

The Magic Flute

A Guide for Educators



The Met
ropolitan
Opera

Marty Sohl/Metropolitan Opera

MOZART'S *THE MAGIC FLUTE*—HIS LAST OPERA TO BE PRODUCED BEFORE HIS UNTIMELY death at age 35—is a remarkable combination of musical and dramatic styles, from the earthly to the otherworldly. The story begins as a magical rescue mission, a plot outline that would have been familiar to Viennese audiences of the popular theater, but soon transforms into a fable of enlightenment and humanity. With its program of inner development and illumination, *The Magic Flute* imagines a world of peace, brotherhood, and love.

This special holiday presentation of *The Magic Flute* is an abridged English-language version of the production by the award-winning director of theater, opera, and film Julie Taymor. Taymor seeks to remain true to the fairy-tale aspect of the story while revealing what she calls its “darker face, the one that is hidden in the innocent shell of the unruly libretto but apparent in the exquisite subtlety of the music.” In developing the colorful visual style of her production, she was inspired by the patterns viewed through the tube of a kaleidoscope, which she sees as an ideal way to express “both the exterior and inner landscapes of *The Magic Flute*.” Taymor’s whimsical production magnifies the opera’s emotional threads, highlights the story’s humor and captures the ethereal nature of Mozart’s music.

This guide is intended to help your students appreciate the opera within the context of 18th-century politics, philosophy, and musical style. By studying Mozart’s musical invention in a selection of arias from the opera, students will discover some of the elements that make *The Magic Flute* not only a product of its age but also an enduring masterwork of the operatic canon. The information on the following pages is designed to provide context, deepen background knowledge, and enrich the overall experience of attending a final dress rehearsal at the Metropolitan Opera.

THE WORK:

THE MAGIC FLUTE (DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE)

An opera in two acts, sung in English
Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Libretto by Emanuel Schikaneder
English adaptation by J. D. McClatchy
First performed September 30, 1791
at the Freihaus-Theater auf der
Wieden, Vienna, Austria

PRODUCTION

Lothar Koenigs, Conductor
Julie Taymor, Production
George Tsypin, Set Designer
Julie Taymor, Costume Designer
Donald Holder, Lighting Designer
Julie Taymor and Michael Curry, Puppet
Designers
Mark Dendy, Choreographer

STARRING

Joëlle Harvey
PAMINA

Kathryn Lewek
QUEEN OF THE NIGHT

David Portillo
TAMINO

Rodell Rosel
MONOSTATOS

Joshua Hopkins
PAPAGENO

Patrick Carfizzi
SPEAKER

Morris Robinson
SARASTRO

Abridged production of *The Magic Flute* a gift of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Bill Rollnick and Nancy Ellison Rollnick

Original production of *Die Zauberflöte* a gift of Mr. and Mrs. Henry R. Kravis

Additional funding from John Van Meter, The Annenberg Foundation, Karen and Kevin Kennedy, Bill Rollnick and Nancy Ellison Rollnick, Mr. and Mrs. William R. Miller, Agnes Varis and Karl Leichtman, and Mr. and Mrs. Ezra K. Zilkha

ABOUT THE METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE



Photo: Johnathan Tichler/
Metropolitan Opera

The Metropolitan Opera is a vibrant home for the most creative and talented singers, conductors, composers, musicians, stage directors, designers, visual artists, choreographers, and dancers from around the world.

The Metropolitan Opera was founded in 1883, with its first opera house built on Broadway and 39th Street by a group of wealthy businessmen who wanted their own theater. In the company's early years, the management changed course several times, first performing everything in Italian (even *Carmen* and *Lohengrin*), then everything in German (even *Aida* and *Faust*), before finally settling into a policy of performing most works in their original language.

Almost from the beginning, it was clear that the opera house on 39th Street did not have adequate stage facilities. But it was not until the Met joined with other New York institutions in forming Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts that a new home became possible. The new Metropolitan Opera House, which opened at Lincoln Center in September of 1966, was equipped with the finest technical facilities of the day.

Each season the Met stages more than 200 opera performances in New York. More than 800,000 people attend the performances in the opera house during the season, and millions more experience the Met through new media distribution initiatives and state-of-the-art technology.

This guide includes several sections with a variety of background material on *The Magic Flute*.

- **The Source, The Story, and Who's Who in *The Magic Flute***
- **A Timeline:** The historical context of the opera's story and composition
- **A Closer Look:** A brief article highlighting an important aspect of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*
- **Guided Listening:** A series of musical excerpts with questions and a roadmap to possible student responses
- **Student Critique:** A performance activity, highlighting specific aspects of this production; and topics for wrap-up discussion following students' attendance
- **Further Resources:** Recommendations for additional study, both online and in print
- **Glossary:** Common musical terms found in this guide and in the concert hall

This guide is intended to cultivate students' interest in *The Magic Flute*, whether or not they have any prior acquaintance with opera or the performing arts. It includes activities for students with a wide range of musical backgrounds and seeks to encourage them to think about opera—and the performing arts as a whole—as a medium of both entertainment and creative expression.

In particular, this guide will offer in-depth introductions to:

- The opera's context in the writings of the European Enlightenment
- The aria as a vehicle for personal expression
- Creative choices made by the artists of the Metropolitan Opera for this production
- The opera as a unified work of art, involving the efforts of composer, librettist, and Met artists

Photo: Marty Sohl/
Metropolitan Opera



THE SOURCE

Emanuel Schikaneder—impresario, writer, actor, and singer—drew from a variety of sources in crafting the libretto for *The Magic Flute*, or *Die Zauberflöte* in the original German. Influences include Arthurian romance (Chrétien de Troyes’s 12th-century *Yvain, ou Le Chevalier de Lion*) as well as more contemporary works: the faux-Egyptian novel *Sethos* by Jean Terrasson (1731, translated into German 1777); *Dschinnistan*, a collection of stories published by the poet Christoph Martin Wieland in the 1780s that features the tale of a fairy who enlists a prince to rescue a young maiden abducted by an evil sorcerer and gives him a magic flute to help him along his way; and the 1784 essay “Über die Mysterien der Ägyptier” (“On the Mysteries of the Egyptians”) by Vienna’s foremost Freemason, Ignaz von Born.

Schikaneder also drew from the performance history of Viennese popular theater, which embraced magic, lowbrow humor, mystery, spectacle, and moralizing sentiments. Its tradition also provided a model for the character of Papageno in the stock role of Hanswurst (“Jack Sausage”), a crafty but coarse type who usually falls prey to his baser instincts and provides much of the comic relief.



Photo: Marty Sohl/
Metropolitan Opera

SYNOPSIS

A mythical land between the sun and the moon.

Three ladies in the service of the Queen of the Night save Prince Tamino from a serpent. When they leave to tell the queen, the birdcatcher Papageno appears. He boasts to Tamino that it was he who killed the creature. The ladies return to give Tamino a portrait of the queen's daughter, Pamina, who they say has been enslaved by the evil Sarastro. Tamino immediately falls in love with the girl's picture. The queen, appearing in a burst of thunder, tells Tamino about the loss of her daughter and commands him to rescue her. The ladies give a magic flute to Tamino and silver bells to Papageno to ensure their safety on the journey and appoint three spirits to guide them.

Sarastro's slave Monostatos pursues Pamina but is frightened away by Papageno. The birdcatcher tells Pamina that Tamino loves her and is on his way to save her. Led by the three spirits to the temple of Sarastro, Tamino learns from a high priest that it is the Queen, not Sarastro, who is evil. Hearing that Pamina is safe, Tamino charms the wild animals with his flute then rushes off to follow the sound of Papageno's pipes. Monostatos and his men chase Papageno and Pamina but are left helpless when Papageno plays his magic bells. Sarastro enters in great ceremony. He punishes Monostatos and promises Pamina that he will eventually set her free. Pamina catches a glimpse of Tamino, who is led into the temple with Papageno.

Sarastro tells the priests that Tamino will undergo initiation rites. Monostatos tries to kiss the sleeping Pamina but is surprised by the appearance of the Queen of the Night. The Queen gives her daughter a dagger and orders her to murder Sarastro.

Sarastro finds the desperate Pamina and consoles her, explaining that he is not interested in vengeance. Tamino and Papageno are told by a priest that they must remain silent and are not allowed to eat, a vow that Papageno immediately breaks when he takes a glass of water from a flirtatious old lady. When he asks her name, she vanishes. The three spirits guide Tamino through the rest of his journey and tell Papageno to be quiet. Tamino remains silent even when Pamina appears. Misunderstanding his action for coldness, she is heartbroken.

VOICE TYPE

Since the early 19th century, singing voices have usually been classified in six basic types, three male and three female, according to their range:

SOPRANO

the highest voice type, normally possessed only by women and boys

MEZZO-SOPRANO

the voice type lying below the soprano and above the contralto; the term comes from the Italian word "mezzo," meaning "middle"

CONTRALTO

the lowest female voice type, also called "alto"

TENOR

the highest standard voice type in adult males

BARITONE

the voice type lying below the tenor and above the bass

BASS

the lowest voice type

The priests inform Tamino that he has only two more trials to complete his initiation. Papageno, who has given up on entering the brotherhood, longs for a wife instead. He eventually settles for the old lady. When he promises to be faithful, she is suddenly transformed into a beautiful young Papagena but then immediately disappears. Pamina and Tamino are reunited and face the ordeals of water and fire together, protected by the magic flute.

Desolate to be without a wife, Papageno tries to hang himself on a tree but is saved by the three spirits, who remind him that if he uses his magic bells he will find true happiness. When he plays the bells, Papagena appears, and the two immediately start making family plans. The Queen of the Night, her three ladies, and Monostatos attack the temple but are defeated and banished. Sarastro blesses Pamina and Tamino as all join in celebrating the triumph of courage, virtue, and wisdom.

WHO'S WHO IN *THE MAGIC FLUTE*

Character		Pronunciation Guide	Voice Type	The Lowdown
Tamino	A young prince	tah-MEE-noe	Tenor	Handsome and courageous, he accepts the Queen's commission to rescue Pamina.
Pamina	Daughter of the Queen of the Night	pah-MEE-nah	Soprano	Her beauty initially attracts Tamino, but she proves to be his match in withstanding the trials they face.
Papageno	A bird-catcher in service to the Queen of the Night	pah-pah-GAY-noe	Baritone	Primarily concerned for his physical well-being rather than loftier pursuits; his highest desire is to find a wife.
Queen of the Night	The powerful ruler of the realm of the moon and stars		Soprano	She is enraged at the abduction of her daughter and commits all of her forces to the defeat of her enemy Sarastro.
Sarastro	High priest of the Sun	zah-RAS-troe	Bass	The leader of a powerful order of priests, he has abducted Pamina and compels her and Tamino to undergo tests and ordeals.



Photo: Marty Sohl/
Metropolitan Opera

- **1756** Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is born on January 27, one of the two surviving children of Leopold Mozart, a composer in the service of the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg.

- **1762** At the age of seven, Mozart performs for the Empress Maria Theresia in Vienna as a keyboard prodigy and composer. Over the next 11 years, the Mozart family tours throughout Europe, performing for members of the royalty and nobility.

- **1767** Mozart completes his first full-length dramatic work, *Apollo et Hyacinthus*, based on a Latin text drawn from Ovid. It is first performed in Salzburg on May 13.

- **1776** Emperor Joseph II dismisses the impresario of the Burgtheater, one of the two imperial court theaters in Vienna, and re-opens it as the “Nationaltheater,” the home of German drama. Two years later, Joseph founds the National-Singspiel, intended to encourage the composition of music dramas in German. Mozart’s *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782) is the most successful of the singspiels created for the Burgtheater before the failure of the National-Singspiel in 1788.

- **1781** Mozart relocates to Vienna, seeking to make his living as an independent composer and performer in the culturally rich Habsburg capital, rather than solely under contract to a wealthy patron or the church.

- **1784** Mozart becomes a Freemason and joins the Viennese lodge “Zur Wohltätigkeit” (“Beneficence”), a community of liberal intellectuals whose philosophical interests align closely with the Enlightenment concerns of reason, nature, and the universal brotherhood of fellow men.



A posthumous portrait of Mozart by Barbara Krafft (Vienna, Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde)



Maria Theresia of Austria (The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore)

- **1786** Mozart completes *Le Nozze di Figaro*, the first of his collaborations with the librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte (followed by *Don Giovanni* in 1787 and *Così fan tutte* in 1790). The three works, masterpieces of dramatic structure and musical expression, are considered among the pinnacles of the opera buffa genre.

- **1787-89** The German poet Christoph Martin Wieland publishes *Dschinnistan*, a collection of stories, several of which inspire the plot of *Die Zauberflöte*, notably “Lulu, oder Die Zauberflöte,” which tells the story of Prince Lulu, who is enlisted by a “radiant fairy” to rescue a maiden who has been captured by an evil sorcerer, and who is provided with a magic flute to help him in his mission.

- **1789** The actor, librettist, and theatrical producer Emanuel Schikaneder takes over the direction of the Freihaus-Theater auf der Wieden in Vienna. His repertory includes musical dramas (mostly comprising Singspiels), spoken plays with spectacular staging effects, as well as works by serious German dramatists. Its audience bridges the different classes of Viennese society.

- **1791** *Die Zauberflöte* premieres on September 30 at the Theater auf der Wieden, with Schikaneder performing the role of Papageno and Mozart conducting. The opera receives 20 performances by the end of the following month, and over 200 performances by 1800.

- **1791** Mozart falls ill on November 22 and dies on December 5, likely from rheumatic fever.

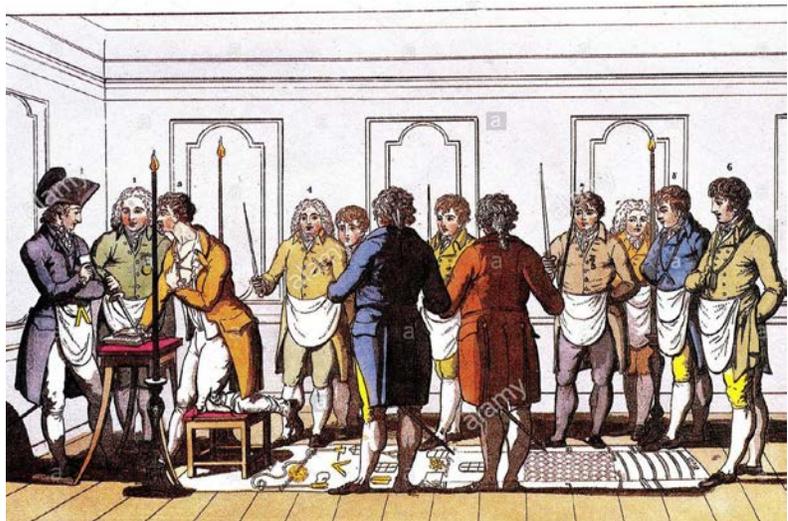


An engraving of Schikaneder as Papageno

MOZART AND FREEMASONRY

A fraternal organization whose members are committed to ideals of morality, justice, and reason, Freemasonry originally grew out of the medieval guilds of stonemasons and the study of the philosophical aspects of math and architecture. Among the central ideas of Masonic thought and practice are the exploration of the nature of man and society and a quasi-religious ritual and mysticism. From its initial popularity in England, the movement had spread across the European continent by the early 18th century.

The first Masonic lodge in Vienna was founded in 1742, and within 40 years, another lodge, "Zur wahren Eintracht" ("True Concord"), had become the foremost community of Viennese artistic, scientific, and literary thinkers. Mozart joined its smaller sister lodge "Zur Wohltätigkeit" ("Beneficence") in 1784. From his letters it is evident that Freemasonry played a large role in Mozart's life, and he composed several works for use with Masonic rituals (including the cantatas *Dir, Seele des Weltalls* and *Die Maurerfreude*) as well as many more that more generally allude to Masonic symbolism or ideals. Within his lodge, Mozart also found friends and supporters who assisted him financially, with both gifts and commissions for compositions. Of all his works, the one most frequently associated with Masonic ideals is *The Magic Flute*. Its evocation of ancient Egypt aligns with Masonic interests, and it prominently uses the number three, which held special significance in Freemasonry: the opera includes three Ladies as attendants to the Queen of the Night, three Spirits, three trials that Tamino must endure, a prominent musical motive built from three chords, and a significant role for the key of E-flat major (indicated by three flats). Although Masonic influences are only one aspect of *The Magic Flute*, the opera demonstrates the interests of Viennese Freemasonry in its semi-religious program of enlightenment and progress.



An early illustration of a Masonic ritual

The Guided Listening Activities are designed to introduce students to a selection of memorable moments from the opera. They include information on what is happening dramatically, a description of the musical style, and a roadmap of musical features to listen for. Guided Listening Activities can be used by students and teachers of varying levels of musical experience.

IN PREPARATION

For this activity, teachers will need access to a recording of *The Magic Flute* and the libretto.

"I'M PAPAGENO, THAT'S MY NAME" (TRACK 3)

Close to the opening of the opera, the three ladies have just killed the giant serpent while Prince Tamino lies nearby, unconscious. After bickering over who will have the privilege of watching over the prince, they all depart together to report back to the Queen of the Night. As Tamino awakens, the birdcatcher Papageno appears and introduces himself with this song.

What to listen for:

- the simple, folk-like style of Papageno's singing
- the musical representation of Papageno's pipe

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| (00:10)
tempo is | The orchestra plays an introduction, with the melody in the violins presented against a light, running accompaniment. The brisk, the music is set in the major mode, and the tone is folk-like. Notice the first occurrences of a brief, rising 5-note scale. |
| (00:50) | The voice enters, singing the same melody just heard in the orchestra introduction. As in the introduction, the range of the melody is narrow, and music is largely step-wise. The rhythm is similarly simple. |
| (01:15) | At the close of the first verse, Papageno plays his pipes. Usually the performer playing Papageno plays the music using a small wind instrument from the stage. |
| (01:31) | The second verse begins with a new text. The music proceeds in an exact repetition of the melodies heard before. |

"THIS PORTRAIT'S BEAUTY I ADORE" (TRACK 5)

Papageno and Tamino have just met one another, and Papageno takes credit for having slain the serpent. When the three ladies appear again, they punish Papageno for this lie by padlocking his mouth. They also give a portrait to Tamino: It is a gift from the Queen of the Night, a picture of her daughter Pamina. And just as suddenly as they appeared, they depart again, leaving Tamino to contemplate the beautiful girl in the portrait.

What to listen for:

- Tamino's long, elegant melodies, a marked contrast to Papageno's simple lines

- (00:00) After a brief introductory gesture in the orchestra, the voice enters with a large leap, followed by a graceful scale downwards. Tamino's music is graceful, and the tempo is slow and stately.
- (00:35) Tamino continues with the next line of his text, "If so, to true love I yield." He sings several notes to each syllable of text, another contrast to Papageno's musical style (which invariably set a note per syllable).
- (01:02) Tamino extends his final line, "Nothing can keep us apart," by repeating it with new music. Leaps in the vocal line correspond with emotional exclamations in the text.

"O ISIS AND OSIRIS" (TRACK 20)

After learning of Monastatos's bad behavior, Sarastro has punished him and pledged that Tamino and Pamina shall be together, but Tamino must first undergo initiation rites in the temple. Together with Papageno, he is led into the temple, and Sarastro responds with a prayer, entrusting them to the care of the Egyptian gods Isis and Osiris.

What to listen for:

- The slow and solemn tempo, corresponding to the meaning of the text
- The predominance of wind instruments in the instrumental texture

- (00:00) The orchestra, led by winds, intones an introductory phrase that establishes the stately and slow atmosphere of the song.
- (00:11) The voice enters with the text "O Isis and Osiris, guide them as they now make their dangerous way." The music is solemn, with consistent and smooth rhythms in the vocal line.
- (00:53) In this repetition of the text "Protect them both from harm, we pray," the melody extends into the lowest reaches of the bass vocal range.
- (01:05) The chorus repeats Sarastro's line, now in harmony.
- (01:16) Sarastro begins a new, contrasting section, with music initially in the minor mode and in a higher section of his vocal range.
- (01:38) Sarastro begins his final petition, "Think of their virtue, their tender hearts; Your everlasting peace impart." Ascending melodic patterns grant the music a supplicatory tone.
- (02:14) The chorus responds one final time, repeating Sarastro's final line.

"HERE IN MY HEART, HELL'S BITTERNESS IS SEETHING" (TRACK 26)

The Queen of the Night is one of the most notoriously difficult roles in all of opera. It requires a soprano with a powerful and high range, but also with great agility and the capability to perform highly virtuosic coloratura. A great example of the demands made on the singer is the Queen's aria "Here in My Heart, Hell's Bitterness is Seething" (usually referred to in German as "Der Hölle Rache"). In this scene, the Queen pushes Pamina to kill Sarastro, or else be disowned. The Queen moves through increasing flights of ornamentation and stratospheric high notes, with her frenzied virtuosity making it explicit that she is not the benevolent, mournful character she initially presented herself as.

What to listen for:

- The extremely high vocal range
- The rapid, angry fast passages in the voice

- (00:00) The orchestra enters with an aggressive, tremolo gesture. The voice follows and continues in this vein, with jagged movement, large leaps, and angry gestures in the minor mode.
- (00:17) At the text "If you refuse," the melody modulates to the major mode, although the aggressive texture remains.
- (00:40) The most virtuosic vocal music of the work begins, on an extended melisma—in which many notes are set to the same syllable of text.
- (01:25) A contrasting section begins, starting at the text "Sarastro once betrayed me." The Queen's music is incisive, outlining an octave with staccato accents.
- (01:43) The Queen repeats this musical gesture at a higher pitch, now to the text "Abandoned, forsaken, and tormented."
- (01:53) The Queen sings another lavishly virtuosic melisma, here to the repetition of "his dominion I defy."
- (02:18) The final section of the aria begins, with aggressive chords in the orchestra and incisive statements in the voice, as the Queen states, "Swear to avenge me; swear or you will die." The aria ends with a closing, angry orchestral flourish.

IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the Opera Review: *The Magic Flute* reproducible handout found in the back of this guide.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND THE MAGIC FLUTE

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1d

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

ENCOURAGING STUDENT RESPONSE IN ATTENDING THE FINAL DRESS REHEARSAL

Watching and listening to a performance is a unique experience that takes students beyond the printed page to an immersion in images, sound, interpretation, technology, drama, skill, and craft. Performance activities help students analyze different aspects of the experience and engage critically with the performance. They will consider the creative choices that have been made for the particular production they are watching and examine different aspects of the performance.

The enclosed performance activity is called "Opera Review: *The Magic Flute*." The reproducible handout for this activity, available at the back of this guide, will invite students to think of themselves as opera critics, taking notes on what they see and hear during the performance and critiquing each singer and scene on a five-star scale. Students should bring this activity sheet to the final dress rehearsal and fill it out during intermission and/or after the final curtain. When you return to class, students can use their "Opera Review" sheets as they review and discuss their experience.

FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION

Students will enjoy starting the class with an open discussion of the Met performance. What did they like? What didn't they? Did anything surprise them? What would they like to see or hear again? What would they have done differently? The discussion offers an opportunity to apply the notes on students' *Opera Review* sheet, as well as their thoughts about the visual design of the Met production—in short, to see themselves as *The Magic Flute* experts.

A central aspect of the plot of *The Magic Flute* is the revelation that the Queen of the Night is not an innocent grieving mother and Sarastro is not an evil sorcerer—that, in fact, their roles are reversed. Students may enjoy discussing their initial impressions of these characters and how convincing they found them. You may prompt them with the following questions:

- Was the Queen of the Night believable when she first appeared in the opera? Was there anything about her music, the staging, or the costume design that hinted at her true nature?
- When did you first begin to doubt that Sarastro was an evil character? What helped convince you?
- Do you think there was a significant difference between the music and design of the Queen of the Night early in the opera compared her later appearances?
- Alternatively, do you think the shift in roles (good vs. evil) was ineffective? Do you think the opera would have been stronger dramatically if there were no shift?

IN PRINT

Branscombe, Peter. *W.A. Mozart: Die Zauberflöte*. Cambridge Opera Handbooks. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

A detailed and scholarly investigation of The Magic Flute, drawn from the Cambridge Opera Handbooks series. It includes sections on the genesis of Mozart's work, its literary sources, and in-depth musical analysis.

Cairns, David. *Mozart and His Operas*. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006.

An engaging and accessible biography of Mozart using his operas as a guide through his developing musical style.

Hunter, Mary. *Mozart's Operas: A Companion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

A guide to Mozart's operas, including synopsis and commentary, as well as a discussion of operatic genre and historical context.

ONLINE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2NxvM-rlkQ>

Nathan Gunn performs Papageno's aria "A Cuddly Wife or Sweetheart" in the Met's production of The Magic Flute.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqwXkf3MQ-8>

A preview of the Met's Holiday Presentation of The Magic Flute.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2Gedb05J5M>

The Overture to The Magic Flute, performed at the Salzburg festival in 2006, with The Vienna Philharmonic and conducted Riccardo Muti.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-laVXO0IYKY>

An illustrated plot synopsis of The Magic Flute, produced by Classical Minnesota Public Radio.

act/scene

Acts and scenes are ways of categorizing sections of operas. An act is a large-scale division of an opera, and each opera will typically include from two to five acts. Acts can be subdivided into scenes, which are often differentiated by a change in setting or characters.

adagio

Literally “at ease,” adagio is a tempo marking that indicates a slow speed. An adagio tempo marking indicates that the performer should play in a slow and leisurely style.

allegro

Italian for “cheerful” or “joyful,” Allegro is the most common tempo marking in Western music, indicating a moderately fast to quick speed.

aria

A song for solo voice accompanied by orchestra. In opera, arias mostly appear during a pause in dramatic action when a character is reflecting musically on his or her emotions. Most arias are lyrical, with a tune that can be hummed, and many arias include musical repetition. For example, the earliest arias in opera consist of music sung with different stanzas of text (strophic arias). Another type of aria, da capo arias, became common by the eighteenth century and feature the return of the opening music and text after a contrasting middle section. Nineteenth-century Italian arias often feature a two-part form that showcases an intensification of emotion from the first section (the cantabile) to the second section (the cabaletta).

articulation

The smoothness or hardness with which a note is begun and ended. Articulation is a way of indicating the degree to which each note connects to the next, and can be seen while watching the bow of a stringed instrument player. A note can be attacked sharply and made short, or it can flow smoothly into the next note.

baritone

Literally “deep sounding,” a baritone is what a typical male voice sounds like—the term refers to a male singer with a low but not extremely low vocal range. A baritone will sing notes that are higher than those sung by a bass and lower than those sung by a tenor. Uncommon until the nineteenth century, baritone roles have grown in popularity in opera since the works of Verdi, who often reserved the voice type for villains.

baroque

A period of music history lasting from approximately 1600 to 1750. The beginning of the Baroque period coincides with the invention of opera as a genre, and its end coincides with the death of the composer Johann Sebastian Bach. The Baroque period saw the rise of modern tonality, an expansion of performing forces, and increased ornamentation. The term “baroque” means bizarre or exaggerated, and was used by critics in the Eighteenth century critics who preferred a simpler and less-ornamented style.

bass

The lowest sounding line in music. Bass also refers to the lowest singing range for the male voice. Opera composers often choose a bass voice to sing one of two opposite types of roles: comic characters or dramatic and serious characters. For example, Mozart and Rossini wrote comic parts for bass voice, using musical repetition and low register for comic effect. Wagner and Mozart wrote serious parts for bass voice, focusing on the gravity that a low register can contribute to the overall musical texture.

bel canto

Referring to the Italian vocal style of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, bel canto singing emphasizes lyricism and ornamentation in order to showcase the beauty of the singer's voice. Its focus on lyrical embellishment directly contrasts with a contemporary Germanic focus on a weighty, dramatic style. Bel canto singing is most closely associated with the music of Gioachino Rossini, Vincenzo Bellini, and Gaetano Donizetti.

cadenza

An ornamented musical elaboration played in a free style by a soloist to display his or her virtuosity. Cadenzas are typically improvised—that is, created by a performer on the spot—though they can also be written out in advance. They most frequently occur near the end of a piece, at a point of harmonic tension when the piece is about to conclude.

chorus

A section of an opera in which a large group of singers performs together, typically with orchestral accompaniment. Most choruses include at least four different vocal lines, in registers from low to high, with multiple singers per part. The singers are typically from a particular group of people who play a certain role on stage—soldiers, peasants, prisoners, and so on. Choruses may offer a moral or commentary on the plot, or participate in the dramatic action.

Classical

A period of music history lasting from approximately 1750 to 1830, bordered by the earlier Baroque period and the later Romantic period. Contrasting with the ornamentation common to the preceding Baroque period, Classical music is characterized by simple and elegant melodies, regular harmonic accompaniment, and contrasts between melodic themes. The composers most closely associated with the Classical period include Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Ludwig van Beethoven.

coloratura

A rapid and elaborate ornamentation by a solo singer, particularly common in operas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Requiring vocal agility and a wide and high range, coloratura showcases the virtuosity of a singer by featuring repeating melodic figures, rapid scales, trills, and other embellishments.

conductor

The person who directs the orchestra, setting the tempo, giving interpretive directions to the musicians, and generally holding all the musical elements of a performance together. In orchestra performance, the conductor typically stands on a podium in front of the players and uses a baton to communicate the meter and tempo, and his or her non-baton hand to indicate dynamics, phrasing, and articulation to the musicians. The gestures of a conductor can be likened to a non-verbal language that the musicians understand.

contralto

A deep female voice, with a vocal range that extends lower than that of a mezzo-soprano. Contraltos are known for having a very wide range and for the power and depth of sound with which they can sing. As is the case for roles for basses, many of the earliest roles in opera for contraltos are comic roles, though nineteenth-century composers also wrote dramatic roles for female singers with a lower range.

crescendo

A gradual raising of volume in music achieved by increasing the dynamic level. When music crescendos, the performers begin at a softer dynamic level and become incrementally louder. One of the most famous types of crescendos in opera, the Rossini crescendo, includes an increase in volume together with repeating melodic and rhythmic phrases, higher instrumental registers, and the gradual addition of instruments in order to create a particularly dramatic effect.

diminuendo

A gradual lowering of volume in music achieved by decreasing the dynamic level. During a diminuendo, the performers begin at a louder dynamic level and become incrementally softer.

dynamics

A musical trait pertaining to loudness and softness. During the eighteenth century, composers began indicating their desired intensity of volume in music by writing words such as piano (soft) and forte (loud) into the musical score. Dynamics encompass a spectrum from pianissimo (very soft) to piano (soft) to mezzo piano (moderately soft), all the way up to fortissimo (very loud). Music can shift to another dynamic level either suddenly or gradually, through a crescendo or diminuendo.

ensemble

A musical piece for two or more soloists, accompanied by orchestra. Types of ensembles include duets (for two soloists), trios (for three soloists), and quartets (for four soloists). Sometimes singers will respond directly to one another during an ensemble. At other times, singers will each sing to themselves as if the other singers were not on stage. In ensembles, multiple characters may simultaneously express very different emotions from one another.

finale

The last portion of an act, a finale consists of several musical sections that accompany an escalating dramatic tension. Finales frequently consist of multiple ensembles with different numbers of characters. When it occurs at the end of an early act in the opera, a finale may create a messy situation—and the resolution of this situation will only happen in subsequent acts. One type of finale common in comic operas, a chain finale, features characters entering or exiting from the stage to create unexpected combinations of characters, in turn increasing the opera's dramatic tension.

forte

Meaning "loud" or "strong" in Italian, forte is a dynamic level in music that indicates a loud volume. Adding the suffix "-issimo" to a word serves as an intensifier—since forte means "loud," fortissimo means "very loud."

harmony

The simultaneous sounding of pitches to produce chords, and the relationship between different chords as they succeed one another. Throughout much of Western music, systems of rules govern these progressions to help create our sense of musical tension, expectation, and conclusion. Tonal harmony is based on progressions of chords in relationship to a tonic (or home) key. In the 19th century, as composers sought novel sounds to reflect the originality of their invention, they began to employ chords and progressions of greater dissonance and greater distance from the home key. As such dissonances moved beyond mere sound effects into the musical structure itself, the traditional theory of tonal harmony began to become insufficient as a way to understand and describe musical structure.

intermission

A break between acts of an opera. At the beginning of an intermission, the curtain will fall (that is, close) on stage, and the lights in the auditorium, called the house lights, will become brighter. Intermissions provide audiences with a chance to walk around, talk with one another, and reflect on what they have seen and what could happen next. The break in the performance may also correspond with a change of time or scene in the story of the opera—the next act may take place hours or months later, or be set in a different location. Usually lights will dim and a bell may sound to indicate that the intermission is drawing to a close and the opera is about to resume.

legato

A type of articulation in which a melody is played with smooth connection between the notes. A legato passage does not include any pauses between notes or any accents at the beginnings of notes, as the notes blend into one another without a break. In contrast, a passage that is played staccato features notes played in a separated manner.

Leitmotif

From the German for “leading motive,” a leitmotif is a recurring musical idea, or motive, that represents a particular person, object, idea, emotion, or place. This musical idea is usually a few seconds in length and can occur in the music’s melody, harmony, rhythm, or a combination of the three. Leitmotifs are most closely associated with the operas of Richard Wagner, where they are used repeatedly throughout the opera to provide unity; they also less frequently appear in operas of other composers, including Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Strauss.

libretto

The text of an opera, including all the words that are said or sung by performers. Until the early eighteenth century, a composer would frequently set music to a pre-existing libretto, and any given libretto could thus be set to music multiple times by different composers. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, collaboration between the author of the libretto, known as the librettist, and the composer became more frequent. Some opera composers, most notably Richard Wagner, are known for writing their own text.

maestro

A title of respect used to address a conductor. The term is often applied to conductors with several decades of experience. However, performers often use this honorific when addressing the conductor.

melody

A succession of pitches that form an understandable unit. The melody of a piece consists of the tune that a listener can hum or sing. During arias, the singer will usually sing the main melody, though other instruments may play parts of the melody. Sometimes, such as during ensembles, multiple melodies can occur simultaneously.

mezzo-soprano

A female voice with a range between that of a contralto and soprano. A mezzo-soprano's voice is slightly deeper than that of a soprano, so mezzo-sopranos are often cast in supporting roles as older women, including nurses, confidantes, or maids.

opera buffa

A term applied to Italian comic operas from the mid-eighteenth through mid-nineteenth centuries. The plot of an opera buffa often features scenes and characters from everyday life and addresses a light or sentimental subject, concluding with a happy ending.

opera seria

An eighteenth- or nineteenth-century Italian opera employing a noble and serious style. The plot of an opera seria often upholds morality by presenting conflicting emotions such as love versus duty, or by modeling enlightened rulers.

operetta

Featuring spoken dialogue, songs, and dances, an operetta is a short theatrical piece. Shorter in duration than operas, operettas typically feature a light subject matter, incorporate melodies composed in a popular style, and feature spoken dialogue. Most popular from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, the genre is the precursor of the American musical.

ornamentation

An embellishment to the melody, rhythm, or harmony of music, intended to make a melody more expressive or ornate. Ornamentation can be either indicated through symbols written into the music or improvised by the performer.

overture

An instrumental piece that occurs before the first act as an introduction to an opera. After the conductor enters the orchestra pit and takes a bow, the music for the overture begins. Most overtures are a few minutes in duration, and set the mood for the opera—even featuring musical themes that will occur later in the opera.

piano

Abbreviated *p* in a musical score, piano indicates a soft dynamic level. Musicians may achieve a piano sound by using less bow, less air, or less force. In opera, soft music will often correspond with emotions of sadness or moments in the plot when a character is reflecting on a course of action or emotional state. Pianissimo is “very soft,” and can be so quiet that an audience may need to listen carefully in order to discern its melody and harmony.

pitch

The quality of a musical sound corresponding to its perceived highness or lowness. Scientifically, pitch can be measured as the number of vibrations (or repetitions) of a sound wave per second, which is called its frequency. A sound with a low frequency, like a bass drum, will sound low and have a low pitch, while a sound with a high frequency, like a siren, will sound high.

prima donna

Meaning “first lady” in Italian, the prima donna is the leading female role in an opera. The term may apply to the role or to the singer herself, who usually sings in the soprano register and is the star of the show. Since the nineteenth century, the term has also been applied to a singer of any gender with a self-centered and demanding personality.

recitative

A type of vocal writing between speech and song that imitates the accents and inflections of natural speech. Composers often employ recitative for passages of text that involve quick dialogue and the advancement of plot, since the style allows singers to move rapidly through a large amount of text. Recitative may be accompanied either by keyboard or by the whole orchestra.

rhythm

Rhythm refers to the way music unfolds over time; it is a series of durations in a range from long to short. Along with pitch, it is a basic and indispensable parameter of music. Rhythm is perceived in relation to an underlying beat and within the context of a meter. Western musical notation indicates to the performer the exact duration of each note or rest.

Romantic

A period of music history lasting from approximately 1830 to 1900. Beginning in literature and later adopted by composers, romanticism reflected a newfound focus on individuality, nature, and emotional extremes. Music from the Romantic period often explores music’s redemptive power, focusing on the sublimity of nature, love, and the mysterious. Composers began to experiment with shortening and lengthening the standard forms and durations of musical works, and also added more expressive harmonies to convey the originality of their musical vision.

score

The complete musical notation for a piece, the score includes notated lines for all of the different instrumental and vocal parts that unite to constitute a musical composition. In an opera orchestra, the conductor follows the score during rehearsals and performances, while each performer follows his or her individual part.

Singspiel

Literally “sung play,” a Singspiel is an opera with spoken dialogue. Singspiels are typically in German and are from the Classical or early Romantic eras. The plot of a Singspiel is usually comic in nature, and its music may include songs, choruses, and instrumental numbers that are separated by spoken dialogue.

solo

A piece, musical passage, or line for a lone singer or other performer, with or without instrumental accompaniment. The most common type of solo in opera is the aria, which is composed for a single voice with orchestral accompaniment.

soprano

The highest singing range for the female voice. Roles composed for soprano singers are typically among the leading roles in the opera and require soprano singers to show off their virtuosic flexibility and range.

tempo

Literally “time” in Italian, tempo refers to the speed of a piece of music. Tempo is indicated in a score by a variety of conventional (often Italian) words—such as *allegro*, *adagio*, *vivace*, *moderato*, *grave*, and many more—that not only provide direction on the composer’s desired rate of speed, but also carry associations of gesture and character. For instance, *vivace* indicates not only a brisk speed but also a lively spirit. Additional tempo markings may indicate when a composer asks for a section of music to be sped up (such as “*accelerando*”) or slowed down (such as “*rallentando*”).

tenor

The highest natural male vocal range. By the nineteenth century, the tenor had become the most common vocal range for male leading roles in operas. Tenor roles often feature high-pitched notes for male voice in order to showcase the singer’s range and power. A related voice type is the countertenor, with a range above that of a tenor and similar to that of a contralto.

theme/motive

Themes are the melodic ideas that are musical building blocks for a piece. A theme is often recognizable as a distinct tune and may reappear in its original form or in altered form throughout the piece. A motif (or motive) is a brief musical idea that recurs throughout a musical work. Motives can be based on a melodic, rhythmic, or harmonic component, and their repetition makes them recognizable to the listener. In opera, musical motives are often symbolically associated with specific characters or dramatic ideas.

timbre

Pronounced TAM-bruh, a French word that means “sound color.” It refers to the complex combination of characteristics that give each instrument or voice its unique sound. Just as we can recognize each other by the differences in our speaking voices, operatic singing voices are distinguishable by their unique timbres. Listeners can also identify orchestral instruments by their timbre without being able to see them. The creative combination of different instrumental timbres is one of the artistic aspects of orchestration.

trill

A rapid alternation between two pitches that are adjacent to one another. Trills are a type of ornamentation, serving to embellish the melodic line, and appear regularly within coloratura passages. Trills also may appear near the end of a piece in order to prolong the musical tension before the music concludes.

verismo

A movement in Italian theater and opera in the late 19th century that embraced realism and explored areas of society previously ignored on the stage: the poor, the lower-class, and the criminal. Its characters are driven by passion to defy reason, morality, and the law. In order to reflect these emotional extremes, composers of verismo opera developed a musical style that communicates raw and unfiltered passions. Musically, verismo operas react against the forced ornamentation of the *bel canto* style and instead emphasize a more natural setting of the text to music. Before its exploration on the operatic stage, the verismo aesthetic first developed within the realm of literature.

Reviewed by _____

Have you ever wanted to be a music and theater critic? Now's your chance!

As you watch *The Magic Flute*, use the space below to keep track of your thoughts and opinions. What did you like about the performance? What didn't you like? If you were in charge, what might you have done differently? Think carefully about the action, music, and stage design, and rate each of the star singers. Then, after the opera, share your opinions with your friends, classmates, and anyone else who wants to learn more about Mozart's opera and this performance at the Met!

THE STARS:	STAR POWER	MY COMMENTS
Joëlle Harvey as Pamina	*****	
Kathryn Lewek as the Queen of the Night	*****	
David Portillo as Tamino	*****	
Rodell Rosel as Monostatos	*****	
Joshua Hopkins as Papageno	*****	
Patrick Carfizzi as Speaker	*****	
Morris Robinson as Sarastro	*****	

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN/STAGING
A serpent is defeated			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Tamino and Papageno meet			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Tamino sees Pamina's portrait			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
The Queen of the Night's grief			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Papageno finds Pamina			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN/STAGING
They meet Sarastro			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
The trials of Papageno			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Pamina's grief			
My opinion of this scene	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Papageno and Papagena meet			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5
Everyone is reunited and rejoices			
My opinion of this scene:	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5	1-2-3-4-5