



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS



PRESENTS

GREAT AMERICAN VOICES

MILITARY BASE TOUR



UNFORGETTABLE MELODIES FROM
OPERA & BROADWAY



MADE POSSIBLE BY



GREAT AMERICAN VOICES MILITARY BASE TOUR

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is proud to present the *Great American Voices Military Base Tour*. This national initiative will continue our goal of serving military services personnel and their families by providing admission-free professional performances of opera and Broadway classics. Supplemental educational activities will be available for both adults and youth to enhance their understanding of the music.

Great American Voices builds on the existing partnership between the NEA and the Department of Defense as reflected through such NEA projects as *Operation Homecoming* and *Shakespeare in American Communities*. In April 2004, *Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience* was launched as a national initiative to bring writing workshops with distinguished authors to more than 20 military bases nationwide and abroad. In fall 2004, the NEA launched the *Shakespeare in American Communities Military Base Tour*, which brought the Alabama Shakespeare Festival and its production of *Macbeth* to 13 U.S. bases.

Through *Great American Voices*, the NEA aims to foster long-term partnerships among military bases seeking cultural programming and regional opera companies with community outreach programs. Performances will take place at domestic military installations as early as July 2005 and will continue through August 2006, with 23 opera companies serving 39 military installations nationwide.

The NEA offers its sincere thanks to staff at participating bases for their invaluable assistance in coordinating these performances. We are grateful to the participating opera companies for their creativity and enthusiasm in reaching out to new military audiences. Most of all, we extend our appreciation to the men and women who serve our country in the armed services, and to the families that support them. We hope you enjoy the show.

Great American Voices is presented with assistance from OPERA America. *Great American Voices* is made possible by The Boeing Company.

A NIGHT AT THE OPERA, A TRIP TO BROADWAY



Photo by Vance Jacobs.

Opera is one of the most exciting and enjoyable arts. Although it may seem intimidating to some people, those who get the chance to experience opera in person usually come away dazzled.

Opera is great singing, heartfelt passion, and unforgettable music. It's no wonder that — until the appearance of movies — opera was for centuries the most popular art form in the world. Audiences flocked to it for laughter, tears, romance, terror, and suspense. Opera singers were the first international superstars, and opera composers like Giuseppe Verdi and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart became national heroes. Legendary tenor Enrico Caruso was the first musician ever to sell records in the millions.

Opera has always been enormously popular in the United States. It played to huge audiences from coast to coast — not only in cultural centers like New York or Philadelphia, but also in Gold Rush California and antebellum New Orleans. In the 1960s opera singers were regular guests on major television variety programs, from *The Tonight Show* to *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Today opera appears in many aspects of popular culture, and was featured in such films as *The Godfather*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *Moonstruck*, and *Pretty Woman*.

The Broadway musical began as an American attempt to create a native version of Italian opera and Viennese operetta. Like opera, Broadway musicals tell powerful human stories through song.

Building on these great musical traditions, the National Endowment for the Arts presents the *Great American Voices Military Base Tour*. This program provides an evening of unforgettable melodies from opera and Broadway classics at military bases nationwide. Each performance will feature young artists from leading American opera companies. The singers will also present workshops at local schools and community centers to enhance understanding and appreciation of the music.

Great American Voices is made possible by the generous support of The Boeing Company. The Arts Endowment is delighted to bring the best of the arts to military communities through *Great American Voices*.

See you at the opera.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dana Gioia".

Dana Gioia
Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts



PARTICIPATING MILITARY BASES

PARTICIPATING OPERA COMPANIES

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 Los Angeles Opera (Los Angeles, CA)
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 Lyric Opera of Kansas City (Kansas City, MO)
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 The Minnesota Opera Company (Minneapolis, MN)
 Opera Carolina (Charlotte, NC)
 Opera Colorado (Denver, CO)
 Opera Theatre of Saint Louis (Saint Louis, MO)
 Orlando Opera (Orlando, FL)
 Pensacola Opera (Pensacola, FL)
 Pittsburgh Opera (Pittsburgh, PA)
 Rimrock Opera Company (Billings, MT)
 San Diego Opera Association (San Diego, CA)
 The Santa Fe Opera (Santa Fe, NM)
 Seattle Opera (Seattle, WA)
 Virginia Opera Association (Norfolk, VA)
 Washington National Opera (Washington, DC)

For more information on these organizations, please visit www.greatamericanvoices.org.



Scott Ramsay, Tracie Luck, Staff Sgt. Alvy Powell, and Robin Follman perform with Opera Carolina and the Winston-Salem Symphony at Camp Lejeune, July 4, 2005. Photo by Leslie Liberato/NEA.

(As of September 1, 2005. Bases are subject to change.)



OPERA IS ALL AROUND YOU

Opera is all around you, and you may not even know it. It can be found in commercials, cartoons, television, movies, and even on Broadway. By the end of the performance you will hear today, you may discover that you are familiar with many opera melodies. The next time you turn on the television or the radio, or go to the movies, listen closely, and you may find that opera plays a larger role in your life than you had previously thought. Below are just some of the ways that opera has found a place in popular culture.

WHAT'S OPERA, DOC?

Everyone remembers Elmer Fudd singing “Kill the wabbit . . . kill the wabbit” as he searches for Bugs Bunny in the Warner Bros. cartoons. But did you know that Elmer’s melody came from opera? The tune is courtesy of Richard Wagner, and can be found in his opera *Die Walküre*, part of his famous *Ring Cycle*.

Warner Bros. also includes several melodies from Rossini’s *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*) as part of a cartoon featuring Bugs Bunny emulating one of the most popular characters in opera, Figaro, a barber from the Spanish city of Seville, as he tries to outsmart Elmer Fudd.

OPERA IS FOR KIDS OF ALL AGES

Bugs Bunny episodes are not the only way that today’s adults were introduced to opera and musical theater as children. *The Muppet Show* and *Sesame Street* also offered many opportunities. Beverly Sills and Luciano Pavarotti are among the opera celebrities who have performed with the Muppets. In the 1980s, Plácido Domingo, a pink bird inspired by tenor, conductor, and arts administrator Plácido Domingo, appeared on *Sesame Street* as a regular character. More recently, Denyce Graves recorded “Elmo’s Opera Lullaby.”

While *The Muppet Show* and *Sesame Street* still reach children today, even more opera programming is available for kids. Acclaimed soprano Joan Sutherland created the series, “Who’s Afraid of Opera?”, which features opera tales and



Luciano Pavarotti with Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy. Photo courtesy of www.lucianopavarotti.com.

excerpts told and sung by Sutherland and puppets. Recent popular videos for children have featured opera, including “Baby Mozart,” which combines Mozart compositions such as *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*) with stimulating imagery for infants, and “Sumo at the Opera,” a VeggieTales story that stars Larry the Cucumber in an operatic lesson on perseverance.

OPERA ON THE SMALL SCREEN

Opera has found a place in television, as a part of both programming and commercials.

Opera has been the backdrop for such television shows as *Grace Under Fire*, *Just Shoot Me!*, and *Will and Grace*. Nathan Lane starred as a retired opera singer in the sitcom *Encore! Encore!* President Bartlett on *The West Wing* frequently attends the opera and is an opera devotee.

Other programs have incorporated opera into episodes:

- on *Frasier*, both Frasier and Niles are season ticket holders. In one episode, Frasier is befriended by a fictitious stage director at Seattle Opera, played by Patrick Stewart;
- in one memorable episode of *Seinfeld*, the gang gets tickets to see the opera *Pagliacci*. Aspects of the opera’s story of a troupe of traveling theater players whose indiscretions have tragic consequences are played out in “real” life, as Elaine’s boyfriend becomes obsessed with her and follows her to the theater in a clown suit.

Opera singers have been featured guests on many television variety shows over the years. Renowned opera star Beverly Sills appeared on *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson and had her own television special with Carol Burnett. Denyce Graves and Renée Fleming have appeared on *Late Night with Conan O’Brien* and the *Late Show with David Letterman*, respectively, and both have guest starred on *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*.

Audra McDonald, a three-time Tony Award-winner before she was 30, is known for her work on Broadway and has performed on some of the greatest stages worldwide. In



addition to her vocal work, she has increasingly earned film and television credits, including appearing as a guest star on *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* and starring in the series *Mr. Sterling* with Josh Brolin.



Soprano Audra McDonald as Jackie Brock and Josh Brolin as Senator Bill Sterling in the NBC Series, *Mister Sterling*. Photo by Vivian Zink and courtesy of NBC Universal.

Even MTV has gotten in on the act, releasing the movie-musical *Carmen: A Hip Hopera*. This update to Georges Bizet's *Carmen* features rapping as well as singing, and stars pop singer Beyonce Knowles, actor Mekhi Phifer, and a cast of young actors and hip-hop performers.

COMMERCIALS CASH IN WITH OPERA

Opera has been used to sell such brands as Barilla Tomato Sauce, British Airways, Sony, Dunkin' Donuts, Pizza Hut, and MasterCard, often creating memorable moments. Beyonce Knowles has belted out the sexy "Habanera" from *Carmen* to sell soft drinks, and another commercial featured a puppy promoting flea powder by singing "Hello, Mother," to the music from *La Gioconda*.

In addition, an award-winning ad campaign from Nike showed basketball player Charles Barkley singing about and dueling over sneakers, to tunes from *Il barbiere di Siviglia (The Barber of Seville)*, surrounded by operatic referees, cheerleaders, and newsmen.

OPERA, READY FOR ITS CLOSE-UP

If you've gone to the movies recently, chances are good you've heard some opera. Opera has been used to heighten tension, provide comic relief, and convey emotion in such varied films as *The Shawshank Redemption*, *Fatal Attraction*, *The Godfather*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Moonstruck*, *Philadelphia*, and *Bend It Like Beckham*. Opera excerpts frequently serve as background music, but opera often can be central to the plot.

In *Pretty Woman*, Edward (Richard Gere) takes Vivian (Julia Roberts) to the opera *La traviata*, which tells a tale of a courtesan who has fallen in love with someone above her stature, much in the same way that Vivian has fallen for Edward. As Vivian watches the action unfold on the stage, she realizes she is watching her life story and has a very strong emotional reaction to the opera.

THE THRILL OF VICTORY

Music has long been used to heighten "the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat," no more so than when The Three Tenors' version of "Nessun dorma" from *Turandot* became soccer's World Cup anthem in 1990.

Opera singers also appear regularly at major sporting events to perform the national anthem. Soprano Renée Fleming and mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves sang the anthem at the 2003 and 2001 World Series, respectively.



Soprano Renée Fleming sings the national anthem prior to game 2 of the Major League Baseball World Series in 2003 at Yankee Stadium. Photo by Mike Blake-Pool/Getty Images.

ARE THEY OR AREN'T THEY?

Opera's ability to reach people has hit the mainstream with an abundance of recording artists: Andrea Bocelli, Charlotte Church, Josh Groban, and now Amici and Il Divo, the group created by *American Idol's* Simon Cowell. With a few exceptions, these are not the singers you will find on opera's stages. Enjoy these artists, and remember that there are thousands of opera singers waiting to perform at an opera house near you.

"People's reactions to opera the first time they see it are very dramatic. They either love it, or they hate it. If they love it, they will always love it. If they don't, they may learn to appreciate it, but it will never become part of their soul."

— Edward Lewis (played by Richard Gere) in *Pretty Woman*



PAST AND PRESENT

Many of our most beloved patriotic songs were written in the 1800s. Our national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner," was written in 1814; "America the Beautiful" was composed in 1893; and John Philip Sousa, the March King, wrote "Stars and Stripes Forever" in 1896. In the 1900s, Irving Berlin, Aaron Copland, and George M. Cohan wrote some of our nation's most recognizable patriotic music: "God Bless America," "Fanfare for the Common Man," and "Yankee Doodle Dandy." Today, we continue to celebrate our national pride with these classic works. Similarly, many of opera's greatest hits are also from the past. Though opera's history began well before our young nation, the music of both genres continues to delight audiences.



Stephanie Blythe as Caesar sings to Elizabeth Futral's Cleopatra in Opera Colorado's 2005 production of Handel's *Julius Caesar*. Photo by P. Switzer.

LATE 1500S-1750 — RENAISSANCE AND BAROQUE

The birth of opera can be traced to the Renaissance era, though it gained popularity during the Baroque period. Composers working in the Baroque period created a complicated and fancy style of music. Opera singers needed to have flexible voices capable of handling the extra notes and embellished music designed to enhance the dramatic effect of the story. The focus of opera in the Baroque period was frequently on religious tales or mythology. Handel, a prominent opera composer of this period, is best-known for his oratorio *Messiah*, a popular work often performed today at Christmas and Easter concerts.



Mozart

LATE 1700S — CLASSICAL

In favor of writing music that was clear and simple to follow, composers of the

Classical period rejected many musical techniques that defined Baroque music. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was a prolific composer during this time. A child prodigy, by age four he played keyboard, by age five he played violin, and by age six he composed his first work of music (a minuet).

He lived only 35 years, but Mozart wrote more than 20 Italian operas and popular German music theater pieces. Many of his operas center around regular people rather than mythological, Biblical, or historical stories. Mozart's operas continue to be popular; *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*), *Le nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*), and *Don Giovanni* are among the top operatic works performed today.



Bruce Sledge, Dale Travis, and Ana Maria Martinez in The Santa Fe Opera's 2005 production of Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*). Photo by Ken Howard.

LATE 1700S-1850S — BEL CANTO

The Bel Canto period is defined by beautiful singing. More than any other style of opera, the music written during the Bel Canto period was created to showcase the singers' range, power, and flexibility. Opera stories

DID YOU KNOW?

Mozart's life was brought to the big screen in the 1984 Academy Award-winning movie *Amadeus*.



Rossini was famed for his short temper. While conducting a rehearsal one day, he was dismayed to hear a squealing noise emanating from a player's horn. "What's that?" he fumed, and instructed the player to go home. As the player was leaving, Rossini snapped, "I'll join you later." The player in question? Rossini's own father.



Rossini wrote *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*) in 13 days and, according to legend, he spent the whole time in his dressing gown, unshaven.



Aida is the quintessential grand opera due in large part to its triumphal march. The stage fills with numerous people, usually about 100 actors, but legend has it that in one production in a Connecticut arena in the 1980s, 1001 actors were used. Over the years, the procession has also featured such animals as elephants, tigers, and camels.



More than 100 years after its world premiere (and after thousands of performances worldwide), Puccini's *La bohème* recently made its Broadway debut. Australian producer Baz Luhrmann — of *Moulin Rouge* and *Strictly Ballroom* fame — brought *La bohème* to the Broadway stage and popular acclaim. His interest in this piece and the attention of audiences showcase how relevant time-tested classics are today.



Turandot, which was left unfinished at the time of Puccini's death, debuted 17 months later. Though a final scene had been added by another composer, conductor Arturo Toscanini chose to end the opera with Liu's death, following the last notes that Puccini had inscribed. The conductor simply set down his baton and, preempting applause, turned around to make the only speech of his life to an audience. "Here death triumphed over art," he said, and left the pit. The lights went up, and the audience dispersed in silence.

during this period frequently focused on passion and romance.

The most important Italian opera composer of the first half of the 19th century, and a leader in the Bel Canto style, Gioacchino Rossini reinvented the form and content of Italian opera. By the age of 20, he was the leading composer in Italy, and he went on to conquer the music worlds of Austria, France, and England. He was comfortable writing serious opera, but is perhaps best known for his comic operas: *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*) and *La Cenerentola* (a retelling of the story of Cinderella).

Another important Bel Canto composer was Gaetano Donizetti. Born quite poor, his life changed forever when a conductor educated him and sent him to a prestigious music school. Donizetti moved from Italy to Paris and finally to Vienna while pursuing his career. His legacy includes many operas, of which the most well-known is *Lucia di Lammermoor*, based on a popular 19th-century English novel.



Verdi

MID- TO LATE 1800s — THE DOMINANCE OF VERDI

During his lifetime, Giuseppe Verdi dominated the opera scene in Italy. At a memorial a month after his funeral, thousands of people filled the streets of Milan and sang the most famous of his choruses, "Va, pensiero" from his opera *Nabucco*. Verdi wanted to convey a more realistic theatrical experience. In his operas, more was demanded of the lead performers, orchestra, and chorus, both musically and dramatically. Verdi's *La traviata* and *Rigoletto* are among the most popular operatic works performed by opera companies today. Verdi is also known for developing the style of grand opera, with large casts of singers, stunning sets, beautiful costumes, and high drama. A classic example of this is his opera *Aida*, which is set in ancient Egypt.



Orlando Opera's 2004 production of Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*. Photo by Tony Firriolo.

LATE 1800s TO EARLY 1900s — VERISMO AND PUCCINI

"Verismo" means "realism" in Italian, and this realism was often portrayed in opera through central themes of passion, violence, or sensational depictions of daily life. The writers and playwrights of this time were particularly interested in new subject matter that reflected life in the lower classes, local customs, the southern regions of Italy, and regional language and idioms. Examples of Verismo operas are Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* (*Rustic Chivalry*) and Ruggiero Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*.



Puccini

Giacomo Puccini was one of the composers connected to the Verismo period. Puccini was born into a family of church musicians and was expected to follow in his father's footsteps.

However, he attended a performance of Verdi's *Aida* that changed the course of his life, and ultimately altered the landscape of opera with his well-known compositions. He took time between operas, refining the previous one, selecting the topic of the next, and hunting for game. His operas are known for their musical accessibility and dramatic stories. *Madama Butterfly*, *La bohème*, *Turandot*, and *Tosca* are among the most frequently performed operas today.

"My association with opera has opened my eyes. Singers are as passionate about their arias as I am about batting .390. If only we could get patrons to do the wave!"

— George Brett, baseball player



Gershwin

AMERICAN MUSICALS AND OPERA

George Gershwin, born in 1898, began his musical career as a songwriter working with his lyricist brother, Ira, creating such songs as "They Can't Take That Away From Me" and "Love Is Here To Stay." The Gershwins were at home on Broadway, but perhaps their best-known work — *Porgy and Bess* — continues to be the most performed American work on opera stages.

The 1940s brought *Oklahoma!* from the prolific duo of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. In many ways, this musical marked a turning point for Broadway composers. It was the first time that composers focused on creating characterizations through music instead of simply writing beautiful melodies, and it was the first musical in which all the songs were recorded for a soundtrack album. Rodgers and Hammerstein continued into the 1950s with *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music*.

In 1954 the music world was taken by storm by *West Side Story*, an interpretation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Written by Leonard Bernstein with lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, this work is infused with classical, pop, jazz, and Latin music. Bernstein also gave us *Candide*, and Sondheim has since composed Tony Award-winning works that have been performed on both Broadway and opera stages, including *Sweeney Todd*, *A Little Night Music*, and *Into the Woods*.

The 1950s also saw important premieres on the opera stage — 1954's *The Tender Land* by Aaron Copland, known to many as the composer of "Fanfare for the Common Man," and *Susannah* by Carlisle Floyd, which premiered at Florida State University in 1955. Floyd is an important composer of modern American opera and continues to write today, most recently premiering *Cold Sassy Tree*.

In the 1960s and '70s, opera's popularity in the United States grew. The result was the establishment of opera companies in cities of all sizes. No longer were major cities the only choice for opera lovers. With the increased

number of opera houses and with growing audiences, companies focused on commissioning new works.



Sandra Piques Eddy, Benjamin Bunsold, Jennifer Dudley, Coral Owdom, and Tawney Seward perform in Fort Worth Opera's 2005 production of Adamo's *Little Women*. Photo courtesy of Fort Worth Opera Association.

PRESENT DAY — BLURRED LINES

New operas are created around a variety of subjects, many of which originate in literature. Examples include *Little Women*, composed by Mark Adamo, based on the classic novel by Louisa May Alcott; *The Great Gatsby* by John Harbison, based on the F. Scott Fitzgerald novel; and *Margaret Garner* by Richard Danielpour and Toni Morrison, an opera about a historic person whose story also serves as the basis of Morrison's book *Beloved*.

On Broadway, many musicals are based on texts that originated as operas. The musical *Rent*, written by Jonathan Larson, is based on Puccini's *La bohème* and focuses on the relationships of struggling young people. Larson updated Puccini's opera to feature a rock score and changed the setting from Paris to New York City, but the challenges facing the characters, as well as the strong emotions felt among them, are timeless.

Another popular opera story, *Madama Butterfly*, has played to packed houses as the musical *Miss Saigon*, written by Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil. The opera explores the tragic love story between a young Japanese geisha and an American soldier at the turn of the 19th century. The musical sets the story in Saigon during the Vietnam War, but the passion between the young couple and the tragedy that overtakes their lives remain the same.

Gershwin's musical *Of Thee I Sing* was awarded the first Pulitzer Prize for a musical comedy.



At the turn of this century, *Time* magazine listed Rodgers and Hammerstein among the "Top 100 Most Important People of the [20th] Century."



Shirley Jones (a.k.a. Mrs. Partridge from the 1970s sitcom *The Partridge Family*) sang the ingenue in the movie versions of *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*.



Gertrude Lawrence, the actress who created the role of Anna in *The King and I*, was buried in the pink satin hoop ballgown that she wore during the famous "Shall We Dance" number.



Bernstein wrote *Candide* and *West Side Story* at the same time. The now famous "Tonight" duet was originally planned for *Candide*, and "Oh, Happy We" was originally for *West Side Story*.



After a seven-year struggle to get *Rent* produced, composer Larson saw the first preview performance and then died unexpectedly, leaving behind a musical that has cult-like popularity.







Continued from page 9.



Patrick Miller dips Anna Christy in Lyric Opera of Chicago's 2004 production of Bolcom's *A Wedding*. Photo by Dan Rest.

Most recently, Elton John and Tim Rice collaborated on *Aida*, based on Verdi's opera, explaining that it is an "ageless story of love and betrayal." This musical premiered after their other collaboration, Disney's *The Lion King*.

Broadway and opera are thriving today with productions of new works and old favorites. Hot tickets on Broadway include the Tony Award-winning musicals *Spamalot* and *The Producers*, as well as revivals of *Fiddler on the Roof* and *Sweet Charity*. In opera, William Bolcom's *A Wedding*, based on Robert Altman's movie, had its highly anticipated premiere; Jake Heggie's recent *Dead Man Walking* continues to be presented by numerous companies; and a number of classic operas such as

Madama Butterfly, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*), and *La traviata* highlight opera company seasons.

Opera and patriotic music both have a long and rich history and continue to move us today. Just as U.S. citizens love to tap their toes to familiar marches, opera audiences never tire of crying when *La bohème's* Mimì dies, gasping when Tosca stabs Scarpia, or laughing when Bartolo is outwitted by his ward in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*). Both genres offer songs and arias from the past and present that have entertained audiences for centuries and most assuredly will delight future generations.



Denyce Graves singing at the National Prayer Service for the victims of September 11th. Photo by Donovan Marks.

OPERA FOR THE BRAVE OF HEART

A history of opera is not complete without recognizing Richard Wagner. Born the same year as Verdi, he was an innovator who created works on a large scale. Wagner's operas deal with the legends and mythology of Nordic and Germanic culture. He takes his time telling the stories and his music stretches the abilities of most singers, often making these operas difficult to perform. His operas have developed a strong fan base, with opera lovers traveling the world to see his complete *Ring Cycle*, which includes four individual operas performed over several evenings: *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung*.

"I was in my late 40s before I seriously began attending opera. It has been worth the wait. I am quite naive about music, but nothing would make me change my naivete for sophistication, because it means that almost every opera that I see, I'm seeing for the first time, and everything, therefore, is fresh and surprising."

— Patrick Stewart, actor



DEBUNKING MYTHS

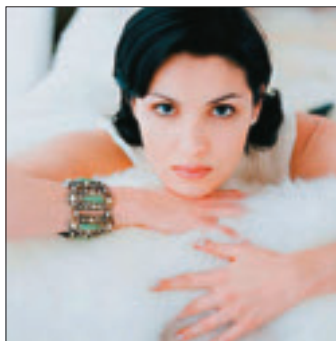
"I had some friends drag me to an opera recently, you know how they've got those little opera glasses, you know, do you really need binoculars, I mean how big do these people have to get before you can spot 'em? The opera kids they're going two-fifty, two-eighty, three-twenty-five, they're wearing big white woolly vests, the women have like the breast plates, the bullet hats with the horn coming out. If you can't pick these people out, forget opera, think about optometry, maybe that's more your thing."

— Jerry Seinfeld

Jerry Seinfeld's closing monologue from "The Opera" episode of *Seinfeld*, where he and his friends attend the opera, captures the sentiments of many people when they think about opera. However, if you look a little closer, you'll discover that many of these stereotypes don't hold true in today's opera performances.

BREAST PLATES AND HORNS

For the record, breast plates and horns on the hats are a feature of Richard Wagner's *Ring Cycle*. This four-part musical extravaganza features gods, giants, humans, and the underworld, and the costumes are similar to those in epics such as *Troy* and *Gladiator*. But, like movies, operas have a wide variety of settings and styles, and you can see everything from extravagant period costumes to modern-day attire.



Soprano Anna Netrebko. Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Opera.

IT'S NOT OVER 'TIL THE FAT LADY SINGS

Although opera singers are typically thought of as having full figures, as well as full voices, this is not always the case. Several opera singers have made *People* magazine's annual "Most Beautiful People" list, including Kathleen Battle and Thomas Hampson.

Singing is athletic, and today's singers care for their bodies, which house their instruments — their voices. They must be able to project their voices, without microphones, into theaters that seat as many as 4,000 people.

LONG AND BORING

The average opera is approximately three hours long, which is comparable to many Academy Award-winning movies including *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *Saving Private Ryan*, and *Titanic*. In opera, at least, the three-hour performances include intermissions! Operas also tell timeless stories of love,

deception, seduction, jealousy, passion, loyalty, betrayal, tragedy, and whimsy. Many have plots that are similar to movies:

- *Don Giovanni* features the misadventures of two men on the run, much like *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (or, in a gender switch, *Thelma and Louise*).
- *Faust* finds a modern-day equivalent in *The Devil's Advocate*.
- *The Magic Flute's* hero, Tamino, undergoes a series of trials in a magical world, similar to Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*.
- In *Aida*, Amneris' jealousy runs as deep as Glenn Close's in *Fatal Attraction*, but Amneris is successful in getting *her* revenge.

Many of Shakespeare's works — including *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth* — have been remade into operas. And many popular books have inspired new operas, including Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and Sister Helen Prejean's *Dead Man Walking*.



Nathan Gunn as the title role in Opera Theatre of Saint Louis' 2002 production of Thomas' *Hamlet*. Photo by Ken Howard.



Top: Al Pacino and Keanu Reeves in *The Devil's Advocate*. Photo by Warner Bros./ Online USA and courtesy of Getty Images. Bottom: Los Angeles Opera's production of Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust*. Photo by Robert Millard/LA Opera.

CONVINCED YET?

When considering attending the opera for the first time, here are some answers to frequently asked questions about the experience.

Do I need to prepare in advance?

Are you the kind of person who made a point of reading (or re-reading) *War of the Worlds* or perhaps *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* before seeing the movie? Are you intrigued by the bonus

features on DVDs? If so, you may want to take advantage of various opportunities to explore an opera before the curtain comes up.

Printed programs usually provide a synopsis and background articles, and many people arrive at the opera 20 minutes early to do some reading before the opera begins. Most companies also offer preview talks that illuminate themes of the opera and identify key musical passages.

Overachievers can listen to a recording of the opera or read background information in advance of attending a performance. But none of this is a requirement for enjoying a night at the opera. Nearly every opera company in the United States has supertitles (English translations of the opera's libretto that are projected onto a screen above the stage, similar to the subtitles in a foreign film) so you can be sure to understand what is happening on stage.

Is it expensive?

Like Broadway shows and sporting events, opera tickets come in all price ranges. Every opera company offers reasonably priced seats, and many also provide discounts for students, teachers, military, and seniors. In addition, some opera houses have deeply discounted "standing room" tickets.

Insider's Tip: Many opera fans consider the cheap seats to be the best in the house; these seats are usually located in the balcony of the theater, so they actually provide a better view of the stage and a fuller sound than seats in the front of the theater.

What do I wear?

When attending the opera, feel free to wear what you feel comfortable in. Most people wear what they would wear to work in an office, but you may see people more casually dressed. Opening night of the season or a new production will bring out audience members dressed in tuxedos and evening gowns. And, on regular nights, you may also see people who are dressed up for a special occasion — a night at the opera!

When should I applaud?

It is appropriate to applaud after big arias and ensemble numbers throughout the performance, at the end of scenes and acts, and most certainly at the end, when the performers take their curtain calls. When in doubt, follow the lead of those around you. If you are feeling daring, you may yell "BRAVO!" after a particularly moving aria or performance.

“Of the performing arts, grand opera has it all — magnificent music, glorious voices, imaginative sets, gorgeous costumes, high drama, and exuberant comedy. The sights and sound of opera can be spellbinding, and the magic of performances may repeat in one’s dreams.”

— The Honorable Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Associate Justice, U.S. Supreme Court



IMPORTANT DATES IN OPERA AND MUSICAL THEATER



Stephen Kechulus as Rigoletto and Raúl Hernández as the Duke in Seattle Opera's 2004 production of Verdi's *Rigoletto*. Photo by Rozarii Lynch and courtesy of Seattle Opera.

1500s

1597 Birth of opera: *Dafne* (Jacopo Peri). Created by a Florentine group called the Camerata

1600s

1643 Premiere of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (*The Coronation of Poppea*) (Claudio Monteverdi), one of the earliest operas that continues to be performed today

1700s

1756 (January 27) – Birth of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, in Salzburg, Austria

1786 (May 1) – Premiere of *Le nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*) (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart)

1787 (October 29) – Premiere of *Don Giovanni* (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart)

1791 (September 30) – Premiere of *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*) (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart)

1792 (February 29) – Birth of Gioacchino Rossini in Pesaro, Italy

1800s

1813 (October 9) – Birth of Giuseppe Verdi in Roncole, Italy

1816 (February 20) – Premiere of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*) (Gioacchino Rossini)

1838 (October 25) – Birth of Georges Bizet in Paris, France

1851 (March 11) – Premiere of *Rigoletto* (Giuseppe Verdi)

1853 (March 6) – Premiere of *La traviata* (Giuseppe Verdi)

1858 (December 22) – Birth of Giacomo Puccini in Lucca, Italy

1871 (December 24) – Premiere of *Aida* (Giuseppe Verdi)

1874 (April 5) – Premiere of *Die Fledermaus* (*The Bat*) (Johann Strauss)

1875 (March 3) – Premiere of *Carmen* (Georges Bizet)

1883 (October 22) – Metropolitan Opera opens in New York City

1896 (February 1) – Premiere of *La bohème* (Giacomo Puccini)

1898 (September 26) – Birth of George Gershwin in Brooklyn, New York

1900s

1900 (January 14) – Premiere of *Tosca* (Giacomo Puccini)

1902 (June 28) – Birth of Richard Rodgers in New York City

1904 (February 17) – Premiere of *Madama Butterfly* (Giacomo Puccini)



Pittsburgh Opera's 2003 production of Puccini's *La bohème*. Photo by Suellen Fitzsimmons.



Paul Saik, Brian Shadowens, Corey Trahan, and Jane Redding in Des Moines Metro Opera's 2002 production of Bernstein's *Candide*. Photo by Davitt Photo Alliance.

- 1910 (March 9) – Birth of Samuel Barber in West Chester, Pennsylvania
- 1911 (January 26) – Premiere of *Der Rosenkavalier* (Richard Strauss)
- 1918 (August 25) – Birth of Leonard Bernstein in Lawrence, Massachusetts
- 1926 (June 11) – Birth of Carlisle Floyd in Latta, South Carolina
- 1930 (March 22) – Birth of Stephen Sondheim in New York City
- 1935 (October 10) – Premiere of *Porgy and Bess* (George Gershwin)
- 1940 (December 7) – Metropolitan Opera / Texaco Radio Broadcasts begin
- 1943 (March 31) – Premiere of *Oklahoma!* (Richard Rodgers)
- 1949 (April 7) – Premiere of *South Pacific* (Richard Rodgers)
- 1951 (March 29) – Premiere of *The King and I* (Richard Rodgers)
- 1954 (April 1) – Premiere of *The Tender Land* (Aaron Copland)
- 1955 (February 24) – Premiere of *Susannah* (Carlisle Floyd)
- 1956 (October 29) – Premiere of *Candide* (Leonard Bernstein)
- 1957 (August 19) – Premiere of *West Side Story* (Leonard Bernstein)
- 1958 (January 15) – Premiere of *Vanessa* (Samuel Barber)

- 1965 Congress establishes The National Endowment for the Arts
- 1970 OPERA America is established
- 1979 (March 1) – Premiere of *Sweeney Todd* (Stephen Sondheim)
- 1983 New York City Opera introduces projected English translations (called supertitles) – the first company to do so in the United States
- 1986 (October 9) – Premiere of *The Phantom of the Opera* (Andrew Lloyd Webber)
- 1987 (October 22) – Premiere of *Nixon in China* (John Adams)
- 1989 (September 20) – Premiere of *Miss Saigon* (Claude-Michel Schönberg)
- 1990 (July 7) – First Three Tenors Concert in Rome, Italy for the World Cup
- 1996 (January 27) – Premiere of *Rent* (Jonathan Larson)
- 1998 (March 13) – Premiere of *Little Women* (Mark Adamo)
(September 19) – Premiere of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (André Previn)
- 1999 (December 20) – Premiere of *The Great Gatsby* (John Harbison)

2000s

- 2000 (October 7) – Premiere of *Dead Man Walking* (Jake Heggie)
- 2002 (December 8) – Premiere of *La bohème* on Broadway
- 2005 (May 7) – Premiere of *Margaret Garner* (Richard Danielpour)



John Packard is arrested in Michigan Opera Theatre's 2003 production of Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*. Photo by Christopher Barbeau.



Rinat Shaham in the title role of The Minnesota Opera's 2005 production of Bizet's *Carmen*. Photo courtesy of The Minnesota Opera.



Denyce Graves and Rodney Gilfrey struggle in Michigan Opera Theatre's 2005 world premiere production of Richard Danielpour's *Margaret Garner*. Photo courtesy of Michigan Opera Theatre.



Melissa Parks, Richard Bernstein, Isabel Bayrakdarian, and Kevin Glavin are a happy family in Pittsburgh Opera's 2004 production of Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*). Photo by David Bachman.

GLOSSARY

ARIA: Generally defined, a musical work (or "song") for solo voice in an opera, expressing the innermost thoughts and feelings of an operatic character. Arias usually do not drive the action of the drama but rather are moments of reflection for the character. They provide an opportunity for lyrical expression in an opera.

BARITONE: The baritone is the most common male voice, lower in range than the tenor and with a "darker" tone. In comic opera, the baritone is often the ringleader of the hijinks, but in tragic opera, he is often the villain.

BASS: The lowest and "darkest" of the male voices. Low voices usually suggest age and wisdom or evil characters in serious opera, but in comic opera they are generally used for old characters who are foolish or laughable.

BROADWAY: While the term comes from a street in New York City's theater district, Broadway commonly refers to the popular musicals and plays produced there.

CHORUS: A group of singers with more than one individual singing each part. The chorus usually represents collective groups such as soldiers, priests, peasants, nymphs, etc. — whatever is required by the story. The term also refers to the music sung by a chorus.

COLORATURA: Widely used to denote certain passages of rapidly moving, complex vocal music in opera, characterized by flexibility in the voice, and the singers who specialize in them, e.g., coloratura sopranos.

CONTRALTO: The lowest of the female voice types. It is rare to find a contralto singer, and true contralto roles are few and far between. These roles are usually older women and special character parts such as witches and gypsies.

DUET: In opera and musical theater, a composition for two voices supported by accompaniment. A duet is often performed by pairs of lovers, but may also be used to express conflict between characters who are at odds with one another.



David Daniels resists the temptation of Elizabeth Futral in Lyric Opera of Chicago's 2003 updated production of Handel's *Partenope*. Photo by Dan Rest.



Robert Orth, Maria Kanyova, Chen-Ye Yuan, and Mark Duffin celebrate in Opera Theatre of Saint Louis' 2004 production of Adams' *Nixon in China*. Photo by Ken Howard.

ENSEMBLE: In opera and musical theater, it is a piece sung by more than two members of the cast. Although the term can refer to a trio of three singers, a quartet of four signers, etc., it is often used to refer to any sung portion of a piece in which a number of characters are expressing different emotions simultaneously or are expressing perplexity or confusion in the face of an impossible situation.

FINALE: The last part of an opera, or of an act of an opera. The finale is often a formal, extended piece during which the principal characters have the opportunity to dramatically evolve to a climactic point or to the completion of the drama.

INTERLUDE: A short instrumental passage or separate work of music that is often provided by a composer to cover a change of scene or to move dramatically from one mood to another.

LIBRETTO: The complete text of an opera, but literally the "little book" that was published for operatic audiences beginning in the 18th century so that they could read the text during the performance (or prepare prior to a performance). They are not regularly published anymore, now that audio recordings of operas come with complete texts, and projected English translations are provided in most opera houses.

MEZZO-SOPRANO: A mezzo-soprano, or mezzo, has a voice lower than a soprano's but higher than a contralto's. Throughout opera history the mezzo has been used to convey many different types of characters: everything from boys or young men (so-called "trouser" or "pants" roles), to mothers or mother-types, seductive heroines, and villainesses.

OVERTURE: An instrumental or orchestral musical composition that acts as an introduction to an opera or other theater work. The overture originated in opera.

PRELUDE: A short instrumental number for orchestra that leads directly, with no pause, into the opening act of an opera or other theater work.

RECITATIVE: A type of vocal writing in opera that mimics speech or recitation; often precedes an aria.

SOPRANO: The highest of the female voice types, the soprano has always had a place of prominence in the hierarchy of vocal types. In the operatic drama, the soprano is almost always the heroine or protagonist of an opera, since a high, bright sound can suggest youth, innocence, and virtue.

SUPERTITLES: English translations of an opera's libretto that are typically projected onto a screen above the stage.

TENOR: The highest of the male voices, the tenor is frequently the hero or protagonist of an opera.

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On the cover: Eudora Brown and William Burden sing the title characters in Hector Berlioz's *Beatrice and Benedict*. Photo by Scott Humbert, courtesy of The Santa Fe Opera.

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