



# LUCIA DI LAMMERMoor

**A tragic drama in three acts**

**By**

**Gaetano Donizetti**

**Study Guide**

**2007-2008 Season**

# **Sponsor Page**

## **Norfolk**



**MAERSK LINE,  
LIMITED**

**The Virginian-Pilot**  
PilotOnline.com

## **RICHMOND**

**SCHUMACHER FOUNDATION**

**UKROP'S FIRST MARKET BANK**

**Hauni Richmond, Inc**

**OWENS&MINOR**

# Lucia di Lammermoor

## A tragic Drama in Three Acts

By  
**Gaetano Donizetti**

Libretto by  
**Salvatore Cammarano**

## Table of Contents

Cast of Characters	3
Brief Summary	3
Full Synopsis	4
The Music of Lucia di Lammermoor	7
The life of Gaetano Donizetti	8
A Short History of Lucia di Lammermoor	9
Discussion Questions	10
A Short History of Opera	11
The Operatic Voice	12
Opera Production	14

**SOLs: Science:** 5.2, PH.10, PH.11 **English:** 4.4, 4.5, 5.4, 5.5, 5.8, 6.2, 6.4, 6.6, 7.2, 7.5, 8.2, 8.3, 9.1, 9.3, 9.5, 10.3, 10.6, 10.8, 12.3, 12.6 **History:** 7.8, 9.5, 9.7, 10.1, 10.4, 10.7, 10.11 **Music:** 4.6-4.8, 4.12, 4.13, 5.5, 5.6, 5.11, MS.5-MS.9, HS.1, HS.5-HS.9, CB.11, CI.11, CAD.11, CAR.11 **Theatre Arts:** M.13, M.14, TI.11-TI.13, TII.12, TII.14, TII.15 **Visual Arts:** 4.16, 6.19, 8.16, AII.11

**Lucia di Lammermoor**  
**A Tragic Drama in Three Acts**

**By**  
**Gaetano Donizetti**

**Libretto by**  
**Salvatore Cammarano**  
**(After Sir Walter Scott's novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*)**

**Cast of Characters**

<b>Enrico Ashton, Lord of Lammermoor</b> .....	Baritone
<b>Lucia Ashton</b> , his sister.....	Soprano
<b>Edgardo</b> , Master of Ravenswood.....	Tenor
<b>Lord Arturo Bucklaw</b> , Lucia's bridegroom.....	Tenor
<b>Raimondo Bidebent</b> , A Calvinist chaplin and Lucia's Tutor.....	Bass
<b>Alisa</b> , Lucia's companion.....	Mezzo Soprano
<b>Normanno</b> , Head of the Lammermoor Guard.....	Baritone
<b>Retainers and Servants, Wedding Guests</b> .....	Chorus

Setting: The grounds and hall of Lammermoor, the graveyard of the Ravenswoods, Scotland. During the reign of William and Mary in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.

**Brief Summary**

The action is laid in Scotland, in the Lammermoor district, and in Act 1 Enrico Ashton and his followers are plotting to arrange a marriage between his sister Lucia and Arturo Bucklaw, whose wealth and influence will assist the involved lord greatly, both financially and politically, he being concerned in a somewhat dangerous plot; but he is furious on learning from Lucy's tutor, Raimondo, that his young mistress has a secret lover, who has saved her recently from the attack of an infuriated bull, and whom he has discovered is none other than Edgardo of Ravenswood, Enrico Ashton's greatest enemy. Meanwhile, Lucia and her lover meet secretly in the park, and as Edgardo is compelled to leave for France on State business. He desires to visit her brother and ask for her hand in marriage before leaving. This, however, Lucia begs him not to do, fearing her brother's anger; and finally the pair, having plighted their troth and exchanged rings, bid each other a tender farewell.

In Act 2 Enrico Ashton is persecuting his sister, and endeavoring to force her to wed Arturo Bucklaw, declaring that he himself is utterly lost unless she consents to do so; but Lucia declares that Edgardo of Ravenswood is her only love, and vows to remain true to him. Finding her so steadfast, Enrico makes use of deceit by showing his sister a forged letter, supposed to come from Edgardo, stating that he is false to her and has taken a new love. Lucia, believing that Edgardo no longer loves her, and thus not caring what becomes of her, is now willing to sacrifice herself for her brother's good, and very reluctantly she consents to wed the wealthy Arturo. On the marriage night, however, just as the wretched Lucia has signed the marriage contract, and the ceremony is over, Edgardo dashes into the midst of the guests to claim his betrothed. Seeing that Lucia has actually signed the marriage contract, and believing she has played him false, he turns upon the poor girl and upbraids her passionately, finally departing, hurling curses upon the whole family. Enrico follows, and after a heated quarrel, the enemies arrange to fight a duel at dawn next morning. The despairing bride is then led away, but shortly afterwards the guests are horrified by Raimondo bursting into their midst and announcing that the intensity of her grief has caused Lucy to become insane, and that she has murdered her newly-wedded husband.

The awful news is confirmed by the entrance of the distraught Lucia, who calls upon her beloved Edgardo, and falls back dying. Meanwhile Edgardo has been passing the night amongst the tombs of his ancestors, waiting for the dawn to appear, that he may meet his enemy he is soon alarmed on hearing the funeral-bells tolling at the castle, and the followers of Enrico Ashton presently enter to inform him that their young mistress is dead. Edgardo is filled with despair and remorse on hearing that his beloved one is no more, and, seizing his dagger. He stabs himself, having no further desire to live.

## **Full Synopsis of Lucia di Lammermoor**

### **Act I, Scene I** The grounds of Ravenswood Castle

The curtain rises on Normanno and his huntsmen, who are about to explore the nearby ruins of the castle belonging to Enrico's hated enemy Edgardo, Master of Ravenswood. The huntsmen leave, and Normanno, seeing that Enrico is troubled, learns from him that the Lammermoor fortunes are in jeopardy; only Lucia can save them, by marrying well. Raimondo reminds Enrico that she is still grieving her mother's death, and is not ready to love. At that, Normanno declares that she has been on fire with love for Edgardo, meeting him every morning since he rescued her from a rampaging bull. Enraged, Enrico swears vengeance, and leads his huntsmen in pursuit of his mortal enemy.

### **Act I, Scene II** The park at Lammermoor Castle, with a fountain

Impatiently, Lucia awaits a tryst with Edgardo. She looks at the fountain, where an ancestor of the Ravenswoods jettisoned the corpse of a Lammermoor lass he had slain in a jealous rage; she is frightened because she has recently seen the girl's ghost. She describes the episode vividly to Alisa, mentioning that the water had turned blood-red. Alisa declares that Lucia's love for Edgardo is beset with difficulties and urges her to renounce him. Lucia, however, believes in his constancy. Edgardo arrives and Alisa goes to watch for intruders. He tells Lucia that he has been called to the Stuart cause in France and must leave the next morning. Before he goes he wants to extend the hand of friendship to Enrico, despite the longstanding feud between their families. Lucia, frightened of her brother's temper, begs Edgardo to keep their love secret. He reminds her that he swore, by his father's grave, that he would be avenged, and although their love has quenched his anger his oath remains unfulfilled. Lucia calms him, and he places a ring on her finger, claiming that henceforth they are as married; Lucia accepts this, giving him a ring in return. She begs him to write to her, and he reassures her before he departs.

### **Act II, Scene I** Enrico's apartments in Lammermoor Castle

Enrico discusses with Normanno the marriage he has hastily arranged between Lucia and Arturo, and he is worried that she may oppose it. Normanno has been intercepting Edgardo's letters and has forged one to say that Edgardo loves another woman, leaving her no reason to hold back from the proposed marriage. Taking the forged letter, Enrico sends Normanno to welcome Arturo. Lucia enters, listless; Enrico comments on her pallor, to which she responds that he knows why she grieves. She protests at his inhuman severity, but he claims that his strong fraternal feelings prompt his wish to see her appropriately married. When she says that she already considers herself Edgardo's wife, Enrico hands her the forged letter; the shock of reading it causes her to stagger as though she had received a blow. Enrico reproaches her with folly, but Lucia is numbed at the thought of Edgardo's infidelity. Sounds are heard of the welcome for Arturo. Lucia wants only to die, not to marry; but Enrico stresses the perils of his political situation, from which only an alliance with the Bucklaws can save him. He ruthlessly tells her that without her cooperation he will surely be executed, and she will be responsible.

Enrico rushes out to greet Arturo. Lucia turns to Raimondo, who tells her that, although he knows her letters to Edgardo were intercepted, he managed to have one of them securely delivered. Believing Edgardo has never replied, the chaplain is convinced

of his infidelity and tells Lucia that the exchange of rings has no validity in God's eyes. Despite his persuasiveness, Lucia confesses she loves Edgardo still. He urges the impressionable girl to remember a sister's duty and her obligation to her dead mother, and goes on to assure her of heavenly rewards.

**Act II, Scene II** The Great Hall of Lammermoor Castle

Wedding guests have assembled to greet Arturo who smugly claims that the fortunes of the house will surely improve. Enrico tells him not to be surprised at Lucia's sad demeanor, as she still grieves for her mother. Arturo questions Enrico about the rumors of Edgardo, but Lucia's entrance saves him from answering. The marriage contract is produced: half-fainting, Lucia signs her name. The document is like a death warrant. Suddenly there is uproar as Edgardo unexpectedly appears; he wonders what power restrains him as he confronts his enemy, and Enrico fears that he has betrayed his sister. Lucia is bereft; Raimondo is touched by her pitiable state. Their swords drawn, Arturo and Enrico order Edgardo away, but he defies them, insisting on his right to be present: Lucia, he claims, is his bride. Raimondo now shows him the contract; Edgardo asks if Lucia herself has signed it and when she confesses he tears off her ring and tramples on it, cursing the moment he fell in love with her and vowing eternal hatred. Enrico, Arturo and the guests demand his instant departure. Lucia sinks to her knees, praying for deliverance; but Edgardo throws down his sword, bares his breast and declares he has no more desire to live.

**Act III, Scene I** The Great Hall of Lammermoor Castle

The wedding guests dance to celebrate Lucia's wedding. Suddenly a shaken Raimondo appears, ordering them to sop their merriment. In a grisly narrative, he tells that he heard a cry from the bridal chamber; hastening there, he found Arturo dead on the floor, with Lucia, holding a bloodstained dagger, smiling, inquiring where the bridegroom was. The guests are stunned.

At Lucia's entrance her mental disorder is immediately apparent. She is wearing a white gown, now splattered with blood, and believes she is ready for her wedding to Edgardo. Trembling, she urges him to let her rest by the fountain in the park; then she remembers the ghost that arose from the fountain. Next, imagining they are before an altar, she believes she hears their wedding hymn, and sees the ceremony taking place. Enrico appears, and is at first furious at Lucia's apparent vindictiveness; but Raimondo points out that her mind has failed. Her declaration that she is the victim of her brother's cruelty fills Enrico with remorse; foreseeing her death, Lucia assures the imagined Edgardo that heaven will be beautiful for her only when he joins her there.

**Act III, Scene II** The graveyard of the Ravenswoods

Edgardo appears. The thought of death is not unwelcome to him as the whole universe now seems a desert. He thinks of Lucia as a joyous bride as he confronts the prospect of this death. He bids farewell to the earth, thinking of his own neglected, unwept grave and wishing Lucia would at least pay heed to the tomb of one who died for love of her. The Lammermoor retainers approach, remarking how a day that dawned in gladness has ended in grief. Edgardo demands their meaning: they tell him that Lucia lies near death and is calling for him. A funeral knell tolls. Edgardo is determined to try to see her once more but Raimondo restrains him, assuring him that Lucia is indeed already dead. Edgardo thinks of her in heaven; although they were separated on earth, they shall

be united before God. He is determined to die. Raimondo and the others try to restrain him, but he draws his dagger and stabs himself. As the final curtain falls on the tale of sorrow, his dying thoughts are of Lucia.

## The Music of Lucia di Lammermoor

The opening measures of the orchestral prelude immediately depict a somber tone. The mysterious solo tympani opening combined with the mournful quality of the French horns exude the aura of melancholy which will permeate the drama which is to unfold. The thirty-three measure prelude is brief, yet powerful. After building to a *tutti forte* climax, the melody quickly subsides into a repetition of the opening motive.

The quiet prelude is immediately followed by an energetic *Allegro giusto* in 6/8 meter, a galloping *cabaletta* which so accurately depicts the arrival of Normanno and his men in pursuit of an intruder on the grounds of the Lammermoor castle.

The opening measures of Enrico's aria from the first scene. The repetitive triplet figure of the accompaniment creates a solid foundation for the baritone's melody as well as representing the forward driven motion of Enrico's emotional state. In the first vocal *scena* of the evening, Donizetti utilized the popular *bel canto* form of slow aria (*cavatina*) followed by brilliant *cabaletta*.

Lucia's first entrance is preceded by an extended virtuosic solo for the harp, accompanied by the strings and woodwinds. The use of the delicate harp in such an extended solo passage was a unique innovation on the part of Donizetti. But what other instrument of the orchestra could so accurately depict the fragile and delicate nature of the title character?

From Lucia's first aria, "*Regnava nel silenzio*" (Sleeping in Silence) we hear the use of the clarinet in an arpeggiated chord accompaniment to Lucia's mournful melody. Though the arpeggiated figure serves to accompany one of Donizetti's brilliant *bel canto* melodies, it also vividly depicts the rippling of the water in the well in which Lucia has seen the menacing shadow of a long dead Lammermoor lass.

The use of *coloratura* permeates the *cabaletta*, "*Quando rapito in estasi*," which closes Lucia's first vocal *scena*. Wide leaps and *fioratura* must be executed by the soprano. This lilting *Moderato* in duple time during which Lucia anticipates the arrival of her lover Edgardo is in direct contrast to the immediately preceding mournful *Larghetto*.

Donizetti wrote for two voices utilizing the *coloratura* in a free-form cadenza. The absence of orchestral accompaniment allows the two singers the freedom to join together in an almost improvisatory nature while they both execute the florid writing. A sample comes from the Act II scene during which Enrico demands that Lucia forsake Edgardo and save the Lammermoor future by marrying Arturo.

The opening measures of the Sextet which begins with the enemies Edgardo and Enrico expressing identical emotions. The arpeggiated accompaniment figure is played by the complete string section without their bows (*pizzicato*), which creates a sound very similar to the lute or guitar. The inspired melody is taken up by Lucia, Raimondo, Arturo, Alisa, the choral ensemble and the entire orchestra as it develops to a stirring climax. This Sextet is perhaps one of the best known ensembles in the operatic repertory.

A clue to the desperate nature of Lucia's mental state is seen in *Andante Arietta*, which opens her infamous "Mad Scene." While the plaintive solo flute echoes a theme first heard during her Act I love duet with Edgardo, Lucia relives their meeting in her mind, imagining that Edgardo is with her and that she can hear his voice.

The vocal tour-de-force *scena* which is known as Lucia's "Mad Scene" is comprised by the unusual juxtaposition of myriad musical forms. Before the *scena* ends with Lucia near death, the soprano will negotiate through a musical maze which includes an *Andante arietta*, a manic *Allegro Vivace*, and *Andante arietta*, and *Allegro recitativo accompagnato*, a *Larghetto* aria (w/chorus) and *Allegro* trio with Enrico, Raimondo and full chorus, a two-verse *Moderato* aria and a *Piu Allegro Coda*. No wonder that the scene is acclaimed as one of the most difficult in the repertory for any voice.



## The Life of Gaetano Donizetti

Gaetano Donizetti was born in Bergamo, Italy, on November 29, 1797. He came from a poor family and was fortunate to have his talent discovered at an early age. He studied in both Bergamo and Bologna and received excellent music training from Simon Mayr and Padre Mattei. Donizetti developed into one of the most prolific composers of the *bel canto* period. In addition to his seventy operas he composed twelve string quartets, seven masses, and a multitude of songs, piano music, cantatas, motets, and psalms.

The opera composers of the *bel canto* period were travelers, moving from one opera house to another, composing and staging their work. Donizetti was no exception. He accepted every commission proffered in order to support himself financially, sometimes producing as many as four operas in a single year. He toured all of Italy producing new operas, many of which were great successes. By the time he had composed *Anna Bolena* in 1830, this congenial and outgoing man was famous throughout Italy.

*Bel canto* composers were a prolific lot because of their reliance on a formulaic process. This suited audiences of the period well because they seemed to enjoy and encourage opera as pure entertainment without a great deal of complication. They were very content with music crafted for singers, and singing that required no deep thought or involvement to enjoy. During this period Hector Berlioz was very critical of Italian audiences stating that to Italians music was like a bowl of macaroni, to be consumed and enjoyed on the spot, like a sexual pleasure, not a worthy expression of the mind. Donizetti, like other composers of his day, knew what audiences wanted, and he turned out operas with astonishing rapidity.

The speed with which he completed his work has led some to believe that he abused his talent by not taking more time with it. He seemed to be challenged by the conditions under which he composed. The circumstances surrounding his opera, *L'elisir d'amore*, clearly demonstrates how exhilarated he was by short deadlines. In 1832, Donizetti was contacted by the manager of a theater in Milan who needed an opera for an opening which was scheduled in two weeks. The manager suggested rearranging something old and producing it as new, but Donizetti would have none of it. A new work it would be! He told the librettist, Felice Romani, that he had one week to provide a libretto and he himself would compose the music in the remaining week. All work was completed on schedule and the opera was a success at its opening, remaining so to this day.

In Naples in 1835, he produced the opera that would become one of the most popular of the nineteenth century, *Lucia di Lammermoor*. When it was composed it was considered the epitome of the Romantic ideal. Mad scenes were very popular with *bel canto* audiences, and Donizetti's were particularly admired. The Mad Scene from *Lucia* is considered to be the opera world's most famous.

In 1837, Donizetti lost his beloved wife in a cholera epidemic and never truly recovered from the shock. He moved to Paris the following year seeking greater prestige, fees and artistic freedom, and also traveled to Vienna in 1842 to accept a musical appointment to the Hapsburg court. He split his time between the two cities for three years but periods of poor health followed and in 1845 he suffered a stroke, which resulted in a continuous deterioration of his mind. Three years later he died on April 7, 1848, in Bergamo, where he was being nursed by friends.

## A Short History of Lucia di Lammermoor

*Bel canto*, the art of beautiful singing, was in full flower when Donizetti wrote his opera, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, which premiered at the San Carlo Opera House in Naples, Italy, on September 26, 1835. Two other composers who had dominated the *bel canto* stage, Gioacchino Rossini and Vincenzo Bellini, were no longer actively composing. Rossini having achieved great renown and considerable fortune, had retired to Paris, and the thirty-three year old Bellini had died only three days earlier, on September 23, 1835. Donizetti was at the midpoint of his career.

In its ideal form *bel canto* singing required a pure sound and impeccable physical technique. It was an outgrowth of the eighteenth century's love of improvisation, but also a modern day reflection of the vocal abilities of the *castrati*. The singer was expected to embellish and ornament what the composer had written, but to do so with a sense of style and taste. The musical vehicle for singers to demonstrate the full range of their abilities was through the device of the *cavatina* and *cabaletta*. The *cavatina* was slow-paced and melodious, showing the singer's ability to sustain the long line with beautiful tone and coloration, while the *cabaletta* moved swiftly, displaying the singer's technical skill and vocal flexibility.

Donizetti believed in the supremacy of the voice in opera and composed music the singers delighted in singing. Roles in his operas were highly sought after by the great singers of the day because his music provided a platform for the showcasing of their vocal abilities. He wrote his music with flair and style and had a gift for writing melodies that the public could easily remember and whistle on the street after the performance.

The libretto for *Lucia* was written by Salvatore Cammarano, based on Sir Walter Scott's novel, *The Bride of Lammermoor*. The opera reflects the somewhat violent nature of Scott's subject matter, and is full of melodramatic circumstances. The music of *Lucia* is designed with care and attention which was not always the case with Donizetti's operas. There is a robustness and energy to the work and the frequent use of ensembles. The chorus is used to great effect, sometimes for dramatic reasons and at other times to add volume and spirit to the setting. Another musical device successfully employed in the opera is singing in unison, both by singers during a duet and by the chorus during times of high drama. *Lucia di Lammermoor* was greatly admired for its Mad Scene by both singers and the opera-going public. A Mad Scene was an extended vocal *scena* in which the heroine has a mental collapse and loses touch with reality. Donizetti included Mad Scenes in many of his operas, influencing French opera in this manner, but none have achieved the longstanding fame or popularity of the Mad Scene from *Lucia*. This lengthy scene is considered a tour de force for coloratura soprano requiring a wide range both vocally and dramatically, and makes very effective use of melodic material, which recall earlier moments of the opera. The Mad Scene made a huge impact on contemporary audiences, often reducing them to tears. *Lucia* was destined to become one of the most popular operas of the century.

Of the three most famous *bel canto* composers, Donizetti had the greatest influence on Giuseppe Verdi, the next major force in Italian opera, and the composer who brought Italian romantic opera to its highest pinnacle. Verdi's early operas reflect the fluency of Donizetti combined with the greater sweep and expressive force of the Verdi style.

## Discussion Questions

1. Does the story of Lucia remind you of any other famous “Forbidden Love” stories? Which ones?
2. Why are these stories of “Forbidden Love” so popular?
3. The “Mad Scene” by Lucia is well known and respected by opera lovers. What did you think about the “Mad Scene?”
4. What characters in the opera do you feel compassion for and why?
5. What characters in the opera do you dislike? Why?
6. Edgardo and Enrico arrange to fight a duel to settle their argument. How could they have settled their differences other way?
7. During Lucia’s “Mad Scene” how does the orchestra assist Lucia in creating the mood?
8. What is more important to Enrico Ashton, his sister’s happiness or securing financial security for Lammermoor Castle? By the end of the opera do you think he has any regrets?
9. This opera is considered “Bel Canto” the art of beautiful singing. Do you agree?
10. When Lucia makes her first appearance on stage Donizetti uses the delicate sound of the harp to depict her entrance. Why did Donizetti choose the harp and what does this say about Lucia’s character?
11. What instrument of the orchestra would you have chosen to introduce each of the following characters and why?
  - a. Enrico Ashton
  - b. Edgardo
  - c. Lord Arturo Bucklaw



## 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 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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*) that 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.

	<i>Coloratura</i>	<i>Lyric</i>	<i>Spinto</i>	<i>Dramatic</i>
<i>Soprano</i>	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)
<i>Mezzo-Soprano</i>	Rosina (Barber of Seville) Angelina (La Cenerentola) Dorabella (Così 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)
<i>Tenor</i>	Count Almaviva (Barber of Seville) Don Ottavio (Don Giovanni) Ferrando (Così fan tutte)	Alfredo (La Traviata) Rodolfo (La Bohème) Tamino (Magic Flute)	Calaf (Turandot) Pollione (Norma) Cavaradossi (Tosca)	Dick Johnson (Fanciulla) Don Jose (Carmen) Otello (Otello)
<i>Baritone</i>	Figaro (Barber of Seville) Count Almavira (Le nozze di Figaro) Dr. Malatesta (Don Pasquale)	Marcello (La Bohème) Don Giovanni (Don Giovanni) Sharpless (Madama Butterfly)	<b>Verdi Baritone</b> Germont (La Traviata) Di Luna (Il Trovatore) Rigoletto (Rigoletto)	Scarpia (Tosca) Jochanaan (Salome) Jack Rance (Fanciulla)
<i>Bass</i>	Bartolo (Barber of Seville) Don Magnifico (Cenerentola) Dr. Dulcamara (Elixir of Love)	Leporello (Don Giovanni) Colline (La Bohème) Figaro (Marriage of Figaro)	<b>Buffo Bass</b> Don Pasquale (Don Pasquale) Don Alfonso (Così fan tutte)	<b>Basso Cantate</b> Oroveso (Norma) Timur (Turandot) Sarastro (Magic Flute)

# Opera Production

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 lighting 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.