

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS

Gianni Schicchi is a story told through music. In order for the music to be important to the story, that music must express what the characters in the opera are feeling, thinking, plotting and scheming. In opera, there are three main types of songs that do just that. They are:

- 1 Recitative:** Singing that sounds like talking; composed to the natural patterns of speech. The characters use one note per word, and very little melody. When recitative is used in an opera, it may be a conversation between two or more characters, or a person speaking to themselves. The plot is moved along in a recitative and usually leads into an aria or an ensemble. An example of a recitative in *Gianni Schicchi* is when Zita speaks her opinion of Gianni (she calls him a vulgar and revolting peasant) and Rinuccio comes to his defense (he believes him to be clever and wise). Another example is when Dr. Spinelloccio comes to visit Gianni, who is in bed pretending to be Buoso Donati.
- 2 Aria:** A piece that is sung by one person. In an aria, a character is expressing his or her feelings, such as whether or not they are happy with a particular situation. The melody is flowing and there is more than one note per word (sometimes, there are many notes to one word or one note that lasts a long time over one word). A most famous aria in *Gianni Schicchi* is "O mio babbino, caro," in which Lauretta, Gianni's daughter, appeals to him for his permission to marry her love Rinuccio. When he sings about how wonderful both Gianni and the city of Florence are, Rinuccio is also performing an aria.
- 3 Ensemble:** This is singing that involves two or more characters at the same time. An ensemble can be called by other names, such as a duet (for two characters), trio (for three characters), quartet (for four characters), and so on. During an ensemble there are several different melodies sung simultaneously by the characters in the story. Technically, these pieces can be very demanding. You will notice in *Gianni Schicchi* that there is ensemble singing throughout the opera. Relatives are singing together about the lost will, or what fools they will be made when it is revealed that Buoso's fortune has been left to monks.

Here is a glossary of musical terms that you may see or hear as you learn more about opera and music:

ACOUSTICS: The science of sound. When an auditorium is built, designers must know about acoustics so that people in the audience will hear what is presented on the stage fully and clearly.

BARITONE: Middle range male voice. The rich, full sound of the baritone voice is often used for characters who act as helpful companions, villains and (sometimes) heroes.

BASS: Lowest male voice. The deep, powerful bass voice can be used for kings, priests and villains.

CHORUS: A group of singers (male, female or both) large enough to allow at least several performers for each part of the music. Mixed choruses are usually divided into sections of sopranos, altos, tenors and basses. The term denotes music written for these groups of singers.

CODA: An Italian word meaning "tail." A short portion added to the end of a musical piece, and it usually gives the ending a special flourish.

CONTRALTO: Also more commonly known as "alto," this is the lowest range female voice. This fuller sound is used for characters who act as old women, witches or comic roles.

DUET: A song for two voices, of any vocal combination (tenor/soprano, bass/alto, etc.)

DYNAMICS: The varying degrees of loudness and softness in music.

FINALE: The concluding portion of a composition. In opera, the concluding segment of an act or scene, often very spirited and musically elaborate.

FORTE: Italian word meaning "loud."

LIBRETTO: Italian word for "book." The text of the opera, usually written by a poet, novelist or playwright, and occasionally, a composer.

MEZZO-SOPRANO: Middle range female voice. Vocal category most used for mothers, older women, best friends, villains and roles in which women play men (called "trouser roles").

OPERA: A play which is sung. It combines many of the performing arts, such as vocal and instrumental music, dramatic action, dance, poetry, costumes and scenery. It usually consists of one to five acts, each of which may be divided into several scenes. Operas may be comic or dramatic, and may also contain spoken dialogue

ORCHESTRA: The group of instruments who are lead by a conductor and who accompany the singers.

ORCHESTRA PIT: The sunken area in front of the stage where the orchestra sits and plays.

PIANO: Italian word meaning "soft," and in this case, used to describe a particular dynamic in the music, not the musical instrument.

PITCH: The quality of a sound that fixes its position in a musical scale, and determined by what the ear hears as a particular and unique sound.

PLOT: The story or the main idea.

PROPS: Short for "properties." Anything that is used on the set and is not a part of the supportive structure. A prop can be as simple as a mug or as big as the furniture used.

PROSCENIUM: The structure that frames the stage, often in the shape of an arch.

QUARTET: Four people singing or playing instruments together.

RHYTHM: The grouping of musical sounds by means of duration and stress.

SCORE: The written music of the opera, which is the printed combination of the words and music. These exist in several forms, such as the entire orchestra with vocal lines, or a piano reduction of the orchestral music with vocal lines included.

SCRIM: A light coarse cotton or linen fabric which is often hung at the front of the stage to create a special visual effect. When lighted from behind, the audience can see through it.

SEQUENCE: Notes that create a musical phrase are repeated at a higher or lower pitch.

SET: The decoration on stage to make it resemble the location of the opera, or reflect the events of the plot or themes in the opera.

SOLO: Music that is sung by one performer.

SOPRANO: Highest female voice. This is a large category that includes voices of widely differing power, sound and flexibility. The heroine of the opera is usually a soprano.

STACCATO: Very short notes either played or sung.

STAGING: The physical movement of characters in a production.

TEMPO: Italian word meaning "time," but when used in music it means the rate of speed of a composition.

TENOR: Highest male voice. This is a large category that, like a soprano, includes the voices of widely differing power, sound and flexibility. The tenor is most often the hero of the opera.

THEME: A group of notes or musical phrase that makes up an important element in the construction of a piece. It can be repeated and developed. Often a theme will be used to represent a certain character or action.

TRIO: Three people singing or playing instruments together.