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Opera

Opera is a drama in which the characters sing, rather than speak, all or most of their lines. Opera is one of the most complex of all art forms. It combines acting, singing, orchestral music, costumes, scenery and often ballet or some other form of dance.

An opera has two basic elements: (1) the libretto and (2) the music. The libretto, which means little book in Italian, consists of the words, or text, of an opera. The music, which is also called the score, consists of both vocal and instrumental music. To translate the libretto and music into a performance, an opera must have singers, a conductor and an orchestra.

Opera companies today present mainly works that were composed between the late 1700's and the early 1900's. Almost all the operas in this standard repertoire were written by Austrian, French, German, Italian and Russian composers.

Aida, a tragic opera in four acts by Giuseppe Verdi, Libretto in Italian by Verdi and Antonio Ghislanzoni. First performed in Cairo, Egypt in 1871.

Barber of Seville, The (Il Barbiere di Siviglia), a comic opera in two acts by Gioacchino Rossini. Libretto in Italian by Cesare Sterbini, based on the French play The Barber of Seville by Pierre de Beaumarchais. First performed in Rome in 1816.

Boheme, La (The Bohemian), a tragic opera in four acts by Giacomo Puccini. Libretto in Italian by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica, based on the French novel Scenes from Bohemian Life by Henri Murger. First performed in Turin, Italy in 1896.

Boris Gudunov, a tragic opera in a prologue and four acts by Modest Mussorgsky. Libretto in Russian by the composer, based primarily on the Russian play Boris Gudunov by Alexander Pushkin. First performed in St. Petersburg, Russia in 1874.

Carmen, a tragic opera in four acts by Georges Bizet. Libretto in French by Ludovic Halevy and Henri Meilhac, based on the French story Carmen by Prosper Merimee. First performed in Paris in 1875.

Cavalleria Rusticana (Rustic Chivalry), a tragic opera in one act by Pietro Mascagni. Libretto in Italian by Guido Menasci and Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti, based on the Italian story and play Cavalleria Rusticana by Giovanni Verga. First performed in Rome in 1890.

Don Giovanni, a comic opera with serious elements in two acts by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Libretto in Italian by Lorenzo da Ponte. First performed in Prague, Bohemia (now part of the Czech Republic), in 1787.

Faust, a tragic opera in five acts by Charles Gounod. Libretto in French by Jules Barbier and Michel Carre, based on part 1 of the German play Faust by Johann Wolfgang van Goethe. First performed in Paris in 1859.

Lucia di Lammermoor, a tragic opera in three acts by Gaetano Donizetti. Libretto in Italian by Salvatore Cammarano, based on the Scottish novel The Bride of Lammermoor by Sir Walter Scott. First performed in Naples, Italy, in 1835.

Madama Butterfly, a tragic opera in three acts by Giacomo Puccini. Libretto in Italian by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica, based on the American play Madame Butterfly by David Belasco, from a story by John Luther Long. First performed in Milan, Italy, in 1904.

Magic Flute, The (Die Zauberflöte), a fairy-tale opera in two acts by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Libretto in German by Emanuel Schikaneder. First performed in Vienna, Austria, in 1791.

Marriage of Figaro (LeNozze di Figaro), a comic opera in four acts by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Libretto in Italian by Lorenzo da Ponte, based on the French play The Marriage of Figaro by Pierre de Beaumarchais. First performed in Vienna, Austria, in 1786.

Pagliacci (The Players), a tragic opera in prologue and two acts by Ruggiero Leoncavallo. Libretto in Italian by the composer. First performed in Milan, Italy, in 1892.

Porgy and Bess, a folk opera in three acts by George Gershwin. Libretto in English by Gershwin's brother Ira and DuBose Heyward, based on Heyward's novel Porgy. First performed in Boston in 1935.

Rigoletto, a tragic opera in three acts by Giuseppe Verdi. Libretto in Italian by Francesco Maria Piave, based on the French play Le Roi S'amuse (The King is Amused) by Victor Hugo. First performed in Venice, Italy, in 1851.

Ring of the Nibelung, The, (der Ring des Nibelungen), a cycle of four operas by Richard Wagner. Libretto in German by the composer. The three main parts are **Die Walküre** (The Valkyrie, 1870); **Siegfried** (1876); and **Die Gotterdammerung** (The Twilight of the Gods, 1876). Wagner called the fourth work, **Das Rheingold** (The Rhine Gold, 1869), the prologue to the other three. However, it is a complete opera. All four works were first performed as a cycle at the opening of the Festival Opera House in Bayreuth, Germany, in 1876.

Rosenkavalier, Der (The Cavalier of the Rose), a partly comic, partly serious opera in three acts by Richard Strauss. Libretto in German by Hugo von Hofmannsthal. First performed in Dresden, Germany, in 1911.

Salome, a tragic opera in one act by Richard Strauss. Libretto in German by Hedwig Lachman; a translation of a play in French, **Salome**, by the Irish-born author Oscar Wilde. First performed in Dresden, Germany, in 1905.

Tosca. A tragic opera in three acts by Giacomo Puccini. Libretto in Italian by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica, based on the French play La Tosca by Vicrorien Sardou. First performed in Rome in 1900.

Traviata, La (The Wayward One), a tragic opera in three acts by Giuseppe Verdi. Libretto in Italian by Francesco Maria Piave, based on the French play The Lady of the Camillias by Alexandre Dumas the Younger. First performed in Venice, Italy, in 1853.

Trovatore, Il (The Troubadour), a tragic opera in four acts by Giuseppe Verdi. Libretto in Italian by Salvatore Cammarano, based on the Spanish play El Trovador by Antonio Garcia Gutierrez. First performed in Rome in 1853.

Wozzeck, a tragic opera in three acts by Alban Berg. Libretto in German by the composer, based on the German play Woyzeck by Georg Buchner. First performed in Berlin in 1925.

