Included are:

- ◇ An introduction to *The Merry Widow*
- ◇ The characters of *The Merry Widow*
- ◇ Plot synopsis for middle school students
- ◇ Plot synopsis for high school students
- ◇ The life of the composer, Franz Lehár
- ◇ A brief history of opera
- ◇ A glossary of opera and music terms
- ◇ A description of operatic voices
- ◇ Myths and realities about opera as an art form
- ◇ Jobs in opera on and behind the stage
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- ◇ Feedback Form—FOR STUDENTS TO FILL OUT AND RETURN— THEY MIGHT WIN A PRIZE!
- ◇ Thank you to our generous funders.

## Teaching Objectives

We recommend that prior to the performance students should be able to:

- ◇ Recognize major character names
- ◇ Recall major plot points in their own words

Students who demonstrate strength in art, music and / or language arts should be encouraged to explore:

- ◇ How language and music combine to tell a story
- ◇ How opera reflects real human situations and emotions
- ◇ How music can be used to create a mood
- ◇ How the many elements combine to create an opera

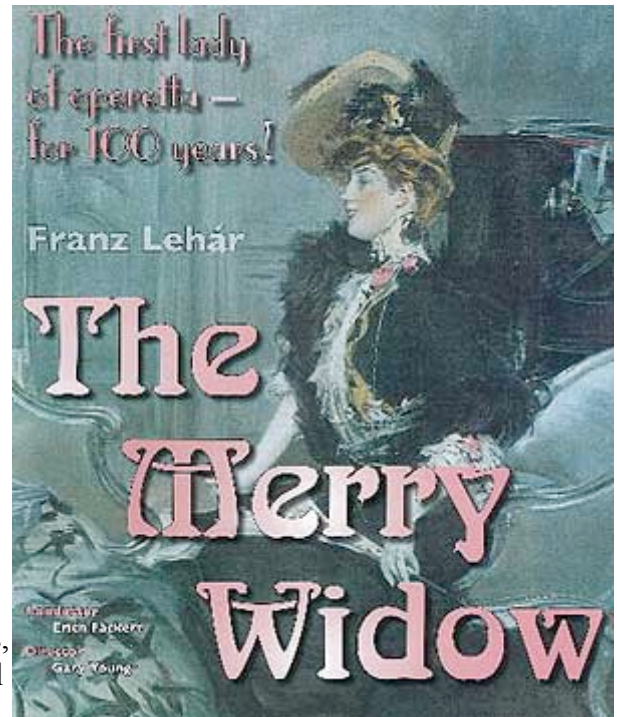
***The Merry Widow* has been called “The Queen of Operettas” as it is one of the best known and most performed. In its first decade, *The Merry Widow* received nearly 5,000 performances worldwide!**

The setting is Paris in the early 1900s.

The scenes take place at:

- the Parisian embassy of the small country of Pontevedro;
- the sumptuous home of Hanna (the merry widow);
- and a famous night club, Maxims.

Pontevedro is an imaginary country, but Maxims was a real place, one of the most fashionable spots in Paris. It was known for stunning entertainment and beautiful patrons.



## **The Main Characters / Roles in *The Merry Widow***

- Hanna Glawari  
*A wealthy and glamorous widow from Pontevedro, who is enjoying being the toast of Paris.*
- Baron Zeta  
*Pontevedro’s ambassador to France—in charge of making sure Hanna doesn’t marry a Parisian.. If she takes her money out of Pontevedro, the whole country will be bankrupt!*
- Count Danilo  
*a handsome Pontevedrian gentleman famous for his romantic adventures*
- Njegus  
*Aide to Baron Zeta*
- Valencienne  
*wife of Baron Zeta*
- Count Camille de Rosillon  
*a Parisian in love with Valencienne*
- Small roles and Chorus Parts: Pontevedrians, Parisians, dancers at the famous dinner club, Maxim’s.

# *The Merry Widow*

## *Brief Synopsis*

### **Act 1:**

#### **The Pontevedrian Embassy in Paris.**

The Pontevedrian ambassador in Paris, Baron Zeta, gives a party. Camille declares his passion for Valencienne, but she reminds him she is Zeta's devoted wife. Everyone awaits the newly widowed, wealthy Hanna Glawari. Zeta urges Danilo to marry Hanna as he wants Hanna's wealth to remain in Pontevedro. Hanna invites everyone to a party in her house. Prince Danilo arrives. He is actually Hanna's first love but his aristocratic family rejected her so Danilo was unable to marry her. Later, Hanna married a rich banker, who died a week after the wedding, leaving her a huge amount of money. Danilo insists she has no interest in Hanna and would rather be in Maxim's having an enjoyable dinner and watching the Cancan dancers. Meantime, Camille is being nudged by Valencienne to consider marrying Hanna for the sake of their country's financial stability.

### **Act 2:**

#### **At Hanna's House**

Hanna entertains her guests in a lavish Pontevedrian style. Baron Zeta is furious to think that Danilo is not attending the party as he was ordered to not only attend, but to propose to Hanna that very night before one of the Parisians can lure her (and her money) to live in Paris. Eventually, Danilo arrives and he and Hanna dance and reminisce.

Meantime, Camille insists on a kiss from Valencienne. Zeta is alerted and by the time he finds his wife with the attentive Camille, Hanna has come up with a plan to cover up for Valencienne. Hanna announces her engagement to Camille and saves Valencienne from the jealous anger of Baron Zeta. In a fit of jealousy, Danilo storms off to Maxim's. His actions let Hanna know that Danilo still loves her as she does him.

### **Act 3:**

#### **At Maxim's**

Valencienne and her friends Sylviane and Olga go to Maxim's to persuade Danilo to marry Hanna. Danilo and Hanna bribe the maitre d'hotel to clear out the restaurant. Hanna admits she has no intention of marrying Camille. Danilo is overjoyed and confesses he loves her.

(Happy Ending)

# Meet the Composer!

**Franz Lehár**  
**1870 - 1948**

*Hungarian born Lehar kept Viennese operetta alive well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Meanwhile others, notably Victor Herbert and Sigmund Romberg (another Hungarian) took operetta to America. where under the bright lights of Broadway, songwriters like Irving Berlin, and singing stars like Mario Lanza added an exciting new pace and energy to the old Viennese charm. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century operetta had been transformed into the musical of stage and screen.*

Franz Lehar was born on April 30, 1870 in Komarom Hungary to Franz Lehar senior, a military bandmaster and composer, and Christine Neubrandt. Being born into a musical house, Franz learned to play the violin and piano before he could read or write. His mother encouraged free improvisation on the piano, and by age eleven, Franz had composed his first song. Franz then attended the conservatory of Prague for six years.

In the summer of 1888, Franz began his first musical engagement as a violinist. However, he did not enjoy all the concerts because it left no time for him to compose. To get out of this predicament, his father arranged his draft into the army. Beginning in 1890 and for the next twelve years, Franz was a military bandmaster. To supplement his pay, Franz made band arrangements of folk songs, classical pieces and popular songs. In 1894, Franz was discharged from the military after an "incident" in which he refused to conduct a concert. After his first opera received mixed reviews and it looked as if he would not be making any money as a composer in the near future, Lehar re-enlisted in the military. He eventually transferred to Vienna in 1899 as the bandmaster of the infantry regiment #26 and in 1902, he composed the waltz "Gold and Silver" that garnered him some of the international fame that he sought.

Later that same year, Lehar gave up the military for good and received the position of musical director at Vienna's famous Theater an der Wien. In 1905 Franz began a friendship with Viktor Leon, a noted librettist (writer of words that the composer sets to music). Leon was one of the most important and successful personalities of the Viennese operetta scene. They would work on many operettas together starting with *The Merry Widow*.



Continued...

The operetta met with an instant success among the public (although the critics were divided). By April 1907, *The Merry Widow* celebrated its 400th performance in Vienna. Later in 1907, *The Merry Widow* was performed in London and New York, with performances in 1908 in Copenhagen, Moscow and Milan; 1909 in Madrid and Paris and in 1910 in Brussels.

After the success of *The Merry Widow*, Franz no longer needed to worry about composing for a living. The royalties alone made him a wealthy man and he soon purchased a summer home in Bad Ischl, the playground of the wealthy. It was in Bad Ischl, that Franz met Sophie Meth, the daughter of a Viennese carpet dealer and already married. In 1906, they began a love affair that ended with Sophie's eventual divorce from her husband and subsequent marriage to Lehar in 1921. Although married, Franz insisted on maintaining his original style of autonomous living and insisted on separate apartments.

Lehar continued to write operettas although none achieved the same success as *The Merry Widow*. Throughout 1909 and 1910, he composed several more operettas which gained in fame throughout the Viennese theaters in record breaking fashion. In three Viennese theaters during 1910, Lehar's operettas were performed 200 times in each!

During World War I, Lehar continued to compose operettas, classical song cycles, and symphonic poems. In 1921, Lehar would begin a friendship that would dramatically effect his compositional life; he met the famed classical tenor Richard Tauber. Tauber's interpretation of Lehar's work entranced the composer as well as the public. During the remainder of the 1920s, Lehar composed several operettas for Tauber's voice, the most famous of which was *The Land of Smiles*. In 1933, Lehar composed *Giudetta*, a full fledged comic opera, which became Lehar's final work. During his final years, Lehar devoted himself to the Glocken-Verlag, a publishing house he founded in 1935.

During World War II, Franz and Sophie faced a most difficult situation given that Franz had cooperated with Jewish librettists, and Sophie had Jewish origins. Fortunately for the Lehars, Hitler was a great admirer of *The Merry Widow* so they escaped the brutality of the Nazi regime. Not so for Lehar's librettists, Fritz Grunbaum and Fritz Lohner who were eventually murdered in concentration camps. Franz and Sophie spent the remainder of World War II at their home in Bad Ischl, while their home in Vienna was ransacked.

Sophie died in 1947. Franz Lehár died on October 24, 1948. In 1958, a monument dedicated to the composer was created in Bad Ischl and the theater in the town is named after him.

### **More about tenor Richard Tauber:**

On stage, on record, and on film, Tauber became one of the most popular international performers of his day. He began his career as a singer in his native Austria and established a considerable reputation in the tenor repertoire, especially that of Mozart. When he turned to operetta his friends berated him for what they saw as a lapse of taste; his voice, and his musicianship, they said, was too good for operetta. To which Tauber responded by telling them **"I don't sing operetta, I sing Lehár!"**

## Significant Events During Franz Lehar's Lifetime

**1873** Edgar Degas paints Ballet Rehearsal

**1876** Alexander Graham Bell (1847–1922) invents the telephone; Mark Twain writes Tom Sawyer

**1885** The first modern bicycle is built. Bikes are a craze in America and Europe until the end of the century; The Gilbert and Sullivan opera *The Mikado* premieres in London.  
First movie invented by T. Edison

**1886** The Statue of Liberty, designed and built by Gustav Eiffel is dedicated in New York Harbor, a gift from the French people

**1888** The amateur photography craze is launched with the invention of the Kodak #1 camera by George Eastman (1854–1932); VanGogh paints “Sunflowers”

**1889** Eiffel Tower completed in Paris

**1891** Sir Arthur Conan Doyle writes The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

**1896** Olympic Games revived in Athens, Greece

**1901** Orville and Wilbur Wright fly first controlled, heavier-than-air plane at Kitty Hawk

**1902** First public radio broadcast by N. Stubblefield in Kentucky; Pierre and Marie Curie discover radium;

**1904** Giacomo Puccini composes Madame Butterfly

**1908** Henry Ford produces First Model T motorcar

**1909** North Pole American explorers Robert Peary and Matthew Henson reach North Pole; Frank Lloyd Wright designs Robie House in Chicago

**1910** Discovery of protons and electrons

**1912** *Titanic* sinks on the night of Sunday 14 April

**1914** World War I begins (1914 – 1918); Panama canal opens

**1915** Albert Einstein formulates General Theory of Relativity;  
Worldwide influenza epidemic strikes; by 1920, nearly 20 million are dead. In U.S. alone, 500,000 perish; Russian revolutionaries execute the former czar Nicholas and his family during Russian civil war.

- 1919** Mohandas Ghandi initiates satyagraha (“truth force”) campaigns, beginning his nonviolent resistance movement against British rule in India
- 1921** Charlie Chaplin produces his silent film “The Kid”
- 1926** F. Scott Fitzgerald writes The Great Gatsby
- 1927** Charles Lindburgh flies solo across the Atlantic in his plane “The Spirit of St. Louis”
- 1929** American Stock Market Crashes, “The Great Depression” ensues
- 1930** Penicillin discovered by scientists
- 1931** First broadcast of Metropolitan Opera- Hansel & Gretel by E. Humperdinck
- 1934** Adolph Hitler becomes Fuhrer of Germany
- 1935** George Gershwin writes opera Porgy and Bess
- 1937** Amelia Earhart is lost on a trans-world flight
- 1939** Steinbeck writes Grapes of Wrath
- 1940** US enters WWII
- 1941** December 7<sup>th</sup>, Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor
- 1945** Atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; first electronic computer ENIAC built
- 1946** First United Nations assembly
- 1948** India and Pakistan gain independence from Britain

## How did Opera Get Started?

Millions of people, over many centuries, love opera, but why? What is opera, and why does it pull people in? Why do some people feel it is the greatest form of musical expression?

Opera began in the latter part of the 16th century in Italy. It was invented by a group of wealthy people in Florence who wanted to reproduce ancient Greek dramas.

At the time, Europe was experiencing a renaissance -- a time when artists, writers, and architects became interested in the cultures of the past, especially the ancient Greeks. The texts of the dramas made it clear that music was used in the Greek play productions of centuries earlier. There were no recordings at that time, so the sound of the Greek music remains a mystery. The Italians began to experiment by reading the plays aloud and adding a few music chords as accompaniment. This practice of reciting text to music naturally led to singing the words, what is known in English as “recitative”. Over time, the music grew more complex, and musical professionals became interested in this combination of drama mixed with music.

The first “real” opera was most likely a recitative work titled *Dafne*, written in the late 1500s, by Jacopo Peri. Peri’s opera is lost, but its existence is known because so many people wrote comments about the performance, thus spreading the word about this exciting new art form.

Soon other expert composers began experimenting, adding showy and complicated songs called arias, which allowed the singers to express the emotions of the characters and to show off their singing abilities. Later composers added choruses, dances, and instrumental interludes, and opera continued to grow and change. The popularity of opera quickly spread throughout Europe and Russia.

In 1637, the first theater dedicated strictly to opera productions was built in Venice. At first, the great German and Austrian composers like Handel and Mozart wrote their operas in Italian, since opera was considered an Italian art form, but eventually composers began to create operas in their own languages.

By the late 19th century, operas of tremendous length, with expansive music and stories were being written. These productions lasted hours, demanding huge, expensive productions, mature singers with big voices, large choruses, orchestras and lavish scenery and costumes.

European immigrants brought opera to the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries. The most famous opera theater in the United States, the Metropolitan Opera House, opened in New York City in 1883 and is now housed in Lincoln Center. To this day opera buffs still love to attend their favorite operas at the “Met”.

The MET now transmits live performances to movie theaters in most major cities, including Lynchburg. The combination of up-close cameras and those showing the whole stage picture give a feeling of being right there—because you are! No touch-ups are do-overs—real time, real

art.

## **Learn to speak Opera!**

## **An Operatic Glossary**

**ARIA** – An extended musical piece for solo voice; in opera, it's usually when a character expresses his or her emotions in regards to a particular situation in the plot.

**BEL CANTO** – Translated literally as “beautiful singing”, the term describes a vocal technique demanding ease, vocal agility and precision. This technique flourished in Italy from the 17th to the 19th centuries.

**BITONALITY** – A compositional technique which utilizes two key signatures, harmonic structures, or modalities simultaneously.

**CABALETTA** – Characterized by a vocal line requiring extreme vocal virtuosity, its highly punctuated rhythmic style is in great contrast to the lyrical sweetness of the aria which immediately precedes it.

**CHOREOGRAPHER** – The member of an opera's production team who is responsible for the creation of dance steps and movement which will be performed as part of the opera.

**CHORUS** – An ensemble of mixed voices (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) which perform in an opera as villagers, courtiers, servants, or any group of people. Their music is frequently some of the most dramatic in the work.

**COMIC OPERA** – An opera using a light or sentimental subject with a happy ending. To be compared to, but not confused with, **OPERETTA**.

**COMPOSER** – The person responsible for the creation of the music.

**CONDUCTOR** – The person responsible for rehearsing and leading performances of the work. The conductor oversees all musical details of the pieces, from the minutest rhythm questions to large-scale concepts of pacing and musical/dramatic impact.

**DIRECTOR** – The person responsible for creating the **STAGING**, as well as the overall concept and interpretation of the dramaturgical aspects of the work. Works in close collaboration with the **CONDUCTOR**.

**DUET** – A section of the opera performed by two singers.

**DYNAMICS** – A term which is used to describe the range of volume of sound required by the composer; an expressive element of interpretation.

**ENSEMBLE** – A section of the opera which combines many soloists (and frequently chorus) expressing many emotions (often conflicting) simultaneously.

**FIORITURA** – Italian for “flourish”; embellishment of the melodic line, whether written out by the composer or interpolated by the singer.

**LEITMOTIF** – A German term referring to a (frequently short) musical phrase which is used consistently throughout an opera to represent a specific character, emotion, location or situation. Used extensively in the operas of Richard Wagner.

LIBRETTIST – The person or persons who create the LIBRETTO for an opera.

LIBRETTO – Literally, “little book”, a term which describes the text or words of an opera. A libretto can be newly created or based on an existing pieces of literature or drama. Some librettists are as famous as the composers who set their words..

MAESTRO – Translated literally as “master”, the term is one of respect used when addressing a CONDUCTOR of a symphony orchestra or opera.

OPERA – Plural form of the Latin word opus (work).

OPERA BUFFA – Derived from the Italian “buffone” or buffoon, a type of opera characterized by comedy, improbable situations and general hilarity.

OPERA SERIA – A form of Italian opera from the 18th century, dealing largely with historical Classical figures. These works presented stories from antiquity in a comprehensible format.

OPERETTA – A type of comic music theatre which incorporates music, dialogue and dance. The music is frequently in a popular vein and the plot is usually stock comic situations. Operetta is the forerunner of American musical theatre.

PRODUCTION TEAM – The group of individuals responsible for the complete look of the show. The team is comprised of the DIRECTOR, CHOREOGRAPHER, Set Designer, Costume Designer, and Lighting Designer. They create a production concept many months before the STAGING begins.

PROPS – Objects used or placed on the stage, excluding scenery.

RECITATIVE – From the Italian word “recitativo” (recitation), musical sections of an opera which provide major plot points through quick delivery of text. Placed between arias and ensembles, the two most common forms are secco (dry) which are accompanied only by a harpsichord (and cello or bassoon), and accompagnato (accompanied) which are underscored by the orchestra.

STAGING – The “traffic pattern” through which the director moves the singers through the plot on stage. The staging can be either very literal or quite stylized. The style of staging usually relates directly to the style of the production.

## **A Note about Opera Voices**

It is truly difficult to define “operatic” singing. Is there any difference between how an opera singer produces their sound compared to a pop or country singer? The actual “voicebox” is absolutely no different, physiologically speaking; just the way in which it is used. A primary difference in this utilization is a more complete command of all the physical attributes of singing; the most important of these being *breath control*. Classically trained singers spend a great deal of time studying how to use this breath control to produce sufficient tone to cut through an orchestra *without amplification*, as well as learning how to sustain a longer musical line. There are six major voice types, listed from highest to lowest: *soprano, mezzo soprano, contralto, tenor, baritone* and *bass*. Within these six categories are four subcategories (*coloratura, lyric, spinto and dramatic*) which further clarify the type of voice and vocal

skills needed for specific roles.

## **MYTH or REALITY? The Truth about Opera**

### **MYTH: “I won’t understand it...”**

It’s true; many of the most renowned operas were written and are still sung in Italian, French, or German. However, almost all opera companies now have supertitles projected above the stage. As a character sings a piece in Italian for instance, you get the simultaneous English translation appearing above the stage. Some companies also provide supertitles in other languages. Florida Grand Opera projects both English AND Spanish translations. Opera companies put the story in reduced form (synopsis) on their websites. Identify the characters and learn the plot beforehand, and much of the action will become much clearer to you.

### **COMPLAINT: “I have to dress up...”**

The most important thing is to feel comfortable, and you will see different attire at an opera performance. However, there can be an element of celebrating a special night at the theater by “dressing up” which many people enjoy. It’s up to you.

### **MISUNDERSTANDING: “It ain’t over ‘til the fat lady sings...”**

This old stereotype went out many years ago. While true that for centuries many operatic stars were on the hefty side, now it is much more important they be fit. Modern opera audiences are demanding that the singers not only sing, act and communicate well, but look the part they are playing on stage. While the past depictions of fat ladies with horned helmets still make us laugh, the reality is that today’s stars are more focused on staying healthy and fit for sometimes grueling roles.

### **HALF-TRUTH: “Opera is for old people...”**

It’s true you will see many older people at the opera, but if you really look around you will see that people of every age are in the theater. In fact, the popularity of opera is growing quickly, so you won’t be the least out of place if you decide to go.

### **TOTAL MYTH: “Opera is boring!...”**

Before you go, take the time to learn about some of the characters, and understand the plot. You won’t be bored if you understand first and foremost what is going on. Once you are there, take in your surroundings – the theater itself, the stage, the orchestra, the sets, costumes, and characters. Then immerse yourself in the actions, the emotions, the magic of the music and the drama or comedy taking place before you. Another great aspect to opera – it’s like a wonderful book or painting: the more times you read it or look at it, the richer the experience.

### **ARGUMENT: “Opera is antiquated and out of date...”**

Never. Opera is an art form that has lasted for centuries – it has amazed, amused, impressed, and enticed audiences of all ages for generations. In addition to traditional opera stars, classical crossover artists like Andrea Bocelli, Sara Brightman, Il Divo, Josh Groban and Charlotte Church are becoming so popular that Billboard recently added a new category to their charts, “Classical Crossover”. Many beloved movies have drawn their inspiration from opera; recent ones include *Philadelphia*, *Moonstruck*, *Pretty Woman*, *Fatal Attraction*. Broadway musicals, such as *Aida*, *Miss Saigon*, *Rent*, and *La Bohème* are based on traditional operas. Today’s composers continue to create new and exciting opera material. Opera will never be out of date.

### **FINAL ARGUMENT: “I can’t afford it; opera is too expensive.”**

Not so. Student tickets for Opera on the James performances are only \$10 - just about the same cost as an

evening movie ticket, or a fancy coffee and a brownie from Starbucks!

## **Jobs in Opera - On and Off the Stage**

The composer does not wake up one morning and say, “Tonight I think I will go to the concert hall and present my opera for an audience. Clearly, more than one night is needed to pull together any theatrical production; an opera is no exception. Basically, you can divide an opera into two components - those under the lights and those behind the scenes.

### **UNDER THE LIGHTS**

You’ve already learned about the “voices” (actors) in the opera. They clearly have great talent. They also need the following: ability to master the music, rhythms, and words of multiple languages, memorize challenging passages of music, acting ability, and amazing physical stamina to perform for hours in hot, heavy, bulky costumes. They are as highly trained as any star athlete: they are fit, disciplined, and dedicated to their art. Let’s not forget the other performers. Many operas have a large chorus of singers who sing together as one unit and often appear in crowd scenes. They can also appear in costume, representing soldiers, townspeople and the like. Other non-speaking, non-singing people paid to appear in crowd scenes on stage are called supernumeraries. In some instances, operas will also have dancers. They can be part of a crowd scene or featured in solo roles. In some operas there are ballet performances as part of the production. The orchestra: talented musicians all. The blending of the composer’s music with the action and singing is key to keeping the opera on track. Again, these people are hard-working, highly trained, and constantly practicing to hone their skills. The conductor keeps everyone in the orchestra on task, guiding the musicians, timing the music, but never overpowering the action on stage. That’s in addition to coordinating the singers, choruses and other musical actions on the stage.

### **BEHIND THE SCENES**

**So you can’t sing, don’t dance, have no acting or musical ability and could care less about learning a foreign language. What on earth could you do in an opera, and why would you?**

There are many, many other careers in theater besides those on stage. Putting together a major production like an opera requires a vast number of people in a variety of interesting jobs, requiring many skill sets. Besides all the business people that run the company, raise money, hire staff and artists, etc., there’s also:

- **The construction crew:** Today’s performances require carpenters, painters, electricians, lighting and sound designers, set and costume designers, and make-up artists. A great costume designer, for example, has to clearly understand the story and time period of the opera, so the costumes appear authentic and are made sturdy enough to withstand the rigors of the performance.
- **The scenery or set designers are like architects:** They create detailed blueprints of the sets, making models to ensure that all the scenery will fit properly on the stage. The lighting designer underscores the actions and emotions of the opera with the use of lights that affect the appearance of the characters, the sets, the props, and the mood of the performance.
- **The technical director orchestrates all of these people:** He/she manages the construction crew, the stagehands, the building of the sets and scenery - anything to do with the physical make-up and logistics of the staging.
- **Let’s not forget the choreographer:** This artist designs and creates the steps of the dances and trains the dancers in the performance. He/she can recreate the original choreography of an opera or interpret the music and story with his own unique style.
- **The stage manager:** This is the person who coordinates everybody involved in the opera. This person tells the crew when to raise and lower the curtain, when to change the lighting, scenery, sets, and sound effects. She/he keeps everyone in the loop on their places and parts to keep the performance flowing

smoothly.

### Activity 1: MAKE IT MATCH

Directions: Match the operatic terms with their definitions. You may have to do some research to find the correct match.

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 1. Librettist | a. Often for comic effect, a man sings in a very high voice.                         |
| 2. Synopsis   | b. A section of an aria where the singer may improvise, to display vocal talents.    |
| 3. Composer   | c. All of the music, both vocal and orchestral, is written in this.                  |
| 4. Aria       | d. A solo piece in an opera, written to focus on the character's emotion.            |
| 5. Cadenza    | e. Singers, as characters, perform these parts of the opera.                         |
| 6. Opera      | f. An Italian word for expressing appreciation to a male performer.                  |
| 7. Roles      | g. The person who writes the words for an opera.                                     |
| 8. Score      | h. A musical drama or comedy in which the actors sing rather than speak their lines. |
| 9. Falsetto   | i. A short summary of what takes place in the story.                                 |
| 10. Bravo!    | j. The writer of the music for an opera.   |

### Activity 2: RESEARCH these additional operatic terms. Share your findings with your class.

Pants Role or Trouser Role

“Brava!” and “Bravi tutti!”

Buffo

Ensemble

Bel Canto

### Activity 3:

1. CREATE an opera timeline. Start with the earliest opera, *Dafne*, by Peri, and continue to current times. Include the most famous or influential operas, their composers, and countries of origin.
2. After creating your timeline, choose an opera to research in depth. Read the libretto in English; listen to a recording of the opera.

Make sure to ask and answer the following questions:

- a. What kind of opera is it?
- b. In what language was it first written?
- c. Who are the major characters? What “voice” sings each role? Are any of the singers on the recording famous? Who are they?
- d. What is the story line about? What is the overall theme of the opera?
- e. Is the opera based on some other source? A book? A painting? An historical or Biblical event? A myth?
- f. What major events are taking place at the time the opera was created?
- g. What other elements may have influenced the composer to write this particular opera?

### Activity 4:

1. READ a favorite short story, book or poem. Describe what kind of scenery you would design for it and what costumes you might use. If you like, you can make drawings or pictures as well.

QUOTE:

***“When the music and the characters are flawlessly synchronized, the opera develops an emotional force that movies and plays cannot match.”***

***-- Bruce Beresford, Australian Film Writer, Director and Producer***

## ***Recommended Resources:***

### ***DVDs:***

*The Merry Widow* produced by San Francisco Opera

**CDs for middle and high school**—NO NOT BE PUT OFF BY THE “for children” markings!

- The World’s Very Best Opera for Kids in English [www.childrensgroup.com](http://www.childrensgroup.com)
- Classical Child at the Opera [www.metromusic.com](http://www.metromusic.com)
- Pavarotti’s Opera Made Easy: My Favorite Opera for Children London/Decca Records
- Matthew Sabatella: Songs in the Life of Abraham Lincoln [info@balladofamerica.com](mailto:info@balladofamerica.com)
- Bernstein Favorites: Children’s Classics with the New York Philharmonic Sony Classics
- Classical Kids Hallelujah Handel! [www.childrensgroup.com](http://www.childrensgroup.com)
- Classical Kids Mozart’s Magic Fantasy
- Classical Kids Mr. Bach Comes to Call

### ***Online Resources***

- The Metropolitan Opera: [www.metoperafmaily.org](http://www.metoperafmaily.org)
- Opera on the James: [www.operaonthejames.org](http://www.operaonthejames.org)
- [www.grovemusic.com](http://www.grovemusic.com)
- [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)
- For succinct information on the origins of opera: <http://www.pirandello.com/opera.html>

### ***Books:***

- Opera for Dummies by David Pogue
- Opera, The Rough Guide by Matthew Boyden
- The Random House Book of Opera Stories by Adele Geras
- A Young Person’s Guide to Music by Neil Ardley
- 101 Opera Librettos: Complete Texts with English Translations by Allison Brewster Franzetti
- Great Composers by Stuart A. Kallen
- Listening Out Loud: Becoming a Composer by Elisabeth Swados
- Women Music Makers: An Introduction to Women Composers by Janet Nicvhols
- Period Make-up for the Stage: Step-by-Step by Rosemarie Swinfield
- Stage Costume: Step by Step by Mary T. Kidd
- Stagecraft 1: A Complete Guide to Backstage Work, by William H. Lord

## **Everything you wanted to know about going to the opera but were afraid to ask...**

The performers on stage today are thrilled to be here with you sharing their passion for music and singing. Attending any live concert performance is a unique experience, and one that can have a profound effect on the listener. To make sure that everyone in the audience has the chance to enjoy the concert in the fullest, listed below are some general guidelines to observe while listening to any live concert.

### **When to applaud**

- ◆ Clap when the conductor and pianist enter and bow.
- ◆ Clap when the scenes and acts are finished.
- ◆ Clapping is appropriate after a difficult aria (see Opera – A Brief Glossary); at that point there is usually an obvious break in the music.

### **Courtesy**

- ◆ Listen quietly. Talking and distracting movements prevent you and your neighbors from enjoying the concert.
- ◆ Talking, giggling, and whispering are distracting to the performers on stage.
- ◆ Performers can hear you talk even when singing and playing. REMEMBER: The performers hear you just as well as you hear them!
- ◆ The ringing of cell phones and pagers, while sometimes quite musical, were not intended by the composer to compliment the piece. REMEMBER: Turn them off and keep them off for the duration of the performance.
- ◆ Cameras and recording devices of ANY kind are not permitted during the performance. Flashes are extremely distracting to the performers on stage. This is a LIVE performance!

### ***LISTENING IS AN ACTIVE EXPERIENCE***

***Engage your mind and heart, and enjoy the amazing chance to hear some of the world's most profound music!***

***Thank you to our colleagues for information included in this Study Guide:***

***Opera Pacific  
Metropolitan Opera  
Arizona Opera  
San Francisco Opera  
Anchorage Opera  
New York City Opera***

*Sun-Sentinel Newspaper, Ft. Lauderdale  
Florida Grand Opera*

**DON'T MISS OUT!**

**YOU MIGHT WIN A \$100 BEST BUY GIFT CERTIFICATE!  
DEADLINE: RECEIVED BY MAY 1, 2010**

**FEEDBACK SURVEY—*The Merry Widow***

**To enter the contest, you will need to have attended either the Dress Rehearsal or a performance of *The Merry Widow* and send your responses to the eight questions below to Cecelia Schieve at Opera on the James. You can return by email or postal mail (addresses below). If sending by postal mail, be sure your name and address or email are on the letter for a chance to win the Best Buy certificate. The winner is chosen by blind draw.**

**There are four questions to answer before the performance, and four to answer after. Please be thoughtful so we have quality information to consider as we plan future programs. THANK YOU!**

*(1 being “not familiar at all” and 5 being “very familiar”)*

***Pre-performance:***

- 1) How familiar are you with opera? Scale of 1 – 5 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Do you expect to enjoy hearing live opera? Y, N or N/A
- 3) Can you name at least one opera other than the  
opera you are seeing today? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Can you name at least one operatic voice type? \_\_\_\_\_

***Post-performance:***

Following the live opera performance and/or thorough review of the Education Guide:

- 1) How familiar do you feel you are with opera? Scale of 1 – 5 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Did you enjoy the live opera performance? Y, N or N/A
- 3) What did you enjoy most? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) What did you enjoy least? \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL answers to: [cecelias@operaonthejames.org](mailto:cecelias@operaonthejames.org) or mail to:

Opera on the James  
Attention: Cecelia Schieve  
2240 Rivermont Ave.

Lynchburg, VA 24503

**Thank you for your responses—Good Luck! Winner will be notified after May 1, 2010**