

The Victorian Lyric Opera Company Presents....

# *Patience*



Curriculum Guide

## Acknowledgements:

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Lobby display photographs courtesy of Harvey Levine, Todd and Kiersten Whitehead, & Carlton and Jane Maryott.

# The Merry Widow

Victorian Lyric Opera Company will present its community outreach performance of Lehar's **The Merry Widow** on Sunday, 2008 at 2 p.m. in the F. Scott Fitzgerald Theatre. Two children will be admitted for free with each paying adult. Pre-show activities, a backstage tour and post-show question and answer session with the artists and staff will be included with the performance.

## What is Opera?



Opera is a play set to music. The characters sing about their feelings instead of speaking them. Both the orchestra and vocal music help tell the story. The music provides clues to the story: it reflects the characters' feelings, sets the mood of the scene, hints at a turn in the plot, describes an event (such as a storm), and makes the audience feel more strongly about what they see onstage. Opera uses all of the art forms. It combines singing, acting, dance, music, poetry and the visual arts (in scenery, costumes, and lights). Opera has two basic elements: the libretto (Italian for little book) which is the words or text of the opera and the score, which is the music (the vocal and instrumental parts of the music composition).

## The Music

Most operas begin with an **overture**, an orchestral introduction to the music of the opera, usually played before the action begins. The overture often introduces themes heard in the opera. Operas are divided into **acts** and further subdivided into **scenes**. Each act is often divided by an **entr'acte** (French for "between the scenes"). Each scene consists of a mixture of **aria** (a song expressing the feelings of one character), **duet** (a song for two characters in which they usually express their feeling for one another), and **ensembles** (songs in which several characters sing the same lines – or different lines at the same time – to express their feelings about the story's actions). The melody that each character sings clearly describes what he or she is feeling. Larger ensembles generally appear at the finale, or end, of acts in the opera. An ensemble for three voices is a **trio**, for four voices is a **quartet**, for five voices is a **quintet**, and so on.



## The Voices

Opera singers do not usually use microphones, so their voices must be developed to make a very large sound that projects over an orchestra in a large theatre. There are six major voice types.

- The highest female voice is the **soprano**. The heroine is usually a soprano.
- The middle female voice is the **mezzo-soprano**. This voice is darker and warmer sounding than the soprano. Composers use the mezzo voice for villainesses, seductresses, mothers and boys (such as Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel*).
- The lowest female voice is the **contralto**. This voice type is usually used by composers for older women, wise women, and witches.
- The highest male voice is the **tenor**. The tenor is usually the hero and/or love interest.
- The middle male voice is the **baritone**. Composers frequently use this voice for fathers and villains.
- The lowest male voice is the **bass**. Composers frequently use this voice for older, wise men.

In addition to training their voices, opera singers must also train in acting, movement, dance, and foreign languages.



## Behind the Scenes

When an audience sees an opera, they are viewing the tip of the production iceberg. Many people are involved in writing, performing, and producing an opera. Most of these people are not seen by the audience.

- A **composer** writes the vocal and orchestral music (called a score) for the opera.
- The **librettist** writes the words (called the libretto) for the opera.
- The **conductor** is responsible for what you hear in an opera. The conductor rehearses both the singers and the orchestra and presides over the performance. This is a complex job, because the conductor must coordinate the work of all the performers.
- The **rehearsal accompanist** plays the piano for music and staging rehearsals when the orchestra is not required.
- The **orchestra** is a group of instrumentalists who provide accompaniment for the voices and play the orchestral score.
- The **director** is responsible for what you see in an opera. The director assists the performers in interpreting their characters as well as determining where and how these characters move throughout the stage area (this is called blocking). The director also coordinates all of the visual elements, collaborating with the designers to create a unified vision of the opera.
- The **designers** create the visual effects and the visual mood of the opera.
  - The **set designer** is responsible for characterizing and defining the performance space through the placement of scenic elements (such as walls, doors, windows, and furniture).
  - The **lighting designer** is responsible for enhancing the visual elements of the performance. The lighting establishes the mood, atmosphere, time of day, source of light (sun, lamps, fire, etc.) and special effects (such as lightning, stars, and so on).
  - The **costume designer** is responsible for the visual appearance of the performers. The costumes establish the time period, locale, and socioeconomic status of the characters as well as the mood and style of the production.
  - The **makeup designer** is also responsible for the visual appearance of the performer. The makeup is used to create an image of the character. It can be used to age a performer, add facial hair, scars, birthmarks and other features to the performer's body, and to heighten the performer's features. The makeup designer is usually responsible for any wigs used by performers.
  - The **props designer** collects or creates objects (such as furniture, tools, dishes, and so on) that help convey the time and place of the opera. The word "props" is short for properties.

The **stage manager** is the director's most valuable assistant. The stage manager coordinates all aspects of the technical production, attending all rehearsals, recording all blocking, organizing rehearsals, assembling the prompt book and running the show at each performance.



## Meet the Orchestra



There are four basic families of instruments in the orchestra:

- **Strings:** violin, viola, cello, double bass
- **Woodwinds:** piccolo, flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, English horn, oboe, bassoon, contrabassoon
- **Brass:** trumpet, trombone, French horn, tuba
- **Percussion:** drums, xylophone, castanets, gong, triangle, cymbals, chimes, and tambourine

In addition to these instruments there are keyboards (such as the piano and harpsichord), and plucked instruments (such as the harp).

Opera orchestras vary in size, both in number of different types of instruments and the number of instruments within each instrument group. The opera orchestra will often perform from the orchestra pit. This is a space which is lower than and in front of the stage. The orchestra is led by the conductor.



## Who Is Who in *Patience*



**Colonel Calverley** }  
**Major Murgatroyd** } *Officers of Dragoon Guards*  
**Lieut. The Duke of Dunstable** }

**Reginald Bunthorne** (*A Fleshly Poet*)  
**Archibald Grosvenor** (*An Idyllic Poet*)

**The Lady Angela** }  
**The Lady Saphir** } *Rapturous Maidens*  
**The Lady Ella** }  
**The Lady Jane** }

**Patience** (*A Dairy Maid*)

**Chorus of Rapturous Maidens and Officers of Dragoon Guards**



## Synopsis of *Patience*



### ACT I

The opening scene is laid at "Castle Bunthorne," where **Bunthorne**, an aesthetic poet, is explaining to twenty love-sick maidens the mysteries of love, which, he asserts, can be cured by proper medical treatment. They listen to him with adoration, but he remains unaware of their interest. He loves Patience, they declare.

**Patience**, a simple dairy-maid, has never loved anyone except an aunt, and learns that true love must be "utter unselfishness." The previous year the officers of a regiment of Dragoon Guards had been much beloved by the twenty maidens. When they return, and the colonel introduces himself and them in a rollicking, boastful song, the maidens are no longer interested in them. Bunthorne has "idealised them" and "their eyes are opened." When alone, Bunthorne admits being a fake – he is only pretending to be an aesthetic poet to gain admiration.

**Archibald Grosvenor** appears and Patience remembers he is the boy who was her childhood friend. They love each other, but Patience, in the belief that true love is "utter unselfishness," thinks she cannot marry one so perfect.

Bunthorne, returning, has decided to raffle himself, and just as the lot is to be drawn, Patience in her "utter unselfishness" says that she will marry him because "she detests him so."

The disappointed maidens then return to the Dragoons, but when they see Archibald Grosvenor, they immediately transfer their affections to him because "he is aesthetic!" Bunthorne is jealous, and the Dragoons are disgusted.

### ACT II

A "Rural Glade." The unattractive **Lady Jane** bewails the lot of maidens who are unmarried. Grosvenor is now adored by all the maidens. He is somewhat annoyed by their attentions for they have followed him since Monday. He pleads for "the usual half holiday on Saturday." Bunthorne, deserted and consumed by jealousy, still has one faithful admirer -- the portly Lady Jane, whose charms decrease as her size increases. She implores him not to wait too long, but Bunthorne is determined to beat Grosvenor on his own ground.

At last the rival poets meet. Bunthorne threatens to "curse" Archibald unless he consents to cut his hair and become quite commonplace. Grosvenor outwardly appalled, but secretly relieved, consents to become an "every day young man".

Now that Bunthorne is happy, Patience, in her "utter unselfishness," breaks her engagement. Upon Archibald Grosvenor's return, in a tweed suit, she realizes that since he is now a commonplace young man, she can marry him.

Bunthorne finds that the twenty love-sick maidens have returned to their soldier-lovers. He then decides to console himself with Lady Jane. But the Duke of Dunstable, who wants to marry a plain woman, has already claimed Lady Jane, so Bunthorne is left without a bride!

*[Plot summary adapted from the book The Victor Book of the Opera, RCA Manufacturing Co., Camden, NJ, 1936.]*



## Glossary



### Act I:

- **Colonel Calverly's "If you want a receipt..."** - requires at least a page to itself, and is annotated on the lobby board. The receipt (recipe) for a heavy dragoon (cavalry soldier) consists of characteristics of many famous people. The scum is removed, and the residuum (remainder) is the final product.
- **Fleshy thing** - something carnal or sensual
- **Bunthorne's poem Oh, Hollow! Hollow! Hollow:** - amaranthine asphodel means "undying lilies", and calomel, colocynth, and aloe are all laxatives derived from plants. The gist of the poem is the incompatibility of poetic and medicinal properties of flowers.
- **You are not Empyrean** - Celestial
- **You are not Della Cruscan** - school of poetry started by sentimental Englishmen in Florence in the eighteenth century.
- **Oh, South Kensington** - Lady Jane is apostrophizing an artistic area of London including the School of Design and several museums.
- **When uttered in Hessians** - military boots (from German state Hesse)
- **the peripatetics of long-haired aesthetics** - wanderings
- **yearning for Elysian Fields** - Abode of the blessed, in Greek myth
- **black Aceldama of sorrow** - field of blood; originally the potter's field purchased with Judas's blood money.
- **Oh, Chronos, this is too bad of you** - Greek word for time
- **Gaily pipe Pandaen pleasure** - refers to Pan, Greek pastoral god, who played Pan pipes.
- **With a Daphephoric bound** - Daphne, a nymph renowned for virgin timidity and shyness, was changed into a laurel tree to escape the attentions of Apollo. She presumably bounded as she ran.

### Act II:

- **with rouge, lip-salve, and pearly grey** - a face powder
- **decalet** - a ten-line poem
- **his placidity emetical** - nauseating (or worse)
- **To stuff his conversation full of quibble and of quiddity** - to make his conversation pompous and boring with hair-splitting.
- **half-bread black and tan** - mongrel terrier dog, a low-class pet
- **thinks suburban 'hops' more fun than 'Monday Pops'** - prefers low-class dances to more high-brow classical concerts
- **A Chancery Land young man, a Somerset House young man** - references to Legal and Government office districts, respectively
- **Greenery-yallery, Grosvenor Gallery** - Green and yellow were colors favored by Pre-Raphaelites, who exhibited in Grosvenor Gallery
- **Sewell & Cross ... Howell & James ... Waterloo House ... Madame Louise** - references to fashionable drapers and milliners shops (where Archibald and the women's chorus would be shop-clerks).
- *This glossary appeared in the program of the 1990 performance of Patience by The Gilbert & Sullivan Very Light Opera Company.*



## Aesthetic Movement



*Patience* pokes fun at the Aesthetic Movement. The Aesthetic Movement was an English artistic movement of the late 19th century, dedicated to the idea of art for art's sake—that is, art concerned solely with beauty and not with any moral or social purpose. Associated with the movement were the artists Aubrey Beardsley and James McNeill Whistler and writers Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. The artists and writers of the Aesthetic movement believed that the Arts should provide pleasure, rather than convey ethical or sentimental messages. They believed that Art did not have any instructive purpose; it need only be beautiful. The Aesthetes developed the cult of beauty, which they considered the basic factor in art. Life should copy Art, they declared. They considered nature as crude and lacking in design when compared to art. The main characteristics of the movement were: suggestion rather than statement, sensuality, massive use of symbols, and correspondence between words, colors and music.