

*Southeast Center for*

**EDUCATION  
IN THE ARTS**

*Mozart's*

*Die Zauberflöte  
(The Magic Flute)*

OPERAS TELL STORIES  
ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS AND  
ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS  
FALL 2002

CHATTANOOGA SYMPHONY & OPERA

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AT CHATTANOOGA

*Music*



The **Southeast Center for Education in the Arts** is a nationally recognized professional development institute located at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Since 1988, our goal has been to help administrators, arts specialists, classroom teachers, artists, and parents understand the nature of art, dance, music and theatre as they discover exciting ways to integrate the arts throughout the curriculum. Innovative research and programs in comprehensive arts education and school reform have enabled elementary and secondary school educators from across the nation to establish the arts as vital components in the basic education of all students.

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# Introduction



## WHAT IS OPERA?

Very simply defined, opera is a play in which words are sung rather than spoken. But opera is much, much more than that because it depends upon music – sung music – for its expression and can communicate emotions, situations, words, and atmosphere better than the spoken word alone.

Opera is the result of combining characters, story, action, drama, poetry, singing, orchestral music, scenery, costumes, props, lighting, and special effects in such a way that all together they become one work of musical-dramatic art. This defines opera as it has existed since around the year 1600. Operas are usually sung in the language of their origins, such as Italian, French, German, English, Russian, etc.

Creating an opera starts with the composer. The composer looks for a suitable book or story (libretto) to serve the music he wants to create. Sometimes the composer asks a librettist to join him, and together they work to create the plot or story idea that eventually becomes a completed operatic work. The creators usually divide their opera into acts or sections with several scenes in each act. In many operas these acts are further divided into arias (solo songs), duets, trios, quartets, and choruses.

Often the composer writes a musical introduction to the opera that is played by the orchestra before the singers appear on the stage and the action gets under way. This is called an "overture" or "prelude" and sets up the mood of the work. If the story is a comedy, the humorous quality of the music will be conveyed in the overture.

When the composer finishes writing the opera, his book of music is presented to a producer or producing organization such as the Metropolitan Opera. If the producer likes the opera, and wishes to present it before audiences, a team of hundreds of artists and craftspeople must be brought together to mount the production.

Singers need to be selected. It is the operatic singer's responsibility to create a dramatic character using the color and expressiveness of his or her voice to move an audience and to project what the composer and librettist have created. It has been said that the voice is the greatest musical instrument in the world because of its versatility, and the opera composer exercises that versatility with his music. Whether it is the classical singer or a jazz artist wailing the blues, the voice must be selected that matches the composer's intent. The singer must be able to apply all of his or her training and talent to the role, and lift the audience into a greater understanding of the words, character, or situation. In addition to the starring singers, opera

sometimes requires that hundreds of people assemble on stage at one time – choristers, dancers, and extras. And, some operas require that all these people share the stage with a great variety of theatrical wizardry – fire-breathing mechanical dragons, live-stock, even elephants from time to time.

Opera is the most complex, elaborate, spectacular, and expensive art form to produce. To bring together and hold together the action on stage requires a production and technical staff equal to the forces on stage and in the orchestra pit where as many as 120 instrumental musicians accompany the stage action. The production staff work together, sometimes as much as two years in advance, preparing for a first performance. Set designers and electricians, costumers, wig, hair and makeup artists, stage managers and assistants (who coordinate the stage effort), conductors and assistant conductors (who direct the show musically), choreographers, ballet masters, rehearsal pianists, vocal coaches, prop persons, stage directors (who direct the acting) and assistants, chorusmasters, sound technicians, and even animal trainers are employed in mounting a production. Among the many duties of the technical crew might be to build dragons, castles, and whole cities. Why do all these people go to all that trouble? When all is ready for the performance and the curtain goes up, the powerful language of music connects and translates individual labors into a magical whole, giving the audience an unforgettable experience.

## **MAIN IDEAS**

An opera is a play which is sung, usually accompanied by an orchestra;

Fantasy, fairy tales and stories teach lessons to children and adults. The story in *The Magic Flute* tells of the triumph of good over evil;

Mozart's music describes the characters of the opera and sets the mood for the action of the story; and

Mozart breaks new ground in *The Magic Flute* through the use of fantasy and *singspiel* (spoken dialogue).

## **THE FOUR DISCIPLINES AND HOW THEY CONTRIBUTE TO MUSICAL UNDERSTANDING**

In discipline-based music education, each of the four disciplines contributes to our understanding of the works of music studied. For every work, the disciplines contribute to our understanding in a unique way. It is important to investigate all four of the disciplines in each unit to insure a comprehensive approach and student understanding.

## **Aesthetic Issues**

What is opera? What is *singspiel*? What is a musical?

How do we distinguish between opera, *singspiel* and musical?

What is fantasy? What elements of fantasy are in *The Magic Flute*?

How does the music contribute to setting the mood for a particular scene?

How does the spectacle (costumes, lighting, props, set, makeup ), contribute the action in a particular scene?

How does the music portray the personality of a particular character?

How does the text portray the personality of a particular character?

Must we have a particular mind-set in order to understand *The Magic Flute*? If so, how would we characterize that mind-set?

Does this music have intrinsic value, or is it simply a vehicle for telling the story?

Are there universal themes in this music which may be found in other operas? Other works of music?

## **Historical and Socio-cultural Issues**

Who was Mozart?

Who was Emanuel Schikaneder?

Why did Mozart write *The Magic Flute*?

Where did the story of *The Magic Flute* come from?

What was opera in Mozart's day?

Where did *singspiel* originate?

Does this music tell us anything about the people who lived during Mozart's time?

What were the roles of musicians in this period?

Who were some of the important composers and performers of opera at this period?

How has this music influenced operas written afterward?

How did the instruments of the time determine what music was composed and how it was performed?

How did the theatre technology of the time affect the production of the opera?

Who were the singers who first performed this opera?

What were the popular forms of musical entertainment at this time?

## **Production (Music-Making) Issues**

How was this opera composed?

How did the abilities of the singers who premiered the opera determine how the music was written?

Is improvisation used in this opera?

## **Criticism Issues**

What is this music about?

What is most significant or important about this opera? What in the music supports your answer?

Is *The Magic Flute* significant historically? Why or why not?

Is there anything in *The Magic Flute* that tells us something about ourselves today? If so, what is the message?

Would the story of the opera be effective if performed as a play without music?

Is the opera's meaning affected by the quality of a particular performance?

How would Mozart be viewed by the modern audience if he were composing today?

Can we compare modern composers of musicals (e.g., Andrew Lloyd-Webber— "Cats", Alan Menken — "The Little Mermaid" ) to Mozart?

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

To deepen student understanding of opera through writing activities and music-making.

To familiarize students further with the form, elements, and the content of opera.

Students will demonstrate their knowledge of how opera tells stories by getting into character and acting out scenes from *The Magic Flute*, as well as creating their own opera from fairy tales and well-known stories.

## **CONTENT STANDARDS IN MUSIC EDUCATION MET WITHIN THIS DOCENT GUIDE**

(Taken from the National Standards for Arts Education.)

3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music
7. Evaluating music and music performances
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts



# Background Information for Teachers



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMPOSER AND THE OPERA

### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

There may be no composer whose name is better known than Mozart's, with the possible exception of Ludwig van Beethoven. Mozart's music has certainly found a wide audience throughout the world. Peter Shaffer's play *Amadeus* and the film upon which it was based have brought even more attention to bear on the composer whose music has delighted and moved listeners and whose genius has intrigued scholars for two centuries. Who was this "wonder child?"

He was born in Salzburg, Austria, on January 27, 1756, to Leopold and Maria Anna Mozart. Leopold was a well-regarded violinist and composer who published a book on violin-playing in the same year as his son's birth. Of the seven children born to Leopold and Maria Anna, only Wolfgang and his older sister Nannerl survived infancy. It was while he was a toddler that Mozart's extraordinary musical ability was recognized. He began to play the piano at the age of three and wrote his first composition when he was five. His performances were not limited to the piano, however.

At the age of six, Wolfgang amazed Leopold and a violinist from the Salzburg court by playing the second violin part in a violin duet so beautifully that the friend stopped playing while the youngster and his father, tears running down his cheeks, finished the entire duet. The most amazing feature of this episode is that Wolfgang had never had a lesson on the violin, but had merely observed others as they played.

Wolfgang's phenomenal musical ability was the prime attraction when his father took the boy and his sister, Nannerl, on a series of concert tours for the courts of Europe. His amazing musical powers earned him the title "wunderkind" (German for "wonder child"). Much of Mozart's childhood was spent traveling on these musical tours; however, they brought the family more fame than fortune. On one occasion, Mozart heard a piece of sacred choral music performed at the Sistine Chapel in Rome. No other churches were permitted to perform the work, or even to possess a copy of the music, which was locked away after the performance. After the single performance, Mozart returned to his room and wrote out the entire piece from memory, including the instrumental parts. There is no doubt that his musical memory was nothing short of unique.

Despite the early acclaim, Mozart the young man was not as successful as Mozart the prodigy. He was not adept in managing his relationship with his employers, and found that admirers who had applauded him as a child were not interested in his later compositions. In order to introduce himself and his music to a wider audience, Mozart in 1781 resigned his post with the Archbishop of Salzburg and moved to Vienna, Austria. In that same year, he married Constanze Weber, against his father's wishes. His years in Vienna were productive from a compositional standpoint, but did not advance his career to the extent he had hoped. Vienna was a city full of composers and musicians who were certainly less gifted than Mozart, but nonetheless held secure positions in the imperial and ecclesiastical courts.

While he was in Vienna, Mozart wrote some of his best-known works: the operas *Abduction from the Seraglio*, *Don Giovanni*, *The Marriage of Figaro*; the serenade *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (*A Little Night Music*); the Clarinet Concerto in A; his *Requiem*, unfinished at the time of his death; Symphony #40 in G minor; as well as solo piano music, concertos for violin, piano, horn, and string quartets. He was the master of any form and for any instrument for which he composed. His composition process seems to have been that he was always composing: while playing cards, traveling, conversing with family and friends, and, especially, while playing billiards, a game he adored.

Mozart and Constanze were never financially secure, although they lived rather well. There were many times that friends lent them money which was sometimes repaid, sometimes not. Mozart performed and composed out of financial necessity, as well as artistic fervor. The physical toll of his work weakened his health, which had always been frail due to the illnesses he had suffered as a child traveling on various musical tours. It has been a favorite rumor, from the time of Mozart's death, that he was actually poisoned by a rival composer, Antonio Salieri. This was central to the plot of *Amadeus*, Peter Shaffer's play about the relationship between Mozart and Salieri. There is no evidence to support the theory, however. It appears that Mozart succumbed to kidney failure on December 5, 1791, at the age of thirty-five.

## **Synopsis of *The Magic Flute***

*Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*

*Libretto by Emanuel Schikaneder*

*First performed at Theater auf der Wieden, Vienna, Austria, 1791*

*Setting in Egypt, in mythological times*

### **Characters:**

*Pamina, lyric soprano*

*Queen of the Night, coloratura soprano*

*Papagena, soprano*

*Three Ladies, 2 sopranos and 1 mezzo-soprano*

*Three Genii (Spirits), 2 sopranos and 1 alto (boys' voices)*

*Tamino, tenor*

*Papageno, baritone*

*Sarastro, bass*

*Monostatos, tenor*

*Priests, tenors and basses*  
*Soldiers, tenors and basses*

## ACT I

Pursued by a giant serpent while hunting near the Temple of Isis, Prince Tamino faints with exhaustion. Three ladies, attendants of the Queen of the Night, kill the monster.

The three ladies leave to tell their ruler about the handsome stranger. When Tamino awakens, he is astonished to find the serpent dead. He hides when distant pipes announce the approach of Papageno, the Queen's bird-catcher, who enters singing of his carefree occupation and his search for a pretty wife.

Meeting Tamino, Papageno boasts that it was he who killed the serpent, at which the ladies return and padlock his mouth for lying. To Tamino they give a portrait of the Queen's daughter, Pamina, with whom he falls instantly in love.

The Queen herself appears, calling on Tamino to save her daughter, who has been abducted by Sarastro, whom the Queen describes as an evil sorcerer. The ladies give the prince a magic flute for protection during his search for Pamina. To the bird-catcher, his lips now unsealed, they present a set of bells.

The two young men then set off for Sarastro's palace. At Sarastro's court, three slaves discuss Pamina's escape from the cruel Monostatos, who soon drags in the recaptured girl. Papageno appears suddenly and Monostatos flees, frightened by the bird-catcher's feathered dress. Papageno tells Pamina of her impending rescue. They join in a duet in praise of love and depart to find Tamino.

Three Genii lead Tamino to Sarastro's realm. He seeks admittance and is informed by a priest that he stands before the Temple of Wisdom and that Sarastro took Pamina from the deceitful Queen of the Night for reasons that cannot yet be revealed. The priest refuses to divulge Pamina's fate, but a chorus from within announces that she lives. Overjoyed, Tamino plays the sound of Papageno's pipe, hurries away to search for his friend. No sooner is he gone than Pamina and the bird-catcher rush in, pursued by Monostatos and his slaves. Papageno renders the attackers harmless by playing an enchanting melody with his bells.

Sarastro, entering to the strains of a march of praise, reassures Pamina that she will be freed but warns her against her proud, ambitious mother. The High Priest punishes Monostatos when he brings in Tamino, whose gaze of love is already returned by Pamina. He then declares that he cannot release Pamina until Tamino and Papageno undergo mysterious trials in the Temple of Wisdom.

## ACT II

The priests march into a sanctuary, where Sarastro prays for Isis and Osiris to protect the two young men. Two priests lead the veiled Tamino and Papageno into the dark temple court, where they are warned of the trials ahead and sworn to silence. When the Queen's ladies

appear, trying to tempt the men from their purpose, the prince stands firm. The ladies flee in terror as a voice from the temple announces their doom.

Monostatos, finding Pamina asleep in the temple garden, tries to steal a kiss but is dismissed by the wrathful Queen of the Night who demands that Pamina kill Sarastro, and then vanishes.

Monostatos returns, but Pamina is rescued by Sarastro, who proclaims the principles of friendship and brotherly love.

Tamino and Papageno are led to the entrance of a crypt, where they encounter an old woman who insists that Papageno marry her or forever renounce all pleasures of the world. She disappears when he asks her name.

After the Genii have reassured the two novices and provided them with food, Pamina enters. Tamino has been forbidden to speak to her and at his silence she becomes disconsolate and leaves. The prince drags off the gluttonous Papageno.

Deep in the temple, the priests recount the steadfastness of Tamino, who is told by Sarastro that he still has two dangerous trials to undergo. Pamina is brought in, but the lovers are kept separate. Papageno, learning that he has failed in his initiation, pleads for a pretty girl.

He is rewarded by the old woman who, on his promise to be faithful, turns into the pert young Papagena. The girl is whisked away, however, by a priest who tells Papageno that he is not yet worthy of a wife.

The Genii, singing of wisdom's approaching dawn, save the despairing Pamina from suicide. Later, at the Caves of Fire and Water, two men in armor warn Tamino that he must pass the test of the elements. Joined by Pamina and aided by his magic flute, he is successful.

Meanwhile, Papageno, believing himself forsaken, tries to hang himself. He is saved by the Genii, who tell him to sound his bells. Papagena is joyfully returned to him. Immediately, the couple begins to plan a family.

The Queen of the Night storms the temple with her ladies and Monostatos, but is driven back and with a cry, sinks into the earth.

Hailed by the multitude that throngs the Temple of the Sun, Tamino and Pamina are initiated into the joys of Isis and Osiris, and thus the wisdom of Sarastro and the power of the sun and life triumph over the Queen of the Night and the forces of evil.

*(This synopsis was reprinted with permission from the metropolitan opera box series.)*

# *Additional Questions and Activities for Students*



## **CHARACTER SKETCHES**

**TAMINO:** The Handsome and Noble Prince

What are the three tasks he must complete to prove himself worthy?

What will help him reach his goal?

Will he have to face these trials by himself?

What kind of voice did Tamino have? Did his voice fit the character?

**PAPAGENO:** The Happy Bird-catcher

How does Papageno earn his living?

Who does he work for?

Who is the mysterious old woman that he keeps running into?

Is he also involved in saving Pamina?

Is he always an honest person?

Does he pass all three tests?

Did the music fit Papageno's character?

**PAMINA:** The Beautiful and Noble Princess

Why did Sarastro take her from her mother?

Do you think that Pamina will turn out to be like her mother?

What does her mother tell her to do to Sarastro? Does she do it?

How did she feel when Tamino refused to talk to her?

Do you think that she will ever forgive her mother?

Do you think that Mozart did a good job of composing music that shows Pamina as a honest and noble princess? What did he do that tells you this?

**THE QUEEN OF THE NIGHT**

What kind of person is The Queen of the Night?

Does she want to really rescue her daughter?

What does she ask her daughter, Pamina to do?

What kind of a voice does she have?

How did Mozart compose music to show how evil she was?

**SARASTRO**

Was he really a wicked sorcerer?

Why did he have Pamina kidnapped?

Why is the Queen of the Night so angry with him?  
Why does he ask Tamino to endure the three difficult trials?  
Is he honest, wise and truthful or is he really a villain?  
What kind of a voice does Sarastro have?  
Did Mozart compose music for him to suit his character? How?

#### THE THREE LADIES

Who do these three ladies work for?  
Why did they rescue Tamino from the Serpent?  
Why did they put a padlock on Papageno's mouth?  
Why do they try to lure Tamino and Pamina out of the temple?  
Did they ever appear separately?  
Did Mozart do a good job of composing appropriate music for them to sing?

#### THE THREE GENII

Who were these three beings?  
Will they guide Tamino and Papageno toward evil or good?  
Who do they work for, Sarastro or the Queen of the Night?  
How do they help save Pamina?  
How do their voices sound as compared to the three Ladies?

#### PAPAGENA

Is she really an old woman or a pretty young maiden?  
In some opera productions, she and Papageno are portrayed like half bird/half human. In this production, what do they look like on stage?  
Why was she changed from an old woman to a young girl?  
Do you think that Papageno would have liked her as well as an old woman?  
Will she ever change back?  
Did you like the song that Mozart composed for the duet with Papageno? What did he have them sing? Did it remind you of birds?

### **MORE QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES**

1. Define what opera is and what it is not.
2. How does music build the characters in the opera?
3. How does the music establish different moods for characters and scenes?
4. Improvise a scene between Mozart and Schikaneder where Schikaneder is trying to explain the plot of *The Magic Flute* and Mozart isn't buying into it at all and thinks it is a silly story. How is Mozart going to be convinced?

5. Improvise with music and dialogue one scene which might be Mozart's reaction to the first night of the production of *The Magic Flute*, when the public did not like it at all.
6. Pick a scene from *The Magic Flute* and identify characters that you would like to play. Improvise dialogue and melodies to tell the story in your own way using your voice and instruments available.

Keep in mind: Characters in the scene-good and bad  
What is the conflict?  
What is the solution?

7. Make a flow chart to show how the characters of *The Magic Flute* relate to each other.
8. Make up your own tall tale or fairy tale and compose simple songs to tell the story.
9. Choose a familiar tall tale or myth, legend or fairy tale and compose music to simple dialogues. Act out the story using the music composed for the dialogue.
10. If you know of a composer in your city, have him/her come to your classroom to tell you about what it takes for them to compose a song or an opera.
11. Listen to and watch other operas on television and video tapes and try to see as many LIVE PERFORMANCES as possible.
12. If Mozart were alive today, would he use the synthesizer to compose opera? Why or why not? How do you think he might change it? Would he change it or would he want it just as it is?
13. Would you consider (insert title of latest Disney movie/animated musical) as being something like an opera? Why or why not?
14. Check out CD's and videos of *The Magic Flute* from the library to listen to at home.

