

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.