

FIRST TIME AT THE OPERA? READ THIS!

WHAT'S AN OPERA? The word opera means “works” and started to be used to refer to theatrical music in the 1600s. Opera is, quite simply, a story acted out through music and singing. Humans have acted out stories for thousands of years, but how they looked and were presented changed drastically over that time. Most of the operas we see in the United States developed throughout Europe between 1700 and the 1920s. However, operas are still being written today, and they are being presented in new ways too. Sometimes in abandoned buildings or mansions, sometimes in small cafes, and sometimes in gardens. The art form continues to evolve. Some operas written in recent years include *The Little Prince* (Rachel Portman), *Dead Man Walking* (Jake Heggie), *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs* (Mason Bates), Charlie Parker's *YARDBIRD* (Daniel Schnyder), and many others.

HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT'S GOING ON? Operas are written in many different languages. Don't speak the language of the opera? No problem! To help audiences follow the story, even if the opera is in English, an opera house will use **supertitles**. Supertitles are a translation of the libretto projected onto the screen above the stage for audiences to read. But the words are only the surface; the music adds many rich layers full of meaning, giving opera an appeal even if you don't understand the words.

WHERE'S THAT MUSIC COMING FROM? That's the **orchestra**! An orchestra is an instrumental ensemble featuring string, brass, woodwind, and percussion instruments. The orchestra is led by the **conductor**, sometimes called the **maestro**. The conductor usually holds a **baton** to help communicate musical ideas, tempo, and interpretation of the score.



Maestro Oliver Von Dohnányi conducts members of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra during a rehearsal of Seattle Opera's *Katya Kabanova*.



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