

OPERA BASICS – ITS COMPONENTS

A Syllabus for September 2022

Tuesdays, September 13 and 20; 10:00 - 11:30am; CC Young Senior Living (Dallas, TX)

Opera has always been intended as a glorious entertainment - one that beguiles all the senses. If you've ever been tempted to find out what opera's attractions really are, but have been put off by seemingly incomprehensible conventions, then this is the course for you. Focusing on the operas of the late 18th, the 19th, and the early 20th centuries, members will discover together the wealth of performance resources composers of opera have at their disposal and, especially, the voices of the opera singers themselves classified by range, weight, and color.

I, Steve Dubrow (smdubrow@gmail.com), have been a devotee of opera since my childhood, attending, over the years, several hundreds of opera and vocal recital performances in the U.S. and Europe and maintaining an extensive CD collection focused on the classical vocal arts. Having graduated summa cum laude from Columbia, I did graduate work in Romance Languages and Literatures at Princeton and taught French at Brown University. A specialist in press and cultural affairs, I served for 25 years as a U.S. Foreign Service Officer, working in Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, Slovenia, Congo, Poland, Belgium, France, Austria, and – of course – in Washington, DC. I retired in 1998 as a member of the Senior Foreign Service of the United States (only to spend two more years as the spokesman for the Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs). From 2000 until 2019, I taught world languages (French, Latin, Spanish, Italian) in a high school ("Walter Johnson") in Montgomery County, MD, where I became a National Board Certified Teacher (a professional designation attained by 3.5% of American teachers). My wife, Jeannette, and I retired and moved to Denton in June of 2019, joining our poet and essayist daughter Jehanne, UNT Professor of English, but, alas, leaving our son Eric behind in Maryland.

SEPTEMBER 13. The class will focus on the components of an opera, in order to assure that we have a commonly understood vocabulary for

further discussion; to create an appreciation of the wealth of performance resources composers of opera have at their disposal; and to prepare us for the variety of performance pleasures opera presents to its audiences. Once each component is introduced, it will be exemplified by an appropriate opera selection (selected from those available on YouTube).

(2) Overture – the finale from the overture to GUILLAUME TELL by Rossini (in a performance by the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Edo de Waart)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIbYCOiETx0>

(33 seconds) Recitative – “Leporello, ove sei?” – *recitativo secco* from DON GIOVANNI (act 1, scene 1) by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (taken from the Salzburg Festival production, 1954, with Cesare Siepi and Otto Edelmann – 12:49-13:22)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPYjqz7nToY&t=802s>

(1) Aria – “Quand’ero paggio...,” Falstaff’s aria from FALSTAFF (act 2, scene 2) by Giuseppe Verdi (taken from the Metropolitan Opera production with Ambrogio Maestri as Falstaff – 0:37-1:11)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukS7qDd4pDA>

(7.5) Duet – second half of the love duet from TRISTAN UND ISOLDE (act 2) by Richard Wagner (taken from the Bayreuth Festival production with Sigmund Jerusalem and Johanna Meier; Daniel Barenboim, conductor – 31:12-38:40)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQNcTYVlcEg>

(5.5) Ensembles (trios, quartets, etc.) – Quintet (“Nous avons en tête une affaire...”) from CARMEN (act 2) by Georges Bizet (taken from the Metropolitan Opera production)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quAawHRj3HU>

(4) Choral scene – “Gloria all’Egitto...” (act 2) from AIDA by Verdi (taken from the Metropolitan Opera production)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czEfHr8YGPA>

(1.5) Ballet – Finale of “The Dance of the Hours (act 3) from LA GIOCONDA by Ponchielli (taken from the production at La Monnaie, Brussels – 7:00-8:30)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gb1An2BTN7M>

(5) Orchestral interlude – “Meditation” (act 2, between scenes 1 and 2) from THAÏS by Massenet (Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, David Chan, concertmaster)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LE-vk76Fg5k>

(19) Our first meeting will close by our viewing Act 2 of Puccini’s LA BOHEME, which will, in under 20 minutes, feature many of the components we have examined (1965 film by Franco Zeffirelli with Freni, Raimondi, Martino, and Panerai, La Scala orchestra and chorus conducted by Herbert von Karajan– 33:49-52:25)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5U2N2c96Kuk>

SEPTEMBER 20. Candidate Bill Clinton, in 1992, famously focused the voting public’s attention on the key issue to consider that election year with the catch phrase “It’s the economy, stupid.” Well, in opera, any year, “it’s the voice!” The kind of voice singers have is often referred to as their **Fach** - a German word that, as used in opera, has come to mean the singer’s vocal specialization, according to the range, weight, and color of singers’ voices. Although there is no strict agreement on all the names of the categories (or even, in every case, on which singer fits into what category), we will consider below 14 “Fächer” (the German plural of “Fach”). At the same time, we will consider some of the famous singers of modern times who incarnated these Fächer and try to put into words why they have had such success. Once each Fach and its representative singer are introduced, we will listen to an appropriate selection available on YouTube.

Soprano

(3) Coloratura – Diana Damrau (the Queen of the Night's act 1 aria from Mozart's THE MAGIC FLUTE – “Die Hölle Rache...”; the Royal Opera, Covent Garden)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuBeBjqKSGQ>

(2) Lyric - Kristina Mkhitarian (Lauretta's aria from Puccini's GIANNI SCHICCHI - "O, mio babbino caro, ..."; the Metropolitan Opera)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9J9XMe7zvVg>

(6.5) Spinto – Leontyne Price (Aida's act 1 aria from Verdi's AIDA – “Ritorna vincitor”)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-W--M_VMIY

(3.5) Dramatic (often termed “Wagnerian”) - Birgit Nilsson (Elisabeth's act 2 aria from Wagner's TANNHÄUSER - "Dich, Teure Halle...")

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwHnfay7hrc>

Mezzo-soprano

(6.5) Coloratura – Joyce DiDonato (Rosina's act 2 aria from Rossini's BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA – “Una voce poco fa...”)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zthY-DlabBI>

(4.5) Lyric/Dramatic – Elina Garanča (Carmen's act 1 aria from Bizet's CARMEN – “L'Amour est un oiseau rebelle...”; the Metropolitan Opera)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2snTkaD64U>

(3) Contralto – Ewa Podleś (the Marquise de Birkenfeld's act 1 aria from Donizetti's LA FILLE DU REGIMENT – “Pour une femme de mon nom...”)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kGUN7OCyIs>

Tenor

(4) Coloratura – Javier Camarena (Tonio's act 1 aria from Donizetti's LA FILLE DU REGIMENT – “Ah, mes amis...”; the Metropolitan Opera)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYgRFZdinTQ>

(4) Lyric – Fritz Wunderlich (Tamino's act 1 aria from Mozart's THE MAGIC FLUTE – “Dies Bildnis Ist Bezaubernd Schön...”)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=px0H0rD2L2E>

(4) Lyric-dramatic (spinto) – Luciano Pavarotti (Canio’s aria from act 1 of Leoncavallo’s I PAGLIACCI – “Vesti la giubba...”)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pieIgmPZ4Ro>

(7.5) Dramatic (Heldentenor) – Bryan Hymel (Enée’s act 5 recitative and aria from Berlioz’s LES TROYENS – “Inutiles regrets!”)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ctb3TNq3M7A>

Baritone/Bass

(4.5) Baritone – Dmitri Hvorostovsky (Giorgio Germont’s act 2 aria from Verdi’s LA TRAVIATA – “Di Provenza...”; the Vienna State Opera)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVXpinw-Xu4>

(4) Bass-baritone – George Gagnidze (as Scarpia in the “Te Deum,” finale of act 1 of Puccini’s TOSCA)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BW0XEPeYAjk>

(3) Bass – Günther Groissböck (as the Baron von Ochs in the act 2 finale of Richard Strauss’s DER ROSENKAVALIER)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49LM4opBff8>