

GLOSSARY

BASIC OPERA TERMS & VOCABULARY

ACT / SCENE

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

ADAGIO

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

ALLEGRO

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

ARIA

A song for solo voice accompanied by orchestra.

BRAVO

Italian for “nicely done”; shouted by audience members after a performance

CADENZA

An ornamented musical elaboration played in a free style by a soloist to display his or her virtuosity.

CHORUS

A section of an opera in which a large group of singers performs together, typically with orchestral accompaniment.

CRESCENDO

A gradual raising of volume in music achieved by increasing the dynamic level. When music crescendos, the performers begin at a softer dynamic level and become incrementally louder.

DIMINUENDO

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

DYNAMICS

A musical trait pertaining to loudness and softness. Dynamics encompass a spectrum from **pianissimo** (very soft) to **piano** (soft) to **mezzo piano** (moderately soft), all the way up to **fortissimo** (very loud). Music can shift to another dynamic level either suddenly or gradually, through a **crescendo** or **diminuendo**.

ENSEMBLE

A musical piece for two or more soloists, accompanied by orchestra. Types of ensembles include **duets** (for two soloists), **trios** (for three soloists), and **quartets** (for four soloists).

FINALE

The last portion of an act, a finale consists of several musical sections that accompany an escalating dramatic tension. Finales frequently consist of multiple ensembles with different numbers of characters.

FORTE

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

INTERMISSION

A break between acts of an opera.

LEGATO

A type of articulation in which a melody is played with smooth connection between the notes.

LIBRETTO

The text of an opera, including all the words that are said or sung by performers.

MELODY

A succession of pitches that form an understandable unit. The melody of a piece consists of the tune that a listener can hum or sing.

OVERTURE

An instrumental piece that occurs before the first act as an introduction to an opera.

PIANO

Abbreviated p in a musical score, piano indicates a soft dynamic level.

RECITATIVE

Speech-like singing in-between musical numbers that advances the plot.

RHYTHM

Refers to the way music unfolds over time; it is a series of durations in a range from long to short. Along with pitch, it is a basic and indispensable parameter of music.

SCORE

The complete musical notation for a piece, the score includes notated lines for all of the different instrumental and vocal parts that unite to constitute a musical composition.

TEMPO

Literally “time” in Italian, tempo refers to the speed of a piece of music.

TIMBRE

Pronounced TAM-bruh, a French word that means “sound color.” It refers to the complex combination of characteristics that give each instrument or voice its unique sound.

VOCABULARY

ACTIVITY

Write the letter of the correct match next to each problem.



ACTIVITY

1. _____ **CHORUS**
 2. _____ **SCENES**
 3. _____ **DYNAMICS**
 4. _____ **ADAGIO**
 5. _____ **SCORE**
 6. _____ **INTERMISSION**
 7. _____ **ARIA**
 8. _____ **TIMBRE**
 9. _____ **TEMPO**
 10. _____ **LEGATO**
 11. _____ **OVERTURE**
 12. _____ **ALLEGRO**
 13. _____ **LIBRETTO**
 14. _____ **RECITATIVE**
 15. _____ **ENSEMBLE**
 16. _____ **BRAVO**
 17. _____ **CRESCENDO**
 18. _____ **FINALE**
 19. _____ **DIMINUENDO**
 20. _____ **RHYTHM**
- a. A break between acts of an opera.
 - b. A type of articulation in which a melody is played with smooth connection between the notes.
 - c. The last portion of an act.
 - d. Refers to the speed of a piece of music.
 - e. A way to categorize the sections of operas.
 - f. A musical trait pertaining to loudness and softness.
 - g. A gradual raising of volume in music achieved by increasing the dynamic level.
 - h. A song for solo voice accompanied by orchestra.
 - i. A musical piece for two or more soloists, accompanied by orchestra.
 - j. A tempo marking indicating a moderately fast to quick speed.
 - k. Italian for "nicely done;" shouted by audience members after a performance
 - l. Refers to the complex combination of characteristics that give each instrument or voice its unique sound.
 - m. Speechlike singing in between musical numbers that advances the plot.
 - n. The complete musical notation for a piece,
 - o. The text of an opera.
 - p. Refers to the way music unfolds over time; it is a series of durations in a range from long to short.
 - q. An instrumental piece that occurs before the first act as an introduction to an opera.
 - r. A section of an opera in which a large group of singers performs together, typically with orchestral accompaniment.
 - s. A gradual lowering of volume in music achieved by decreasing the dynamic level.
 - t. A tempo marking that indicates that the performer should play in a slow and leisurely style.