



GLOSSARY

ACCELERANDO

An acceleration or speeding up of the tempo of a particular aria, chorus or ensemble.

ACT

A portion of an opera designated by the composer, which has a dramatic structure of its own.

ARIA

A solo piece written for a main character which focuses on the character's emotion.

ASCENDING

A series of notes going from a low to a high pitch.

ASIDE

A secret comment from an actor or singer directly to the audience that the other characters cannot hear.

BARITONE

The male singing voice that is higher than bass but lower than tenor.

BASS

The lowest male singing voice.

BEL CANTO

Italian phrase literally meaning "beautiful singing". A traditional Italian style of singing emphasizing tone, phrasing, coloratura passages, and technique; also the operas written in this style.

BUFFO

From the Italian for "buffoon". A singer of comic roles (basso-buffo) or a comic opera (opera-buffa).

CABALETTA

The final part of a Bel Canto aria. It is usually rather fast.

CADENZA

A passage of singing, often at the end of an aria, which shows off the singer's vocal ability.

CAVATINA

The first part of a Bel Canto aria. It usual is slow and very melodic.

CHORD

A simultaneous combination of three or more tones that constitute a single block of harmony.

CHOREOGRAPHY

The act of setting movement to music to create a dance.

CHORUS

A group of singers who portray servants, party guests, or other unnamed characters; also the music written for them.

COLORATURA

Elaborate ornamentation of music written for a singer using many fast notes and trills.

COMMEDIA DELL' ARTE

A kind of opera that flourished in Italy from the 16th Century that uses an open-ended scenario instead of a script.

COMPOSER

The person who writes the music.

COMPOSITION

A work of music, literature, or art.

COMPROMARIO ROLE

A role in an opera that is sung by a character who is not one of the main characters.

CONDUCTOR

The leader of the orchestra sometimes called maestro.

CONTRALTO

The lowest female singing voice.

COUNTERTENOR

A countertenor voice is that of a male contralto. The role of the Sandman in *Hansel and Gretel* is usually sung by a female contralto, but can be sung by a male countertenor.

CRESCENDO

A build in the volume or dynamic of the music.

DECRESCENDO

Gradually playing music softer.

DESIGNER

The person who creates the lighting, costumes or sets.

DESCENDING

A series of notes going from a high to a low pitch.

DIRECTOR

The person who instructs the singer-actors in their movements on-stage and in the interpretation of their roles.

DUET

Two people singing or playing together, or the music written for two performers.

ENSEMBLE

Two or more people singing at the same time, or the music written for such a group.

FINALE

The last musical number of an opera or the last number of an act.

FORTE

The Italian term for "loud", indicated in the musical score by the marking "f".

GLISSANDO

An Italian word for "slide", meaning sliding up and down a series of notes very quickly.

HARMONY

Two or more notes played at the same time; in other words harmony deals with chords, simultaneous sounds, and counterpoint with melody set against melody.

INTERLUDE

A short piece of instrumental music played between scenes or acts.

KEY

The specific tonality of a piece of music, indicating the precise pitch which is to serve as the tonal center.

LIBRETTO

The text or words of an opera.

LYRICS

The sung words or text of a musical comedy or operetta song.

MELODY

The tune of the music.

MEZZO-SOPRANO

The middle female singing voice, lower than soprano, but higher than contralto.

MAESTRO

Another word for conductor; Italian for "master".

OCTAVE

Eight notes, beginning and ending on the same letter name; double the frequency of vibration.

OPERA

Italian for "the work". A libretto acted and sung by one or more singers to an instrumental accompaniment. In short: words plus music plus staging.

OPERA BUFFA

Light, humorous opera that developed from the comic scenes at the end of serious operas.

OPERA SERIA

Romantic, flowery, serious opera.

ORCHESTRA

The group of instrumentalists or musicians who, led by the conductor, accompany the singers.

ORCHESTRATION

The art of writing for the orchestra. Decisions about what instruments should play which parts of the music can affect the sound of a composition a great deal.

OVERTURE

The orchestra's introduction to an opera that shows the mood or tone of the opera. It may contain melodies used in the opera itself.

PIANO

The Italian term for "soft", indicated in the musical score by the marking "p".

PITCH

The highness/lowness of a sound or tone.

PRINCIPAL

A major singing role, or the singer who performs such a role.

QUARTET

Four singers or the music that is written for four singers. Also quintet, sextet, etc.

RANGE

How high and low an instrument can play.

RECITATIVE

The sung words which often come before an aria or ensemble. The purpose of recitative is to advance the plot.

RITARD

A slowing in the tempo of a piece of music.

RHYTHM

The arrangement of notes according to their relative length and relative emphasis (beat).

SCALE

A scale is a sequence of notes arranged in order from lowest to highest or from highest to lowest.

SCORE

The written music of an opera or other musical work.

SOLO

Playing or singing alone, as a featured performer.

SOPRANO

The highest female singing voice.

TEMPO

The speed of the music.

TENOR

The highest adult male singing voice.

TRILL

Very quick alternation of pitch between two adjacent notes. See coloratura.

TRIO

An ensemble of three singers or the music that is written for three singers.