

Ariadne auf Naxos



2013-14 Season
by Richard Strauss

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Purpose

This study guide is intended to aid you, the teacher, in increasing your students' understanding and appreciation of *Ariadne auf Naxos*. This will not only add to knowledge about opera, but should develop awareness of other related subjects, making the performance they attend much more enjoyable.

Most Important

If you only have a limited amount of time, concentrate on the cast of characters, the plot and some of the musical and dramatic highlights of the opera. Recognition produces familiarity which in turn produces a positive experience.

The Language

The Virginia Opera will perform *Ariadne auf Naxos* in the original language, German, but an English translation will be projected on a screen above the stage. With these Supertitles, audiences can experience the beauty of opera in the original language, yet still understand the meaning of all that is being sung.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Prima donna/Ariadnt	Soprano
The tenor/Bacchust	Tenor
Zerbinetta	Coloratura soprano
Harlequin	Baritone
Scaramuccio	Tenor
Truffaldino	Bass
Brighella	Tenor
The composer	Soprano or mezzo-soprano
The music master	Baritone
The dancing master	Tenor
The wig maker	Baritone
A lackey	Bass
An officer	Tenor
The Major-Domo	Speaking role
Naiad (a nymph)	Coloratura soprano

BRIEF SUMMARY

Setting: The private home of a wealthy Viennese man. This work consists of an opera within an opera. The first section depicts backstage activities prior to the performance of a new opera; the concluding section depicts the performance of that opera, which itself is set on the island of Naxos in legendary times.

A troupe of comedians and a band of operatic musicians arrive at the house, each prepared to offer separate performances following dinner. When the meal runs late, the Major-Domo announces that the two groups will perform simultaneously so as not to delay a scheduled fireworks show. The Composer is horrified, but his Music Master persuades him that it's in his financial interests to agree. The various performers fume and plot intrigue, but the comic Zerbinetta plans her new role in the opera seria. The Composer shares a flirtation with her, raising his spirits enough to inspire a rousing ode to music. But when he realizes what is about to happen to his composition, he rushes out in despair as the opera begins.

Ariadne, abandoned by her lover Theseus, dwells on the island of Naxos with Naiad, Dryad and Echo. Devasted by her lost love, she sings of her longing for death. The four comedians, led by Zerbinetta, try to entertain her with their antics, to no avail. Zerbinetta advises Ariadne to find a new lover, but she is ignored. As Ariadne retreats to her cave, the four clowns attempt to woo Zerbinetta, who chooses Harlequin. The nymphs herald the presence of a stranger. Ariadne hopes it is Death's messenger Hermes, but the stranger is in fact the god Bacchus who has just escaped from the witch Circe. After confusion over their identities is resolved, Bacchus becomes enamored of Ariadne; they sing a passionate duet as Zerbinetta observes that when a new love appears, one must yield to it.

PROLOGUE

We are in the splendid home of a wealthy Viennese man who has planned a lavish evening's entertainment for his friends. A sumptuous dinner will be followed by the performance of a new opera he has commissioned, based on the mythical story of Ariadne. Immediately following the opera, there will be a comic play starring the coquette actress Zerbinetta and her troupe of clowns; the festivities will be capped off by a fireworks show.

A brief orchestral introduction captures the bustling, exciting atmosphere of the occasion. A dynamic ascending motive in the strings represents the impetuosity, enthusiasm and idealism of the young Composer, author of the Ariadne opera.

Last-minute preparations for the evening's gala are observed: workmen, actors and servants are going about their business. Props, costumes and open trunks clutter the backstage area. The Music Master stops the Major-Domo to voice his concerns about the low comedy act that, he has just learned, will follow the sublime new opera seria composed by his protégé. The Major-Domo, busily overseeing everything, is unable to hide his impatience and disdain for these concerns; in fact, he finds it impertinent for the Music-Master to express his opinion. After all, he points out condescendingly, a "handsome gratuity" is being paid. In short, the Master has the final say in this matter.

As the Music Master frets over how to break this news to the Composer, a Lackey escorts an Officer to the door of Zerbinetta's dressing room. The Officer makes it clear he is free to visit her, unannounced, any time he likes. The Composer enters and, spying the Lackey, bids him assemble the strings of his orchestra for a last-minute brush-up rehearsal. The Lackey sneeringly informs him that they are busy at the dining table. When the Composer objects that they shouldn't be eating so close to a performance, the Lackey clarifies: they're providing musical entertainment for the diners.

Deciding instead to rehearse Ariadne's aria with his Prima Donna, the Composer mistakenly heads for Zerbinetta's dressing room but is stopped by a footman before he can interrupt her tryst with the Officer. Frustrated now, the Composer proudly asks "Do you know who I am?", claiming he can

speak to any of his singers any time he wishes. Pacing about backstage, overwhelmed with the realization that his opera will soon make its debut, he is suddenly hit with inspiration: a beautiful new melody has occurred to him, though he dreads having to teach it to the tenor singing the role of Bacchus. At that, the Tenor himself bursts out of his dressing room, pitching a fit over a wig he finds unsuitable for his bald head. The composer vainly tries to get his attention as the Tenor castigates the indignant Wig-Maker. The Composer, desperate to jot down his melody before he forgets it, asks the Wig-Maker for a scrap of paper but is rudely rebuffed.

At this, Zerbinetta and her Officer emerge from her dressing room; she expects that by the time her comedy act begins, the audience will be so bored from the opera that she won't get any laughs. As the couple continues conversing, the Prima Donna and Music Master enter. He has filled her in on the evening's plan and she, horrified, demands to speak to the Master of the House to complain about the comic act. She returns to her dressing room as the Music Master bars the Composer from following her; she's having her hair done, he explains.

Noticing Zerbinetta for the first time, the Composer asks who she is. Meanwhile, the Dancing Master, no opera fan, assures the actress that the opera is so boring and bereft of melody that everyone will love her show all the more. As tactfully as he can, the Music Master tells his pupil that the "enchanted young girl" whose beauty has clearly caught the Composer's eye is Zerbinetta, who will, with her four partners, sing and dance in the "comic epilogue" after the opera.

The Composer recoils in shocked disbelief, repulsed by the lack of taste that would allow such buffoonery to follow his opera, an opera he claims will "reveal the mystery of life". The Music Master attempts to calm him down, but his efforts are futile. In mid-rant, however, the Composer remembers the melody that came to him and, explaining how he came to think of it, begins demonstrating it to improvised words:

He furiously begins to write down the tune on some paper from the Music Master as Zerbinetta, accompanied by the actors playing Harlequin, Truffaldino, Scaramuccio and Brighella, completes her make-up. The Prima Donna catches sight of them and is disgusted with their common appearance. Zerbinetta, just to annoy her, repeats her opinion that the opera

will bore the audience so much they'll be unresponsive to her comedy. The Dancing Master hastens to assure the comedians that their entertainment will triumph because it's the kind of show people enjoy: good tunes and a plot "as clear as daylight". For his part, the Music Master assures the Prima Donna that by tomorrow, all anyone will remember is her performance as Ariadne.

The Lackey enters to announce that the dinner is over, leading the Music Master to assume that the opera singers should take their places. However, the Major-Domo enters with a bombshell announcement: the Master of the house has again changed his mind about the entertainment. With all the performers bombarding him with questions, he has difficulty proceeding but in the end declares that neither show will go first: the opera and the comedy will be performed simultaneously. Furthermore, they must be finished by nine o'clock, as the fireworks show must start precisely on time.

A confused chaos greets this dictum. All parties are incredulous, full of questions about how this can possibly be managed. The Major-Domo dismisses all objections; they are professional performers, after all – they should be able to manage this "minor" change with no difficulty at all. How it can be done is certainly not the affair of the host; he has paid for this performance and expects his orders to be obeyed. The Composer mutters that he was doomed from the cradle while Zerbinetta, in the tradition of "the show must go on", begins to ready herself.

The Dancing Master likes the new plan. The Music-Master is overwhelmed. The Composer suggests the two of them walk out in protest: "What do we have to lose?" The Music Master glumly replies "Fifty ducats, the money you were planning to live on for the next six months." The Dancing Master assures them that all is for the best; the comedians are experienced performers and can improvise at a moment's notice.

Under the gun now, the Composer and Music Master begin marking wholesale cuts in the opera score. The Prima Donna and the Tenor, aware that cuts are taking place, station themselves nearby, each suggesting that the other's role be greatly reduced. The Music Master tells the Prima Donna that Bacchus's part is being reduced by half and hers will be untouched, then says exactly the opposite to the Tenor.

The Dancing Master now hurriedly outlines the opera's story

to Zerbinetta to help her calculate how best to interject herself and her fellow clowns. Ariadne, a king's daughter, eloped with Theseus after having saved his life. But Theseus, tiring of her, left her on a desert island. Ariadne, alone, longs for death. "She means she longs for another lover", says Zerbinetta cynically. The Composer protests that she is by no means that fickle; Ariadne, he claims passionately, is the sort of woman who can only belong to one man and no other, save Death. Zerbinetta points out that Ariadne, in the end, leaves with the handsome Bacchus on his ship. "Only because she takes him to be the god of Death", answers the Composer defensively. Zerbinetta laughs at his naiveté.

She quickly fills in her fellow clowns on the new plan for the opera while the Composer goes on lecturing about Ariadne yielding, in her death, to "the mystery of transfiguration" and her rebirth in his arms. Zerbinetta, still amused, bids him use common sense about the performance, promising not to ruin anything. At this moment, the two young people seem to regard each other as if for the first time. Zerbinetta shyly confides that few people really know her; she appears merry, but is often lonely. The Composer, suddenly infatuated with her charm, begins praising her, while Zerbinetta allows she wishes she could find one man to whom she could remain faithful.

She runs off as the Music Master quickly organizes the opening scene, directing all performers to take their places on the stage. The Prima Donna threatens drastic action should Zerbinetta share the stage with her but is somewhat mollified when the Music Master says the audience cannot fail to notice the "gulf" that separates them.

The Composer, stimulated by his conversation with Zerbinetta, embraces the Music Master, launching into an enthusiastic affirmation of the beauty of life and the power of music. This is the climactic musical moment of the Prologue, a justly famous solo commonly referred to as "the Composer's aria" ("Sein wir wieder gut"). The motive associated with the Composer from the orchestral introduction returns as the young man sings in ever more expansive, sweeping phrases of soaring lyricism:

His paen is interrupted by the four clowns and Zerbinetta taking the stage, prepared to insert themselves into the opera that will begin momentarily. With renewed despair the Composer bitterly berates the Music Master for allowing this travesty to take place and runs off.

THE OPERA

We now see the stage in the wealthy man's home from the audience's perspective; it depicts the island of Naxos. There is a cave to one side, with the sea visible in the background. Ariadne lies on the ground near the cave with the three nymphs Naiad, Dryad and Echo standing around her. In an ethereal trio ("Ach, wir sind es eingewöhnet"), they describe her pitiable state of endless weeping and sadness:

Ariadne rouses up, surprised to find herself still living with her heart so broken; Harlequin, Ruffaldino and Zerbinetta eavesdrop from the side of the stage, remarking that cheering her up will be no easy task. Ariadne, seemingly unaware of anyone else, sings of her broken romance with Theseus, fondly remembering their love ("Ein Schönes war")

When the nymphs call out to her, Ariadne speaks of herself in the third person, saying she lives alone on the island, waiting patiently for death. Zerbinetta suggests that Harlequin try to raise Ariadne's spirits with some music. He sings a light serenade ("Lieben, Hassen, Hoffen, Zagen") more in the character of a folk-like ballad than an operatic aria:

Ariadne ignores the music as Harlequin remarks he's never before felt so touched by another human being. When Zerbinetta slyly observes he always gets like this over a woman, Harlequin retorts that she's no different when it comes to men.

Ariadne, still behaving as though she's alone, sings of her longing for "a realm where all is pure": the Realm of Death ("Es gibt ein Reich"). As her joyfulness at the thought of death increases, she imagines the arrival of Hermes, the messenger of Death, in an ecstatic melody resembling a fanfare:

The nymphs have withdrawn during the aria; now the four clowns take the stage in an all-out attempt to entertain Ariadne. The bold Harlequin, the shy Brighella, the wily Scaramuccio and the foolish old Truffaldino sing and dance almost in the style of a madrigal ("Die Dame gibt mit trüben Sinn"). At times, their act approaches the liveliness of Vaudeville:

Their antics fail to stir any response from the desolate Ariadne. Zerbinetta decides to take matters into her own hands. Sending away her comrades, she appeals to the princess on a woman-to-woman basis, explaining that all women go through rocky relationships with men. This aria ("Grossmächtige Prinzessin") is a fiendishly difficult coloratura virtuoso piece. In its

sheer length, the variety of affects and moods it reflects and the dazzling technical resources of agility and range required to bring it off, it has become the sine qua non of the high soprano repertoire. It would appear that Strauss's goal was to out-do composers of the bel canto period of opera history such as Donizetti (composer of Lucia di Lammermoor with its famous Mad Scene) by writing a coloratura showpiece topping them all. As if to signal his intention, the concluding section of the aria, in rondo form, features an Italianate melody very much in the style of Donizetti:

Zerbinetta's message is that when a woman is in love, her heart belongs completely to her man – until the next love comes along, that is. The grieving Ariadne withdraws into her cave midway through this lecture; Zerbinetta realizes that she and the princess "speak different languages".

Harlequin and the other clowns rejoin Zerbinetta and, with nothing else to occupy them, begin to vie for her affections, flirting and dancing for her. Zerbinetta sneaks off with the victorious Harlequin. The other three abruptly stop dancing when they realize they are now alone. They exit.

The three nymphs reappear, excitedly heralding the approach of a "radiant youth", the god Bacchus. They quickly recount his story: raised by nymphs when his mother died in childbirth, Grown to manhood, his ship landed on the island of the sorceress Circe, who welcomed him to her dinner table. She attempted to ensnare him with a magic potion, but Bacchus was "freed from her encircling arms", now transfigured; a god.

As if hearing them, Ariadne emerges from her cave. Bacchus appears on the island's shore; not yet seeing Ariadne, he sings of Circe, asking what she had intended to do with him. Naiad, Dryad and Echo sing a glowing hymn-like trio extolling the sweetness of his voice:

Momentarily thinking that the man before her might be Theseus, Ariadne is then transported with happiness, believing him to be Hermes, the messenger of Death for whose arrival she has been longing. Bacchus wonders if she is yet another sorceress like Circe. He understands that she sees him as a god, a status he grandly affirms ("Bin ich ein Gott, schuf mich ein Gott"). Ariadne peppers him with questions about the process of joining him in the Realm of the Dead. Will she find oblivion from one moment to the next? Will her pain be taken away forever? How will her death be accomplished – with a

potion? By hand? Bacchus brushes aside any confusion he may have about her questions; entranced with her beauty and quite in love, he kisses her. This is indeed a “transformation” for Ariadne, though perhaps not the one she was expecting! Bacchus declares that only now has life begun for the two of them. Ariadne feels free of all her sadness and longing, though she apparently still believes Bacchus to be her guide to the next life. In any case, she has “died” in the sense that the miserable, heartbroken woman she has been is no more; a radiantly happy woman, a completely different creature, has taken her place with the birth of this new love. Bacchus passionately declares that his love for her has fully awakened his godhood. As they slowly begin to retire to the privacy of Ariadne’s cave, now regarded as a bridal chamber, the nymphs repeat their hymn in praise of Bacchus while Zerbinetta, appearing from just off-stage, smiles knowingly. Her prediction has come true and her philosophy has proven correct: Ariadne has surrendered to a new lover.

ARIADNE IN MYTHOLOGY

Ariadne was the daughter of King Minos and Queen Pasiphaë of Crete. Minos ordered a maze called the Cretan Labyrinth erected, at the center of which dwelt the Minotaur, a creature half-man and half-bull. The monster was appeased with periodic sacrifices of young men and women, which he devoured. When Theseus, hero-king of Athens, vowed to slay the Minotaur, Ariadne fell in love with him at once and helped him achieve the feat by providing him with a sword and a ball of string. He used the latter to mark his way through the maze. Theseus and Ariadne became lovers but he soon tired of her and left her on the island of Naxos. After a period of isolation during which she wept inconsolably, Ariadne was discovered by Bacchus, which is the Roman name for Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and revelry. In some versions of the story, Bacchus discovers Ariadne on the island, falls in love with her and takes her as his wife. In others, Bacchus comes to Naxos already knowing she would be there. The constellation Corona is said to be her wedding diadem. Bacchus and Ariadne had several offspring and were faithful until her death. In some tellings, Ariadne was killed by Perseus; in others, she hanged herself.

Ariadne has been the subject of numerous treatments by composers throughout history. Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643), regarded as the first great operatic composer, composed his opera *L'Arianna* in 1608. The music has been lost save for one famous aria, "Il lamento d'Arianna". Here is a representative list of other operas about Ariadne. Some deal with Ariadne on Crete and Theseus's slaying of the Minotaur; others tell of her abandonment on Naxos.

- *Arianna e Teseo* (1714) by N. Porpora (The libretto for this work, by Pariati, was also set by such composers as Leo, Sarti and Galuppi)
- *Arianna in Creta* (1734) by G. F. Händel
- *Ariane* (1906) by J. Massenet
- *L'abandon d'Ariane* (1927) by D. Milhaud
- *Ariane* (1958) by B. Martin

Franz Josef Haydn (1732-1809) is the composer of a cantata entitled *Arianna a Naxos*. There is a ballet by French composer Albert Roussel called *Bacchus et Ariadne* from 1931.

Literary treatments of the story without music include a story by Anton and poems by Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg and Friedrich Nietzsche.

THE CREATION OF THE OPERA

It took some five years for Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* to be completed as we know it today, from earliest inception to ultimate revision. Strauss (1864-1949) was an established and successful operatic composer at the time work began on *Ariadne*, with no fewer than five works to his credit. The two most recent, *Elektra* (1909) and *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911) were created with the writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874). The two men would collaborate on a total of six operas, with *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (1919), *Die ägyptische Helena* (1928), and *Arabella* (1933) following *Ariadne*.

Strauss and Hofmannsthal originally meant for *Ariadne* to exist as a short one-act "mini-opera", perhaps thirty minutes in length, to be incorporated within a performance of Molière's play *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* as translated into German by Hofmannsthal. The opera would be characterized by the ironic intrusion of characters from the Italian *commedia dell'arte* into the drama. Strauss would also compose some original incidental music for the Molière play itself.

As time went along during the creative process, both composer and librettist found their initial ideas expanding: Hofmannsthal became interested in the metaphysical aspects of Ariadne's grief, while Strauss insisted on giving the character of Zerbinetta a lengthy scene of coloratura display. The resulting performance of *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* consisted of Hofmannsthal's translation in Acts 1 and 2, with the now-inflated opera serving as the closing third act.

This concoction was neither a critical or popular success upon its debut in 1916. The opera struck people as an anchor weighing down the French comedy, and the play seemed too unrelated to Strauss's soaring music. Feeling strongly about the merits of *Ariadne*, the two artists committed to solving the problem of how best to present the material, settling on an entirely new plan. They discarded the Molière play, substitut-

ing new material by the librettist: a prologue depicting the back-stage circumstances just prior to an opera called *Ariadne auf Naxos*. There would be a vain soprano and tenor displaying typical diva-style fits of temperament; subsequently those same artists would portray the title characters in the opera.

Hofmannsthal is said to have been perturbed about the lyrical and complex nature of Strauss's musical treatment of the Prologue; he had expected a more cursory, recitative-style setting. He had also not envisioned the character of the Composer as a so-called "trouser role" for a female singer, similar to the role of Octavian in their most recent work, *Der Rosenkavalier*. For his part, Strauss pointed out that that the work already called for three tenors, and his casting held sway.

The premiere of this revised version, for all purposes a new work (the *Ariadne-Bacchus* section was also tweaked), was received with acclaim and has become established as a popular work in the standard repertoire. The three roles of Zerbinetta, the Composer and *Ariadne* are regarded as among the greatest and most challenging written for women's voices. Strauss is widely regarded as one of the greatest masters of orchestration; in *Ariadne auf Naxos* it is remarkable the level of sonority that is created by an ensemble of less size than usual: a mere thirty-nine players. Many of the characteristic elements of Strauss's style are fully in evidence in this opera, including:

- Expert writing for the human voice, with vocal lines successfully straddling the delicate balance between challenging and abusive technical requirements;
- A harmonic style alternating extreme chromaticism with unabashed functional diatonic chord progressions; and
- A particular fondness for creating musical tension by prolonging dominant seventh sonorities over several bars, resulting in intense climaxes when the resolution finally arrives on the tonic.

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

RICHARD STRAUSS 1864-1949

Richard Strauss was the first child of Franz Joseph Strauss, principal horn player in the Munich Court Orchestra for 50 years, and his second wife, Josephine Pschorr. She was from a well-off family of brewers, which enabled her husband to enjoy financial independence and meant that Strauss and his sister had a happy, carefree childhood. Richard showed musical promise from his earliest years: he was taught piano at the age of four and violin at eight by his father's professional colleagues. He also studied theory and composition with the assistant Court conductor when he was eleven. Strauss' first works were composed when he was six years old – before he could even write them down himself. From then until the last days of his life he meticulously composed a copious amount of music.

Franz Strauss was intensely conservative in his musical tastes, not allowing his son to listen to anything but the classics until he was in his early teens. A powerful influence was his freedom to attend the Munich Court Orchestra during his father's rehearsals. Soon after Richard encountered the operas of Wagner, although at first he did not know how to appreciate them. Several years later he admitted that he “wolfed the score of Tristan as if in trance.”

Richard Strauss never attended a formal academy of music because of his extensive private study and experience. (His father's connections assured the performance of his early compositions throughout Germany.) Unlike his contemporaries Debussy and Mahler, Richard Strauss received high estimation at an early age: before he was 21 he had been hailed as the successor to Brahms and Wagner and the tone poems written in his 20's and early 30's immediately entered the international repertory. However, Strauss considered his principal role as a conductor. Strauss was in constant demand as guest conductor of his own works, regularly touring Europe as well as the Americas. He also held positions with the Court Operas of Berlin, Vienna, Munich and Meiningen. Another important feature of Strauss' life at this period was his campaign for a revision of the German copyright law and the establishment of a performing-right society in 1898. Strauss was always aware of the benefit of money and constantly talked about royalties. As a practical man he saw no reason why a composer should not be well remunerated for his works.

In the period from 1898 to 1918, Strauss shifted his concentration from lieder (songs) and orchestral work to composing operas. *Feuersnot* (1901) was an instant success, being a considerable advance on his first pseudo-Wagnerian opera, *Guntram*. Then, in 1905, his *Salome* created a scandal: Strauss ran into censorship trouble almost everywhere, but this merely provided profitable publicity for the opera. *Salome* was a great success with the public, and with the royalties he built the villa at Garmisch in which he and his wife, soprano Pauline de Ahna, lived. *Elektra*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, and *Ariadne auf Naxos* were his better known operas.

Strauss spent his later years composing and touring to conduct performances and his own premiers. He died at the age of 85 in 1949 in Germany survived by his wife Pauline and son, Franz.

A SHORT HISTORY OF OPERA

The word opera is the plural form of the Latin word opus, which translates quite literally as work. The use of the plural form alludes to the plurality of art forms that combine to create an operatic performance. Today we accept the word opera as a reference to a theatrically based musical art form in which the drama is propelled by the sung declamation of text accompanied by a full symphony orchestra.

Opera as an art form can claim its origin with the inclusion of incidental music that was performed during the tragedies and comedies popular during ancient Greek times. The tradition of including music as an integral part of theatrical activities expanded in Roman times and continued throughout the Middle Ages. Surviving examples of liturgical dramas and vernacular plays from Medieval times show the use of music as an “insignificant” part of the action as do the vast mystery and morality plays of the 15th and 16th centuries. Traditional view holds that the first completely sung musical drama (or opera) developed as a result of discussions held in Florence in the 1570s by an informal academy known as the Camerata which led to the musical setting of Rinuccini’s drama, *Dafne*, by composer, Jacopo Peri in 1597.

The work of such early Italian masters as Giulio Caccini and Claudio Monteverdi led to the development of a through-composed musical entertainment comprised of recitative sections (*secco* and *accompagnato*) which revealed the plot of the drama; followed by *da capo* arias which provided the soloist an opportunity to develop the emotions of the character. The function of the chorus in these early works mirrored that of the character of the same name found in Greek drama. The new “form” was greeted favorably by the public and quickly became a popular entertainment.

Opera has flourished throughout the world as a vehicle for the expression of the full range of human emotions. Italians claim the art form as their own, retaining dominance in the field through the death of Giacomo Puccini in 1924. Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, and Leoncavallo developed the art form through clearly defined periods that produced *opera buffa*, *opera seria*, *bel canto*, and *verismo*. The Austrian Mozart also wrote operas in Italian and championed the *singspiel* (sing play), which combined the spoken word with music, a form also used by Beethoven in his only opera, *Fidelio*. Bizet (*Carmen*), Offenbach (*Les Contes d’Hoffmann*), Gounod (*Faust*),

and Meyerbeer (*Les Huguenots*) led the adaptation by the French which ranged from the *opera comique* to the grand full-scale *tragedie lyrique*. German composers von Weber (*Der Freischütz*), Richard Strauss (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), and Wagner (*Der Ring des Nibelungen*) developed diverse forms such as *singspiel* to through-composed spectacles unified through the use of the *leitmotif*. The English ballad opera, Spanish *zarzuela* and Viennese *operetta* helped to establish opera as a form of entertainment which continues to enjoy great popularity throughout the world.

With the beginning of the 20th century, composers in America diverged from European traditions in order to focus on their own roots while exploring and developing the vast body of the country’s folk music and legends. Composers such as Aaron Copland, Douglas Moore, Carlisle Floyd, Howard Hanson, and Robert Ward have all crafted operas that have been presented throughout the world to great success. Today, composers John Adams, Philip Glass, and John Corigliano enjoy success both at home and abroad and are credited with the infusion of new life into an art form which continues to evolve even as it approaches its fifth century.

THE OPERATIC VOICE

A true (and brief) definition of the “operatic” voice is a difficult proposition. Many believe the voice is “born,” while just as many hold to the belief that the voice is “trained.” The truth lies somewhere between the two. Voices that can sustain the demands required by the operatic repertoire do have many things in common. First and foremost is a strong physical technique that allows the singer to sustain long phrases through the control of both the inhalation and exhalation of breath. Secondly, the voice (regardless of its size) must maintain a resonance in both the head (mouth, sinuses) and chest cavities. The Italian word “squillo” (squeal) is used to describe the brilliant tone required to penetrate the full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singers. Finally, all voices are defined by both the actual voice “type” and the selection of repertoire for which the voice is ideally suited.

Within the five major voice types (Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, Baritone, Bass) there is a further delineation into categories (Coloratura, Lyric, Spinto, Dramatic) which help to define each particular instrument. The Coloratura is the highest within each voice type whose extended upper range is complimented by extreme flexibility. The Lyric is the most common of the “types.” This instrument is recognized more for the exceptional beauty of its tone rather than its power or range. The Spinto is a voice which combines the beauty of a lyric with the weight and power of a Dramatic, which is the most “powerful” of the voices. The Dramatic instrument is characterized by the combination of both incredible volume and “steely” intensity.

While the definition presented in the preceding paragraph may seem clearly outlined, many voices combine qualities from each category, thus carving an unique niche in operatic history. Just as each person is different from the next, so is each voice. Throughout her career Maria Callas defied categorization as she performed and recorded roles associated with each category in the soprano voice type. Joan Sutherland as well can be heard in recordings of soprano roles as diverse as the coloratura Gilda in Rigoletto to the dramatic Turandot in Turandot. Below is a very brief outline of voice types and categories with roles usually associated with the individual voice type.

	Coloratura	Lyric	Spinto	Dramatic
Soprano	Norina (Don Pasquale) Gilda (Rigoletto) Lucia (Lucia di Lammermoor)	Liu (Turandot) Mimi (La Bohème) Pamina (Magic Flute)	Tosca (Tosca) Amelia (A Masked Ball) Leonora (Il Trovatore)	Turandot (Turandot) Norma (Norma) Elektra (Elektra)
Mezzo-Soprano	Rosina (Barber of Seville) Angelina (La Cenerentola) Dorabella (Cosi fan tutte)	Carmen (Carmen) Charlotte (Werther) Giulietta (Hoffmann)	Santuzza (Cavalleria) Adalgisa (Norma) The Composer (Ariadne auf Naxos)	Azucena (Il Trovatore) Ulrica (A Masked Ball) Herodias (Salome)
Tenor	Figaro (Barber of Seville) Count Almavira (Le nozze di Figaro) Dr. Malatesta (Don Pasquale)	Alfredo (La Traviata) Rodolfo (La Bohème) Tamino (Magic Flute)	Calaf (Turandot) Pollione (Norma) Cavaradossi (Tosca)	Dick Johnson (Fanciulla) Don Jose (Carmen) Otello (Otello)
Baritone	Figaro (Barber of Seville) Count Almavira (Le nozze di Figaro) Dr. Malatesta (Don Pasquale)	Marcello (La Bohème) Don Giovanni (Don Giovanni) Sharpless (Madama Butterfly)	Verdi Baritone Germont (La Traviata) Di Luna (Il Trovatore) Rigoletto (Rigoletto)	Scarpia (Tosca) Jochanaan (Salome) Jack Rance (Fanciulla)
Bass	Figaro (Barber of Seville) Count Almavira (Le nozze di Figaro) Dr. Malatesta (Don Pasquale)	Leporello (Don Giovanni) Colline (La Bohème) Figaro (Marriage of Figaro)	Buffo Bass Don Pasquale (Don Pasquale) Don Alfonso (Cosi fan tutte)	Basso Cantate Oroveso (Norma) Timur (Turandot) Sarastro (Magic Flute)

Opera is created by the combination of myriad art forms. First and foremost are the actors who portray characters by revealing their thoughts and emotions through the singing voice. The next very important component is a full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singing actors and actresses, helping them to portray the full range of emotions possible in the operatic format. The orchestra performs in an area in front of the singers called the orchestra pit while the singers perform on the open area called the stage. Wigs, costumes, sets and specialized lighting further enhance these performances, all of which are designed, created, and executed by a team of highly trained artisans.

The creation of an opera begins with a dramatic scenario crafted by a playwright or dramaturg who alone or with a librettist fashions the script or libretto that contains the words the artists will sing. Working in tandem, the composer and librettist team up to create a cohesive musical drama in which the music and words work together to express the emotions revealed in the story. Following the completion of their work, the composer and librettist entrust their new work to a conductor who with a team of assistants (repetiteurs) assumes responsibility for the musical preparation of the work. The conductor collaborates with a stage director (responsible for the visual component) in order to bring a performance of the new piece to life on the stage. The stage director and conductor form the creative spearhead for the new composition while assembling a design team which will take charge of the actual physical production.

Set designers, lighting designers, costume designers, wig and makeup designers and even choreographers must all be brought “on board” to participate in the creation of the new production. The set designer combines the skills of both an artist and an architect using “blueprint” plans to design the actual physical set which will reside on the stage, recreating the physical setting required by the storyline. These blueprints are turned over to a team of carpenters who are specially trained in the art of stage carpentry. Following the actual building of the set, painters following instructions from the set designers’ original plans paint the set. As the set is assembled on the stage, the lighting designer works with a team of electricians to throw light onto both the stage and the set in an atmospheric as well as practical way. Using specialized light-

ing instruments, colored gels and a state of the art computer, the designer along with the stage director create a “lighting plot” by writing “lighting cues” which are stored in the computer and used during the actual performance of the opera.

During this production period, the costume designer in consultation with the stage director has designed appropriate clothing for the singing actors and actresses to wear. These designs are fashioned into patterns and crafted by a team of highly skilled artisans called cutters, stitchers, and sewers. Each costume is specially made for each singer using his/her individual measurements. The wig and makeup designer, working with the costume designer, designs and creates wigs which will complement both the costume and the singer as well as represent historically accurate “period” fashions.

As the actual performance date approaches, rehearsals are held on the newly crafted set, combined with costumes, lights, and orchestra in order to ensure a cohesive performance that will be both dramatically and musically satisfying to the assembled audience.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. We know that one reason Strauss composed the role of the Composer for female voice was to avoid having too many tenors in the cast. What other factors may have led to this choice? How does the sound of a female voice affect your perception of the character?
2. In the same way, what is the effect of making the Major-Domo a speaking role? How does the fact that he never sings help define his character and function?
3. Which characters in the Prologue, if any, do you find likeable, and why? Which do you find irritating or unlikeable, and why?
4. If you were in the place of the Composer, how would you have reacted: would you, too, react in horror and outrage, or would you be more pragmatic and make the best of things like Zerbinetta?
5. Given the Composer's obvious interest in Zerbinetta in their duet, and Zerbinetta's wistful wish to find a man to whom she could be loyal, do you think we are meant to conclude that they will become lovers at some point in the future?
6. When Zerbinetta sings her long aria during the Ariadne opera in the second portion, why do you think Ariadne ignores her? Is it only because of her grief, or could it relate to the relationship between the two performers in the Prologue?
7. Consider the contributions of Harlequin, Truffaldino, Brighella, Scaramuccio and Zerbinetta to the "opera" being performed in the wealthy Viennese man's home. How realistic is it that the music they sing could actually have become part of the Composer's opus in mere minutes after the announcement of the Major-Domo? What would the revision of an operatic score to that extent actually entail in practical terms?
8. What is the purpose and function of the nymphs Naiad, Dryad and Echo?

A black horizontal bar with the text "DISCUSSION QUESTIONS" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

9. Given Ariadne's interactions with Bacchus, do you think she comes to understand that he is not, as she assumed, Hermes? In other words, as the curtain comes down, does she believe she is literally dying and entering the Underworld, or does she realize she is beginning a new love affair with a living being?

10. Is Zerbinetta a totally comic character, or are there serious aspects to her words and behaviors?

Before bringing a group to the Opera, please go over etiquette with your students to ensure an enjoyable experience for all audience members.

WHAT TO WEAR

Most people like to dress up when they go to the opera because it's part of the fun! Nowadays you can pretty much wear whatever you want. However, an evening at the opera is usually considered to be a special occasion. We encourage dressing in layers so bring a sweater, wrap or jacket just in case.

ARRIVE ON TIME

You should always make sure you get to the opera house in plenty of time to find parking, get your tickets and be seated before the performance starts. Thirty minutes before start time (curtain) is usually sufficient. If you are late, the ushers may let you in after the overture, but, if there is not an overture, you may have to wait until intermission and miss the entire first act!

REMAIN QUIET DURING THE PERFORMANCE

There is nothing worse than sitting near a chatterbox, someone text messaging or a ringing cell phone during a performance. Please turn off anything that can make noise or light. Save your comments for intermission and, by all means, do not sing along! Remember recording devices, video and photography is not permitted of any Virginia Opera performance.

APPLAUD WHEN APPROPRIATE

The correct times to applaud are when the conductor takes the podium at the very beginning of the performance, after the overture, after a big aria, at the end of each act, and when the singers come out to take a bow. If you are unsure when those times are, it is best to wait and follow the lead of other audience members.

APPLAUD APPROPRIATELY

Clapping while sitting or standing is always acceptable, and you can yell "Bravo!" to show appreciation for a male singer, "Brava!" to show appreciation for a female singer, and "Bravi!" to show appreciation for a group of singers. Yelling out anything other than those three words, as well as screaming or whistling, is inappropriate.

WHY WE FOLLOW THESE ETIQUETTE RULES:

- Because it is respectful to the performers and the theater to dress nicely.
- Because it's dangerous to try to step over people in the dark, and because it's disrespectful to the performers and the other audience members.
- Because the performers really can hear the whispers from on stage, and other people are trying to watch.
- Gum, candy, and drinks make noise that will distract the performers, and are not permitted in the theatre.