



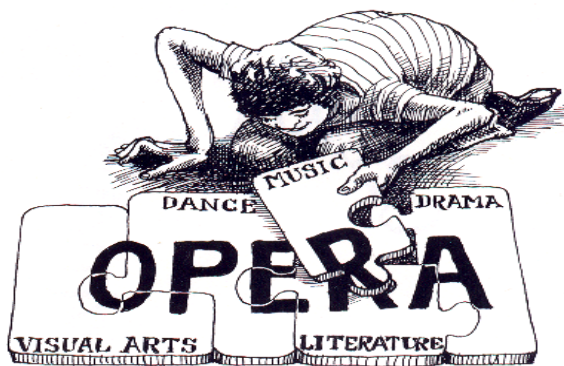
What is Opera?

Opera means “Work” in Italian and some people might say opera is hard work for the listener but opera is very hard work for the singer.

Opera is one of the many types of theatre. We call it a “sung play”, it is a play where people sing the words instead of speaking them.

Operas tell a story that is moving and dramatic. Operas were the soap operas of yesteryear and like soap operas on TV today, operas deal with stories of love, hate, revenge, envy, murder and all the dramatic elements that make a really good story.

Opera singers in their day were like pop stars or Shortland St stars today. They were mobbed in the streets!



Terms used in Opera

Forms of Opera

Opera is a sung dramatic performance, with instrumental accompaniment, by one or more singers in costumes

There are several forms of opera:

Grand Opera In which all words are sung – e.g. The flying Dutchman, The Marriage of Figaro

Opera Comique (Singspiel) Does not mean humorous but indicating there is some spoken dialogue e.g. Die Fledermaus

Opera Buffo – Comic A humorous opera, may be a grand or Comique opera e.g. Falstaff

Operetta A lighter form of opera Comique with overture, dialogue, songs, interludes and dances

e.g. The Merry Widow

Shows -
Musical
Comedies or
tragic stories

Similar to operetta, but with lighter and more romantic music. The aim is to frame the plot with musical numbers e.g. West Side story, The Sound of Music, Fiddler on the Roof , Phantom of the Opera

Who sings in an opera

Singers come in wide range of voice types from Lowest voice to Highest

- Bass** The lowest male voice – It has a rich deep quality and often plays the older man, or the bad guy.
- Baritone** Not as deep as bass – have a slightly lighter quality but still a rich sound – plays the off-sider to the tenor usually, but sometimes as in Rigoletto is the bad guy and has the best music.
- Tenor** The highest male voice the quality can range from very light to quite full and 'heroic' usually in opera plays the romantic lead character in love with the soprano
- Counter tenor** An extra high male voice that sounds very high and very light – used mostly in religious music and early opera.
- Contralto** The lowest female voice – a very rich sound, a true contralto is very rare.
- Mezzo Contralto** The middle female voice has a rich quality, sings fairly low, they often play the older woman or ' bad women' or witches.
- Mezzo soprano** Voice is slightly lighter than Mezzo contralto
- Soprano** The highest female voice. Can have a wide range of types – plays the "young love" of the tenor usually. Various types such as Coloratura – very light and very high acrobatic with the music. Lyric – warmer voice with good flexibility. Dramatic – powerful voice very declamatory

