PATHWAYS FOR UNDERSTANDING

Don Giovanni by W.A. Mozart

The Metropolitan Opera Guild
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An Introduction to
Pathways for Understanding Study Materials

The goal of Pathways for Understanding materials is to provide multiple “pathways” for learning about a specific opera as well as the operatic art form, and to allow teachers to create lessons that work best for their particular teaching style, subject area, and class of students.

Meet the Characters / The Story/ Resources
Fostering familiarity with specific operas as well as the operatic art form, these sections describe characters and story, and provide historical context. Guiding questions are included to suggest connections to other subject areas, encourage higher-order thinking, and promote a broader understanding of the opera and its potential significance to other areas of learning.

Guided Listening
The Guided Listening section highlights key musical moments from the opera and provides areas of focus for listening to each musical excerpt. Main topics and questions are introduced, giving teachers of all musical backgrounds (or none at all) the means to discuss the music of the opera with their students. A complimentary CD of the full opera, as well as the full libretto (with English translation), are provided as part of the Guided Listening resources and are sent via mail.

Guiding Questions / Discussion Points
Guiding Questions or Discussion Points appear within several sections of these materials to spark discussion in your classroom and facilitate student exploration. Note that these questions are not intended to serve as “official” learning outcomes for the opera experience; rather, we hope that they act as a point of departure for prompting meaningful analysis and conversation amongst students. We are aware that teachers incorporate the study of opera into their classrooms in many ways and to address a variety of student outcomes, and we expect that individual teachers will adapt these materials to best serve their specific curriculum and instructional goals.

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**CD Provided**
- Mozart: Don Giovanni
  - Siepi, Della Casa, Danco, Gueden, Corena, Dermota
  - Wiener Staatsopernchor and Philharmoniker
  - Josef Krips (Conductor)
- Copyright 2009 Decca Music Group Limited

**Libretto Provided**
- Don Giovanni
  - Music by W.A. Mozart
  - Libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte after the play by Tirso de Molina
  - English version by W.H. Auden and Chester Kallman
  - G. Schirmer, Inc.
- Copyright 1961 by G. Schirmer, Inc.
Production Information

Music: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Text (Italian): Lorenzo da Ponte, after a libretto by Giovanni Bertati
World Premiere: Prague, National Theater
October 29, 1787

Meet the Characters

Don Giovanni (baritone): A nobleman obsessed with seducing women. He is willing to lie, cheat, and even murder to add more women to his list of conquests.

Donna Anna (soprano): The daughter of the Commendatore, strong, brave, and determined to avenge her father’s death.

Donna Elvira (soprano): A noblewoman once seduced by Don Giovanni, she has followed him to Seville to expose his crimes to the world.

Zerlina (soprano): A lovely peasant girl, engaged to Masetto, but attracted to Don Giovanni.

Don Ottavio (tenor): Donna Anna’s fiancé.

Masetto (baritone): Zerlina's fiancé, a peasant. He is in love with Zerlina, but doesn’t trust her by herself-especially not with a nobleman.

Commendatore (bass): Donna Anna’s father. After Don Giovanni kills him, the Commendatore returns from the dead as a statue to warn his murderer to repent.

Leporello (bass): Don Giovanni’s servant. Leporello hates working for the Don, which usually involves lying, cheating, stealing, and putting his own life on the line so that his master can seduce more women.
The Story of *Don Giovanni*: Synopsis

**Act I**

*Seville, 16th century.* Leporello keeps watch outside the Commendatore’s palace at night, unhappy with his position as servant to the nobleman Don Giovanni (Introduction: “Notte e giorno faticar”). Suddenly, the Commendatore’s daughter, Donna Anna, rushes out of the building, struggling with the masked Giovanni. Her cries for help wake her father, who challenges Giovanni to a duel and is killed in the ensuing fight. Giovanni and Leporello escape. Anna runs for help and returns with her fiancé, Don Ottavio. When she discovers her father’s body, she makes Ottavio swear to avenge his death.

In the morning, Giovanni and Leporello accidentally encounter one of Giovanni’s former conquests, Donna Elvira, in despair over his betrayal (“Ah! chi mi dice mai”). Recognizing her too late to make his exit undetected, Giovanni pushes Leporello forward to explain. Leporello tells Elvira she is neither the first nor the last woman to fall victim to Don Giovanni and shows her the catalogue he keeps, with the name of every woman Giovanni has seduced (“Madamina, il catalogo è questo”).

Peasants celebrate the marriage of Masetto and Zerlina. Attracted to the bride, Giovanni invites the entire party to his palace and sends them all ahead, except Zerlina. Alone with her, he tells her she is destined for a better life and promises to marry her (Duet: “Là ci darem la mano”). As they are about to leave for the palace, Elvira appears and vehemently warns Zerlina about her suitor (“Ah, fuggi il traditor!”), then leads her away. Anna and Ottavio enter and ask Giovanni’s help in finding the Commendatore’s murderer. Just then, Elvira appears again and warns Anna not to trust Giovanni, who insists that Elvira is mad. Anna and Ottavio wonder what to believe (Quartet: “Non ti fidar, o misera”). As Elvira runs off, followed by Giovanni, Anna suddenly recognizes his voice as that of her father’s murderer. Devastated but determined, she once more asks Ottavio to avenge her (“Or sai chi l’onore”). Left alone, Ottavio thinks about his love for Anna and wonders how to restore her peace of
mind ("Dalla sua pace"). Giovanni tells Leporello to get ready for an evening of drinking and dancing ("Fin ch’han dal vino").

In the garden of Giovanni’s palace, Zerlina asks Masetto to forgive her ("Batti, batti, o bel Masetto"). When Giovanni’s voice is heard, she becomes nervous and Masetto’s suspicions return. Giovanni enters and leads Zerlina and Masetto inside. Anna, Elvira, and Ottavio appear masked, and Giovanni instructs Leporello to invite them in. In the ballroom, Giovanni dances with Zerlina and, while Leporello distracts Masetto, drags Zerlina into the adjoining room. When she cries for help and runs back into the ballroom, Giovanni blames Leporello. Anna, Elvira, and Ottavio take off their masks and, along with Zerlina and Masetto, accuse Giovanni. Though momentarily surprised, he manages to outface them and slips away.

**Act II**

Leporello threatens to resign, but when Giovanni offers him money, he decides otherwise. The men exchange hats and cloaks in the dark under Elvira’s window, and Leporello, in his master’s clothes, leads Elvira away, leaving Giovanni free to serenade her maid ("Deh, vieni alla finestra"). When Masetto arrives with a band of peasants he has gathered to hunt down Giovanni, the disguised Don divides them into search parties and sends them off in various directions. He then beats up Masetto and leaves. Zerlina finds her bruised fiancé and comforts him ("Vedrai, carino").

Later that night, Leporello—still believed by Elvira to be Giovanni—is surprised by Anna, Ottavio, Zerlina, and Masetto, who all denounce the supposed Don, despite Elvira’s protests. Fearing for his life, Leporello reveals his true identity and escapes. Ottavio proclaims that he will take revenge on Giovanni and asks the others to look after Anna ("Il mio tesoro"). Elvira thinks about her betrayal by Giovanni, whom she still loves in spite of everything ("Mi tradì quell’alma ingrata").

Leporello finds Giovanni in a cemetery. As he talks about his latest conquest, Giovanni is interrupted by the voice of the statue on the Commendatore’s grave. It warns him
that by morning he will laugh no longer. Giovanni forces the terrified Leporello to invite the statue to dinner (Duet: “O statua gentilissima”), and the statue accepts. Ottavio once again asks Anna to stop grieving and marry him, but she says she can’t until her father’s death hasn’t been avenged (“Non mi dir”).

Leporello serves supper in Giovanni’s palace. Elvira arrives and makes a last desperate attempt to persuade Giovanni to change his life, but he only laughs at her. Elvira runs off. There is a knock on the door and the statue enters. Giovanni greets it while Leporello hides under the table. The statue asks Giovanni to repent (“Don Giovanni, a cenar teco”). When he boldly refuses he is consumed by flames. Elvira, Anna, Ottavio, Zerlina, Masetto, and Leporello appear, contemplating their futures and the fate of an immoral man (“Questo è il fin di chi fa mal”).

THE METROPOLITAN OPERA
The History of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*

The Don Juan Character

The character of Don Juan, on whom Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* is based, was introduced to the world in *El Burlador de Sevilla* (1630), a play by Spanish monk and playwright Tirso de Molina. There was nothing particularly special about Molina’s play; it was a cautionary tale about the dangers of atheism. It was well-written, but was never considered important during Molina’s lifetime. The character of Don Juan, however, was to fascinate Europe for centuries, appearing in thousands of plays, stories, epic poems, operas, ballets, and philosophical treatises under various aliases—among them Don Juan, Don John, and Don Giovanni.

Artists inspired by the Don Juan theme have included Molière, Goldoni, Corneille, E.T.A Hoffman, Pushkin, George Bernard Shaw, Mozart, Gluck, and Richard Strauss. Every version of the story introduces new characters, episodes, and subtexts—and in each new incarnation the Don’s personality and motivation change. A detailed history of Don Juan’s evolution throughout the ages would read like a philosophical, religious, and artistic history of Europe.

Between the first performance of *El Burlador de Sevilla* and the premiere of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, the Don Juan story had already undergone several transformations. Tirso de Molina’s Don Juan was a baroque hero, rebellious and excessive, impulsive, driven by the desire for action. As Don Juan’s story spread to other countries, he lost some of these characteristics. In Italy the story was embraced by the Commedia dell’arte, a type of improvised street theater featuring masks, physical comedy, and lots of dirty jokes. Commedia dell’arte troupes celebrated the Don’s sexual prowess, made his valet into an Italian trickster, and added new commedia-style characters and gags. The Italian Don Juan became an unbelievably selfish man, controlled by his monstrous appetites and relentless in the pursuit of sexual pleasures.

It was probably the Italian Don Juan that Molière used as a model for his brilliant (though convoluted) version of the story, *Don Juan, ou le festin de pierre* (1665). Molière’s subversive play, written during Louis XIV’s reign, portrays Don Juan as an
inactive noble who has been spoiled by his lavish lifestyle. Lazy, obsessed with beauty, and valuing nothing but his own pleasure, Don Juan would have been right at home in the King Louis' court. He has reasoned God out of his life, and mocks any religious sentiment. His obsession with women stems from his social position and life philosophy.

In England Don Juan took a particularly brutal turn in Shadwell's *The Libertine* (1676). Don John, Shadwell's hero, was the first in a long line of Don Juan characters to directly explain the philosophy behind his actions. Don John argues that all desires stem from nature, and since anything natural cannot be bad, desire justifies the most horrible crimes. Don John lives by his philosophy; before the play begins he has already committed about thirty murders-including that of his own father. He is essentially violent rather than passionate—but defends his crimes with deadly logic.

Da Ponte (1787), Mozart's librettist for *Don Giovanni*, borrowed freely from all the Don Juan stories that had preceded his libretto, from Molina and Molière to commedia dell'arte. He also added some new features to the story, notably the character of Donna Anna, whose strength and determination have captured the imagination of many writers since. Romanticists were particularly drawn to Donna Anna; E.T.A. Hoffman declared that she would have been Don Juan's true love, had she not come into his life too late to save him from his own desires. Richard Wagner himself was convinced that when the opera begins, Don Juan has already had his way with a willing Donna Anna.

After *Don Giovanni* the story of the libertine seducer continued to evolve. E.T.A. Hoffman wrote about Don Juan as a romantic idealist, eternally frustrated by his search for the perfect woman. The Don's quest is fueled by his conviction that only true love will bring him transcendence. Later, in the 20th century, George Bernard Shaw used Don Juan as a mouthpiece for his own complicated philosophies in the third act of *Man and Superman*, a play-within-a-play entitled *Don Juan in Hell*. Others have described Don Juan as the world's greatest lover or even as irresistible to women—both views that would have surprised Tirso de Molina.
But to most people, Mozart and Da Ponte's opera remains the ultimate version of the Don Juan story, presenting the myth in all its emotional range and levels of meaning—and the character of Don Giovanni in all his complexity.

THE METROPOLITAN OPERA
Guided Listening: “Notte e giorno faticar”  
CD 1, Track 2 | Libretto pp. 1 – 2

A street in 18th century Seville. Leporello complains about working for his master, the indecent Don Giovanni, who is actively pursuing an engaged woman named Donna Anna. Observing the scene, the woman’s father challenges Don Giovanni to a duel. Don Giovanni fatally wounds the Commendatore, while the woman’s fiancée, Don Octavio, attempts to find the culprit.

Discussion Points

• Based on the prelude music to this piece, how would you describe the general mood of the scene?
  o Does it seem happy, sad, light, or serious? What about the music gives you that impression?
  o Read the libretto for the scene. Does your sense of the scene’s tone change in anyway? If so, how did the libretto influence your thinking?

• At 1:40, the string sections of the orchestra play a few measures of transitional music. Why do you think Mozart wrote transitional music at this part in the scene? What do you imagine is happening on stage?
  o Do you envision that any of the characters singing on stage are aware of one another? If so, who is aware of who on stage? How are you able to tell?

• How do you think Donna Anna is feeling when she enters the scene?
  o What musical components or gestures within her music give you an idea about how she is feeling?
  o What is her reaction to Don Giovanni?
  o Do you think she is pleased with his advances? Use information from the text and musical examples to support your thoughts.

• During the trio section with Leporello, Donna Anna, and Don Giovanni, which two characters tend to sing together? Which character serves as a constant accompaniment to the general scene?

  continued on next page
Discussion Points (continued)

- At 3:04 there is a musical shift with the entrance of the string section. Here the Commendatore enters the scene.
  - What feeling does the entrance of the string section give you? Is it a happy, sad, angry, or foreboding sound?
  - What might this string section foreshadow? Predict what will happen later in this scene and the scenes to come.
Guided Listening: “Ah! chi mi dice mai”  
CD 1, Track 5 (00:00-03:14) | Libretto pp. 4 – 5

Following the scene with Donna Anna and her family, Leporello and Don Giovanni take refuge a few streets away. Leporello attempts to quit his job, but Giovanni doesn’t allow it. Then, Donna Elvira enters the scene looking for her disloyal lover – Don Giovanni. Giovanni doesn’t recognize the woman and wishes to “comfort” her.

Discussion Points

• This is our first time meeting Donna Elvira in the opera. What is your initial reaction to her as a character?
  o Does she seem happy, sad, or angry? How are you able to tell? What about her music gives you a defined sense of her character?
  o Review the libretto. Does the text give you any additional information about how Donna Elvira arrived in this situation?
  o Who do you imagine Elvira is singing about? Do you think Don Giovanni understands the situation? How are you able to tell?
  o Explain your understanding of the circumstances with concrete references from the music and libretto.

• How would you describe Donna Elvira’s melodic line in this trio?
  o Would you consider it to be a linear melody, or would you describe it as containing multiple jumps and leaps?
  o What might this style of music imply about Donna Elvira as a character? Do you imagine that she is level-headed and calm, or emotional and disoriented in this moment?
  o How might the structure of her melody parallel her feelings?
  o How is Don Giovanni’s melody line structured? How is it different from Donna Elvira’s melody line?

• How do you imagine Leporello feels about his master, Don Giovanni? Do you think he respects him as a boss? Do you think he believes Don Giovanni’s actions are right or wrong? Explain.
Guided Listening: “Là ci darem la mano”
CD 1, Track 11 | Libretto pp. 9 – 10

After witnessing Zerlina and Masetto, a peasant couple, celebrating their new engagement, Don Giovanni decides to seduce the peasant girl for sport. Giovanni invites the couple to his castle, has Leporello distract Masetto, and tells Zerlina to forget her fiancée. Donna Elvira enters the scene and warns the young girl of Don Giovanni’s true intentions.

Discussion Points

• Based on the scene of events, do you think that Don Giovanni was successful in seducing Zerlina?
  o How are you able to tell? Why might it be so easy for Zerlina to give up her engagement to Masetto? Do you think she really loves Masetto?
  o Do you suppose that Don Giovanni is being truthful about his love for Zerlina?
  o Do you think that Donna Elvira was able to enlighten Zerlina to Don Giovanni’s true intentions? Explain.

• At what point in the music do you think Zerlina gives in to Don Giovanni’s advances? Do you think the music and/or text might give this point away to the audience? If so, how?
  o When the pair begins singing in unison, do you think this reflects an emotional shift? Why?
  o What do you think the staging is like at this point?
  o Review the libretto for this scene. What are they saying in these moments?

• Why do you think that Donna Elvira’s entrance into this scene is recitative and not an additional melody line?
  o Why might Mozart have distinguished Donna Elvira’s music in this way?
  o How is Donna Elvira’s music different than either Zerlina or Don Giovanni’s music? How might Donna Elvira’s music orient the audience to the type of character that she is in this story?
  o Do you find Donna Elvria or Zerlina’s music to be more pleasing? Why?
Guided Listening: “Batti, batti, o bel Masetto”
CD 2, Track 9 (00:00-03:34) | Libretto pp. 15 – 16

Masetto has doubts about his fiancée and is angered by what happened between her and Don Giovanni. Here Zerlina tries to explain herself.

Discussion Points

• What is your reaction to Zerlina’s music? How would you describe it?
  o Is Zerlina’s melody simplistic or complicated?
  o How old do you think Zerlina is? How are you able to predict her age from her music?
  o Do you think that Zerlina is naïve or worldly? Why do you think she was so easily swayed by Don Giovanni?
  o Do you think that Masetto will forgive her? Predict Masetto’s reaction to Zerlina’s plea for forgiveness in this scene.

• What type of accompanying orchestration do you hear in this piece? Do you hear woodwinds, strings, brass, and/or percussion instruments predominately?
  o How would you describe the musical sounds played by the orchestra? Is the music strident or pleasing, light or heavy, legato or staccato?
  o If you were the composer of this piece, what orchestral sections would you use to accompany Zerlina’s aria? Why?

• At 2:22 a musical device is used. What do we call this musical device?
  o Is this technique used at any other time in the aria? If so, where?
  o Why do you imagine Mozart wrote this technique at this specific musical moment? Do you think it symbolizes an emotional shift for Zerlina? Explain.

• How does the music change after 2:22? Do you hear repeated musical material, or is this new musical writing in this section?
  o Read the libretto. What is Zerlina saying in this moment?
  o Does the music become more or less melismatic throughout the selection? Describe why you think this musical change was written for Zerlina in this instant.
Guided Listening: “Metà di voi qua vadano”
CD 2, Track 16 (00:00-02:53) | Libretto pp. 26 – 27

Leporello, dressed as Don Giovanni, has taken Donna Elvira away from her home so that Giovanni can seduce her maid. Don Giovanni, dressed as Leporello, is approached by the angry mob looking for vengeance on the Don. Giovanni tells them they can find “Giovanni” down the road with Donna Elvira.

Discussion Points

• How would you describe the tone of this piece?
  o Does Don Giovanni seem happy, sad, nervous, and/or relaxed? How are you able to tell?
  o If you were Don Giovanni, how would you feel in this moment? Would you be nervous and scared, or at ease and relaxed? Why?

• What do you call the musical technique used at 0:55 when Don Giovanni emphasizes the beginning of the phrase?
  o Do you hear this technique used again at a later point in the work? If so, where?
  o Why do you think that Mozart wrote this particular phrase using this technique? Do you think it was a specific choice or an accidental one? Why or why not?

• At 1:46 the musical articulation used by Don Giovanni changes.
  o How does his melody line change in structure and tone?
  o Review the libretto. What is Don Giovanni saying at this moment?
  o What do you imagine is happening on stage at this time?
    ▪ Do you think that Don Giovanni is engaging the angry mob as he sings, or do you think he’s singing more for himself? What about the music makes you feel this way? Explain your reasoning.

• What type of person do you think Don Giovanni is? Do you think he is kind or malicious? Do you believe him to be self-center or giving? Based on his actions throughout the opera, explain your thinking.
Leporello, still dressed as Don Giovanni, hides Donna Elvira in Donna Anna’s courtyard. Leporello leaves, telling Elvira he will return shortly. Shortly thereafter, Anna, Ottavio, Zerlina, and Masetto arrive to take vengeance on the Don. When the mob finds the “Don” they nearly take their revenge on him, but Leporello reveals his true identity, and they stop their attack.

Discussion Points

- Based on this scene, what is your sense of Leporello’s moral fiber and general nature?
  - Do you imagine he takes orders from Don Giovanni because he’s required to do so, or because there is a part of him that enjoys the adventure? How can you tell? Explain.

- How is Don Ottavio’s music different from Leporello’s music?
  - Do they sing in the same or different vocal ranges? Do they have the same voice part?
  - What is Don Ottavio’s voice part?
  - What is Leporello’s voice part?
  - How might you describe Don Ottavio’s music? Does he sing fast or slow, legato (“smooth”) or staccato (“short”), sweetly or abrasively? What might this imply about the type of character that he is?
  - How might you describe Leporello’s music? Is his music the same or different than Don Ottavio’s in tone and articulation? Explain.

- At 1:49 Donna Anna begins singing. How would you describe her music?
  - After reading the libretto, what is she saying? What might be making her feel this way specifically?
  - What percussive instrument do you hear introduce Donna Anna’s music?
    - Does this instrument introduce her music with a positive or negative tone? What about the sounds and the text make you feel this way?

- Based on the end of the scene, what do you think will happen in the remaining scenes? Do you think that the mob will get their revenge on Don Giovanni? Do you think Don Giovanni will change his ways? Discuss possible endings with your peers!
Guided Listening: “Il mio tesoro intanto”
CD 3, Track 4 | Libretto pp. 30

Don Ottavio wishes vengeance on Don Giovanni. In this scene he speaks of his desire to consol his Donna Anna through Don Giovanni’s ruin.

Discussion Points

- What various musical elements and gestures did you hear in Don Ottavio’s aria?
  - Was his music challenging or simplistic?
  - Was it expressive in nature? What about his singing gave you that impression?
  - Discuss the elements in the music that you found interesting and/or that you found enjoyable with your class.

- At 0:58, when Don Ottavio sings his sustained phrase, what instruments do you hear accompanying him?
  - What melody are they playing? Have you heard this melody before? If so, when?
  - Why do you think Mozart decided to use this melody and these instruments to accompany Don Ottavio during this section? Do you think it was purposeful? Explain your thinking.

- After listening to this aria, did you hear any repeated musical material? If so, where did you hear it, and what was repeated?
  - Read the libretto. Was the text repeated as well? Take a moment to map out the musical form of this piece.

- How would you describe the postlude to this aria? Does this section reference any music heard within the aria before?
  - Since this postlude music serves as the conclusion to the piece, what do you imagine this music implies for Don Ottavio in the future?
  - Does the postlude give you hope for Donna Anna and Don Ottavio, or do you think it foreshadows something darker? How did you come to this conclusion? Explain.
Guided Listening: “Non mi dir, bell’idol mio”  
CD 3, Track 9 | Libretto pp. 33

Don Ottavio, having been unsuccessful in defiling Don Giovanni, tells Donna Anna that the villain will pay. Furthermore, Donna Anna postpones their wedding, explaining that her grief has taken priority in this moment.

Discussion Points

• What is the musical tone at the beginning of the aria? Do you find it to be light, dark, simple, or complex?
  o Is the musical writing easy or multifaceted in the first section of the piece?
  o Does the tone of the aria change? If so, where? How are you able to tell?
  o What musical shift happens at 2:40?
    ▪ Does the tonality change?
    ▪ Is there a tempo and/or textual adjustment?
    ▪ Explore what is happening in this moment in the aria.

• At 1:44, what musical device is used by the character Donna Anna?
  o What might be happening on stage at this point in the music?
  o Do you think this is an important segment in the aria? Why or why not? Explain.

• Donna Anna uses a musical device at 4:13. What do we call this musical technique?
  o Do you find this musical technique enjoyable or disagreeable? Why or why not?
  o What might this musical reference represent for the character Donna Anna? Why would Mozart write it? Explain.

• Based on everything that you’ve studied throughout this opera, what do you think will happen to all of the characters?
  o Do you think that Don Giovanni will pay for his misdeeds? Do you think that Leporello will regret helping Don Giovanni?
  o What will happen to Don Ottavio and Donna Anna? Will Donna Anna be able to mourn the loss of her father?
  o What about Zerlina and Masetto?
  o What will happen to Donna Elvira? Talk among your classmates and predict what will happen in the concluding scenes of Don Giovanni!
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria, where his father, Leopold, was a violinist and composer in the service of the Prince Archbishop. Leopold dreamed of becoming the leading musician in the Prince’s court – but when he recognized Wolfgang’s potential, he decided to give up his own ambitions to promote his son’s talents.

Mozart learned his first simple pieces for clavier (a predecessor of the piano) at the age of four, and began to write his own pieces at the age of five. Leopold was determined to make his talented son famous; a child prodigy, he wagered, could bring in a lot of money for a relatively poor family. But Leopold also believed that his son’s talent was God-given, and it was his duty to share it with the world.

In 1762, before Mozart was six years old, his father brought him and his sister Maria Anna to Munich to perform before Bavarian royalty. After a similar visit to the Court at Vienna, Mozart and his sister caused such a sensation that they were able to tour Europe for three-and-a-half years. When he was twelve years old, Mozart wrote his first opera, La Finta Semplice, and he resumed his travels. Eventually returning home to Salzburg in 1771, he spent his teenage years composing masses, concertos, divertimenti and serenades for the local ruler, Archbishop Colloredo.

In 1781, at the age of twenty-five, Mozart wrote his first great opera, Idomeneo, and was summoned by Archbishop Colloredo, who was then visiting Vienna. But Mozart was treated so disrespectfully in the Archbishop’s service that he resigned, and at his last meeting, he was kicked out of the Archbishop’s Vienna residence.

Mozart stayed in Vienna, determined to make a living as an independent composer. He married Constanze Weber, and the newlyweds survived on the money Mozart made by teaching a few pupils. In the early 1780s, he met librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte, who provided him with the libretto for Le Nozze di Figaro. Nozze premiered in Vienna.
on May 1st, 1786, and was enthusiastically received by the public. Mozart and Da Ponte's next opera, *Don Giovanni*, had a successful premiere in Prague in October of 1787, but a slightly different version performed in Vienna the next year was not as well-received. Meanwhile, Mozart's financial situation worsened. Though he became Court Composer to the Holy Roman Emperor, he was not paid well for his work. In 1789, he was offered a more generous salary by the Prussian Emperor, but Mozart refused to leave Vienna.

Mozart's monetary troubles worsened. His wife, Constanze, got sick, and a third opera written in collaboration with Da Ponte, *Così fan tutte*, was not successful enough to solve all his problems. In 1791, he wrote two final operas: *Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute)* and *La Clemenza di Tito*.

Throughout that year Mozart became ill and increasingly despondent. When he died on December 5th, 1791, his funeral was attended by a few friends but not by his wife, who was too ill and grief-stricken to leave her home. He died penniless and, according to the Viennese custom of the time, was buried in a mass grave. He was just 35 years old.

Despite his unfortunate end, Mozart's musical genius is still cherished today, and his timeless operatic masterpieces are known and celebrated throughout the world.
Don Giovanni Resources: Online Resources

Note: click on the blue link below the description to visit the corresponding page.

Videos

- **Introducing Mozart's Don Giovanni**
  Conductor/Artist Interview, Royal Opera House (2014)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFOuVrt6nM4

- **Mariusz Kwiecień performs Don Giovanni's Champagne Aria**
  Opera Excerpt, Royal Opera House (2014)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUOWb40LLuw

- **Don Giovanni Highlights**
  Production Preview, Metropolitan Opera (2012)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPSSIULuLEg

- **LA Opera 2012/13 Season preview**
  Production Preview, LA Opera (2012)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kq0b9iJXkWY

- **Accessible Arias: “Batti batti bel Masetto”**
  Opera Excerpt, Royal Opera House (2011)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhWEic7M68g

- **Don Giovanni preview (San Francisco Opera)**
  Production Preview, San Francisco Opera (2011)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KRSBpBGa04

- **Vladimir Jurowski on Mozart's Masterpiece Don Giovanni**
  Conductor Interview, Glyndebourne Festival (2010)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1OEGPxqrcY

Articles

- **GP at the Met: Don Giovanni for PBS: Thirteen**
  Principal Conductor Fabio Luisi leads his first Met performances of Mozart’s Don Giovanni in a new production directed by Tony Award winner Michael Grandage in his Met debut, on THIRTEEN’s Great Performances at the Met Sunday, February 26 at 12 p.m. on PBS (check local listings).
Additional Resources: Reflections after the Opera

After every opera performance, the director, conductor, and performers reflect and evaluate the different aspects of their production, so that they can improve it for the next night. In a similar way, these Guiding Questions encourage active reflection, both individually and collectively, on your student’s opera experience.

Think about the portrayal of the characters in the production at the Met.

• How were the characters similar or different from what you expected? Try to identify specific qualities or actions that had an impact on your ideas and thinking.
• Did the performers’ voices match the character they were playing? Why or why not?
• Did any characters gain prominence in live performance? If so, how was this achieved? (Consider the impact of specific staging.)
• What did the performers do to depict the nature of the relationships between characters? In other words, how did you know from the characters’ actions (not just their words) how they felt about the other characters in the story?
• Stereotypically, most opera performers are considered singers first, and actors second. Was this the case? How did each performer’s portrayal affect your understanding of (or connection with) their character?

Consider the production elements of the performance.

• How did the director choose to portray the story visually? Did the production have a consistent tone? How did the tone and style of each performer’s actions (movement, characterization, staging) compare with the tone and style of the visual elements (set design, costume design, lighting design)?
• How did the set designer’s work affect the production? Did the style of the setting help you understand the characters in a new way?
• How did different costume elements impact the portrayal of each character?
• How did the lighting designer’s work affect the production?
• Did you agree with the artistic choices made by the directors and designers? If you think changes should be made, explain specifically what you’d change and why.
Additional Resources: The Emergence of Opera

The origins of opera stretch back to ancient Greece, where playwrights used music and dance to augment moments of action in their stories. At this time, it was popular to write plays in Attic, a sing-song language, where half the words were sung and half were spoken. Dance was also a pivotal part of Greek drama; a chorus danced throughout scenes in an effort to highlight the play’s themes.

The philosopher Aristotle, in ‘The Poetics,’ outlined the first guidelines for drama, known as the Six Elements of Drama. Aristotle suggested that a play’s action should take place in one day, portray only one chain of events, and be set in one general location. Over the centuries, playwrights and composers took Aristotle’s advice more seriously. The tradition of including music and dance as an integral part of theatre continued through Roman times and into the Middle Ages. Liturgical drama, as well as vernacular plays, often combined incidental music with acting.

Opera can also be traced to the Gregorian chants of the early Christian Church. Music was an integral part of worship, and incorporated ancient melodies from Hebrew, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine cultures. The Church’s organization of music throughout the early Middle Ages gave it structure, codifying scales, modes, and notation to indicate pitch and rhythm. The chants were originally sung in single-line melodies (monophony), but over time more voices were added to compliment the main melody, resulting in the beginning of polyphony (many independent voices or parts sung simultaneously).

However, the Church objected polyphony, worried that the intricate weaving of melodies and words obscured the liturgical text. Since conveying the meaning of the text was the primary reason for singing in church, polyphony was viewed as too secular by Church leaders, and was banished from the Liturgy by Pope John XXII in 1322. Harmonic music followed, which developed as songs with one-line melodies, accompanied by instruments. Then, in 1364, during the pontificate of Pope Urban V, a composer and priest named Guillaume de Machaut composed a polyphonic setting of
the mass entitled *La Messe de Notre Dame*. This was the first time that the Church officially sanctioned polyphony in sacred music.

Another early contributor to the emergence of opera was Alfonso the Wise, ruler of Castile, Spain, in the 13th century. Also known as the Emperor of Culture, he was a great troubadour and made noted contributions to music's development. First, he dedicated his musical poems, the “Cantigas de Santa Maria,” to Saint Mary, which helped end the church's objection to the musical style. His “Cantigas” are one of the largest collections of monophonic songs from the Middle Ages. Secondly, he played a crucial role in the introduction of instruments from the Moorish kingdoms in southern Spain. These instruments, from the timpani to lute, came from Persia and the Arabic culture of the Middle East. Throughout the European Renaissance (14th – 16th centuries), minstrels and troubadours continued to compose harmonic folk songs which informed and entertained. Some songs were mere gossip; others were songs of love and heroes. These contained a one-line melody accompanied by guitars, lutes, or pipes.

Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) continued to reform church music by composing music in his native tongue (German) for use in services. He also simplified the style so that average people in the congregation could sing it. Luther turned to the one-line melodies and folk tunes of the troubadours and minstrels and adapted them to religious texts. His reforms had great impact upon the music of Europe: the common people began to read and sing music.

From the church at this time also emerged the motet, a vocal composition in polyphonic style, with Biblical or similar text which was intended for use in religious services. Several voices sang sacred text accompanied by instruments, and this format laid the groundwork for the madrigal – one of the last steps in preparing the way for opera. Sung in the native language of the people in their homes, taverns, and village squares, madrigals were written for a small number of voices, between two and eight, and used secular (rather than biblical or liturgical) texts.
When refugee scholars from the fall of Constantinople (1453) flooded Italy and Europe, their knowledge of the classics of Rome and Greece added to the development of European musical traditions. Into this world of renewed interest in learning and culture came a group of men from Florence who formed a club, the Camerata, for the advancement of music and Greek theater. Their goal was to recreate Greek drama as they imagined it must have been presented. The Camerata struggled to solve problems that confronted composers, and were interested in investigating the theory and philosophy of music. The Camerata also experimented with the solo song, a forerunner of the opera aria.

Not surprisingly, Greek and Roman mythology and tragedies provided the subject matter of the first librettists. The presence of immortals and heroes made singing seem natural to the characters. Composers used instrumental accompaniment to help establish harmony, which freed them to experiment with instrumental music for preludes or overtures. Development of the recitative and the instrumental bridge enabled writers to connect the song, dance, and scene of the drama into the spectacle which was to become opera. This connector-recitative later evolved into a form of religious drama known as oratorio, a large concert piece which includes an orchestra, a choir, and soloists.

Members of the Camerata – Jacopo Peri, Ottavio Rinnuccini, and Jacopo Corsi – are credited with writing the first opera, Dafne, based on the Greek myth. Their early efforts were crucial in establishing the musical styles of the new genre in the early 17th century. A sizeable orchestra was used and singers were in costume. Dafne became famous across Europe.

The Camerata set the scene, and onto the budding operatic stage came Claudio Monteverdi. He is considered the last great composer of madrigals and the first great composer of Italian opera. He was revolutionary in developing the orchestra’s tone-color and instrumentation. He developed two techniques to heighten dramatic tension: pizzicato – plucking strings instead of bowing them; and tremolo – rapid repetition of a single note. Modern orchestration owes him as much gratitude as does
opera. In his operas, such as Orfeo (1607), the music was more than a vehicle for the words; it expressed and interpreted the poetry of the libretto. His orchestral combinations for Orfeo were considered to be the beginning of the golden age of Baroque instrumental music.

Monteverdi’s experimentation with instruments and his willingness to break the rules of the past enabled him to breathe life into opera. He was far ahead of his time, freeing instruments to communicate emotion, and his orchestration was valued not only for the sounds instruments created but also for the emotional effects they could convey. In his work, music blended with the poetry of the libretto to create an emotional spectacle. His audiences were moved to an understanding of the possibilities of music’s role in drama.
Additional Resources:
A Guide to Voice Parts and Families of the Orchestra

Voice Parts

SOPRANO
Sopranos have the highest voices, and usually play the heroines of an opera. This means they often sing many arias, and fall in love and/or die more often than other female voice types.

MEZZO-SOPRANO, or MEZZO
This is the middle female voice, and has a darker, warmer sound than the soprano. Mezzos often play mothers and villainesses, although sometimes they are cast as seductive heroines. Mezzos also play young men on occasion, aptly called “pants roles” or “trouser roles.”

CONTRALTO, or ALTO
Contralto, or alto, is the lowest female voice. Contralto is a rare voice type. Altos usually portray older females, witches and old gypsies.

COUNTERTENOR
Also often known as alto, this is the highest male voice, and another vocal rarity. Countertenors sing in a similar range as a contralto. Countertenor roles are most common in baroque opera, but some contemporary composers also write parts for countertenors.

TENOR
If there are no countertenors on stage, then the highest male voice in opera is the tenor. Tenors are usually the heroes who “get the girl” or die horribly in the attempt.

BARITONE
The middle male voice. In comic opera, the baritone is often a schemer, but in tragic opera, he is more likely to play the villain.

BASS
The lowest male voice. Low voices usually suggest age and wisdom in serious opera, and basses usually play kings, fathers, and grandfathers. In comic opera, basses often portray old characters that are foolish or laughable.

Families of the Orchestra

STRINGS
violins, violas, cellos, double bass

WOODWIND
piccolos, flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons

BRASS
trumpets, trombones, French horns, baritones, tubas

PERCUSSION
bass drums, kettle drums, timpani, xylophones, piano, bells, gongs, cymbals, chimes
**Additional Resources: Glossary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adagio</td>
<td>Indication that the music is to be performed at a slow, relaxed pace. A movement for a piece of music with this marking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>allegro</td>
<td>Indicates a fairly fast tempo.</td>
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<tr>
<td>aria</td>
<td>A song for solo voice in an opera, with a clear, formal structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arioso</td>
<td>An operatic passage for solo voice, melodic but with no clearly defined form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baritone</td>
<td>A man’s voice, with a range between that of bass and tenor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ballad opera</td>
<td>A type of opera in which dialogue is interspersed with songs set to popular tunes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>bel canto</td>
<td>Refers to the style cultivated in the 18th and 19th centuries in Italian opera. This demanded precise intonation, clarity of tone and enunciation, and a virtuoso mastery of the most florid passages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cabaletta</td>
<td>The final short, fast section of a type of aria in 19th-century Italian opera.</td>
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<tr>
<td>cadenza</td>
<td>A passage in which the solo instrument or voice performs without the orchestra, usually of an improvisatory nature.</td>
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<tr>
<td>chorus</td>
<td>A body of singers who sing and act as a group, either in unison or in harmony; any musical number written for such a group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coloratura</td>
<td>An elaborate and highly ornamented part for soprano voice, usually written for the upper notes of the voice. The term is also applied to those singers who specialize in the demanding technique required for such parts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conductor</td>
<td>The director of a musical performance for any sizable body of performers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>contralto</td>
<td>Low-pitched woman’s voice, lower than soprano or mezzo-soprano.</td>
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<tr>
<td>crescendo</td>
<td>Meaning “growing,” used as a musical direction to indicate that the music is to get gradually louder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diatonic scale</td>
<td>Notes proper to a key that does not involve accidentals (sharps or flats)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ensemble</td>
<td>From the French word for “together,” this term is used when discussing the degree of effective teamwork among a body of performers; in opera, a set piece for a group of soloists.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<tr>
<td>finale</td>
<td>The final number of an act, when sung by an ensemble.</td>
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<tr>
<td>fortissimo (ff)</td>
<td>Very loud.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forte (f)</td>
<td>Italian for “strong” or “loud.” An indication to perform at a loud volume.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>harmony</td>
<td>A simultaneous sounding of notes that usually serves to support a melody.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intermezzo</td>
<td>A piece of music played between the acts of an opera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intermission</td>
<td>A break between the acts of an opera. The lights go on and the audience is free to move around.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>legato</td>
<td>A direction for smooth performance without detached notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leitmotif</td>
<td>Melodic element first used by Richard Wagner in his operas to musically represent characters, events, ideas, or emotions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>libretto</td>
<td>The text of an opera.</td>
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<tr>
<td>maestro</td>
<td>Literally “master”; used as a courtesy title for the conductor, whether a man or woman.</td>
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<tr>
<td>melody</td>
<td>A succession of musical tones (i.e., notes not sounded at the same time), often prominent and singable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mezzo-soprano</td>
<td>Female voice in the middle range, between that of soprano and contralto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>octave</td>
<td>The interval between the first and eighth notes of the diatonic scale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opera buffa</td>
<td>An Italian form that uses comedic elements. The French term “opera bouffe” describes a similar type, although it may have an explicitly satirical intent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opera seria</td>
<td>Italian for “serious opera.” Used to signify Italian opera of a heroic or dramatic quality during the 18th and early 19th centuries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>operetta</td>
<td>A light opera, whether full-length or not, often using spoken dialogue. The plots are romantic and improbable, even farcical, and the music tuneful and undemanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overture</td>
<td>A piece of music preceding an opera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pentatonic scale</td>
<td>Typical of Japanese, Chinese, and other Far Eastern and folk music, the pentatonic scale divides the octave into five tones and may be played on the piano by striking only the black keys.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
pianissimo (pp) Very softly.
piano (p) Meaning “flat,” or “low”. Softly, or quietly.
pitch The location of a musical sound in the tonal scale; the quality that makes “A” different from “D.”
prima donna The leading woman singer in an operatic cast or company.
prelude A piece of music that precedes another.
recitative A style of sung declamation used in opera. It may be either accompanied or unaccompanied except for punctuating chords from the harpsichord.
reprise A direct repetition of an earlier section in a piece of music, or the repeat of a song.
score The written or printed book containing all the parts of a piece of music.
serenade A song by a lover, sung outside the window of his mistress.
singspiel A German opera with spoken dialogue.
solo A part for unaccompanied instrument or for an instrument or voice with the dominant role in a work.
soprano The high female voice; the high, often highest, member of a family of instruments.
tempo The pace of a piece of music; how fast or how slow it is played.
tenor A high male voice.
theme The main idea of a piece of music; analogous to the topic of a written paper, subject to exploration and changes.
timbre Quality of a tone, also an alternative term for “tone-color.”
tone-color The characteristic quality of tone of an instrument or voice.
trill Musical ornament consisting of the rapid alternation between the note and the note above it.
trio A sustained musical passage for three voices.
verismo A type of “realism” in Italian opera during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in which the plot was on a contemporary, often violent, theme.
| **vocalise** | A musical composition consisting of the singing of melody with vowel sounds or nonsense syllables rather than text, as for special effect in classical compositions, in polyphonic jazz singing by special groups, or in virtuoso vocal exercises. |
| **volume** | A description of how loud or soft a sound is. |
**References: Works Consulted**

**Additional Resources: The Emergence of Opera**


