

Glossary

ACCELERANDO

An acceleration or speeding up of the tempo of a particular aria, chorus or ensemble.

ACT

A portion of an opera or musical designated by the composer, which has a dramatic structure of its own.

ALLEGRO

A quick and lively tempo that is faster than allegretto and slower than presto

ALLITERATION

Repetition of the same sound or letter at the beginning of words.

ANDANTE

Tempo of a walking pace.

ARCHETYPAL

The original model or form, after which other things are modeled.

ASCENDING

A series of notes going from a low to a high pitch.

ASIDE

A secret comment from an actor or singer directly to the audience that the other characters cannot hear.

BARITONE

The male singing voice that is higher than bass but lower than tenor.

BASS

The lowest male singing voice.

CHORD

A simultaneous combination of three or more tones that constitute a single block of harmony.

CHOREOGRAPHY

The act of setting movement to music to create a dance.

CHORUS

A group of singers who portray servants, party guests, or other unnamed characters; also the music written for them.

COMPOSER

The person who writes the music.

COMPOSITION

A work of music, literature, or art.

CONDUCTOR

The leader of the orchestra sometimes called maestro.

CONTRALTO

The lowest female singing voice.

COUNTERTENOR

A countertenor voice is that of a male contralto. Some roles that are usually sung by a female contralto can be sung by a male countertenor.

CRESCENDO

A build in the volume or dynamic of the music.

DECRESCENDO

Gradually playing music softer.

DESIGNER

The person who creates the lighting, costumes or sets.

DESCENDING

A series of notes going from a high to a low pitch.

DIRECTOR

The person who instructs the singer-actors in their movements on-stage and in the interpretation of their roles.

DUET

Two people singing or playing together, or the music written for two performers.
(Example: "Stepsister's Lament")

ENSEMBLE

Two or more people singing at the same time, or the music written for such a group.

FAIRY TALE

A story (as for children) involving fantastic forces and beings. (such as fairies, wizards, and goblins)

FINALE

The last musical number of an opera or musical or the last number of an act.

FORTE

The Italian term for "loud", indicated in the musical score by the marking "f".

HARMONY

Two or more notes played at the same time; in other words harmony deals with chords, simultaneous sounds, and counterpoint with melody set against melody.

HERO(INE)

The principle character at the center of the story who struggles throughout the story, but generally triumphs in some manner at the story's conclusion.

INTERLUDE

A short piece of instrumental music played between scenes or acts.

KEY

The specific tonality of a piece of music, indicating the precise pitch which is to serve as the tonal center.

LIBRETTO

The text of a musical work, such as an opera.

LYRICS

The sung words or text of a musical comedy or operetta song.

MAGIC

A mysterious quality of enchantment, or the art which invokes that quality.

MELODY

The tune of the music.

METAPHOR

An implied comparison between two things, where they are stated as the same thing, i.e. "Hope is a thing with feathers" (Emily Dickinson) (Note: related to a simile, where the comparison uses the words like or as, as in "light as a feather")

MEZZO-SOPRANO

The middle female singing voice, lower than soprano, but higher than contralto.

MAESTRO

Another word for conductor; Italian for "master".

MODERATO

Moderate tempo

OCTAVE

Eight notes, beginning and ending on the same letter name; double the frequency of vibration.

OPERA

Italian for "the work". A libretto acted and sung by one or more singers to an instrumental accompaniment. In short: words plus music plus staging.

ORCHESTRA

The group of instrumentalists or musicians who, led by the conductor, accompany the singers.

ORCHESTRATION

The art of writing for the orchestra. Decisions about what instruments should play which parts of the music can affect the sound of a composition a great deal.

OVERTURE

The orchestra's introduction to an opera or musical that shows the mood or tone of the rest of the piece. It may contain melodies used in the opera or musical itself.

PIANO

The Italian term for "soft", indicated in the musical score by the marking "p".

PITCH

The highness/lowness of a sound or tone.

PRESTO

A tempo that is very fast.

PRINCIPAL

A major singing role, or the singer who performs such a role.

QUARTET

Four singers or the music that is written for four singers. Also quintet, sextet, etc. (Example: "When You're Driving Through the Moonlight")

RANGE

How high and low an instrument can play.

REHEARSAL

A session of practice for a performance.

REPRISE

A return to an original theme.

RITARD

A slowing in the tempo of a piece of music.

RHYME

Words that share the same sound; (i.e. share/care/bear/stare)

RHYTHM

The arrangement of notes according to their relative length and relative emphasis (beat).

SCALE

A scale is a sequence of notes arranged in order from lowest to highest or from highest to lowest.

SCORE

The written music of an opera or other musical work.

SOLO

Playing or singing alone, as a featured performer. (Example: "In My Own Little Corner")

SOPRANO

The highest female singing voice.

STEREOTYPICAL

A conventional, oversimplified, or expected opinion or idea that can be transferred to an image, object or person.

TEMPO

The speed of the music.

TENOR

The highest adult male singing voice.

TRILL

Very quick alternation of pitch between two adjacent notes. See coloratura.

TRIO

An ensemble of three singers or the music that is written for three singers.

TUTTI

"All", meaning that everyone should play or sing together.

UNDERScore

Music that is played softly underneath other action, usually characters talking.

VILLIAN(S)

A character in a story (or play/musical) that is pitted against the hero and is generally depicted as evil or wicked.