



**AUSTIN OPERA**

# **CELEBRATE OPERA!**

*A Spectacular 40th Birthday Concert*

**Interactive Resource Guide**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|    |                                            |
|----|--------------------------------------------|
| 2  | <b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>                   |
| 3  | Welcome                                    |
| 4  | About Austin Opera                         |
| 5  | TEKS: Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills |
| 6  | What to Expect at the Opera                |
| 7  | What is opera?                             |
| 8  | Who works at the opera?                    |
| 9  | The Operatic Voice                         |
| 10 | Design Your Costume                        |
| 11 | A Celebrate Opera! Preview                 |
| 12 | Cast & Creative Team                       |
| 13 | Listening Map – “Nessun dorma”             |
| 14 | Meet Some Key Players                      |

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# Welcome to the Interactive Resource Guide for Celebrate Opera!

Welcome to *Celebrate Opera! A Spectacular 40th Birthday Concert!* We are thrilled to share this milestone with you as we honor Austin Opera's rich history and look forward to an exciting future. This program features some of the most beloved moments from opera's greatest works—a fitting celebration of four decades of music, storytelling, and community.

Inside this guide, we will take a look at some of the broad themes of opera; who works at the opera, operatic voice types, costume design, and a broad overview of the artform will start us off. Then, we'll take a closer look into the concert program and discover some of the exciting pieces waiting to be heard. Plus, a bit more!

Thank you for joining us on this musical journey. We look forward to seeing you at the opera!

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read "Mark Delp", is positioned at the bottom left of the page.



# About AUSTIN OPERA

Austin Opera, voted “Opera Company of the Year” for 2020 in a national BroadwayWorld.com poll, engages 35,000 community members annually through three mainstage productions, as well as a diverse slate of community and educational programming. Serving Central Texas since 1986, Austin Opera inspires audiences with its trademark blend of innovation and artistic excellence. With the leadership of General Director & CEO Annie Burrige and the Sarah and Ernest Butler Music Director Timothy Myers, Austin Opera presents a curated season of grand opera productions at the Long Center, the crown jewel of Austin performing arts venues. Combining the finest

American and international stars with the outstanding local talent of our Orchestra and Chorus, Austin Opera’s productions include accessible takes on classic operas as well as challenging new works that reinforce the continuing relevance of opera. Austin Opera is also a force in hundreds of classrooms across Central Texas, nurturing the next generation of opera audiences through its award-winning education programs. We work directly with educators, community leaders, students, and parents to make opera relevant, educational, and entertaining for students of all ages, offering much of our educational content online for free.

# TEKS: Texas Essential Knowledge & Skills

## **§117.208. Music, Middle School 1, Adopted 2013.**

(5) Critical evaluation and response. The student listens to, responds to, and evaluates music and musical performance in both formal and informal settings. The student is expected to:

(A) demonstrate appropriate concert and stage etiquette as an informed, actively involved listener and performer during live and recorded performances in a variety of settings.

## **§117.208. Music, Middle School 1, Adopted 2013.**

(5) Critical evaluation and response. The student listens to, responds to, and evaluates music and musical performance in both formal and informal settings. The student is expected to:

(B) identify criteria for listening to and evaluating musical performances.

## **§117.315. Theatre, Level I, Adopted 2013.**

(3) Creative expression: production. The student applies design, directing, and theatre production concepts and skills. The student is expected to:

(B) apply technical knowledge and skills safely to create or operate theatrical elements such as scenery, properties, lighting, sound, costumes, makeup, current technology, or publicity.



# WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE OPERA

Whether it's your first time at the opera, or you've been more times than you can count, these tips and tricks for your visit will help you feel comfortable and help the evening run smoothly.

## **Final Dress Rehearsal**

Because this is a final dress rehearsal, there will still be elements of the production that are in process. There may be stopping to fix mistakes, or singers "marking," which means singing lightly to save their voices. There will also be a tech table in the middle of the audience where the production team, including the director, costume, lighting, and set designers, are working hard to make sure all of the finishing details are in place.

## **Be quiet and courteous**

Be quiet and courteous to the actors on stage. Since a night at the opera is a live theater experience, things work a little differently than they would at a movie theater or school assembly. Since there are singers on stage actively working, our audience needs to be as respectful as possible.

## **Applaud after arias**

Let the singers know that you love the work they're doing. You can say "bravo" for men, "brava" for women, and "bravi" for a group!

## **How will I know what is going on?**

No need to worry if you don't know the language of the opera. There will be a highly visible screen with "supertitles" that provide a complete translation of the words being sung. The experience of watching an opera has been truly transformed by making it possible for everyone to follow the story.

## **Dress like yourself**

Whether you wear that dress or suit you've been saving for a special occasion, or you're more comfortable going out in jeans or basketball shorts, dress like yourself at the opera!

And finally... **Have fun!**

# WHAT IS OPERA?

by Dr. Charles Carson, 2025-2026 Scholar-in-Residence

For many of us, the word opera conjures up pictures of women singing in Viking helmets or — let's be real — the over-the-top drama of Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd cartoons. Well, to be honest, those cartoons aren't that far off. Operas are supposed to be dramatic! But what is opera, actually?

The word “opera” comes from the Latin word for “work,” and that's what it is — all of the arts (music, singing, acting, movement, and design) combined to give you larger-than-life characters and dramatic situations in fantastic locations. (It's like TikTok, but live!)

Opera as we know it today began in 16th-century Italy, when musicians and thinkers got together to try to re-create the “pure” drama of Ancient Greece. For them, this meant blurring the lines between singing

and speaking, and using instruments to help singers communicate deeper meanings than acting alone could. They thought this unified approach would speak more directly to audiences. What do you think?

The flexibility of opera means that these elements can be combined in many different ways. Opera typically uses instrumental music (the orchestra), arias (solo singers), and choruses (a choir) to tell many different kinds of stories — from hilarious comedies, to heartbreaking tragedies. The music can be soft and wholesome, or roaring and thunderous. It can be used to describe a rainbow, express love at first sight, or show a daring duel between our hero and the villain. When all of the elements of opera are combined, the result is often larger than life!



# WHO WORKS AT THE OPERA?

It takes more than singers to put on an opera. Although you may see only the performers in the spotlight, many people behind the scenes make what you see possible.

## BACKSTAGE

The **Stage Director** tells singers how to move on stage so that the audience can understand what is being sung, even if it is in a different language.

The **Technical Director** coordinates lighting, set, and costumes, supervises the building and mounting of scenery onstage, and oversees the work of all crews during rehearsals and performances.

The **Scenic Designer** is responsible for the visual appearance and function of all scenic elements in an opera to help bring the story to life on stage. They plan or design the set and supervise its construction.

The **Lighting Designer** plans or designs the color, intensity, and frequency of the light onstage.

The **Wig and Make-Up Designer** creates and

oversees hairstyles, wigs & make-up.

The **Costume Designer** will help the singers accurately portray their characters in the opera's setting.

The **Properties (Props) Manager** is in charge of finding objects for the singers to use while on stage that will correctly reflect the time period of the opera and

give the actions on stage a more realistic feel.

The **Choreographer** invents dances and movements and teaches them to dancers and/or cast members.

The **Crew or Stagehands** assist in the construction, installation, and changes of the set, costumes, lights, and props. Stagehands know when to change the scenery.

## ON STAGE

**Cast:** All singers and actors who appear onstage.

**Actors:** Performers who have dialogue but do not sing.

**Principal:** A singer who performs a large role in the opera.

**Comprimario:** A singer who specializes in the small character roles of opera, from the Italian meaning "next to the first".

**Supernumeraries (or Supers):** Actors who participate in the action but do not speak or sing.

**Dancers:** These performers train for years and perform choreographed routines onstage. From flamenco to ballet, dance plays a supporting role in countless operas.

**Chorus:** A group of singers with more than one person singing each part, like a choir. The choruses in opera represent certain groups required by the story such as soldiers, priests, peasants, or townspeople. Certain operas include the use of a children's chorus.

## IN THE PIT

The **Conductor or Maestro** shows the orchestra when to play and the singers when to sing. The conductor controls how fast or slow the music goes.

The **Orchestra** is made up of a group of musicians who play instruments. They typically stay with the conductor in the **orchestra pit** during operas, as opposed to onstage for concerts.

What is the orchestra pit? It is a partially covered area right in front of the stage. You'll generally only be able to see the back of the conductor's head in the pit if you are an audience member. A composer typically uses woodwinds, brass, percussion, and string instruments in various combinations in the orchestra to help express a variety of emotions and environments.

**Woodwinds** include piccolos, flutes, and reed instruments such as the oboe, clarinet, and bassoon, all requiring a very focused stream of air. **Brass** instruments produce sound through the buzzing or vibration of the player's lips resonating within a tubular chamber. They include horns, trumpets, and trombones. **Percussion** is a broad term describing any instrument that is struck,

scraped, or rubbed by hand. Timpani, snare drum, triangle, cymbals, xylophone, glockenspiel, and chimes are just an example of a few utilized by composers. **Strings** include any instrument that produces sound from vibrating strings such as violins, violas, cellos, double bass, and harp.

## IN THE HOUSE

**The Audience** (that's you!) also has an important role to play. It would not be a real performance without you! Sometimes as an audience member, you have to be creative too. A setting might be suggested by a few panels or a background requiring you to engage your imagination. You can become a part of the communal experience, living and breathing with the cast and musicians as they create art onstage.

# THE OPERATIC VOICE

Being an opera singer is hard work! Singers need to be physically strong and have superb technique in order to sustain long phrases (musical thoughts): this means they have excellent control of both the inhalation and the exhalation of their breath. Likewise, their voices must maintain a resonance using cavities in the face to increase the audibility of the voice in both the head (mouth, sinuses) and the chest cavities. All of this resonance is necessary to achieve the volume required to be heard above the orchestra that accompanies the singers. Opera singers do not usually use microphones, so they must project their voices throughout a whole

theatre using only their muscles and technique! All voices are defined by both the actual voice "type" and the selection of repertoire for which the voice is ideally suited. The range, pitch, and tone of a singer's voice will determine what kind of role they will play in the opera.

[Watch this video from the Royal Ballet and Opera to hear the different voice types in action.](#)

Below is a list of voice types (and ranges) commonly found in operas:

## Treble Voice Types



### Soprano (sopra = over)

The highest pitched female voice. Composers often (but not always) write the female lead role in an opera for a soprano. Soprano voices vary by sound type: coloratura sopranos, who can sing very high notes and rapid passages with ease; dramatic sopranos, whose voices have great power; and lyric sopranos, whose voices have exceptional beauty and can sustain long passages.

Photo: Hailey Clark in Austin Opera's production of *Pagliacci*.



### Mezzo-soprano ("mezzo" = "medium")

Lower than the soprano and higher than the contralto. Mezzos often play either the character of a young boy (this is called a trouser role), a complex character with energy and awareness of life, or an evil character. Bizet's *Carmen* is one of the most famous mezzo roles in opera, and is a rare lead role for a mezzo.

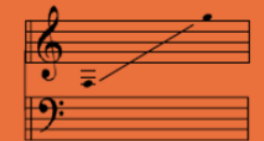
Photo: Cecilia Hall in Austin Opera's production of *Carmen*.



### Contralto ("contra" = "against" & "alto" = "high")

The lowest pitched female voice, these singers have a deep, well-rounded sound. Contraltos are rarer than sopranos or mezzos, and they are usually given the role of a maid, mother, or grandmother.

Photo: Marian Anderson, one of the finest contraltos of her time and a force in the Civil Rights movement.



### Countertenor ("contra" = against, tenor)

The highest pitched male voice, Countertenors typically sing in the mezzo-soprano range, using a well-developed falsetto technique combined with their full voice. They have a distinct, ethereal tone that is often described as bright, pure, and otherworldly. Countertenors are primarily associated with early music, particularly Baroque opera and sacred music, but they have also found a place in contemporary opera and even crossover genres.

Photo: Anthony Roth Costanzo in the Metropolitan Opera's production of *Akhnaten*.



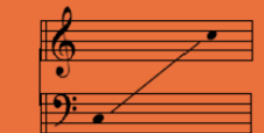
## Non-Treble Voice Types



### Tenor ("tenere" = "to hold")

The highest sounding male voice: often the leading role. Tenors, like sopranos, can have a lyric or dramatic quality. Luciano Pavarotti was one of the world's most famous lyric tenors. Tenors typically play characters that fall in love with sopranos.

Photo: Efraín Corralejo in Austin Opera's production of *Cruzar la Cara de la Luna*.



### Baritone (from the Greek term for "deep sounding")

These voices are more mellow-sounding and slightly lower than tenors. The roles sung by baritones are usually father figures or counts and other nobles, and these are often important roles in the story.

Photo: Will Liverman in Austin Opera's production of *The Pearl Fishers*.



**Bass ("low")** Bases are the lowest-sounding human voices, and they often play roles of wise and older characters in opera, like kings, emperors, or gods. They can also play profoundly evil characters. The basso profundo is the lowers voice in singing, and is commonly heard in Russian opera.

Photo: Musa Ngqungwana in Austin Opera's production of *The Barber of Seville*.



# DESIGN YOUR COSTUME

## 1) WATCH

Design Challenge – Designing and Making a Costume (Royal Opera House)

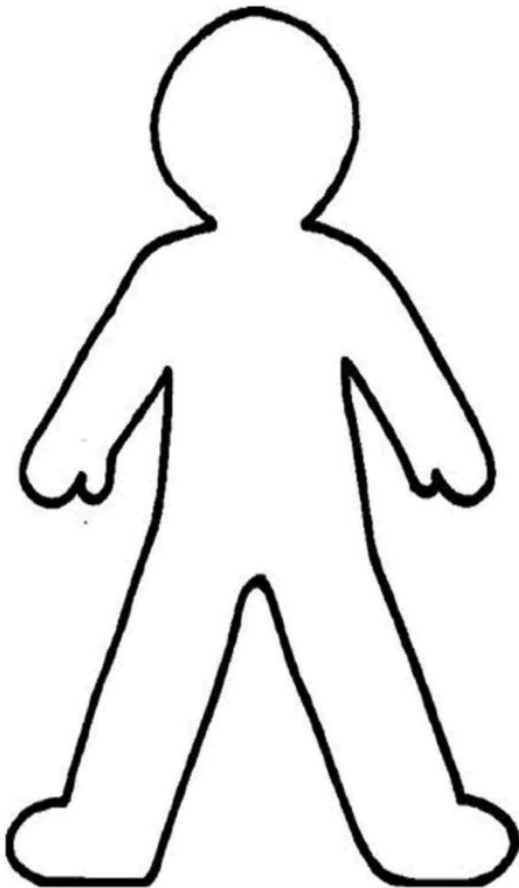
## 2) YOUR CHALLENGE

Design a costume for a character based on you. Use at least five visual elements (colors, symbols, accessories, fabrics, props) that communicate your life, interests, and values. Label each element with a short note. Ideas to consider (pick any):

- **Head/Accessories:** headphones (music you love), cap (team/club), hair clip
- **Top/Jacket:** colors/patterns that represent mood, place, identity; patches or embroidery for communities you belong to
- **Bottoms/Shoes:** practical vs. style—what does that say about you?
- **Props:** book, instrument, sketchbook, camera, tool you actually use
- **Pins/Buttons/Ribbons:** causes you care about (environment, equity, mental health)
- **Textures/Fabrics:** denim, mesh, satin, knit—what feeling does each add?

## 3) DRAW YOUR COSTUME

Use the **blank body outline** and sketch your design.



In this activity, you'll be able to design your own costume for a character based on you! Follow the instructions below to come up with your **YOU** costume.



**Designer tip:** If a detail doesn't communicate something, adjust it until it does.

## 4) REFLECTION

Which **one** detail communicates the most about you, and why?

If this costume had to work **onstage**, what would you change for visibility, durability, or movement?

# A CELEBRATE OPERA! PREVIEW

This concert is a sampler of well-known pieces from opera alongside Spanish-language works and musical theatre. You'll hear several "heavy hitters," including *The Magic Flute* Overture (Mozart), *Nessun dorma* from *Turandot* (Puccini), selections from *Il trovatore* (Verdi), *Habanera* from *Carmen* (Bizet), and the *Te Deum* from *Tosca* (Puccini). The program also features Spanish-language selections such as *Granada, Dime* from *Zorro*, and a duet from *Ofrenda*, reflecting Austin Opera's ongoing Latinx initiatives and partnerships.

The second half includes musical theatre numbers—I Could Have Danced All Night, The Impossible Dream, Climb Ev'ry Mountain, Send in the Clowns, Somewhere, and the ensemble finale *Make Our Garden Grow*. These pieces are included because they use many of the same tools as opera: sung storytelling, live orchestra, and clear character focus.

Overall, the concert is structured to show range—solo arias, ensembles, chorus moments, overtures, and a final piece that brings everyone together. It also marks Austin Opera's 40th year, highlighting the company's history in the community and the variety of work it presents. Consider listening for how the orchestra sets the mood, how singers shape long phrases, and how ensembles balance multiple voices.



**Scan the QR and cue up the Celebrate Opera! playlist—listen ahead, find your favorite moments, and come ready to experience them live!**



# CAST



**Leah Crocetto**  
**Soprano**

[Learn more about Leah Crocetto](#)



**Zoie Reams**  
**Mezzo-soprano**

[Learn more about Zoie Reams](#)



**Jonathan Burton**  
**Tenor**

[Learn more about Jon Burton](#)



**Malcolm MacKenzie**  
**Baritone**

[Learn more about Malcolm MacKenzie](#)

# Creative Team



**Timothy Myers**  
**Sarah & Ernest Butler Music Director**

[Learn more About Timothy Myers](#)



**Rebecca Herman**  
**Stage Director**

# PUCCINI'S "NESSUN DORMA"

"Nessun dorma" is an aria from Puccini's *Turandot*. The character Calaf sings the night before a life-or-death challenge, repeating the word **vincerò**—"I will win." The music grows steadily in range, volume, and orchestral color.

## BEFORE YOU LISTEN

**Predict:** What musical choices might make a final note feel powerful—**melody, range, volume, orchestration, tempo**? Name two and why.



## WHILE YOU LISTEN

Answer in short phrases or bullet points.

**Structure:** Mark three timestamps (approximate) that feel like beginning, middle, and final build.

- ☐ Beginning:
- ☐ Middle:
- ☐ Final Build:

**Voice focus:** Circle the best description of the vocal line overall:

smooth/legato      speech-like      wide leap      mostly stepwise      low/medium/high range

**Dynamics:** Where do you first notice a crescendo (getting louder)? Write the lyric word or a timestamp and what changes (voice, strings, brass, etc.).

**Orchestra's role:** Name two instruments or sections you hear clearly near the end and what each adds (e.g., shimmer, weight, brightness).

## AFTER YOU LISTEN

Why does the final "Vincerò!" land so strongly? **Choose two:**

higher pitch (tessitura)      longer held note      louder dynamics      thicker orchestration      faster tempo

**In one sentence, explain your choices.**

# MEET A KEY PLAYER

## CONDUCTOR'S SPOTLIGHT

with Sarah and Ernest Butler Music Director  
Timothy Myers



1. Tell us about your work as the Sarah and Ernest Butler Music Director.
2. What does *Celebrate Opera!* mean to you?
3. How did you decide to program this concert with the Austin Opera team?
4. What would you like audiences to know before coming to the theatre?



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