

## OPERA GLOSSARY – [THE CULTURE CONCEPT CIRCLE](#)

**aficionado** - A devoted fan or enthusiast.

**apron** - The front part of the stage between the curtain and the orchestra pit.

**aria** - Italian word for "air." a song for solo voice with instrumental accompaniment.

**baritone** - The medium male voice. lies between the low bass voice and the higher tenor voice.

**baroque** - The period of music from the early to mid 1600's to the mid 1700's. Baroque operas are characterized by emotional, highly stylized and flowery presentations.

**bass** - The lowest of the male voices.

**bass-baritone** - A male voice which combines the quality of the baritone with the depth of the bass, avoiding the extremes of either range.

**basso profundo** - The most serious bass voice.

**bel canto** - Italian for "beautiful singing." In a bel canto style opera, the beauty of singing is more important than the plot or the words.

**bravo!** - Bravo is the Italian word for expressing appreciation to a male performer.

**brava!** - Bravo is the Italian word for expressing appreciation to a female performer

**bravi!** - Bravo is the Italian word for expressing appreciation to two or more performers.

**cadenza** - Near the end of an aria, a series of difficult, fast high notes that allow the singer to demonstrate vocal ability.

**classical** - The period in music from roughly the mid 1700's to the early 1800's.

**coloratura soprano** - A very high pitched soprano. also the description of singing which pertains to great feats of agility - fast singing, high singing, trills, and embellishments.

**commedia dell'arte** - A style of dramatic presentation popular in Italy from the 16th century on; the commedia characters were highly stylized and the plots frequently revolved around disguises, mistaken identities and misunderstandings.

**crescendo** - Getting progressively louder.

**diminuendo** - Getting progressively softer.

**diva** - Literally, "goddess," a female opera star. Often used to describe a demanding or fussy opera star.

**duet** - A musical composition for two performers.

**encore** - A request to play again

**falsestto** - The high part of a man's voice, sounding like a woman's voice.

**finale** - Last song of an act, usually involving a large number of singers.

**finale ultimo** - The final finale.

**grand opera** - Opera which is sung from start to finish, as opposed to opera which may have spoken dialogue.

**heldentenor** - German for "heroic tenor." a heldentenor has a brilliant top register (high notes) combined with a strong lower voice, almost like a baritone, and is capable of long passages which require great vocal stamina.

**libretto** - Italian for "little book." the libretto is the text of an opera.

**maestro** - Italian for "master." a title of courtesy, given, especially in Italy, to conductors, composers and directors.

**mezza voce** - Italian for "medium voice." when singing mezza voce, the singer reduces the volume so as to intensify the emotion.

**mezzo soprano** - The female voice between the soprano (highest) and the contralto (lowest).

**opera buffa** - Italian for "comic opera."

**opéra comique** - Opera in which there is some spoken dialogue as opposed to grand opera in which there is none.

**opera seria** - A formal, serious opera, particularly prevalent in the 18th century.

**operetta** - Light hearted opera with spoken dialogue, such as a musical.

**opus** - A single work or composition.

**orchestra** - The group of musicians which accompany a staged presentation.

**overture** - The instrumental introduction to an opera. usually incorporates themes which will be heard later in the the opera.

**prelude** - The instrumental introduction to an individual act within an opera.

**prima donna** - Italian for "first lady." the female star of an opera.

**raked stage** - A stage which slants upward away from the view of the audience.

**range** - The division of the human voice according to six basic types: soprano, mezzo soprano, contralto, tenor, baritone and bass.

**romantic** - The period of music between the early to mid 1800's and the early 1900's.

**soprano** - The highest female voice..

**staccato** - Characterized by short, clipped, rapid articulation.

**stage right/stage left** - The division of the stage from the performer's point of view; when a performer goes stage right, he moves to his own right and to the audience's left.

**supernumerary** - A performer who appears in a non-singing role.

**tempo** - The speed of a musical passage or composition.

**tenor** - The highest male voice.

**trill** - Two rapidly and repeatedly alternated notes.

**upstage/downstage** - The position on stage farthest or nearest the audience. when a performer moves downstage, he goes toward the audience.

**verismo** - Italian for "truth." a documentay style of opera involving melodramatic situations.

**vibrato** - The slightly wavering quality that a singer has in his voice while sustaining a tone.