



San Francisco Opera's Donizetti's *DON PASQUALE*

Curriculum Connections

California Content Standards
Kindergarten through Grade 12

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

MUSIC

STORYTELLING & MUSIC: WHAT IS AN OPERA?

Character and plot development through musical themes. Explore how the composer creates different kinds of music for different moments in the story. Patter song vs. Ernesto's ballad.

Musical moods. Legato vs. staccato, adagio vs. allegro.

Instruments representing characters and emotions (bassoon at beginning of Nemorino's aria); repetition and variation of themes.

Key plot points: The composer and librettist determine the placement of arias within the libretto to heighten emotion in the story.

Call and response between singers and instruments.

Definition of overture. How is orchestra set up in pit? What are instruments in an orchestra? Tuning of different instruments.

Source material for Opera: Novels (Puccini's *La Bohème*, Tan & Wallace's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*); Films (*The Fly*), Real-life events (Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*, Adams' *Nixon in China*); Related genres – Musical Theater (*Sweeney Todd*, *Rent*), Rock Opera (*Tommy*), popular song versions of opera.

VOCABULARY

Musical Structure: Solos, duets, trios, choral numbers.

Composition: Arias, recitative, overture, incidental music.

Musical Instructions: Tempo, legato; pianissimo; crescendo, etc.

Voice ranges: Soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone, bass-baritone, countertenor, bass. Identify voice parts of different characters.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848): Biography, timeline of works, signature sound.

How many operas did Donizetti write? (73) Which of Donizetti's operas are most performed today?

What "school" of opera does *Don Pasquale* belong to? (*bel canto*) Who were the other composers famous for the *bel canto* approach to writing operas? (Rossini and Bellini)

What does *bel canto* mean, literally? (beautiful singing/song) Describe this technique of singing. (light singing; smooth or legato singing throughout the entire vocal range, from low to high; effortless embellishments (runs, trills) Talk about the use of improvisation or embellishments in the *bel canto* style.

What is *da capo*? How do the endings differ? What is the history of the use? Do all singers excel at inventing embellishments?

What is *opera buffa*? (comic opera) What prominence does *Don Pasquale* have with this genre? (*Don Pasquale* is regarded as being the high point of this tradition and marking its ending)

Don Pasquale uses *parlando* or patter singing. What is it? (Two characters singing/talking at the same time.) They share their thoughts and also it is fun to listen to! What current art form might it remind you of? Hip-hop.

The tradition of *opera buffa* makes reference to characters of the *commedia dell'arte*. What is the *commedia dell'arte*? What characters are represented? Pasquale is the blustery Pantalone, Ernesto as the lovesick Pierrot, Malatesta as the scheming Scapino, and Norina as a wily Columbina. The false Notary echoes a long line of false officials as operatic devices.

Research famous sopranos, tenors, and baritones who have played the roles of Adina, Nemorino and Dulcamara.

Research the history of San Francisco Opera, the Adler Fellows program.

ACTIVITIES

Listen to multiple recordings of *Don Pasquale* and study different interpretations.

Learn and memorize songs from *Don Pasquale*.

Create and perform songs for the characters/events of *Don Pasquale* using instruments and voices. Study natural vs. amplified sound. Study high vs. low voices. Study head voice vs. chest voice.

Research songs from 1914.

Evolution of patter song.

Explore musical instruments used in this opera; have they changed since Donizetti's time?

What kinds of musical instruments are used in opera today? What are different sounds, volumes of different instruments?

Build simple string instruments with rubber bands and boxes, strings and any space.

Set parts of opera to different styles of music. Ex. Don Pasquale and Malatesta's patter duet as a rap battle.

VISUAL ARTS

How are line, color, shape, and texture used in costumes and sets of *Don Pasquale*?

LINE

Use of line qualities: soft or hard, wavy or angular, silly spirals.

COLOR

Symbolism of color; color associated with particular characters. How do colors of costumes define characters?

Symmetry/contrast in character pairings. Ex. Norina/Ernesto.

Examine contrast of light and dark; use of lighting.

The emotion of color. Ex. red=passionate, blue=calm, yellow=cheerful.

How are character traits revealed through the use of color?

Explore personal associations with color.

The use of lighting to establish mood and setting.

SHAPE

The use of shape in character design.

Positive & Negative Space—the stage is a frame.

How can patterns and repetition of shape be used to create the illusion of perspective?

TEXTURE

Texture: Material use in sets and costumes.

Visual Texture: Pattern and repetition in sets and costumes.

SPACE

Set design: From 2D plans to 3D construction.

The use of forced perspective in the set.

Playing with perspective – upside down sets – and how other works of art have explored this idea.

Inside versus outside space. Set rotates with an inside face and outside face

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Director Laurents Pelly states that the production's setting and costume designs were inspired by Italian neo-realist comedies of the 50's. Also see the set for Fred Astaire's dance on the ceiling, "You're All The World To Me" from the musical *Royal Wedding* (1951).

Chantal Thomas – scenic designer

Façades - The house has an inside and an outside – the structure has an exaggerated framework, wallpaper/pattern, repetition of pattern.



SAN FRANCISCO OPERA EDUCATION

ACTIVITIES

Create illustrations and storyboards outlining the plot of *Don Pasquale*.

Design your own production of *Don Pasquale*: dioramas, scale models, backdrops, props, costumes. Set in a box.

Study uniforms, create costumes for characters. Design hats.

Create a tunnel book of set.

Puppetry: Create your own version of *Don Pasquale* using puppets (paper bags, stick puppets, shadow puppets, marionettes, and bunraku).

Masks: Create masks of *Don Pasquale* characters.

Design character make-up, costume, sets and props for classroom operas.

Design paper dolls of characters. Dress them for different eras.

Design a production: dioramas, scale models, backdrops, props, costumes.

Listen to audio-only examples prior to viewing the opera. Choose design elements based on the music and text.

Explore scale in production design; how do imposing sets make people look small? How do you make something that fits on an opera set? What is the scale of the room in this set?

Create your own rotating set.

Set and costume designers' portfolios.

Explore the clothing, architecture and furnishings that inspired the opera's production design. (The 50's)

RELATED WORKS OF ART

Commedia dell'arte traditions in costuming.

Surrealism

Neo-Realism

Opera & Visual Art: Study the work of visual artists who have designed performing arts productions: Gerald Scarfe, David Hockney, Julie Taymor, Marc Chagall, Maurice Sendak, Oskar Kokoschka, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, William Kentridge, Gianni Versace, Bill Viola.

Illustrated children's books of *The Magic Flute* and other operas

THEATRE

Commedia characters; opera buffa origins in commedia dell'arte.

History of vaudeville, stock characters.

Stock theater types: boy meets girl; old man.

Compare to similar stories in musical theater (Frank Loesser's *Most Happy Fella*).

What are characters' motivations? How do they grow?

What is audition process for opera? What are criteria involved in getting a role?

How would theater have looked in 1843?

Compare the characters in Shakespearean comedies, such as *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, with *Don Pasquale*.

STAGING

Stage vocabulary: Upstage, downstage, levels, blocking.

Theater Exercises: Tableaux, pantomime, improvisation, vocal projection.

How does a scene fill the space of stage?

Have fun playing with disguises.

Stage etiquette & audience behavior.

THEATRE JOBS

Opera Production Team: Director, stage manager, choreographer, designer, diction coach, artistic administrator, choreographer, lighting, adaptation, abridgement, supernumeraries, etc.

In-House Personnel: Marketing, accounting, ticket takers, ushers etc.

ACTIVITIES

Act out characters and emotions in gestures: shyness, snobbery, bravado, persuasion. How can you exaggerate gestures to show emotion? Have other students guess which character you are portraying.

Act out scenes from opera in different settings and times (Don Pasquale lives in a large mansion in Palm Beach).

Students pick characters to portray; determine how they would act out story. Examine how characters play off each other. Partnering.

Create tableaux of different scenes.

Improvise prologues and epilogues to the story.

Choreograph a stage fight.

"Guns and Ships" from Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical *Hamilton* holds the honor of being the fastest song in the fastest-paced musical theater production of all time (6.3 words per second, while the whole show fits 20,000 words into 2.5 hours) – Compare the speed of Lin Miranda's rap to the patter songs written by Donizetti. Try singing the songs at the original speed, as well as at a slower pace, and record what happens.

<http://genius.com/Lin-manuel-miranda-guns-and-ships-lyrics>

DANCE

Dance and Creative Movement in Stage-Blocking.

Learn more about fight choreography.

Examine the history of Italian dance. <http://web-static.nypl.org/exhibitions/italiandance/over.html>

ACTIVITIES

Create character dances.

Create gestures for elements of opera (music, drama).

Match movement with characters.

Create a gesture to embody each character.

Create relationship dances between characters.

Do the whole story in a dance.

Interpret emotions through gesture and dance. Static and in motion. Ex. Joy, bravado.

Interpreting the instruments through dance– improv to music.

Create dances for scenes that need it.

Mirror dancing–partners and symmetry.

Choose a dance style that best represents each character.

Create a chair dance based on movements that can be seen in the opera.

See how movie magic enabled Fred Astaire to dance on the ceiling in the 1951 film, “Royal Wedding.” Director Stanley Donen recreated the effect for Lionel Ritchie’s music video, “Dancing on the Ceiling” in “Astaire Unwound” by Bigfott Studios. http://www.bigfott.com/astaire_unwound.html

MEDIA ARTS

Research how innovations in technology have influenced the development of Opera: Acoustics and Lighting, Audio Recording, Film and Video, the development of Supertitles, Internet.

Learn about technology currently used by SF Opera: Technology used in staging, SFO's Media Suite, podcasts, cinemacasts, simulcasts, opera vision, etc.

Explore role of editors in creating film and DVD. Explore role of film director.

Director and costume designer Laurent Pelly says the opera's setting and costumes reference the "golden age of Italian film comedies of the 1950s and early 60s. Learn more about the Italian Neo-realist films such as Mario Monicelli's *I soliti Ignoti*.

List camera angles; note when camera angles change.

Study the available media and technological advances during Donizetti's time. Books, newspapers, broadsheets, town crier, and the experimental facsimile machine first invented by Alexander Bain in 1843.

Study history of recording.

Learn about experiments in future technology use involving opera, such as the development of Personal Opera @ MIT Media Lab, *Death and the Powers*.

Use television, films, web content about opera to teach media literacy.

Opera & Popular Culture: Cartoons (Bugs Bunny in *What's Opera, Doc?*, *The Wabbit of Seville*); Television (*Sesame Street*); Movies (*The Godfather*); Commercials (Nike's 1993 ad *Charles Barkley of Seville*); Event themes (*Nessun Dorma - 1994 World Cup*).

Watch films & DVD of *Don Pasquale* and other operas.

ACTIVITIES

Film and Animation: Explore photographic stopmotion techniques. Ex. Use digital media to create 1-minute scenes from *Don Pasquale*.

Storyboard the opera.

Use digital audio to record student readings, musical performances.

Create a 30-second audio spot, a one-minute podcast, or a *Don Pasquale* activities website.

Explore history of opera recordings—some of the earliest recordings.

Create a montage of scenes from the opera to tell the story.