

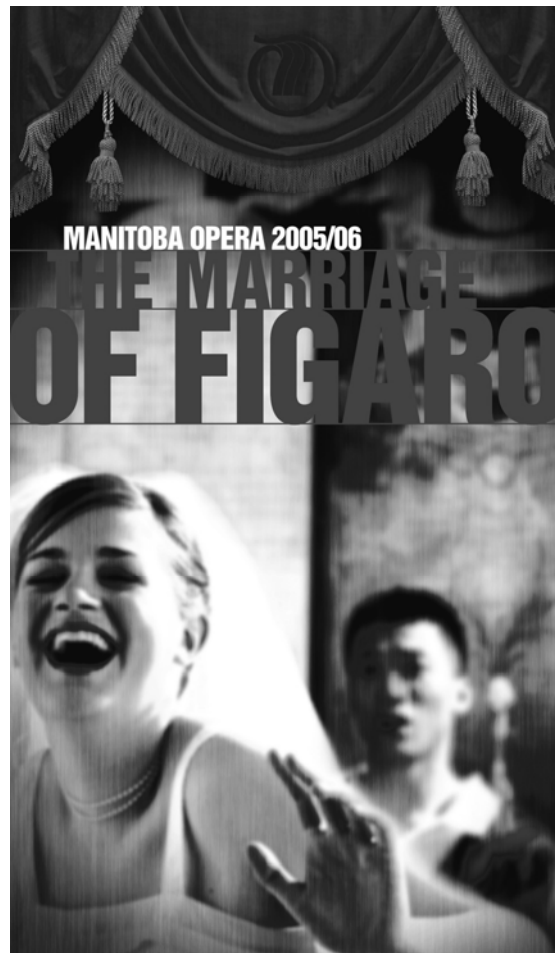


The Marriage of Figaro

Composed by: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Libretto by: Lorenzo da Ponte

Based on the play *Le Mariage de Figaro* by Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais



Study Guide

April 2006

Written & Compiled by: Jane Stewart

IT'S BEEN 250 YEARS SINCE MOZART'S BIRTH

(January 27, 1756 – December 5, 1791)

Welcome to Manitoba Opera

This Study Guide has been created to assist you in preparing your students for their visit to the opera. It is our hope that you will be able to add this to your existing curriculum in order to expand your students' understanding of opera, literature, history, and the fine arts. Materials in the Study Guide may be copied and distributed to students. Some students may wish to go over the information at home if there is insufficient time to discuss in class. Make the opera experience more meaningful and enjoyable by sharing with them knowledge and background on opera and *The Marriage of Figaro* before they attend.

Please Note: The Dress Rehearsal is the last opportunity the singers will have on stage to work with the orchestra before Opening Night. Since vocal demands are so great on opera singers, some singers choose not to sing in full voice during the Dress Rehearsal in order to preserve their vocal chords and avoid unnecessary strain.



Table of Contents

A Short Introduction to Opera	2
Audience Etiquette	3
Cast List	4
Pronunciation Guide	5
The Composer: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	6
The Librettist: Lorenzo da Ponte	8
Historical Notes	8
Synopsis	9
What to Listen for	10
Recordings of <i>The Marriage of Figaro</i>	11
Suggested Books	12
The Operatic Voice	13
Glossary	15
Workshop #1- Stage Business	20
Workshop #2- <i>The Marriage of Figaro</i>	22
Workshop #3- Writing a Review of <i>The Marriage of Figaro</i>	31
Other Activities	36

Opera Comprehension Test	37
Teacher's Evaluation Sheet	39

A Short Introduction to Opera

An **opera**, like a play, is a dramatic form of theatre that includes scenery, **props**, and costumes. In opera, however, the actors are trained singers who sing their lines instead of speaking them. An **orchestra** accompanies the singers. A **conductor** coordinates both the singers on stage and the musicians in the **orchestra pit**.

Opera consists of many dimensions: the human voice, orchestral music, the visual arts (scenery, costumes and special effects), drama (tragedy or comedy), and occasionally dance. The melding of these elements can make you cry tears of joy or sadness, produce laughter or anger, but most importantly transport you to a magical land of music and song.

Opera has its roots in Greek drama and originated in Florence, Italy, in the late 1500's, with a small group of men who were members of a **Camerata** (Italian for society). The intellectuals, poets and musicians of the **Camerata** decided they wanted words to be a featured aspect of music. They used ancient Greek drama as their inspiration, including the use of a **chorus** to comment on the action. The **Camerata** laid down three principles for their new art form:

- ◆ The text must be understood; the accompaniment must be very simple and should not distract from the words.
- ◆ The words must be sung with correct and natural declamation, as if they were spoken, and must avoid the rhythms of songs.
- ◆ The melody must interpret the feeling of the text.

The first significant composer to fully develop the ideas of the **Camerata** was Jacopo Peri (1561-1633), whose opera *Dafne*, based on a Greek myth, was performed in 1594 and is regarded as the first opera. Operas continue to be composed today.

Operas are divided into scenes and **acts** that contain different types of vocal pieces for one or many singers. An **aria** is a vocal solo that focuses on a character's emotions rather than actions. A **recitative** is sung dialogue or speech that occurs between arias and **ensembles**.

Composers write the **score** or the music for the opera. Sometimes the composer will also write the text of the opera, but most often they work with a **librettist**. The story of the opera is written as a **libretto**, a text that is easily set to music. In the past, the libretto was also bound and sold to the audience. Today, the audience can easily follow the plot with the use of **surtitles**. Surtitles are the English translation of the libretto, which are projected onto a screen above the stage.

There are several differences between opera and musicals like *Phantom of the Opera*. One significant difference is the 'partnership' found between the music and the drama in an opera. While musicals use songs to help tell a story, in an opera, the music contributes to the drama, it does not only accompany it. The musical style is another important difference between the two art forms; opera is usually **classical** and complex, while musicals feature pop songs and sometimes rock and roll. Also, singers in musicals have microphones hidden in their costumes or wigs to amplify their voices. The voices of opera singers are so strong, no amplification is needed, even in a large venue. Furthermore, operas are almost completely sung, while the use of spoken words are more common to musicals. There are some operas with spoken words and these are called **singspiels** (German) and **opera-comique** (French). Examples are Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and Bizet's *Carmen*, respectively.

All terms in **bold** are defined in the Glossary.

Audience Etiquette

The following list will help you (and those around you) enjoy the experience of a night at the opera:

- ◆ **Dress** to be comfortable. Many people enjoy dressing up in formal attire.
- ◆ **Arrive** on time. Latecomers disturb the singers and others in the audience. Latecomers will only be seated at suitable breaks - often not until intermission.
- ◆ **Find** your seat with the help of your teacher or an usher.
- ◆ **Remove** your hat. This is customary and is respectful to the artists and to people sitting behind you.
- ◆ **Turn off** cell phones, pagers, digital watch alarms and all electronic devices.
- ◆ **Leave** your camera at home. Recording devices of any kind are not permitted, not only because a camera flash can break a performers concentration but because written permission must be sought from the artist to record their images and voices.
- ◆ **Save** all conversations, eating and drinking, and chewing gum, for the intermission. Talking and eating can be disruptive to other audience members and distracts from your ability to be absorbed by the show. The audience is critical to the success of the show – without you, there can be no performance.
- ◆ **Settle in** and get comfortable **before** the performance begins. Read your program before the performance – rustling through the program during the show can disrupt everyone.
- ◆ **Clap** as the lights are dimmed and the conductor appears and bows to the audience. Watch as the conductor then turns to the orchestra and takes up his or her baton to signal the beginning of the opera.
- ◆ **Listen** to the prelude or overture before the curtain rises. It is part of the performance. It is an opportunity to identify common musical themes that may reoccur during the opera.
- ◆ **Sit** still during the performance. Only whisper when it is absolutely necessary, as a whisper is heard all over the theatre, and NEVER (except in an emergency) stand during the performance.
- ◆ **Applaud** (or shout Bravo!) at the end of an aria or chorus piece to show your enjoyment. The end of a piece can be identified by a pause in the music.
- ◆ **Laugh** when something is funny – this is a performance and you are expected to respond!
- ◆ **Read** the English surtitles projected above the stage. Most operas are not sung in English (*The Marriage of Figaro* is sung in Italian). Use the surtitles to understand the story.
- ◆ **Listen** for subtleties in the music. The tempo, volume and complexity of the music and singing often depict the “feeling” or “sense” of the action or character. Also, notice repeated words or phrases; they are usually significant.

Finally, have fun and enjoy the show!!!

Manitoba Opera
Presents

The Marriage of Figaro

April 2006, Manitoba Centennial Concert Hall
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte

Based on the play *La follée journee ou Le mariage de Figaro* by Pierre Beaumarchais

First Performance: Vienna, Burgtheater, May 1, 1786

Sung in Italian with English surtitles

Approximately 2 hours

with two intermissions (20 minutes and 15 minutes respectively)

Cast & Crew

Figaro (valet to the Count)	Bass	Kristopher Irmiter
Susanna (his fiancée & the Countess' maid)	Soprano	Kathleen Brett
Count Almaviva (a Spanish noble)	Baritone	Russell Braun
Countess (Rosina) Almaviva (his wife)	Soprano	Carol Wilson
Dr. Bartolo (Rosina's former guardian)	Bass	Gregory Atkinson
Cherubino (the Count's page)	Mezzo-Soprano	Michelle Sutton
Marcellina (Dr. Bartolo's housekeeper)	Mezzo-Soprano	Donnalyn Grills
Basilio (a music teacher)	Tenor	Blaine Hendsbee
Don Curzio (a judge)	Tenor	Blaine Hendsbee
Antonio (Count's gardener & Susanna's uncle)	Baritone	Chris Ryan
Barbarina (Antonio's daughter)	Soprano	Andrianna Chuchman
Conductor		James Meena
Director		Michael Cavanagh
Lighting Designer		Scott Henderson
Set and Costume Designer		Charles Allan Klein
Stage Manager		Jacquie Dawson
Assistant Stage Manager #1		Michelle Lagasse
Assistant Stage Manager #2		Gail Henderson-Brown

Pronunciation Guide

The Marriage of Figaro
(Le nozze di Figaro)

Leh NOH-tsay dee FEE-gah-roh)

Figaro

FEE-gah-roh

Susanna

soo-ZAH-nah

Count Almaviva

al-mah-VEE-vah

Cherubino

keh-roo-BEE-noh

Marcellina

mar-cheh-LEE-nah

Basilio

ba-ZEE-lyoh

About the Composer - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart



Mozart

It is 250 years since Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria, January 27, 1756. Considered by many to be the greatest genius in Western musical history, Mozart's family was very musical. His father, Leopold Mozart was a successful composer, violinist, and assistant concertmaster at the Salzburg court.

Mozart was a 'wunderkind,' (a child prodigy) who started playing the keyboard at the age of three, composed little piano pieces at age five, symphonies at nine, and complete operas at age twelve. When he was 6, Mozart and his older sister, Maria Anna, performed a series of concerts for Europe's courts and major cities. Both children played the keyboard, but Wolfgang became a violin virtuoso as well. Throughout the 1760s, the Mozart children played at courts in Vienna, Germany, Paris, at court in Versailles, and London (where Wolfgang wrote his first symphonies and began a friendship with Johann Christian Bach, who became a great musical influence on Wolfgang).

In Paris, the young Mozart published his first works, four sonatas for clavier with accompanying violin (1764). In 1768 he composed his first opera, *La Finta Semplice*, which had its premiere in Salzburg. In 1769-70, Leopold and Wolfgang undertook a tour through Italy, culminating in another opera (*Mitridate, re di Ponto*) and, during two more Italian journeys, he wrote two more operas (*Ascanio* in 1771 and *Lucio Silla* 1772).

In 1772, Archbishop von Colloredo (of Salzburg) retained Wolfgang as concertmaster at a token salary. In this capacity, Mozart composed a large number of sacred and secular works. Wishing to secure a better position outside Salzburg, he obtained permission to undertake another journey in 1777. Travelling with his mother to France, Mozart composed the *Paris Symphony* (1778) but he was unable to find a permanent position. His mother died in Paris.

When Wolfgang returned to Salzburg, he was given the position of court organist (1779) and produced a splendid series of church works, including the famous *Coronation Mass*. He was commissioned to compose a new opera for Munich, *Idomeneo* (1781), that proved he was a consummate master of opera seria. Summoned by von Colloredo to Vienna in 1781 he was dismissed after a series of arguments.

Mozart's career in Vienna began promisingly and he was soon commissioned to write *The Abduction from the Seraglio* (1782). His concerts were a great success, and the emperor, Joseph II, later engaged him as court composer. In 1782, the now-popular Mozart married Constanze Weber from Germany, much to his father's dismay. The young pair visited Salzburg in 1783. There, the *Kyrie and Gloria* of Mozart's great *Mass in C Minor*, composed in Vienna and never finished, were performed. Mozart's greatest success was *Le Nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*) (1786), composed for the Vienna Opera. The great piano concertos and the string quartets dedicated to his "dear friend" Josef Haydn were also composed during this period.

Mozart's fame began to disappear after Figaro. The nobility and court grew increasingly nervous about his revolutionary ideas as seen in Figaro. He sank into debt and was assisted by a brother Freemason, Michael Puchberg (Mozart had joined the Masons in 1784 and remained an outspoken member until his death). His greatest operatic success after Figaro was Don Giovanni (1787), composed for Prague, where Mozart's art was especially appreciated. This was followed in 1790 by *Così fan tutte*, the third and final libretto provided by the Italian poet Lorenzo Da Ponte. and in 1791 by *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute), produced by a suburban theatre in Vienna. During this period of financial strain, Mozart composed his last three symphonies (E flat, G minor, and the Jupiter in C) in less than 7 weeks (summer 1788). These had been preceded by a great series of string quintets, including the two in C and in G minor (1787).

In 1791, Mozart was commissioned to write a requiem (unfinished). He was at the time quite ill—he had never known very good health ~ and imagined that the work was for himself, which it proved to be. His death, on December 5, 1791, which gave rise to false rumours of poisoning, is thought to have resulted from rheumatic fever, a disease which he had suffered from repeatedly throughout his life. After an inexpensive funeral at Saint Stephen's Cathedral, he was buried in an unmarked grave at the cemetery of Saint Marx, a Viennese suburb. Much has been made of this, but at that time such burial was legally required for all Viennese except those of noble or aristocratic birth.

Mozart excelled in every form in which he composed. His contemporaries found the restless ambivalence and complicated emotional content of his music difficult to understand. Accustomed to the light, superficial style of rococo music, his aristocratic audiences could not accept the music's complexity and depth. Yet, with Josef Haydn, Mozart perfected the grand forms of symphony, opera, string quartet, and concerto that marked the classical period in music. In his operas, Mozart's uncanny psychological insight is unique in musical history. His music informed the work of the later Haydn and of the next generation of composers, most notably Beethoven. The brilliance of his work continued until the end, although darker themes of poignancy and isolation grew more marked in his last years. His compositions continue to exert a particular fascination for musicians and music lovers.

Adapted from the Arizona Opera and the Metropolitan Opera

About the Librettist – Lorenzo da Ponte

Born Emmanuele Conegliano to a Jewish father, da Ponte's widowed father converted to Catholicism in order to marry a Roman Catholic girl. Emmanuele, his brothers, and father were baptized and Emmanuele took the name of the priest who baptized them, Bishop Lorenzo da Ponte, a custom of the time.

Da Ponte's mother had died when he was five and he and his brothers 'ran wild' until his father's remarriage. Da Ponte was 14 at the time and almost illiterate but he and his brothers entered the seminary for their education and to train for the priesthood. At the seminary, da Ponte was introduced to Italian poets, starting his life-long love of this genre.



Ordained a priest at age 24, da Ponte moved to Venice, a city renowned for its opera houses and music, its gambling, and its lengthy carnival season. Despite the city's relative 'debauchery,' da Ponte's series of poems called "Whether a man is happier in an organized society or in a simple state of nature" resulted in his being publicly denounced and barred from teaching in the Venetian republic. He stayed on, however, having several affairs and illegitimate children and still serving as a priest saying Mass. Ultimately, his 'indiscretions' caused da Ponte to be exiled from Venice for 15 years.

In 1783, da Ponte was appointed theatre-poet to the Court Opera in Vienna, which was then devoted to the production of Italian comic opera. It was there that he met Mozart, and the two artists collaborated on some of Western music's most popular operas: *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Così fan tutte*, and *Don Giovanni*. Da Ponte did not stay long in Vienna, emigrating to New York in 1805. He eventually taught Italian at Columbia University and was responsible for producing the New York premiere of *Don Giovanni* in 1826. Da Ponte died in 1838, having brought much of Italian culture, including a significant collection of books donated to three major US libraries, to the United States.

Adapted from the San Diego Opera and the Metropolitan Opera

Historical Notes

Mozart's notes about the opera *The Marriage of Figaro* have not survived. The notes left by da Ponte, however, gives da Ponte credit for persuading the political authorities to permit the opera to proceed despite its being based on Beaumarchais' play that had been banned in Vienna. Although many doubt da Ponte's version (he wrote his memoirs when he was elderly and he tended to self-aggrandize), there had been a risk that this still-popular opera would not have been produced. During the first dress rehearsal, the Wedding Dance was banned on orders from the Austrian Emperor. In response, Mozart had the music stopped and the singer gesticulated in total silence. When the Emperor was told why, he requested that dancers be hired immediately and the music restored. (In the movie, *Amadeus*, the dancers dance without music but this, like much of the movie, was done for dramatic purposes and is not based on historical reality.)

Mozart's lifetime was a relatively peaceful era in Europe while in North America, the American War of Independence was fought (1775 - 1783). Social unrest, however, was becoming more evident in Europe and gradually the reins of power shifted from being solely in the hands of the aristocracy to being held, at least in part, by the growing middle class. It was the time of the Industrial Revolution, of invention (Watt's steam engine in 1775; the fountain pen in 1780; the hot-air balloon in 1783; and carbonated soda 1785). It also was the Age of Enlightenment when more people came to believe in the concept of the power of human reason to solve social problems, to correct unjust behaviour, and to make their lives better. The rights of the individual, freedom of thought, relaxation of censorship, and the gradual abolition of child labour were just some of the changes that resulted from the Enlightenment.

Historical notes adapted from the Baltimore Opera Company study guide and from *Arts Alive* (from the National Arts Centre in Ottawa)

Synopsis – *The Marriage of Figaro*

(*The Marriage of Figaro* is an **opera buffa**, a form of comic opera that replaced **opera seria** at the end of the 18th century. This form introduced ensemble singing to operas, and uses recitative to link arias together.)

Act I

A room in the castle of Count Almaviva near Seville, Spain, 1778.

It is Figaro and Susana's wedding day. Figaro, the servant of the Count, and Susanna, the maid of the Countess, are measuring the room the Count has given them to use as their bedroom. Susanna dislikes the room, claiming that it is much too close to the rooms of the Count. She then tells Figaro that the Count has his eye on her. The Countess rings and Susanna departs. Figaro resolves that he will thwart his master's plans.

Dr. Bartolo and Marcellina, Bartolo's housekeeper, enter. Figaro is in debt to Marcellina and has promised to marry her if he doesn't repay her. Bartolo rejoices in this opportunity to avenge himself on Figaro, who arranged the elopement of the Count and Rosina (the Countess), whom Bartolo had hoped to marry himself. As Bartolo exits, Susanna enters and has a brief, barbed encounter with Marcellina, who then departs.

Cherubino, the Count's flirtatious page, dashes in. He explains that the Count discovered him with Barbarina, the daughter of the gardener Antonio, and he will be sent away. He states that he is in love with the Countess as well as every other woman in the palace and asks Susanna to give a song to the Countess. They hear the Count approaching, so Cherubino hides behind an armchair. The Count, thinking that he is alone with Susanna, begins making advances to her until he is interrupted by the arrival of Don Basilio, the music teacher. He conceals himself behind the same chair as Cherubino, who has now moved to the other side and covered himself with a blanket. Basilio gossips about the goings-on in the castle including Cherubino's infatuation with the Countess. The Count becomes angry and reveals himself, discovering Cherubino at the same time. Aware that the boy has overheard his own indiscretions, he vents his anger by giving Cherubino a commission in his Regiment, for which he must leave immediately.

Figaro arrives, carrying Susanna's wedding veil and accompanied by villagers who sing the Count's praises. Figaro thanks the Count for renouncing the wedding-night custom, and asks the Count to give Susanna the veil as a symbol of purity. Count Almaviva says he would prefer to postpone the ceremony until he can celebrate the occasion appropriately. After the villagers leave, both Figaro and Susanna try to persuade the Count to allow Cherubino to stay, but to no avail. Figaro then tells Cherubino about the rigors of military life.

Act II

In the bedroom of the Countess.

The Countess mourns her husband's waning affections towards her. Susanna and Figaro enter and tell the Countess that the Count is trying to seduce Susanna. They devise a plan. The Count will be given a note that says that the Countess is having an affair. While the Count is investigating, Figaro and Susanna will be married quickly. At the same time, they will disguise Cherubino as Susanna and arrange a rendezvous with the Count.

Cherubino arrives and begins trying on his disguise. He sings "Voi che sapete," a love song to the Countess. His commission falls out of his uniform and the Countess notices there is no official seal on it. The Count arrives. Cherubino hides in the dressing room and Susanna hides behind a screen. The Count is suspicious,

as he's just received the anonymous letter regarding the Countess' supposed infidelity. Upon hearing a noise, the Count demands to know who is hiding in the dressing room. When the Countess refuses to tell him, he compels her to accompany him to find a hammer to break down the door.

Cherubino jumps out of the window, leaving Susanna to take his place in the dressing room. The Countess tells Almaviva that it is Cherubino who is in her dressing room. The Count demands that the door be opened and Susanna calmly enters the room. The Count searches for Cherubino. Finding no one, Almaviva begs for forgiveness. Antonio, the gardener, bursts in complaining that someone has just jumped out of the window and spoiled his flowers. Susanna and the Countess try to convince the Count that Antonio is drunk again but it is Figaro who assumes the blame, saying that it was he who jumped from the window. Antonio produces some papers that Figaro claims were given him by Cherubino to have officially sealed. Marcellina enters with Dr. Bartolo and Basilio to demand justice. Figaro must marry Marcellina or repay his debt. The Count must investigate.

Act III

A hall in the castle.

The Count reflects on the current situation when Susanna enters. She says she's prepared to meet him later that evening in the garden if he will give her the dowry he had promised. With the dowry, Susanna will be able to pay off Marcellina and marry Figaro. Susanna leaves and meets Figaro and assures him they will win their case. The Count overhears and becomes infuriated that his servants enjoy a happiness that he does not.

Figaro, Marcellina and Dr. Bartolo join the Count and his notary, Don Curzio, for the judgement: Figaro must marry Marcellina or repay his debt. Figaro protests that he needs the consent of his parents, from whom he was stolen as an infant. Marcellina realizes that Figaro is her long lost son by Dr. Bartolo. As Marcellina and Figaro embrace, it is decided that the wedding will be a double one; Marcellina will marry Dr. Bartolo and Figaro will marry Susanna.

Meanwhile, the Countess is still mourning the loss of her husband's affections. Susanna enters. She tells the Countess of the outcome of Figaro's case and writes a note for Almaviva to wait in the pine grove. They seal the letter with a pin.

Barbarina and the disguised Cherubino, along with other village girls, arrive with flowers for the Countess. The Count enters with Antonio, who reveals that Cherubino was indeed the one who jumped out of the balcony window into his flower bed. The Count wants to punish Cherubino but Barbarina pleads that instead, Cherubino be made her husband. After all, the Count promised her "everything she wanted" in exchange for her affections. The Count agrees.

Figaro enters and the wedding march begins. At the wedding celebration, Susanna passes the note to Almaviva who pricks his finger on the pin. Figaro notices that the Count had received a love letter and is amused by the pin prick. The Count promises splendid entertainment for the evening.

Act IV

The garden of the castle.

Figaro and Marcellina happen upon Barbarina, who is searching for the pin that the Count asked her to return to Susanna. Figaro realizes that it was Susanna who sent the Count the love letter and gives Barbarina one of Marcellina's pins to find out the location of the planned tryst. Figaro complains to Marcellina about Susanna's supposed infidelity and, while Marcellina tries to explain that all is not as it seems, Figaro plans revenge. Both leave.

Barbarina returns, as she has a date with Cherubino, but is frightened by a noise and runs into one of the pavilions. Figaro returns with Bartolo and Basilio as witnesses to his wife's infidelity. Figaro tells them to hide until he gives the signal and then Figaro moves to another part of the garden, still defending the jealousy of men and determining not to trust women.

Marcellina, Susanna, and the Countess enter. Susanna and the Countess have switched clothing. Susanna, aware that Figaro is listening, sings about her approaching happiness with her lover. The Countess (now disguised as Susanna) awaits the planned tryst with the Count. However, Cherubino happens upon her and begins flirting. The Count enters and begins seducing "Susanna." The real Susanna (disguised as the Countess) is confronted by Figaro, who tells her that the Count is with his Susanna. She asks Figaro to be quiet, but forgets to disguise her voice. The truth begins to dawn on Figaro, who then pleads passionate love to the "Countess." A furious Susanna slaps Figaro who tells her that he knew she was in disguise all along. Continuing the prank, Figaro and the "Countess" loudly confess their love and the Count rushes in to catch the two lovers. Basilio, Bartolo, Don Curzio, and Antonio all rush in to investigate the ruckus and the Count denounces his faithless wife. All beg the Count to forgive his wife, but he refuses until the real Countess unveils herself. Almaviva realizes that he has fallen prey to a prank and begs forgiveness. The Countess forgives him and all celebrate the end of a crazy day.

From Arizona Opera online Opera Resource Center

What To Listen For

- The **overture** is among opera's and Mozart's best.
- Cherubino's **Non sò più cosa son, cosa faccio** (I no longer know who I am or what I am doing) as he muses about adolescent love.
- Figaro's **Non più andrai farfollone amoroso** (You are no longer an amorous butterfly) as Cherubino goes off to the army.
- The Countess' lovely **Porgi Amor** (Love, grant me comfort), which opens Act II as she laments the loss of her husband's affection.
- Cherubino's **Voi che sapate** (You who know what love is), one of Mozart's most popular tunes.
- The Countess' **Dove sono** is her most moving piece in the opera.
- The **finale** where the Count begs for forgiveness.

Sampling of Disc and Video Recordings

CD

1993, Archiv 2894398712
Terfel, Hagley, Martinpelto, Gilfry
The Monteverdi Choir, The English Baroque Soloists

John Eliot Gardiner, conductor

1992, Deutsche Grammophon 431619
Furlanetto, Upshaw, Te Kenawa, Hampson, von Otter, Troyanos
Metropolitan Opera Chorus and Orchestra
James Levine, conductor

DVD

1993, Deutsche Grammophon 4400730189
Terfel, Hagley, Martinpelto, Gilfry
The Monteverdi Choir, The English Baroque Soloists
John Eliot Gardiner, conductor

Suggested Books

General

Boyden, Matthew. *Opera, The Rough Guide*, The Rough Guides Ltd, 1997.

Brener, Milton. *Opera Offstage*, Walker & Co., 1996.

Cross, Milton. *The Complete Stories of the Great Operas*, Doubleday, 1952.

Earl of Harewood, ed. *The New Kobbe's Complete Opera Book*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976.

Forman, Sir Denis. *A Night at the Opera*, Random House Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1994.

Jellinek, George. *History Through the Opera Glass*, Pro. Am Music Resources, 1994.

Orrey, Leslie (Rodney Milnes ed.). *A Concise History of Opera*, Thames and Hudson, 1987.

Plotkin, Fred. *Opera 101: A Complete Guide to Learning & Loving Opera*, Hyperion, 1994.

Pogue, David Speck, Scott. *Opera for Dummies*, John Wiley & Sons, 1997.

Sadie, Stanley, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Macmillan Press Ltd., 1992.

Simon, Henry. *One Hundred Great Operas and Their Stories*, Doubleday, 1989.

Walsh, Michael. *Who's Afraid of Opera?* Fireside, 1994.

The Marriage of Figaro and Mozart

Zaslaw, N., Cowdery, W. (eds) *The Complete Mozart: A Guide to the Musical Works of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*

Beaumarchais (aka Pierre Augustin Caron), *Le mariage de Figaro*

The Marriage of Figaro (Mozart) Mini Guide
Opera Journeys Mini Guides

The Operatic Voice

Operatic singing developed in Europe during the 17th century. The vocal demands are far greater on an opera singer than on any other singer. Opera singers rarely use microphones, and therefore must develop their voices to make a sound that will project and be heard above an orchestra and be heard throughout a large theatre.

After years of practice and study, an opera singer learns to use his or her body as an amplification device. By controlling the muscles of the diaphragm (a muscle beneath the lungs and above the stomach) the singer can regulate the amount of breath used. By tightening the diaphragm the singer can push out the right amount of air to make the vocal cords vibrate. The speed at which the cords vibrate determines the pitch. As the sound passes through the mouth it resonates in the upper chest cavities and the sinus cavities of the face and head. These cavities act as small echo chambers and help amplify the sound. The shape of the mouth and the placement of the tongue near the lips contribute to the tone and sound of the words.

Many singers begin their operatic training in university. Opera students study singing, music history, composition and vocal pedagogy (voice teaching). In addition to music classes, they study diction and often study at least one foreign language. After university, singers begin to work in the professional world. Their first roles are usually small parts, but if they continue to study and train, they may move on to the bigger principal roles.

Professional singers develop a number of roles in their repertoire. Since the principal artists are required to have their parts memorized before rehearsals begin, singers must prepare well in advance of each contract. Singers have voice teachers who help them refine their singing techniques and many will also have an acting coach. Even a well-established singer will have a vocal coach to teach singing and acting techniques for specific roles.

Each person's vocal tract is constructed differently. The roles that a singer performs are dependent mostly upon their vocal range, but within the vocal ranges, there are many colours and weights of voice that further determine which roles he or she can sing safely. Vocal colour refers to the richness of the sound and vocal weight refers to how powerful a voice sounds.

After the role has been studied intensely and the singer is hired to perform, they arrive at the opera company for the rehearsals. This time is spent refining the music with the conductor and staging the action with the stage director. Each director has a different idea of how the character should be played, and each conductor has a different idea of how the character should sound, therefore the singer must modify his or her techniques to reach the desired result.

Physical health is a major priority to a singer. Contrary to popular belief not all opera singers are overweight. Conventional wisdom used to state that excessive weight gave added volume and richness to the voice however, in recent years people have discovered that physical fitness can give similar benefits to a voice. Plus, the overall health benefits of being in shape overshadow any loss of vocal power. Most singers, like professional athletes try to avoid such substances as tobacco, alcohol and caffeine.

There are six basic vocal categories:

Women:

Soprano: The highest female voice, similar to a flute in range and tone colour. Usually plays the heroine in the opera since a high, bright sound can easily suggest youth and innocence.

Mezzo-Soprano: The middle-range female voice, similar to an oboe in range and tone colour. Called an alto in choral arrangements, can play a wide variety of characters including gypsies, mothers and even the part of a young man (trouser role).

Contralto: The lowest female voice, similar to an English horn in range and tone colour. Usually plays unique roles including fortune-tellers, witches and older women. Not very common.

Men:

Tenor: The highest male voice, similar to a trumpet in range, tone color and acoustical “ring.” Usually plays the hero or the romantic lead in the opera.

Baritone: The middle-range male voice, similar to a French horn in tone color. Often plays the leader of mischief in comic opera or the villain in tragic opera, sometimes even the hero.

Bass: The lowest male voice, similar to a trombone or bassoon in tone color. Usually portrays old, wise men, or foolish, comic men.

The vocal parts overlap each other. The notes that are high for baritone to sing are low for a tenor. The notes that are low for a baritone to sing are high for a bass. For this reason you may see a high range mezzo-soprano singing a soprano’s role or a low range baritone singing a bass’ role.

The following terms can be used to describe special characteristics in a vocal range:

Coloratura: a light, bright voice that has the ability to sing many notes quickly, usually with an extended upper range.

Lyric: A light to medium weight voice, often singing beautiful sweeping melodies.

Dramatic: Dark, heavy and powerful voice, capable of sustained and forceful singing.



Glossary: Important Words in Opera

Act- a section of the opera that is then divided into scenes.

Aria- means “air” in Italian. This is a piece of music written for a one singer (soloist), usually with instrumental accompaniment.

Aside- a secret comment from an actor directly to the audience that the other characters cannot hear.

Baritone- the middle singing range of the male voice. Russell Braun (Almaviva) is an example of this vocal range.

Bass- the lowest singing range of the male voice. Kristopher Irmiter (Figaro) is an example of this vocal range.

Basso buffo (Italian)- a bass singer who specializes in comic characters.

Basso profundo (Italian)- the most serious bass voice.

Baton- short stick that the conductor uses to lead the orchestra.

Bel Canto- Italian phrase literally meaning “beautiful singing.” A traditional Italian style of singing emphasizing tone, phrasing, coloratura passages, and technique. Also refers to the operas written in this style.

Blocking- directions given to the performers for movement on stage.

Bravo (Italian)- a form of appreciation shouted by audience members at the end of a particularly pleasing performance. Technically, Bravo refers to a male performer, Brava refers to a female performer and Bravi refers to many performers.

Buffo- from the Italian for “buffoon.” A singer of comic roles (basso-buffo) or a comic opera (opera-buffa.)

Cadenza- a passage of singing, often at the end of an aria, which shows off the singer's vocal ability.

Castrato (Italian)- a castrated male prized for his high singing voice.

Choreographer- the person who designs the steps of a dance.

Chorus- a group of singers of all vocal ranges, singing together to support the vocal leads.

Classical- the period in music which comes after the Baroque and before the Romantic, roughly from the birth of Mozart to shortly after the death of Beethoven. It represents the greatest standardization in orchestral form and tonality.

Coloratura- elaborate ornamentation of music written for a singer using many fast notes and trills. Also used to describe a singer who sings this type of music.

Composer- the individual who writes all the music for both voice and instrument.

Comprimario (Italian)- a nineteenth century term referring to secondary or supporting roles such as confidantes, messengers, and matchmakers.

Contralto- the lowest female voice range.

Conductor- the person responsible for the musical interpretation and coordination of the performance. The conductor controls the tempo, the dynamic level and the balance between singers and orchestra. You will see this person standing in the orchestra pit conducting the musicians and the singers. The conductor for *The Marriage of Figaro* is James Meena.

Countertenor- a male singer with the highest male voice range, generally singing within the female contralto or mezzo soprano range.

Crescendo- a build in the volume or dynamic of the music.

Cue- a signal to enter or exit from the stage, to move or to change lighting or scenery; or a signal given by the conductor to the musicians.

Curtain Call- occurs at the end of the performance when all the cast members and the conductor take bows. This can occur in front of the curtain or on the open stage.

Designer- a production can have two or three designers: a lighting designer, a costume designer, a set designer, or someone who is both costume and set designer. They work closely with the stage director to give the production a distinctive look.

Diva- literally, “goddess” in Italian. An important female opera star. The masculine form is divo.

Dress Rehearsal- the final rehearsal before opening night, includes costumes, lights, makeup, etc. Sometimes it is necessary to stop for adjustments, but an attempt is made to make it as much like a regular performance as possible.

Duet- music that is written for two people to sing together.

Encore- a piece that is performed after the last scheduled piece of a concert. An encore is usually performed because the audience wants to hear more music even though the concert is over.

Ensemble- a part of the opera written for a group of two or more singers. This may or may not include the chorus.

Falsetto- the upper part of a voice in which the vocal cords do not vibrate completely. Usually used by males to imitate a female voice.

Finale- the last musical number of an opera or an act.

Grand Opera- spectacular French opera of the Romantic period, lavishly staged, with a historically-based plot, a huge cast, an unusually-large orchestra, and ballet. It also refers to opera without spoken dialogue.

Helden- German prefix meaning “heroic”. Can also apply to other voices, but usually used in “heldentenor.”

House- the auditorium and front of the theatre excluding the stage and backstage areas.

Impresario - the proprietor, manager, or conductor of an opera or concert company; one who puts on or sponsors an entertainment; manager, producer.

Interlude- a short piece of instrumental music played between scenes and acts.

Intermission- a break between acts of an opera. The lights go on and the audience is free to move around. *The Marriage of Figaro* has two intermissions of 20 and 15 minutes respectively.

Librettist- the writer of the opera's text. The librettist for *The Marriage of Figaro* was Lorenzo da Ponte.

Libretto- Italian for "little book." It is the text or story of the opera.

Lyric- used to describe a light to medium weight voice with an innocent quality, capable of both sustained, forceful singing and delicate effects.

Maestro- means "master" in Italian. Used as a courtesy title for the conductor (male or female).

Mark- to sing, but not at full voice. A full-length opera is very hard on a singer's voice so most performers mark during rehearsals. During the Dress Rehearsal singers try to sing at full voice for part if not all of the rehearsal.

Mezzo-soprano- the middle singing range for a female voice. Michelle Sutton (Cherubino) is an example of this voice.

Motif or Leitmotif- a recurring musical theme used to identify an emotion, person, place, or object.

Opera- a dramatic presentation which is set to music. Almost all of it is sung, and the orchestra is an equal partner with the singers. Like a play, an opera is acted on stage with costumes, scenery, makeup, etc. Opera is the plural form of the Latin word opus, which means "work."

Opera buffa (Italian)- an opera about ordinary people, usually, but not always comic. First developed in the eighteenth century.

Opera seria (Italian)- a serious style of opera. The usual characters are gods and goddesses, or ancient heroes.

Opera-comique (French) or Singspiel (German)- a form of opera which contains spoken dialogue.

Operetta- lighthearted opera with spoken dialogue, such as a musical.

Orchestra- an ensemble, led by a conductor, that is comprised of string, woodwind, brass and percussion instruments.

Orchestra pit- sunken area in front of the stage where the orchestra sits.

Overture- an orchestral introduction to the opera played before the curtain rises. Usually longer than a prelude and can be played as a separate piece.

Pitch- how high or low a note sounds.

Prelude- a short introduction that leads into an act without pause.

Prima Donna- literally, “first lady” in Italian. The leading woman in an opera. Because of the way some of them behaved in the past, it often refers to someone who is acting in a superior and demanding fashion. The term for a leading man is primo uomo.

Principal- a major singing role, or the singer who performs such a role.

Production- the combination of sets, costumes, props, and lights etc.

Props- objects carried or used on stage by the performers.

Proscenium- the front opening of the stage which frames the action.

Quartet- four singers or the music that is written for four singers. Also quintet, sextet, etc

Raked Stage- a stage that slants downwards towards the audience.

Recitative- lines of dialogue that are sung, usually with no recognizable melody. It is used to advance the plot.

Rehearsal- a working session in which the singers prepare for public performance.

Score- the written music of an opera or other musical work.

Serenade- a piece of music honouring someone or something, an extension of the traditional performance of a lover beneath the window of his mistress.

Soprano- the highest range of the female singing voice. Kathleen Brett (Susanna) and Carol Wilson (Rosina) are examples of this vocal range.

Soubrette (French)- pert young female character with a light soprano voice.

Spinto (Italian)- a lyric voice that has the power and incisiveness for dramatic climaxes.

Stage Areas- refers to the various sections of the stage as seen by those on stage. See diagram in Workshop #1.

Stage Director- the person in charge of the action on stage. He or she shows the singers, chorus and cast where and when to move and helps them create their characters. The stage director develops a concept for how the entire performance should look and feel. He or she works closely with the stage managers, lighting designer, set designers, costume designer and wig and make-up artists to make his or her vision into reality.

Stage Manager- the person who coordinates and manages elements of the performance. The stage manager for *The Marriage of Figaro* is Jacquie Dawson.

Supernumeraries (Supers)- appear on stage in costume in non-singing and usually, non-speaking roles.

Surtitles- the English translations of the opera’s language, in this production Italian, that are projected above the stage during a performance to help the audience follow the story. Much like subtitles in a foreign film.

Synopsis- a short summary of the story of the opera.

Workshop #1– Stage Business

Objectives:

Students will be able to express and apply their knowledge of the areas of the stage through writing and movement.

Students will investigate the historical background of stage positioning.

Pre-class:

Tape a massive grid to the floor of the space you are working in. This can be used to physically point out the areas of the stage as well as be used for the game (“Director Says”).

Activity #1: Group Discussion

Have a group discussion with your class regarding why individuals might need to assign names for the different areas of the theatre, questioning the purpose that it serves.

Activity #2: Historical Significance of the Stage

Explain briefly the historical significance for the set-up of the theatre. Include such points as how the stage was originally raked so that the back portion of the stage was higher than the front portion. This was done because the audience’s seats were not raised as they usually are today. It enabled those individuals sitting in the back row of the theatre to see the players clearly. As a result the back of the stage is called up stage and the front of the stage is referred to as down stage.

You may also choose to discuss which areas of the stage are most important. For example, the strongest entrance is from stage left.

Distribute the “Stage Facts” on the next page, so that students can refer to it as you physically go to the taped area that you are explaining. You may choose to have them draw and copy the areas of the stage for themselves.

Activity #3: “Director Says” Game

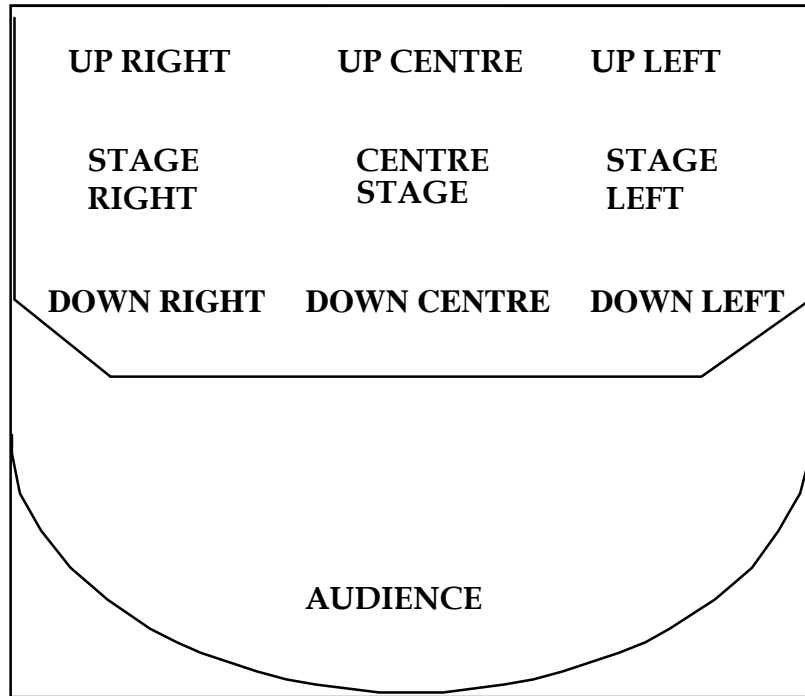
The teacher designates one of the students as the director, or for the first round you can be the director. The remaining students are the performers.

The director gives out the directions: “Move upstage”, “Move stage right,” “Move to up centre,” etc. The director may give out directions to the entire group at once, small groups, or individuals e.g.: “All performers with red socks go to stage left.”

Students are out if they move in any direction other than the one the director gives. The director gives out directions more rapidly, and any performer who moves in the wrong direction or hesitates is out. You may need to have a judge.

Stage Facts

Opera singers are required to act as well as sing and therefore they must understand the stage set-up. In rehearsals, the director will indicate to the singers what they should be doing and where they should do it. To do this they use a special vocabulary. Take a look at the diagram below in order to understand the different areas of the stage.



Workshop #2 – *The Marriage of Figaro*

Objectives:

Student will be able to express their knowledge of the storyline of *The Marriage of Figaro* through verbal and written expression. Students will be able to express their knowledge of character through writing a character sketch

Activity #1: Story of *The Marriage of Figaro*

Have the students read a version of *The Marriage of Figaro*. You can use the synopsis found in the Study Guide or most CD versions include a synopsis and often the libretto. You can choose to read it aloud to the students or have them read it silently. Have the students discuss what happens to the characters and why they think each character behaved the way they did. Do they think a similar story could be told in modern times or can they think of contemporary stories that have a similar theme.

For a more dramatic approach, read the libretto as a reader's theatre, having students take turns speaking the different roles. If done in this manner, ask the students to put emotion into their voices and encourage exaggeration. You might have to start them off, but this will provide an interesting way of reading the story.

Another approach is to convert the synopsis into an improvised play. Have students create the dialogue between characters at key points in the story.

Incorporate the music. Have the students discuss what they hear. Some discussion topics include:

- What mood does the music create?
- What does the music say about the character?
- How does it say it?
- What emotions are conveyed through the music?

Activity #2: Sharing with a group

After viewing the Dress Rehearsal, have the students discuss what they saw. To help focus conversations, get the students to create a list of qualities that they feel are key to understanding *The Marriage of Figaro* and its characters.

Activity #3: Creating a journal from point of view of a character

Allow students to pick a specific moment in the opera, preferably a point of conflict for the character. Have the students write a journal of those events from the point of view of their character. Explain to the students that they are to take on the persona of that character and should refer to the character through personal pronouns. Also, remind students that they are only to express information that their character would know.

Character Profile

Name and role

Physical Characteristics (their style and physical attributes)

Workshop #3 - Writing a Review of *The Marriage of Figaro*

Objectives:

Students will be able to write clear and well-supported expository essays.

Students will utilize observation and critical thinking skills based on real-life, real-time experiences.

Students can submit their writing for publication (school newspaper) or you can send the reviews to Manitoba Opera. We would love to hear what the students thought.

Activity #1- Think-Group-Share

Individually students will write, in point form, the answers to the following questions:

1. What did you like about the opera? What did you dislike?
2. What did you think about the sets, props and costumes?
3. Would you have done something differently? Why?
4. What were you expecting? Did it live up to your expectations?
5. What did you think of the singers' portrayal of their characters?

Break the students into groups to discuss their feelings and reactions to the production. Have the students write on poster papers their answers or important points of their discussion. Encourage the students to go beyond the questions posed. Place their poster papers on the walls.

Activity #2- Gallery Walk

Have the groups travel around the room to examine the discussion poster papers. During the walk, students must write down one thing that surprised them, one thing that they didn't think of, and one thing that they would like explained. Once this is done, have a large group discussion about the different ideas that they encountered on their walk.

Activity #3- Outlining your review

Go over the essential aspects of a review including:

- a clearly stated purpose
- a coherent comparison/contrast organizational pattern
- a summary paragraph
- capturing the interest of the reader
- precise nouns
- revision for consistency of ideas

You might give your students a few samples of reviews for fine arts events from the newspaper as examples - or ask them to bring in some reviews they find themselves. Have the students fill out the "Review Outline" worksheet. Once this has been completed, students may write their rough draft.

Activity #4- Peer Conferencing

Students will exchange reviews to critique and edit. Have the students use the "Peer Evaluation" worksheet to help guide them. Encourage the students to focus on effective coordination of ideas in sentences and the correct use of grammar and punctuation.

Activity #5- Creating the final draft

Have students make the appropriate adjustments to their reviews. You could also have the students type the pieces up and organize them into a newspaper. Also have the students complete the "Self-evaluation" worksheet. Include this in the total mark.

Review Outline

Purpose (why are you writing this and who is your audience?)

Plot Synopsis (including who sang what role, etc.)

Paragraph #1 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

Paragraph #2 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

Paragraph #3 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

Summary/Closing Paragraph

Optional Activity/Approach

Be a music critic in the 1780s. Students imagine they are living at the time of the first performance of *The Marriage of Figaro*, in 1786.

Activity #1 – Historical Research

Students will need to learn about the historical context in Europe in the 1780s. This will include understanding the political situation (e.g., the Austrian Empire and its role in Europe) and social norms, including the differences among classes.

Activity #2 – Writing the review

Students may want to create a periodical from the time in which their review will be published. The review itself could incorporate quotes and/or headlines from actual historical reviews. The students' reviews can follow a similar outline to that for the activity above, but they must remember the time period in which they are pretending to write.

As with the previous activity, peer and self-evaluations of the reviews can be completed, using the outlines in the following pages.

The Manitoba Opera would love to receive a copy of any reviews or newspapers produced by the students.

Other Activities

- Study the history and politics of Mozart's time, particularly the year when *The Marriage of Figaro* premiered (1786); what authors were popular, what scientific discoveries were being made; what was the social and political life in Canada at the time (as well as in Europe).
- Celebrate the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth with a poster or short biography about him. This could include a review of Mozart's most commonly performed symphonies, operas, and other compositions. Or hold a birthday party using as many ideas from his time as possible. Check online for information about the era, e.g., the Costume Museum of Canada (in Dugald) for period dress ideas.
- Write a story about your visit to the Manitoba Opera, write us a letter, or draw a picture to illustrate your memories from the experience.

Online sites worth considering:

Presented by Opera Arizona, online interactive or printable activities:
http://www.vilocity.com/docking/portfolio/azopera/cd_021021/

The Baltimore Opera has good information on opera in general and on the *Marriage of Figaro* specifically:
http://www.baltimoreopera.com/studyguide/general_artform.asp

Opera Comprehension Test

General Opera

1. _____ A theatrical production incorporating both vocal and instrumental music, drama, and sometimes dance.
2. _____ The lowest male vocal range.
3. _____ An instrumental introduction to an opera.
4. _____ The area where the orchestra is seated.
5. _____ The female vocal range lying between soprano and contralto.
6. _____ A song for solo voice in an opera.
7. _____ The highest female vocal range.
8. _____ A song for two voices.
9. _____ The lowest female vocal range.
10. _____ The Italian word meaning "little book."
11. _____ The middle male vocal range.
12. _____ He/she has the artistic view for the performance of the opera.

The Marriage of Figaro

1. The opera *The Marriage of Figaro* takes place in _____ (give the location and approximate date).
2. Figaro is a _____ (name his profession).
3. In the first act, Figaro's marriage plans are at risk because of his promise to repay a debt to _____.
4. The Count orders _____ to join his regiment as a punishment.
5. *The Marriage of Figaro* was composed by _____.
6. The libretto (words) for *The Marriage of Figaro* was written by _____.
7. The role of Figaro is sung by a _____ (vocal category).
8. The role of Susanna is sung by a _____ (vocal category).

Answers

General Opera

1. opera
2. bass
3. overture
4. pit
5. mezzo-soprano
6. aria
7. soprano
8. duet
9. contralto
10. libretto
11. baritone
12. director

The Marriage of Figaro

1. Seville, 1780s
2. Valet
3. Marcellina
4. Cherubino
5. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
6. Lorzeno da Ponte
7. bass
8. soprano

Teacher's Evaluation Sheet

Your comments and suggestions are greatly appreciated. Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire and return it to the address below. Thank you for your comments and suggestions.

Name: _____

School: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Fax: _____

Email: _____

Grade(s) you teach: _____

Subjects: _____

Have you attended other performing arts events with your students in the past year?

Yes No

If yes, what were they? _____

How did you find out about Manitoba Opera's Student Night at the Opera?

Were you able to apply the Teacher's Study Guide in your classroom activities prior to coming to the opera?

Yes No

If not, please elaborate: _____

If so, which sections of the Study Guide did you find most useful?

How appropriate was the information provided in the Study Guide?

What would you add/omit? _____

Did you spend classroom time discussing the performance after your students attended the opera?

Yes No

Do you have any comments about the performance itself?

Would you like to receive information on our future Student Dress Rehearsals? Yes No

How would you like to receive information:

Fax Email Letters Other_____

Further comments and suggestions_____

Please return this form to: **Education Coordinator, 380 Graham Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R3C 4K2**
Fax: (204) 949-0377