

What's Going On (and Why That Guy Is Singing So Loudly)?

A Quick Guide for First-Time Opera Listeners

If this is your first time at an opera concert — welcome! You don't need to know anything in advance to enjoy it. But if you're curious, here's a bit of background that might make things more fun to follow — whether you leave with a new love for opera or just a thoughtful smile.

Voice Types: More Than Just High or Low

In opera, voice types aren't just about pitch — they often match a certain kind of character. Imagine a typical storyline: a tenor (the higher male voice) is in love with a soprano (the higher female voice), but a baritone (the classic brooding type) is after her too. Meanwhile, a mezzo-soprano might be secretly in love with the baritone. Drama unfolds. There's jealousy, heartbreak, perhaps poison — and often a powerful finale featuring a bass, playing someone like a king, a priest, or a very serious father.

Why High Notes Are So Hard

Hitting the top of your vocal range — those big high notes — isn't something we use in everyday speech. They take years of training and fine muscle control (think diaphragm, soft palate, ribs, larynx...). And even then, singers rely on sleep, health and nerves being on their side. It's like the Olympics of the voice!

Arias = Vocal Figure Skating

You can think of an aria like a solo performance in figure skating. It's full of emotion and artistry, but also packed with technical hurdles. Just like a skater's triple axel, a singer's aria is carefully designed to show their skill — with difficult jumps between high and low notes, tricky breathing, and emotional storytelling.

Duets and Ensembles

Now imagine trying all that with someone else. Singing in a duet is like dancing (or skating) in perfect sync. It's also like trying to navigate rush hour with someone talking in your ear — and you still have to sound good doing it.

Why Opera Singing is So Unique

Unlike most musicians, singers are their instrument. They can't take their voice out and listen from the outside — it's all done by feel and muscle memory. And because of that, they need support: from teachers, coaches, audiences... It's a whole invisible team behind every polished performance.

One Last Thought

Opera might look effortless, but it's anything but. Try standing in front of a room and shouting "meow" so the fifth row hears you — it gives you a small idea of what singers do every night.

Those of us who've worked alongside them know how much goes into every note — and admire them endlessly. I certainly do.

Enjoy the concert, and let yourself be drawn in — opera has a way of surprising people.

— Rebekka Magomedova

Pianist, vocal coach and author of the [Floating Opera](#) Telegram channel

Program Descriptions

1. Elisabeth's Entrance (Soprano)

Composer: Richard Wagner | Opera: Tannhäuser

This piece introduces Elisabeth, a noblewoman whose purity and devotion contrast with the turmoil around her. Her entrance highlights her grace and the hope she brings to the story.

You, dear hall, do I greet again
I greet you joyfully, beloved room!
In you his songs awake
And wake me from a dusky dream.
When he departed from you
How dull you seemed to me!
Peace flew out of me
And joy went out of you.
And now my bosom is raised high
As you now seem to me proud and noble
He who brings you and me to life
Is no longer wandering far away
And now my bosom is raised high
As you now seem to me proud and noble
He who brings you and me to life
Is no longer wandering far away
I greet you, dear hall, I greet you!

2. Wolfram's Romance (Baritone)

Composer: Richard Wagner | Opera: Tannhäuser

A heartfelt monologue by Wolfram, expressing unspoken love and admiration for Elisabeth.

Dusk covers the land like a premonition of death,

Wraps the valley in her dark mantle;
The soul that longs for those heights
Dreads to take its dark and awful flight.
Then you appear, O loveliest of stars,
And shed your gentle light from afar;
Your sweet glow cleaves the twilight gloom,
And as a friend you show the way out of the valley.

O you, my fair evening star,
Gladly have I always greeted you:
Greet her, from the depths of this heart,
Which has never betrayed her,
Greet her, when she passes,
When she soars above this mortal vale
To become a holy angel there!
(Translated by Richard Stokes)

3. Marfa's Second Aria (Soprano)

Composer: Rimsky-Korsakov | Opera: The Tsar's Bride

Poisoned and delirious, Marfa imagines she is walking in the garden with her beloved the man who, in reality, was brutally tortured to death by Ivan the Terrible's oprichniks. In this tender, dreamlike aria, her words shift between childlike joy and quiet farewell — a final vision of love before her mind slips away.

Ivan Sergeich, shall we go into the garden?
What a day! It smells so green and fresh.
Want to try and catch me now?
I'll run —
There, down the path!
One, two, three!
Aha! You didn't catch me!
But now I'm quite breathless —
I'm not used to running anymore...

Oh, look — what a lovely bluebell
I just picked, so blue!
Is it true they ring
On St John's Eve?
Petrovna told me
All sorts of wonders about that night.

That little apple tree is always in bloom.
Shall we sit beneath it?

Oh, that dream! Oh, that dream...

Look — just above our heads,
The sky stretches out like a tent.
How marvellously God has woven it —
Like deep blue velvet.

In distant lands, in foreign skies —
Is there a sky like ours?

Look — up there, do you see?
That golden crown of cloud,
So high above.

Crowns like that, my dearest,
They will place on our heads tomorrow.

4. Onegin's Aria (Baritone)

Composer: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky | Opera: Eugene Onegin

The scene where Onegin returns Tatyana her letter and tries to explain why he cannot be her husband. Onegin reflects on the choices.

You wrote to me; do not deny it.
I have read the confession of your trusting soul,
The outpouring of innocent love.
Your sincerity is dear to me,
It has stirred emotions long silent.
But I do not wish to praise you;
Instead, I will repay you
With a confession, just as artless.
So accept my candid words;
I place myself in your judgment.
If I ever sought to confine my life
Within the domestic circle,
If I were destined to be a husband and father
By some pleasant fate,
Then surely, apart from you alone,
I would seek no other bride.
But I am not made for happiness;
My soul is alien to it.
Your virtues are in vain for me,
I am unworthy of them entirely.
Believe me, my conscience swears it true:
Marriage would be torment for us both.
No matter how much I might love you,
Once accustomed, I would cease to care.
Judge for yourself what kind of roses
Hymen would bring us,
And perhaps for many, many days!

Dreams and youth cannot return—
Oh, they cannot return.
I cannot renew my soul...
I love you as a brother might,
As a brother might—
Or, perhaps, even more deeply,
Perhaps, perhaps
Even more tenderly.
So hear me without anger,
A young girl's light dreams
Will soon be replaced by others.

5. La ci darem la mano (Soprano and Baritone)

Composer: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart | Opera: Don Giovanni

A playful and seductive duet where Don Giovanni tempts Zerlina, a young bride-to-be, to abandon her fiancé.

DON GIOVANNI

Finally, we are free,
Gentle Zerlina, from that fool.
What do you say, my dear? Am I not smooth?

ZERLINA

Sir, he is my husband...

DON GIOVANNI

Who? Him?
Do you think an honest man,
A noble gentleman like me,
Could bear to see that golden face,
That sweet, angelic visage,
Mistreated by a lowly brute?

ZERLINA

But, sir, I gave him
My word to marry him.

DON GIOVANNI

Such a word
Is worth nothing. You were not made
To live as a peasant; a different fate
Is destined for those roguish eyes,
Those lovely lips,
Those delicate, fragrant hands—
They feel like silk and smell of roses.

ZERLINA

Ah! I wouldn't want...

DON GIOVANNI

What wouldn't you want?

ZERLINA

In the end

To be deceived. I know that you noblemen
Are rarely honest or sincere with women.

DON GIOVANNI

That's a slander

Spread by common folk! Nobility
Has honesty painted in its eyes.

Come, let's not waste time. This very moment,
I want to marry you.

ZERLINA

You!

DON GIOVANNI

Of course, me.

That little house is mine; we'll be alone,
And there, my jewel, we shall marry.

DON GIOVANNI

There, we'll join hands,
There, you'll say "yes" to me.

Look, it's not far;

Let's leave here, my love.

ZERLINA

(I want to go, but I hesitate;
My heart trembles a little.
It's true, I'd be happy,
But he could still deceive me.)

DON GIOVANNI

Come, my beautiful delight!

ZERLINA

(I feel pity for Masetto.)

DON GIOVANNI

I will change your life.

ZERLINA

Quickly... I can't resist anymore.

DON GIOVANNI

Let's go!

ZERLINA

Let's go!

BOTH

Let's go, let's go, my love,
To ease the pain
Of an innocent love.

6. Non più andrai (Baritone)

Composer: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart | Opera: Le Nozze di Figaro

Figaro teasingly describes the military life awaiting Cherubino, a mischievous young page.

You won't go any more, amorous butterfly,
Fluttering around inside night and day
Disturbing the sleep of beauties,
A little Narcissus and Adonis of love.
You won't have those fine feathers any more,
That light and jaunty hat,
That hair, that shining aspect,
That womanish red color [in your face]!
Among soldiers, by Bacchus!
A huge moustache, a little knapsack,
Gun on your back, sword at your side,
Your neck straight, your nose exposed,
A big helmet, or a big turban,
A lot of honour, very little pay.
And in place of the dance
A march through the mud.
Over mountains, through valleys,
With snow, and heat-stroke,
To the music of trumpets,
Of bombards, and of cannons,
Which, at every boom,
Will make bullets whistle past your ear.
Cherubino, go to victory!
To military glory!

7. Cio-Cio San's Aria (Soprano)

Composer: Giacomo Puccini | Opera: Madama Butterfly

The Japanese geisha Cio-Cio San dreams of the return of her beloved, a naval officer from the American ship Abraham Lincoln.

One good day, we will see
Arising a strand of smoke
Over the far horizon on the sea
And then the ship appears
And then the ship is white
It enters into the port, it rumbles its salute.
Do you see it? He is coming!
I don't go down to meet him, not I.
I stay upon the edge of the hill
And I wait a long time
but I do not grow weary of the long wait.

And leaving from the crowded city,
A man, a little speck
Climbing the hill.
Who is it? Who is it?
And as he arrives
What will he say? What will he say?
He will call Butterfly from the distance
I without answering
Stay hidden
A little to tease him,
A little as to not die.
At the first meeting,
And then a little troubled
He will call, he will call
"Little one, dear wife
Blossom of orange"
The names he called me at his last coming.
(To Suzuki)
All this will happen,
I promise you this
Hold back your fears -
I with secure faith wait for him.

8. Silvio and Nedda's Duet (Soprano and Baritone)

Composer: Ruggero Leoncavallo | Opera: Pagliacci

A passionate love duet between Nedda and her lover Silvio, expressing their desire to escape the oppressive life they lead.

SILVIO

half his body appearing as he climbs the low wall on the right, calling softly
Nedda!

NEDDA

hastening towards him
Silvio! At this hour,
what folly ...

SILVIO

gaily vaulting over and coming towards her
Bah! You can be sure
that I'm taking no risk.
I saw Canio and Peppe in the tavern
from far off! ...
But I came here with care, through

the wooded path I know.

NEDDA

Had you been a moment sooner
you'd have run into Tonio.

SILVIO

laughing
Oh! Tonio the fool!

NEDDA

The fool can be dangerous.
He loves me ...

SILVIO

Ah!

NEDDA

He told me so just now ...
and in his bestial frenzy,
trying to kiss me, he dared to rush on me ...

SILVIO

By Heaven!

NEDDA

But with the whip
I cooled the ardour of the filthy dog.

SILVIO

Will you live forever amid these worries?
Nedda! Nedda! Decide my fate.
O stay here, Nedda!
As you know, the fair is over
and everyone will be gone tomorrow.
Nedda!, Nedda!
And when you too have left here,
what will become of me ...
Of my life?

NEDDA

touched
Silvio!

SILVIO

Nedda, Nedda, answer me.
If it is true that you love Canio no more,
if it is true that you hate
the nomadic life you lead,

if your great love is not a fiction,
let us go tonight!
Nedda, fly with me.

NEDDA

Do not tempt me!
Do you want to ruin my life?
Hush, Silvio, no more ...
It is folly, it is madness!
I trust in you,
to whom I have given my heart.
Do not take advantage of me,
of my feverish love!
Do not tempt me! Pity me!
And yet, who knows! It's better to leave.
Fate is against us,
what we say is in vain.
But from my heart
you can't be removed,
I will live only for that love
that you have planted in my heart!
Ah!

SILVIO

Ah! Nedda, let's flee!

NEDDA

Don't tempt me!
Do you want to be killed?

SILVIO

Nedda, stay!

NEDDA

Stop, Silvio, no more ...
it's crazy, lunacy!

SILVIO

What will become of me ...

NEDDA

I'm telling the truth ...

SILVIO

... when you're gone?

NEDDA

... you, to whom my heart belongs!

SILVIO
Stay!

NEDDA
Don't abuse me ...

SILVIO
Nedda!

NEDDA
... or my feverish love!

SILVIO
Let's flee!

NEDDA
Don't tempt me ... have pity on me!

SILVIO
Ay! Come on!
Ah! Fly with me.
No, you no longer love me!

NEDDA
What!

Tonio appears at the back, on the left

TONIO
having seen him, to himself
I've caught you, you strumpet!

He hurries off by the path, threatening.

NEDDA
Yes, I love you, I do!

SILVIO
lovingly trying to persuade her
Yet you leave tomorrow morning? ...
Then tell me why you have bewitched me
if now without pity you wish to leave me?
Why did you give me those kisses
in that burning ecstasy of pleasure?
Even if you forget those fleeting hours,
I cannot, and I still want
that burning ecstasy, those ardent kisses
which filled my heart with such fever!

NEDDA

I have forgotten nothing;
this love that shines in your eyes
has thrown me into confusion.
I want to live close by your side,
in the spell of a life of calm
and peaceful love.
I give myself to you:
You alone shall rule me, and I take you
and yield myself completely
Let us forget everything!

SILVIO

Let us forget everything!

NEDDA

Look into my eyes!
Kiss me! Let us forget everything!

SILVIO

I look at you, and kiss you.
Let us forget everything!

A three - minute break for the singers, filled with Dvořák's
charming Humoresque.

9. Zemfira's and Aleko's Scene (Soprano and Baritone)

Composer: Sergei Rachmaninoff | Opera: Aleko

A dramatic confrontation between Zemfira and Aleko, revealing betrayal, jealousy, and the destructive nature of possessive love.

Zemfira

(sings a song by the cradle)
An old husband, a cruel husband,
Cut me, burn me:
I am strong, I fear not
The knife or the flame.
I hate you,
I despise you;
I love another.
I die, loving him.

Aleko

My soul is burdened with secret sorrow...
Where are the joys of fleeting love?

Zemfira

Cut me, burn me,
I won't say a word;
An old husband, a cruel husband,
You will never know him.

Aleko

Be silent! I've grown tired of your singing.
I do not love these wild songs.

Zemfira

You don't love them? What do I care!
I sing this song for myself.
(Continues singing.)
He is fresher than spring,
Hotter than a summer day;
How young he is, how bold!
How he loves me!

Aleko

Be silent, Zemfira, I've had enough...

Zemfira

So that's how you understood my song?

Aleko

Zemfira...

Zemfira

You are free to be angry.
I sing this song about you.
(Sings again.)
How I caressed him
In the still of the night!
How we laughed back then
At your grey hair!
He is fresher than spring,
Hotter than a summer day;
How young he is, how bold!
How he loves me!
How I caressed him
In the still of the night!
How we laughed back then
At your grey hair! Ah!

(Zemfira leaves... The moon rises high and grows smaller and paler.)

Aleko

The whole camp sleeps. The moon above it
Shines with midnight beauty.
Why does my poor heart tremble?
What sorrow torments me?
I live without worries, without regrets,
Leading my wandering days.
Despising the chains of enlightenment,
I am as free as they are.
I lived, refusing to acknowledge the power
Of cruel and blind fate.
But, oh God, how passions toy
With my obedient soul!
Zemfira! How she loved!
How, gently leaning against me,
In the silence of the wilderness,
She spent the long nights with me!
How often, with sweet whispers,
With intoxicating kisses,
She could chase away
My pensive thoughts in a moment!
I remember: full of passionate tenderness,
She whispered to me then:
"I love you! I am yours to command!
Yours, Aleko, forever!"
And I forgot everything,
Listening to her words,
And, like a madman, I kissed
Her enchanting eyes,
The strands of her hair, darker than night.
Zemfira's lips... And she,
Full of tenderness and passion,
Clinging to me, looked into my eyes...
And now? Zemfira is unfaithful!
My Zemfira has grown cold!

10. Lippen schweigen (Soprano and Baritone)

Composer: Franz Lehár | Opera: The Merry Widow

In the plot of Franz Lehár's operetta "The Merry Widow" (Die lustige Witwe), the duet "Lippen schweigen" occurs in the finale, where the main characters, Count Danilo and Hanna Glawari, finally acknowledge their mutual feelings.

Lips are silent, violins whisper:
Love me!
Every step pleads softly,
Love me!
Every touch of the hands clearly tells me so,
It says clearly: it's true, it's true,
You love me!
With every waltz step,
The soul dances too,
The little heart leaps,
It beats and pounds:
Be mine! Be mine!
And though the mouth speaks not a word,
The message echoes on and on:
I love you so much,
I love you!
Every touch of the hands clearly tells me so,
It says clearly: it's true, it's true,
You love me!

The end

Thank you so much for coming!

Whether something moved you, puzzled you, or simply made you smile — we'd love to hear your thoughts. Even the unexpected impressions are welcome!

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Hope to see you again soon! 🎵

