

SWEENEY TODD

The Demon Barber of Fleet Street
A Musical Thriller



Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim | Book by Hugh Wheeler
From an Adaptation by Christopher Bond
Originally Directed on Broadway by Harold Prince
Orchestrations by Jonathan Tunick
Originally Produced on Broadway by Richard Barr, Charles Woodward, Robert Fryer,
Mary Lea Johnson, Martin Richards in Association with Dan and Judy Manos

Study Guide

Student Dress Rehearsal | February 23, 2022
Orpheum Theater

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INSIDE THE OPERA

THE WORK

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Performed in English with English supertitles

New Production and Company Premiere

- A musical in two acts, sung in English.
- Music by Steven Sondheim and book by Hugh Wheeler.
- Opened on Broadway in 1979 and tLondon's West End in 1980.
- Based on the play of the same name by Christopher Bond.

CREATIVE TEAM

CONDUCTOR
Hal France

CONCEIVED AND
DIRECTED BY
Susan Clement*

CHOREOGRAPHER
David Neumann*

SET DESIGNER
Martin Marchitto*

LIGHTING DESIGNER
Pablo Santiago

WIG & MAKEUP
DESIGNER
Ronell Oliveri

SOUND DESIGNER
Bill Kirby*

ASSOCIATE
COSTUME DESIGNER
Carole Zacek

ASSOCIATE
CHOREOGRAPHER
Courtney Cairncross

FIGHT DIRECTOR
Ezra Colon*

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Barry Carman II*

*Opera Omaha debut

CAST



Zachary James*
SWEENEY TODD
(BENJAMIN
BARKER)
(baritone)



Emily Pulley
MRS. LOVETT
(mezzo-soprano)



Ashley Emerson
JOHANNA
BARKER
(soprano)



Jonathan Johnson*
ANTHONY HOPE
(tenor)



Rod Nelman*
JUDGE TURPIN
(baritone)



Michael Kuhn
TOBIAS RAGG
(tenor)



Jason Ferrante
BEADLE
BAMFORD (tenor)



Katy Lindhart*
BEGGAR WOMAN
(LUCY BARKER)
(mezzo-soprano)



Barry Banks*
Adolfo Pirelli
(tenor)



Shae'Kell Butler*
Joans Fogg/ Bird
Seller

*Opera Omaha debut

Ensemble | Sean Kelly, Chorus Director
The Omaha Symphony

CHARACTER		VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
Sweeney Todd	The owner of a barbershop on London's Fleet Street, formerly imprisoned in Australia	Baritone	His real name is Benjamin Barker. Let's just say it's not beef in those pies...
Mrs. Lovett	The owner of the meat pie shop below the barber	Mezzo-soprano	Cheerful and talkative but completely amoral, she is enamored with Sweeney Todd
Johanna Barker	Sweeney Todd's daughter	Soprano	A beautiful young woman, she was raised by Judge Turpin as his ward
Anthony Hope	A sailor who rescued Sweeney Todd	Tenor	Young and naïve, he falls in love with Johanna Barker
Judge Turpin	A judge	Baritone	Corrupt to his core, he is obsessed first with Lucy Barker and then Johanna Barker
Tobias Ragg	Mrs. Lovett's employee	Tenor	A simple-minded man, he has a deep distrust for Sweeney Todd
Beadle Bamford	Judge Turpin's right hand man	Tenor	Like his boss the Judge, he is fundamentally corrupt
Lucy Barker	A beggar woman	Mezzo-soprano	She was Benjamin Barker's wife!
Adolfo Pirelli	A rival barber	Tenor	Sweeney challenges Pirelli to a shaving contest

THE STORY OF SWEENEY TODD

PART ONE

PROLOGUE

A man steps forward and invites the audience to attend the tale of Sweeney Todd, joined by the full company.

ACT ONE

It is 1845, and Anthony, a young sailor, has just arrived home to London. He is accompanied by a man he rescued drowning off the coast of Australia, Sweeney Todd. As they disembark, they are accosted by a beggar woman who alternates between begging for alms and soliciting sex, but seems to recognize Sweeney.

Anthony is thrilled to return to London, but Sweeney is not—he tells Anthony the tale of a young barber who was sent into exile by a powerful man with designs on the barber's beautiful wife. Sweeney enters a pie shop on Fleet Street and is immediately accosted by the owner Mrs. Lovett. She bemoans the hard times, and the scarcity of meat (and the speedy cats). Sweeney asks about the empty apartment upstairs, and Mrs. Lovett tells him about the barber Benjamin Barker who was falsely accused by Judge Turpin so that the Judge could exploit Barker's wife, Lucy. The Judge and Beadle Bamford lured Lucy to the Judge's house so he could torment and rape her. Sweeney's anger confirms what Mrs. Lovett has suspected – that he is indeed Benjamin Barker.

Mrs. Lovett tells Sweeney that Lucy poisoned herself, and that his daughter Johanna is now a ward of Judge Turpin. Mrs. Lovett returns a set of silver shaving razors to Sweeney, who vows to use them to get his revenge. In Judge Turpin's house, Johanna sits at a window, admiring the singing of caged birds. Anthony happens to wander by and immediately falls in love with the beautiful young woman. Threats from the Beadle Bamford only strengthen his resolve to save her. As the Judge tells Sweeney about his impending marriage, Sweeney shaves him, enjoying the anticipation of his revenge. But before he can slit the Judge's throat, Anthony bursts in and blurts out his plan to save Johanna. The Judge storms out, declaring that he will lock Johanna up and never come to the barber shop again. Sweeney swears to kill as many people as possible, punishing the rich and corrupt and freeing the poor from their saddened state. Mrs. Lovett sees an opportunity—they can dispose of the bodies by using the meat for her pies—and so a new enterprise is born.

Tobias (Toby) Ragg, barber Signor Pirelli's assistant, hawks a miracle elixir that regrows hair. After exposing the elixir as a hoax, Sweeney challenges Pirelli to a shaving contest, which Sweeney wins easily. Beadle Bamford judges the contest and is impressed—Sweeney invites him to come in for a complimentary shave. Anthony, not knowing that Johanna is Sweeney's daughter, asks the barber for help—he intends to rescue Johanna, and wants to use the shop as a safe house. Pirelli arrives to pay Sweeney a visit. Mrs. Lovett takes Toby downstairs for a pie. Pirelli drops the accent and reveals that he used to be Benjamin Barker's assistant. Instead of giving in to blackmail, Sweeney kills Pirelli.

Johanna is terrified because the Judge intends to marry her on Monday, but Anthony has a plan to help her escape. Meanwhile, the Beadle suggests that the Judge clean up a bit to be more attractive to Johanna and sends him to Sweeney Todd. As the Judge tells

Sweeney about his impending marriage, Sweeney shaves him, enjoying the anticipation of his revenge. But before he can slit the Judge's throat, Anthony bursts in and blurts out his plan to save Johanna. The Judge storms out, declaring that he will lock Johanna up and never come to the barber shop again. Sweeney swears to kill as many people as possible, punishing the rich and corrupt and freeing the poor from their saddened state. Mrs. Lovett sees an opportunity—they can dispose of the bodies by using the meat for her pies—and so a new enterprise is born.

ACT II

Mrs. Lovett's pie shop is now bustling, and Toby helps with customers. Sweeney has a brand new chair, with some special modifications. When Anthony discovers that the Judge has locked up Johanna in the asylum, he gets Sweeney to help him plan an escape—Anthony will go to the asylum pretending to be a wigmaker looking for hair from the inmates. Seeing an opportunity to lure the Judge back to his shop, Sweeney writes a letter, warning him of Anthony's plan, and that Anthony and Johanna could be captured at the barber shop.

Toby has begun to suspect that there is something awry at the pie shop and tries to warn Mrs. Lovett. Mrs. Lovett distracts him and sends him down into the bakehouse. She returns upstairs to find the Beadle waiting— he has been sent to investigate the strange smells and smoke coming from her chimneys. Sweeney comes in and offers the Beadle his free shave. Toby is still in the basement when the Beadle's body tumbles down, and he runs off.

Fogg, the asylum owner, tries to stop Anthony from rescuing Johanna. She shoots Fogg, leaving the rest of the inmates to wander through the streets of London. Sweeney and Mrs. Lovett search for Toby. Back at Sweeney's shop, Johanna hides to avoid the beggar woman, and Anthony goes looking for Sweeney. When Sweeney arrives and finds the beggar woman in his parlor, he slits her throat. The Judge arrives. Sweeney lures him into the chair before revealing his true identity and killing the Judge. Johanna comes out of hiding and barely escapes Sweeney's razor.

Mrs. Lovett struggles with the bodies in the basement. Sweeney arrives, and in the oven's light finally recognizes the beggar woman—it is his wife Lucy. Mrs. Lovett only let him assume that the poison killed his wife out of love. Sweeney takes Mrs. Lovett in his arms for a dance, but then shoves her into the oven.

Sweeney kneels on the floor, holding Lucy. From behind him, Toby approaches and slits Todd's throat just as Johanna, Anthony, and the police enter.

Courtesy of San Francisco Opera

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

by Susan Clement

My Friends!

I am so incredibly grateful to be able to share our production of *Sweeney Todd* with you. What an extraordinary time to be creating and experiencing live performance. The joy of gathering together to watch these phenomenal artists at play is even more poignant and powerful now, when so much is uncertain. The chaos of these last two years has shaped and informed bringing this most operatic of musicals to life. Bringing order out of this chaos and being able to engage with Sondheim's work for such a long period of time was a mind-bending gift. The collaborative spirit and flexibility of the assembled artists, creative team, and Opera Omaha staff has been absolutely critical and nothing short of awe-inspiring. 'The show must go on' means something entirely new now.

Swing those razors high!

More hot pies!

— Susan Clement

DIRECTOR



Susan Clement director

Director **SUSAN CLEMENT** has served as BLUEBARN Theatre's Producing Artistic Director since 2002. She has directed dozens of productions at the BLUEBARN, beginning with *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me* in 1993 and most recently, *Indecent*, *Red Summer* and *A Very Die Hard Christmas*. During her tenure, the BLUEBARN has received the Governor's Award for Organizational Achievement in 2012 and seen its productions lauded with over a hundred awards by the Theatre Arts Guild and the Omaha Arts and Entertainment Awards. In 2015 Susan saw the BLUEBARN's dream of building its own stand-alone facility fulfilled as it moved into its new home on 10th and Pacific. Susan has been honored with Best Play or Best Director awards for her work on *Indecent* (2019), *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (2017), *The Christians* (2016), *Our Town* (2015), *33 Variations* (2014), *Red* (2013), *The 39 Steps* (2012), *Three Tall Women* (2011), *Rabbit Hole* (2010), *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?* (2009), *The Pillowman* (2007), *The Dresser* (2006), *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress* (2003), *A Piece of My Heart* (2003), and *Wit* (2001). Susan holds a BFA in Theatre/Film from the State University of New York at Purchase Conservatory.

CONDUCTOR'S NOTES

by Hal France



The 1979 musical *Sweeney Todd* was the final work of an extraordinary decade of achievement in musical theatre history. In the 70s, Stephen Sondheim's series of five groundbreaking musicals changed the landscape of Broadway. The shows were each unique and totally different and yet each bore the indisputable signature of this American master. A creative force that never stopped reaching.

Company in 1970 and *Follies* in 1971 brought the psychology of contemporary relationships into view. Two years later, the same impeccable insight into the human psyche combined with romantic nostalgia in *A Little Night Music*. In 1976 he marked the American Bicentennial with a critical look at western imperialism in *Pacific Overtures*. Sondheim's evocative musical palette infused each story with its own sound. From the delightful spinning waltzes of *A Little Night Music* to the energetic Japanese inspired melodies of *Pacific Overtures*, the pulsing of the city in *Company* to the stylish grace of *Follies*, Sondheim's music is a marvel.

This brings us to *Sweeney Todd*! The music for *Sweeney Todd* almost never stops. Its vocalism calls equally for power and subtlety. Almost immediately as it came on the scene, the debate started: was it an opera or a musical? Though interesting to consider, the conclusion is simple. The deftness and clarity of intention in *Sweeney Todd* is pure theatre. It's story, themes and characters would tempt any opera composer. All said, a more convincing dramatic universe is difficult to imagine than the one Sondheim created. The curtain rises to the strains of a dark organ as the orchestra and cast spin the melancholy tale. Theatrically brilliant numbers like Mrs. Lovett's *The Worst Pies in London* and *God That's Good* mingle with the poignant ballads *Pretty Women*, *Not While I'm Around* and *Johanna*. There are too many great songs to mention, but every single moment of this score has its purpose, time, and place.

For all of us involved, whether on stage, behind the scenes or in the pit, we are grateful to work on *Sweeney Todd* and thank Opera Omaha for bringing us together for the new production by Susan Clement. We proudly perform Stephen Sondheim's masterful work for you and celebrate this monumental composer, lyricist and artist who gave the American theatre so much to chew on.

Hal France, conductor

Maestro **Hal France** returns to Opera Omaha after last conducting the 2018 production of *Falstaff*. In 2019 Hal France joined the UNO Theatre faculty as Instructor of Musical Theatre in the School of the Arts and College of Communication Fine Arts and Media, and is currently involved in building an undergraduate program in musical theatre at UNO. Maestro France has served as Artistic Director of Opera Omaha, Music Director of the Orlando Philharmonic, Resident and Associate Conductor for the Houston Grand Opera, Music Director of the Mobile Opera and Lake George Opera Festival. He made his conducting debut in 1981 at the Kennedy Center working with the legendary Hal Prince, John DeMain and Carlisle Floyd on the World Premiere of *Willie Stark*. His ongoing work with new opera and musical theatre includes American and world premieres for Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Santa Fe Opera, and New York City Opera. Maestro France has worked extensively at opera companies around the country including Houston Grand Opera, Central City Opera, Kentucky Opera, Opera Theater of St. Louis, the New York City Opera, Orlando Opera, Cleveland Opera, Madison Opera, Calgary Opera and Utah Opera. In the spring of 2021, he joined the BLUEBARN's Susan Clement and Jill Anderson in creating *Sunset to Starlight: A Celebration of American Musical Theatre*.

THE ORIGINS OF THE DEMON BARBER

PENNY DREADFULS

The character of Sweeney Todd was not first invented by Steven Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler. The musical was directly based on the play of the same name, written by Christopher Bond in 1973, but the origins of the story go back over a century earlier. The cut-throat barber on London's Fleet Street first appeared in a series of weekly stories called *The String of Pearls*, which was published between 1846 and 1847 in England. These stories were part of a genre called 'penny dreadfuls' which told sensationalized tales of detectives, criminals, and supernatural beings, and were sold weekly at a cost of one penny (equivalent to roughly one dollar in today's money). Penny dreadful stories like Sweeney Todd were wildly popular in Victorian England and were one of the earliest forms of mass-produced popular culture aimed at young people in the country. Sweeney Todd was not the only popular character to emerge from these books – highwayman Dick Turpin was made famous through penny dreadfuls, and many of our tropes about vampires, such as sharpened teeth, also originated in these stories.

FROM SHORT STORY TO BROADWAY MUSICAL

The story of Sweeney Todd went through many iterations between the version in *The String of Pearls* and the musical you will see on the Orpheum Theater stage. Before the initial run of *The String of Pearls* had even finished, it had been transformed into a play despite audiences not yet knowing how the books would end. By 1852 an American version of the play has been written and by the 1870's the character was familiar to most Brits and Americans.

Over the course of the following 150 years, the story has been adapted and retold countless, times, including in more than 4 film adaptations, numerous songs, and even a ballet version. As mentioned above, the musical as you will see it in Omaha is adapted directly from Christopher Bond's 1973 play. The play introduced a more sympathetic side to Sweeney Todd that was not found in most other versions. He is actually called Benjamin Barker, and was wrongfully imprisoned in Australia before

he escaped and returned to London as Sweeney Todd. The first intends to kill the crooked Judge Turpin in revenge, but when this fails he takes out his anger on the whole world instead by turning his barbershop's clients into pies.

A SMASH HIT ON BROADWAY

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street opened on Broadway in 1979 and the following year in London's West End. An immediate smash hit, it received both the Tony Award for Best New Musical in America and the Olivier Award for Best New Musical in the UK. The gruesome tale that had started in a series of cheap Victorian short stories had now taken over the world!



Sweeney Todd murdering one of his victims, from the original The String of Pearls penny dreadful series

OPERA VS. MUSICAL THEATER

What is the difference between opera and musical theater? Spirited debate around this question has been happening for over a century. In some ways, the forms are very similar – they both tell a story on stage through singing and acting after all – but there are also some important differences that are usually identified between the two.

KEY DIFFERENCES

One of the most identified differences is that in musical theater, the words are typically the driving force, while in opera, music comes first. Relatedly, operas and musicals generally employ vastly different styles of vocal performance – opera singers are required to project their voices over large orchestras with no microphone to help them, while musicals are typically amplified. However, performers in musicals are often required to perform a show up to 8 times a week, something that is inconceivable to most opera singers. Most operas are also ‘through-sung’, meaning every moment is set to music, while musical theater typically intersperses spoken dialogue with musical numbers. Due to when and where they were composed, the most popular operas are usually performed in languages other than English, frequently Italian. Regarding subject matter, operas historically have never shied away from portraying tragedy (for example Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*), while musicals often conclude with a happy ending, regardless of whatever tragic events have occurred during the rest of the story.

A BLURRY LINE

Of course, these are all just guidelines. Elements of opera bleed into musical theater and vice versa. *Sweeney Todd* breaks several of these rules; it is primarily through-sung like most operas, and some roles require a more traditionally operatic style of singing. Other musicals that straddle the line include *Les Misérables* and *West Side Story*, the latter of which was composed by Leonard Bernstein, who is mostly known for his works of classical music, with words by Stephen Sondheim, who also composed *Sweeney Todd*.

Operas from throughout history have also included elements of what we would consider musical theater today. The famous composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote several operas in a genre called ‘singspiel’ in which, like musical theater, songs are interspersed with spoken dialogue, in this case in German. American opera librettists writing today typically write in English or Spanish rather than Italian; one example is *Proving Up*, written by composer Missy Mazzoli and librettist Royce Vavrek, two of the most popular young artists creating opera today. Opera Omaha staged *Proving Up* in 2018. The opera tells the tragic story of a young family in Nebraska in 1868 as they struggle to acquire land to live on after the passing of the U.S. Homestead Act.

The genre of operetta also melded aspects of both opera and musical theater. It initially developed in France as a descriptor for lighter, less ambitious, yet still opera-like works. In the 1930’s operetta largely gave way to musical theater as we know it today, but the works of some operetta composers like the famous duo Gilbert & Sullivan are still regularly performed today.

ABOUT THE COMPOSER: STEPHEN SONDHEIM

Stephen Sondheim, the composer and lyricist of *Sweeney Todd*, is one of the most important figures in the history of 20th century musical theater and is often credited with having re-invented and rejuvenated the form. He has won numerous awards including an Academy Award (the highest award in the American film industry), eight Tony Awards (the highest award in the theatre industry), eight Grammy Awards (the highest award in the music industry), a Pulitzer Prize, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Apart from *Sweeney Todd*, he also composed music for hit musicals including *A Little Night Music*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, and *Into The Woods*, the last of which was adapted into a popular movie in 2014. He also wrote lyrics for *West Side Story* and *Gypsy*.



Stephen Sondheim (1930-2021)
pictured in 1976

BACKGROUND

Like many of the world's most popular musicians and entertainers, Sondheim began his musical journey in school in the 1930's. He became an accomplished organist and pianist at a young age, and studied with another important composer in musical theater, Oscar Hammerstein II, who had already written many popular musicals including *Oklahoma!*, *South Pacific*, and *The Sound of Music*.

Sondheim got his start in the entertainment industry writing scripts for television shows in Hollywood in the early 1950's, but made his first significant mark on Broadway by writing the lyrics to the musical *West Side Story* in 1957. His first musical for which he wrote both music and lyrics was 1962's *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, which told the story of an enslaved man in ancient Rome who tries to gain his freedom by helping his enslaver win the affections of the girl next door. This musical marked the beginning of a streak of popular musicals from the 1960's to 1990's, of which *Sweeney Todd* is one. Alongside his incredible career in musical theater, Sondheim also continued to compose music for non-musical stage productions, film, and television.

SONDHEIM'S LEGACY

Sondheim is regularly credited as one of the most important figures in 20th century musical theater. His musicals tackle a broader range of themes and ideas than had been the case in musicals in the first half of the century, and he has been praised for addressing the "darker, more harrowing elements of the human experience" with his lyrics. Musically, he pulls from a wide array of influences, including 19th century classical composers like Brahms, the experimental music of the 20th composers like Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky, as well as sounds of the Broadway music by composers like his mentor Oscar Hammerstein II. In this way he diversified the palette of sounds open to musical theater composers who succeeded him.

Without a doubt, Sondheim has written some of the most popular musicals of all time and his influence can be felt in just about every show playing on Broadway today.

GUIDING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

The musical *Sweeney Todd* and its film adaptation are the most popular versions of this narrative, but they are not the first.

- Where did the story of Sweeney Todd originate? How did it grow in popularity in Victorian England?
- Though which mediums has the story of Sweeney Todd been told in the last 150 years? How has the story changed between the original version in *The String of Pearls* and Sondheim's musical version?
- Why do you think this story has remained so popular in American culture in the last century?

Opera and musical theater are closely related, but also have some important differences.

- What are some of the most important differences that are usually identified between opera and music theater?
- How has musical theater adopted aspects of opera? Conversely, which elements that one usually associates with musical theater can also be seen in some operas?

American composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim is widely considered as one of the most influential figures in musical theater in 20th century.

- Briefly summarize Sondheim's musical background. How did he start learning music? How did he get his big break in the 1950's?
- Why has Sondheim had such a substantial impact on musical theater? How was he innovative in both the lyrical and musical aspects of his work?
- Can you think of any other musicians, composers, playwrights or other artists who have also had a profound impact on their own art forms? Why do you think these artists in particular have had such a lasting impact?

OPERA 101

OPERA OMAHA HISTORY

For over 60 years Opera Omaha has brought audiences outstanding production quality, artistry and educational opportunities. A strong blend of traditional and innovative programming will continue to ensure the excitement of opera in Omaha.

Opera Omaha began in 1958 as the Omaha Civic Opera Society, an all-volunteer community opera association. By the early 1970s, the company became fully professional, and its name was changed to Opera Omaha. In 1975, Opera Omaha moved performances to the historic Orpheum Theater, opening with *Lucia di Lammermoor* starring Beverly Sills.

Since the 1990s, the company has continued its commitment to high production standards, and in 1998 returned to the development of new works with Libby Larsen's *Eric Hermannson's Soul*, based on a story by Willa Cather. Opera Omaha has also presented educational and engagement programming in schools and communities throughout the region for the last three decades.

Since 2006, Opera Omaha has commissioned numerous new productions utilizing innovative production techniques and engaging visual artists such as Jun Kaneko. These productions have garnered interest from other opera companies and have raised Opera Omaha's artistic profile nationally and internationally.

In August 2011, Opera Omaha welcomed Roger Weitz as the new General Director of the organization. Weitz quickly adopted the strategic business plan established by the Board of Directors and advanced a vision for the company that includes a balanced program of operas annually with an expansion of the company's civic footprint beyond the doors of the Orpheum Theater.

Since then, programs associated with Opera Omaha's main stage productions have more than doubled, and the number of audience members reached through community engagement activities has tripled. Opera Omaha has also significantly grown the number of partners with which it collaborates. Through its extensive programming, Opera Omaha serves individuals from eastern Nebraska, western Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and the southeastern Dakotas, while also drawing national visitors.

MISSION STATEMENT

Opera Omaha's mission is to enrich the quality of life in our community by creating professional opera and music theater, which uniquely combine the visual and performing arts to express humanity's deepest emotions and highest aspirations. This mission is achieved through the presentation of main stage productions with the highest artistic standards and through customized education and community programs designed to inspire people of all ages and backgrounds, regardless of prior exposure to the arts. Embracing the collaborative nature of the art form, Opera Omaha forges opera's rich storytelling power, historical significance, and cross-cultural relevance into an array of activities. The vision of Opera Omaha's Community Engagement program is to enrich people's lives through opera; to help individuals from all walks of life and degrees of artistic exposure find the personal, social or historical resonance inherent in opera; to stimulate an understanding and interest in the classical arts and opera among new audiences and students in schools; and to use opera to inspire individuals to overcome personal obstacles and attain their highest aspirations.

WHAT IS A WORKING DRESS REHEARSAL?

Whether an opera is an original Opera Omaha production, a co-production with one or more companies, a rental from another company, or a revival or remount of an Opera Omaha production, each production must be adjusted for the Orpheum Theater stage. While each department works independently to learn and produce their aspect of the show, it takes tremendous coordination and expense to run through the show with everyone involved.

The final working dress rehearsal is the last time all the elements of the production are brought together before the opening night performance, and the final opportunity for the staff and cast to make adjustments to the on-stage performances, orchestration, sets, costumes, lighting and other technical aspects of the opera. When you attend a dress rehearsal you will see some of the artistic, production, and administrative staff stationed behind computers and other equipment in the seats in front of the orchestra. Occasionally they may stop the performance to give notes to the singers, coordinate with the orchestra conductor, or address a staging or technical concern.

Another characteristic of a working dress rehearsal is that singers sometimes “mark” portions of their vocal parts. This means the singer may not sing out completely through the entire rehearsal. This could be because he or she wants to preserve his/her voice for opening night. In most cases, however, if the dress rehearsal is open to the public, the singers treat the occasion as a performance for the audience present.

On the day of the dress rehearsal, the staff sits in the theater and monitors the performance. Each department is responsible for specific aspects of the production, but there are basic skills that are important for everyone:

Time management—planning well and using time efficiently to accomplish one’s goals

A strong work ethic—the desire to work hard and do well in one’s job

Lifelong learning—continued study in one’s chosen field

Creative thinking—the ability to solve problems as they arise

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE WORKING BEHIND THE TABLE?

Artistic Staff—This could be the producing director and the artistic planning staff. They act in a supervisory role, in case something goes wrong and a problem needs to be solved.

Stage Director and Assistant Director—The stage director is responsible for the dramatic interpretation of the opera. He or she will give notes to the assistant director about anything that needs to be changed and will refer to the notes in communicating with the performers.

Production Stage Manager—The production stage manager communicates all the cues throughout the production including lighting changes, the movement of set pieces, and when the performers enter the stage.

Technical Staff—The technical director and his or her staff supervise the physical elements on stage, such as sets, lights, sound, communications, and video.

Lighting Designer and Assistant Lighting Designer—As with the directors, the lighting designer oversees the lights and gives notes to the assistant lighting designer, who is also communicating with the follow spot operators. There are usually two or three lighting interns observing the process.

Costume Staff—The costume director and wardrobe assistants are present to make any last-minute costume adjustments.

Music Staff—Because the conductor is working and cannot tell how the orchestra sounds from outside the orchestra pit, one or more music assistants are seated in the theater to monitor the sound and balance from within the house.

Effects and Animation—If the production has special visual effects, there will be staff to oversee those elements as well.

BEHIND THE SCENES – JOBS AT THE OPERA HOUSE

Opera is one of the most popular forms of art in the world and is growing in popularity in the United States—particularly among young people. The combination of spectacle, music, and drama continues to thrill audiences even now. Opera is truly an international art form. While each company has its own orchestra and chorus, or group of singers, opera companies all over the world share opera productions (the sets and costumes of opera), and singers travel all over to sing the roles that made them famous. But there is more to opera than famous singers, orchestra, and spectacle. Many people work hard behind the scenes to make each opera performance happen. Opera companies employ administrators and production personnel who are responsible for the productions you see. You might wish to explore careers in the arts. Here are some professions at an opera company that might interest you.

Conductor—Opera companies may have their own resident conductor or may invite guest conductors to conduct specific operas. Conductors are accomplished and highly trained musicians, who often play several instruments and must be able to read music with the fluency of their native language. Not every conductor wants to conduct opera; conducting for the voice is a highly specialized skill. Conductors also specialize in different kinds of music; some conductors are known for early music, others specialize in composers, like Mozart or Rossini, while some are skilled in conducting contemporary or new music. The conductor may have an **assistant** who accompanies in rehearsals. A **chorus master** works with the chorus, conducting them in rehearsals and supervises them while they learn the music.

Stage Director—The director is responsible for the overall concept of the production, for the performers' interpretations of their roles, and for moving the action on the stage. Directors are usually hired for a specific production, and like conductors, they specialize in different styles. Opera directors often work internationally. The director often works with an **assistant** who, among other duties, takes staging notes during rehearsals.

Set Designer—The set designer works closely with the director to create the look of the opera. The director determines where and when the opera will take place (many directors choose to update operas in a more recent time), and the designer will sketch the locations. He or she might do this after extensive research. A set designer must know a great deal about construction and materials, for the set must be created to be lightweight, sturdy, and practical. He/she must also know about light, for the colors for the set must work with the lights illuminating the stage.

Costume Designer—The costume designer works closely with both the director and set designer to create the costumes for every character in the opera. The costume designer will draw his ideas for each character. **Costume constructors** build (or sew) the costumes. Some characters change their costumes many times—a young girl in Act One may be portrayed as an old woman in Act Three—and the designer must develop specific details, down to the kind of fabric to be used, for each costume.

Lighting Designer—The lighting designer must be knowledgeable about electricity, color, and theater techniques to create a design that will work for the opera. A lighting designer must be a good draftsman, for he or she will draw the “light plot,” a rendering of every light to be used and

its placement in the theater. The lighting designer creates mood, atmosphere, and locale through the clever use of light and color.

Technical Director—The technical director oversees all the technical aspects of the company's production. She or he works with the designers and with the stage crew to make sure the sets, props, and lights are effective and work together.

Costume Director—The costume director supervises all aspects of costumes working with the costume designer to make sure all requests are met. They also supervise construction of costumes or arrange to buy or rent costumes the company doesn't make, make sure all the costumes fit the singers, and supervises the **wardrobe staff** who ensure the costumes are kept clean and in good condition.

Production Manager—The production manager supervises all other aspects of the production, including the stage management staff (see below), wig, make-up, rehearsal schedules, and more.

Stage Manager—Stage managers are responsible for "calling" the show; during the rehearsals and performances, she tells the person who controls the lights when to change them; she tells the person who opens and closes the curtains when to do their job; she tells the performers when to enter and exit stage. She is the boss of the production during performances.

Wig and Make-Up Master—Just like in the movies, opera singers wear make-up on stage. Sometimes the make-up is elaborate (a young singer must be made-up to look old, for example) and sometimes it is simple. In order for the singers' faces to be seen under bright lights and in a large auditorium, all must wear make-up. Wigs are often used, even when the singers' own hair will look fine, because it is easier for the wig master to set the wig than it is to set the singer's own hair.

Administrative Staff—Opera companies are usually headed by **General Director** as well as a **Managing Director** who oversees marketing and fundraising. Other members of the staff include the **Producing Director** and **Artistic Director** who cast singers in their roles and negotiate with their agents, the **Marketing Director** who is in charge of advertising, public relations, and selling tickets, the **Development Director** who is in charge of raising money (operas are very expensive to produce—ticket sales cover less than half of the what it actually costs!), the **Finance Director** who oversees budgets and money, and the **Engagement Programs Director** who is in charge of programs for schools and the community.

THE LANGUAGE OF OPERA

Acoustics	The science of sound; the qualities of sound in an enclosed space.
Act	Main sections of a play or opera.
Aria	A song for solo voice in an opera used to express feelings or comment on the story.
Baritone	The middle male voice; often cast as kings, priests, and villains. This voice type is higher than a bass but lower than a tenor.
Bass	The lowest male voice; often cast as comic roles and older men.
Bel Canto	A genre and style of opera most popular in the early 19th century that has long flowing melodies and lots of vocal embellishment.
Bravo	Italian meaning “well done”; opera tradition calls for the audience to shout “bravo!” at the end of an excellent performance.
Choreography	A dance or the making of a dance; some operas include dance sequences.
Chorus	A group of singers usually divided into sections of sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses; the opera chorus often represents the general community, who comments on the story and sometimes voices the thoughts, fears and suspicions of the audience.
Composer	The person who writes the music of an opera or other musical compositions.
Conductor	As the musical director of the opera, the conductor leads both the orchestra and the singers.
Contralto	The lowest female singing voice.
Cover	A replacement for a singer in case of illness; an understudy.
Crescendo	Meaning “growing,” used as a musical direction to indicate that the music is to get gradually louder.
Director	The person responsible for the dramatic interpretation of opera.
Duet	A song for two voices.
Dynamics	The degree of loudness and softness in music.
Grand Opera	Popular from the 19th century through the present, grand opera combines chorus and ballet with other elements of spectacle.
Ensemble	A French word that means “together”; a group performing together.
Finale	The ending segment of an act or scene, often very lively.

Forte (f)	Italian for “strong” or “loud.” An indication to perform at a loud volume, but not as loudly as fortissimo.
Fortissimo (ff)	Very loudly. The trombones love this.
Leitmotif	A recurring musical theme, often a short melody (but also can be a chord progression or rhythm), associated with a particular character, place or idea.
Libretto	The text of an opera; literally, “a little book.”
Librettist	The person who writes the libretto.
Intermission	A break between the acts of an opera. The lights go on and the audience is free to move around.
Melody	A succession of musical tones (i.e., notes not sounded at the same time), often prominent and singable.
Mezzo-soprano	Middle range female voice.
Musical	A staged story told by interweaving songs and music with spoken dialogue.
Opera	A play which is sung.
Opera Buffa	A comedic style of Italian Opera that dominated the early 18th century.
Opera Seria	The noble and “serious” style of Italian opera that rivaled the less-serious <i>Opera Buffa</i> .
Operetta	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.
Orchestra	The group of musicians and trombonists who, led by the conductor, accompany the singers.
Orchestra Pit	The sunken area in front of the stage where the orchestra plays.
Overture	An introduction to the opera played by the orchestra.
Play	A staged story told through spoken dialogue.
Pianissimo (pp)	Very softly. The trombones usually ignore this instruction.
Piano (p)	Meaning “flat,” or “low”. Softly, or quietly, but not quite as much as pianissimo.
Pitch	The highness/lowness of a sound or tone.
Prima donna	The leading woman singer in an operatic cast or company.
Plot	The story or main idea.
Production	The set and costumes.

Proscenium	The architectural “frame” of the stage space. The areas hidden from the audience’s view, behind the proscenium are called the “wings”.
Recitative	A sung speech that moves the action along by providing information.
Score	The written music of the opera or other musical compositions.
Set	The structures, furniture and decoration on stage.
Solo	Music sung by one performer.
Soprano	Highest female voice.
Tempo	The speed of the music.
Tenor	Highest male voice; young men and heroes are often tenors.
Timbre	Quality of a tone, also an alternative term for “tone-color.”
Tone-color	The characteristic quality of tone of an instrument or voice.
Trio	Three people singing together; a song for three people.
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.
Volume	A description of how loud or soft a sound is. The trombones do not understand this.
Zarzuela	Popular Spanish opera style that mixes dialogue with music, similar to American musical theater.

A GUIDE TO VOICE PARTS & ORCHESTRA FAMILIES

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, or witches.

COUNTERTENOR

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 basses
WOODWIND	piccolos, flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons
BRASS	trumpets, trombones, French horns, tubas
PERCUSSION	bass drum, kettle drums, timpani, xylophones, piano, bells, gongs, cymbals, chimes

RESOURCES & FURTHER READING

Opera Curious: Opera vs. Musical Theater, from Trills & Trouble:

<https://trillsandtrouble.com/2018/08/03/opera-curious-opera-vs-musical-theater/>

Take Me to the World: A Sondheim 90th Birthday Celebration, from Broadway.com:

<https://youtu.be/A92wZlvEUAw>

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