

OPERA and its many elements!

An opera is a story.

The story is told by the composer who uses music and the librettist who uses words. The two work closely together to tell the story.

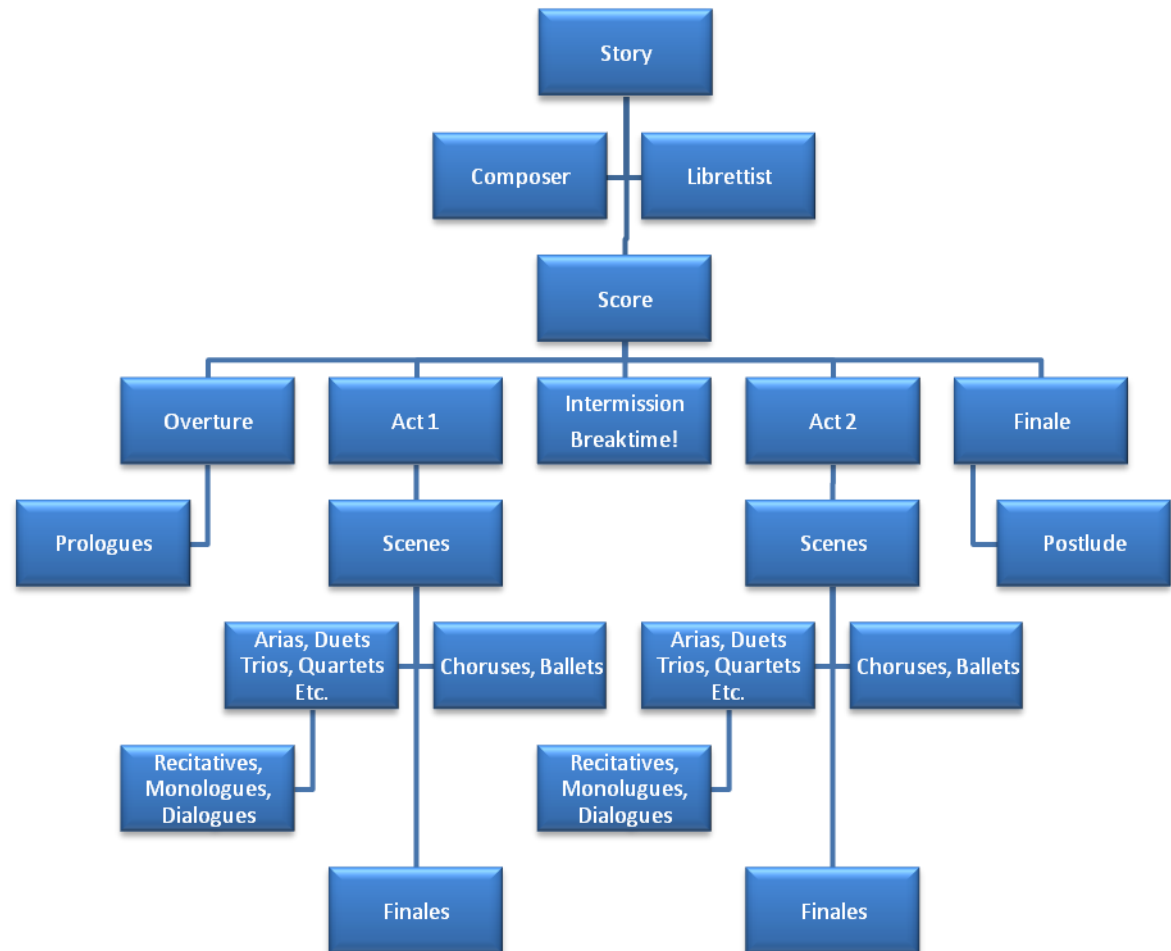
The book that the composer and librettist put together is called a score.

The score has all the musical notes, words, and ideas to help the performers tell the story.

Often, there are operas with overtures, preludes, prologues, several acts, several intermissions or pauses, finales, and postludes. Go on - Look those words up!

During each Act, the story unfolds through the music that the singers sing, the dancers dance, and the orchestra plays.

Sometimes there is spoken dialogue without music. Sometimes there is a melodrama which is spoken dialogue with the orchestra playing. Sometimes there is speech-like singing with just a keyboard accompaniment. Sometimes there is speech-like singing with the entire orchestra playing. Sometimes there is singing and playing all at once. The possible combinations are endless!



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THE SINGERS

The phenomenon of the trained opera singer's voice is a very necessary element of opera. Have you ever stood next to an opera singer, while they are performing? It can be quite an interesting aural experience. Because opera singers typically do not use a microphone except for on rare occasions, they must train their instruments (their bodies) to be heard in large halls over full orchestras with a lot of other stuff happening on stage at the same time. Just to help you get context here, imagine all your family is speaking at once, plus the television is playing loudly and your neighbors are visiting too, you're all in the living room, and you want to tell them an important announcement...How on earth will they ever be able to hear you? If you had received vocal lessons and learned how your body can be used to help produce powerful tones and amplify your voice, you would be undaunted by the noisiness that is going on around you. You would probably be able to command everyone's attention by breaking into song! Here's an idea, next time your teacher is having a hard time getting the classroom to be quiet, encourage him or her to use his/her "opera voice" and see what happens!!!

Professional opera singers spend a great deal of time, energy, and money to become the top of their craft just like all other professionals. They have to learn how the body is built, the physiology of the human voice, the science of acoustics, the history of music and opera, the various styles of music, the various composition styles, the many roles for their voice type, the literary works that the operas come from, and this list goes on and on. In addition to all this, the singer must practice regularly to develop her voice physically so that it can produce the ultimate desired effect: a happy and impressed audience!

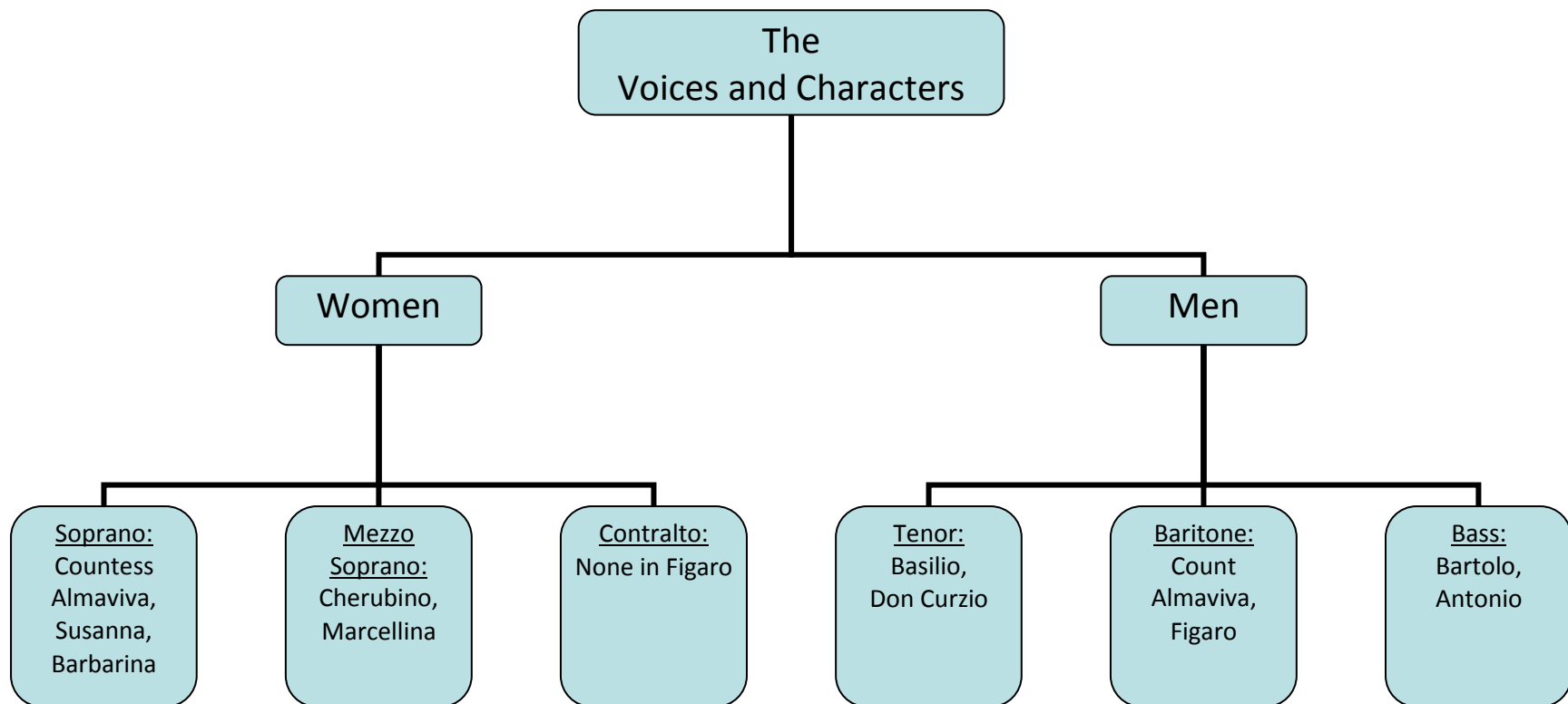
For every singer out there, there are certain characteristics that make each voice unique. There are also characteristics that make each voice sort of fit into categories or voice types. Today, it is easiest to refer to the many voice types by using ranges. For example, there are high, medium and low voice ranges in men's voices as well as women's voices.

<u>RANGE</u>	<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>
High	Tenor	Soprano
Medium	Baritone	Mezzo-soprano
Low	Bass	Contralto

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Within each vocal range, there are more defining characteristics of a singer's voice such as lyric, coloratura, spinto, profundo, counter, contra-, and so on. These characteristics are in the glossary so explore them! There are even more than what's in the glossary. Want to hear a few samples? Visit <http://arts.endow.gov/national/GAV/voicetypes.html>. Vocal ranges are also unique to each singer. There are many singers whose range crosses over into other voice ranges. For example, some sopranos are able to sing as low as many mezzo-sopranos and vice versa. There are baritones who are capable of singing in the same range as many tenors. So enjoy every voice for its uniqueness and remember that the information listed here is only the beginning!

In Mozart's opera *Le Nozze di Figaro* (or The Marriage of Figaro) there are several voice types represented. Take a look at the chart below to see who sings what according to our list of voice ranges.



Our production of *Le Nozze di Figaro* includes a wonderful cast. Check out the terrific singers who will be singing these roles at the opera company's website! Many of the singers have their own websites with sound and video links of their performances. It's a wonderful way to get to know this amazing singers. Enjoy!

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THE ORCHESTRA

The orchestra is usually the combination of instruments that play from an area below the stage called “the orchestra pit”. Think of the orchestra as the giant river that flows with the vocal numbers showing up as islands in the midst of the river. Or you can say the orchestra carries the singers on its shoulders so to speak. Depending on the opera and the type of production, the orchestra may be small and use only a few instruments such as a violin, a viola, a piano, and a flute, or it may be a piano by itself, or it may be a collection of over 40 instruments.

The artists in the orchestra have also received a great deal of training similar to a singer’s training but specific to their instrument family. By instrument family we mean, for instance, violins come from the string family, tympanies come from the percussion family, clarinets come from the woodwind family and so on. Many instrumentalists in the opera orchestra also play in symphony orchestras because they can’t get enough of playing the good stuff!

The orchestra has an equally important role as the singers in telling the story of the opera. Of course, they must do this with their instruments since they don’t have words. Listen to the overture from *Le Nozze di Figaro* where only the orchestra is playing. Do you hear all of the hustle and bustle of wedding plans? [Figaro Overture.mp3](#). Of course, the instruments in Mozart day were different from what you will hear in most contemporary performances. Here is an example of the same overture played on instruments similar to those of Mozart’s day. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKU94kxv-o>. Can you hear any differences?

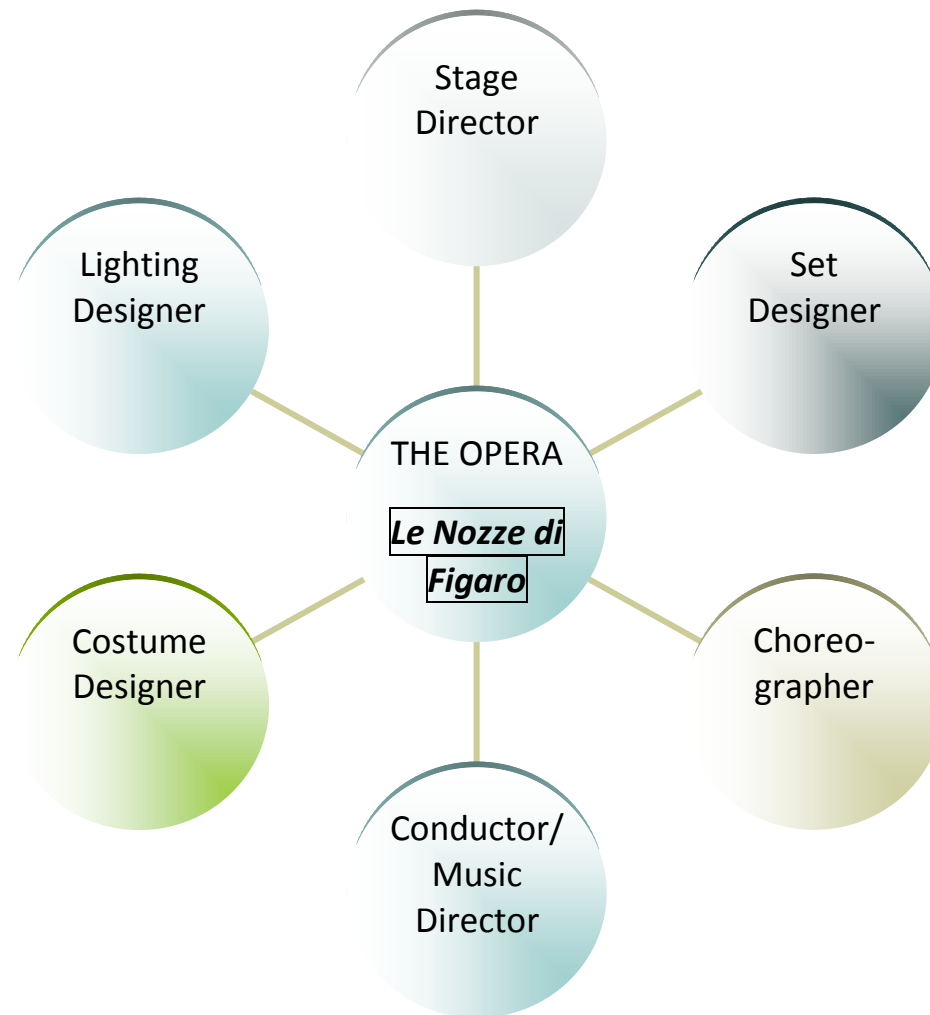
Mozart composed this piece for flutes, oboes, clarinettes, bassoons, french horns, trumpets, tympanis, violins, violas, cellos, and double basses. As you can imagine, Mozart spun together a wonderful mix of sounds with such a large group of instruments. If you would like to learn more about instruments of the orchestra, and how they have changed over the years, visit <http://www.mti.dmu.ac.uk/~ahugill/manual/intro.html>. You will also be able to hear sound clips of the many instruments found in orchestras today.



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In addition to the singers and the orchestra, there are so many other people involved in putting an opera on the stage.

ON and OFF STAGE



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- The **Stage Director** is responsible for the action on the stage. This is accomplished by working with the singers for weeks before the performances, directing their movements (blocking) and helping them develop their individual characters.
- The **Music Director**, also known as the conductor, interprets the music of the opera and rehearses it with the singers and the orchestra. During rehearsal the music is shaped to express different moods of the opera. For example, the conductor decides how fast or slow (tempo) and how loudly or softly (dynamics) the music is played.
- The **Set Designer** designs the scenery for the opera.
- The **Lighting Designer** manipulates the lights to create effects which help set the mood and complement the action on stage.
- The **Costume Designer** creates the clothes that the singers will wear on stage.
- The **Choreographer** is responsible for creating and directing any dancing that takes place in the opera.

BEHIND THE SCENES

- The **Stage Manager** is responsible for keeping the show up and running. She/he must keep track of this long list; all the artists, what's happening on stage and in the pit, what's happening in the sound booth, what time everyone has to be at the theater, what's happening with the audience, the lighting and sound cues, entrances and exits of the artists, and the list goes on! Thanks all you amazing stage managers!
- The Stage Manager does have some help from a group of people known as **Stage Hands** or the **Stage Crew**. They take their orders from the Stage Manager to move scenery and properties or "props" around on stage.
- The **Props Manager** makes sure that the props are placed in the right place for when the singers need them. Often they are required to make props too which is a special skill.
- The **Wardrobe Supervisor** looks after all of the costumes during the show to help with fast costume changes or repairs. Often, they may be assisted by dressers if the opera warrants it. The Wardrobe Supervisor watches the opera to see if he/she is needed to handle an emergency costume issues. Imagine if Figaro split his pants after singing an aria! Off in the wings (the side curtains on stage), the Wardrobe Supervisor would have an emergency sewing kit or another pair of pants to quickly slip Figaro into and get him back on stage!
- The **Makeup Artist** ensures that the artists really look the part and that everyone can see the features even to the last row in the opera house.
- The **Sound Engineer** works from a sound table in the theatre. She/he operates the floor microphones and adjusts the sound.
- The **Master Electrician** works in a booth in the theater, directs the positioning of the lights, and then operates the lights during a show.
- The **Rehearsal Pianist** accompanies the artists as they rehearse the opera. This job also entails serving as a coach and assisting the artists with language and musical preparation.