

 THE ATLANTA OPERA

DENNIS HANTHORN - Zurich General Director

# Porgy & Bess



FEBRUARY 26, MARCH 1, 4, 6(M), 2011

Opera Guide

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# WELCOME!

Spring 2011

Dear Educator:

Hello and thank you for joining us for this production of Gershwin's American classic, ***Porgy & Bess***. The quintessential American opera with its southern roots is particularly appropriate for audiences here in Atlanta, and we welcome students from the metro area and beyond to experience the art form with us through this exciting and innovative production.

The Atlanta Opera Student Shorts are fully-staged, abbreviated versions of the mainstage production. ***Porgy & Bess*** Student Shorts will feature the full Atlanta Opera Chorus and Orchestra, and will be abridged to last about one hour.

This will be the first opera experience for many of your students, and will be most thoroughly enjoyed with a bit of preparation before they arrive at the theater. The guide has been developed to acquaint both you and your students with the opera ***Porgy & Bess***, as well as to familiarize students with the world of opera (vocabulary, history, etc.). Our goal is to provide you with an innovative, multidisciplinary approach to teaching required skills and curriculum, including Georgia Performance Standards and National Arts Standards. Where applicable, you will find the corresponding standard(s) in parenthesis at the end of each activity or lesson.

Thank you again for allowing us to share this opera with you. It is our sincere hope that you enjoy the experience, and we look forward to seeing you and your students at the opera!

Sincerely,

The Atlanta Opera Education Department

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## WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE OPERA

Are you unsure about how to act, what to wear or what you are going to see at the Opera? You are not the only one! Many others, students and adults, are apprehensive about their first trip to the opera. Read the truth behind some of the most popular opera myths and see if they answer some of your questions about the opera as well!

### **MYTH #1:** OPERA IS BORING AND STUFFY.

Not true! Operas tell some of the most interesting, scandalous and beautiful stories of all time. Just like in movies and TV, it's not unusual to find love triangles, murders, fatal illnesses and messages from beyond the grave. They don't call them "soap operas" for nothing!

### **MYTH #2:** OPERA IS SUNG IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE, SO I WON'T UNDERSTAND THE STORY.

It is true that many operas are sung in languages other than English. All of The Atlanta Opera productions feature English translations, called supertitles, of the opera projected on screens above the stage. This way, you can follow along even if you do not understand the language. You also can read the synopsis of the opera before you arrive. Knowing the story will also help you follow along. **Porgy & Bess** is an American opera. It is written and performed in English, but there will still be supertitles – just to make sure you don't miss anything!

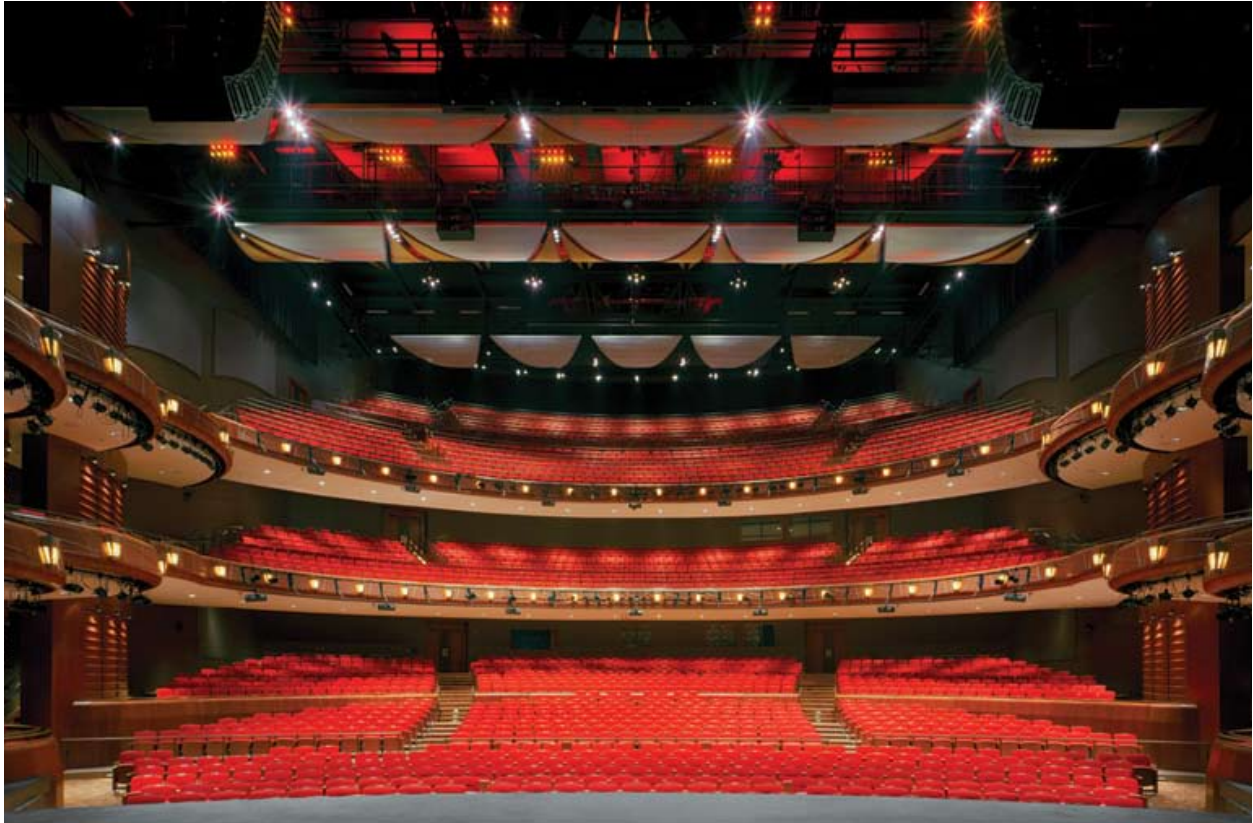
### **MYTH #3:** I NEED TO WEAR A TUXEDO OR A BALL GOWN TO THE OPERA.

Most people dress up when they go to an opera performance. Frequently men wear tuxedos and women wear evening dresses to opening night. When attending performances on other nights or matinees, you can wear business attire or "Sunday" clothes. Wearing a suit or dress is not required – but dressing up can be a part of the fun of going to an opera performance.

### **MYTH #4:** IF I'M A FEW MINUTES LATE, NO ONE WILL CARE. AFTER ALL, THE OPERA IS SO LONG, IT DOESN'T MATTER IF I MISS THE FIRST FEW MINUTES.

You don't want to miss the beginning! If you are not in your seat when the curtain goes up on an Atlanta Opera production, you will not be allowed to take your seat until after the first act or until the first intermission. This procedure prevents patrons from disrupting what is happening onstage or disturbing the rest of the audience. After the orchestra has tuned, the theater will become quiet. The conductor, or maestro, will then enter the pit. It is acceptable (and appreciated) to applaud the maestro's entrance. After all, (s)he worked very hard to bring this performance to life!

## WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE OPERA (cont.)



Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre

**ADDITIONAL TIPS:** HERE ARE A FEW MORE TIPS TO MAKE YOUR TRIP TO THE OPERA MORE COMFORTABLE.

1. Remember: the opera is a live performance. You can hear the performers on stage and that means they can hear you too! Please refrain from talking or whispering during the opera. It is distracting to others around you as well as to the singers. Please do not leave your seat during the performance. The Student Shorts of **Porgy & Bess** will be one hour with no intermission.
2. If you have them, please turn off all cell phones and any other electronic devices that will make noise. No texting during the performance please!
3. Please do not take photographs, video or audio recordings of the performance.
4. If you like what you have seen and heard, let the performers know! It is okay to applaud at the end of songs, called arias, and at the end of a scene. If you really liked what you heard, call out "bravo" (to the men on stage), "brava" (to the women) and "bravi" (for all on stage). And of course, a standing ovation is always welcome!

## THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

**Porgy** - a crippled beggar (bass-baritone)

**Bess** - Crown's girl (soprano)

**Crown** - a tough dockworker (baritone)

**Serena** - Robbins' wife (soprano)

**Clara** - Jake's wife (soprano)

**Maria** - keeper of the cook-shop (contralto)

**Jake** - a fisherman (baritone)

**Sportin' Life** - a drug peddler (tenor)

**Mingo** - a workman (tenor)

**Robbins** - Serena's husband (tenor)

**Peter** - the honeyman (tenor)

**Lily** - Peter's wife (mezzo-soprano)

**Frazier** - a swindling "lawyer" (baritone)

**Annie** (mezzo-soprano)

**Strawberry woman** (mezzo-soprano)

**Jim** - a cotton picker (baritone)

**Undertaker** (baritone)

**Nelson** (tenor)

**Crab man** (tenor)

## SPEAKING PARTS:

**Scipio** - a small boy

**Mr. Archdale** - a white lawyer

**Detective**

**Policeman**

**Coroner**



# SYNOPSIS

## ACT I

### Scene I – Catfish Row

It is evening on Catfish Row, a poor black neighborhood near the waterfront in Charleston, South Carolina, in the 1920s. Clara sings a lullaby to her baby (“Summertime”) while a group of men noisily begin a game of craps. Serena begs her husband



*Porgy & Bess*, 2005 (Tim Wilkerson)

Robbins not to play, but he joins in anyway. Clara’s husband, meanwhile, takes the crying baby from its mother saying, “Give him to me, I’ll fix him for you.” He sings his own lullaby to the child (“A Woman is a Sometime Thing”) about the fickle nature of women.

Porgy, a crippled beggar, joins the game and is teased by the other men for his affections toward Bess, who has just arrived with her boyfriend Crown. Crown joins in the game, as does Sportin’ Life, a drug dealer. Crown becomes violent when he begins to lose and kills Robbins with a cotton hook. Knowing the police will be there soon, the crowd disperses and Crown escapes, telling Bess he’ll come back for her. Bess refuses an invitation to go to New York with Sportin’ Life, even though it means she will be all alone with no one to look out for her. None of the women of Catfish Row will let Bess in but, as the police approach, Porgy opens his door to her.

### Scene II – Serena’s Room

The next night, friends visit Serena’s room to pay their last respects to Robbins (“Gone, gone, gone”). They drop coins into a saucer on his chest to help pay for the funeral. Bess helps Porgy into the room but when she tries to add money to Robbins’ saucer, Serena refuses. Bess explains that it isn’t Crown’s money – it’s Porgy’s, as he is the one taking care of her now. Serena accepts.

A white detective and policeman enter the room and accuse Peter of Robbins’ murder. He cries out that Crown was guilty so the detective takes Peter off to jail to coerce the community to tell him where Crown is.

While Serena laments Robbins’ death (“My Man’s Gone Now”), the undertaker arrives and realizes that Serena does not have enough money to cover the burial. He decides to trust her for the rest, and Bess leads a joyful hymn (“Leavin’ for the Promise’ Land”).

## **SYNOPSIS (cont.)**

### **ACT II**

#### **Scene I – Catfish Row**

Jake and the other fisherman are repairing nets on Jake's boat. Clara warns Jake of the September storms, but he insists that he needs to fish if they are to afford to send their son to college.

Porgy sings cheerfully ("I Got Plenty O' Nuttin'") and everyone talks about the change that has overcome him since he's been with Bess. Mr. Archdale, a white lawyer, comes looking for Porgy saying that he knows Peter and will post his bail. The crowd disperses when a buzzard, a sign of bad luck, flies by. Sportin' Life and Bess remain, and he tries to convince her once again to come to New York. Porgy over hears this, threatens the drug pusher and runs him off. He sings of his happiness with Bess ("Bess, you is my woman now"). The neighbors appear dressed for the upcoming church picnic on Kittiwah Island. Bess says that she will stay behind with Porgy, since he cannot board the boat, but he insists that she goes on with the neighbors and have a good time.

#### **Scene II – Kittiwah Island**

The picnic is in full swing and Sportin' Life begins to kid his neighbors about their God-fearing ways ("It Ain't Necessarily So"). The crowd boards the steamboat to return home but Bess hears Crown calling to her from the bushes. He has been hiding on the island and wants her to stay with him. She tries to leave but, in spite of her love for Porgy, he overpowers her and she stays.

#### **Scene III – Catfish Row**

More than a week later, Jake and the fishermen prepare to set out on their boats, despite the approaching storm. In Porgy's room, Bess is muttering deliriously. She has been sick since she was found a week earlier after having been "lost" on the island for two days. Serena prays for Bess to recover ("Oh, Doctor Jesus"). Bess wakes, and recognizes Porgy. She tells Porgy that she wants to stay with him, but that Crown has a powerful hold on her. Porgy says she is free to leave, but she asks for his help ("I loves you, Porgy"). Just then, the winds pick up and the hurricane alarm sounds.

#### **Scene IV – Serena's Room**

The storm still rages outside while the neighbors huddle together inside and pray ("Oh, Doctor Jesus"). A loud knock at the door scares the group, and they are sure it is Death himself. The door flies open and Crown stands in the doorway. He has come for Bess, who tries to resist him. Porgy tries to defend her, but is thrown down by Crown. The thunder roars, and Crown laughs at the superstitious crowd.



## **SYNOPSIS (cont.)**

Jake's overturned boat is seen out on the water. Clara suddenly hands her baby to Bess and rushes out into the storm after Jake. Crown goes out to bring her back, but not before warning Porgy that "we's on for another bout."

### **ACT III**

#### **Scene I – Catfish Row**

Following the storm, the people of Catfish Row pray for those missing in the storm – Clara, Jake and even Crown. Sportin' Life is waiting for a showdown between Bess' two lovers. As the courtyard stands silent, Crown sneaks toward Porgy's door. Porgy sees him and lunges at him. The two struggle and Porgy strangles Crown to death. Bess hears the two and rushes out to find Crown's body.

#### **Scene II – Catfish Row**

The detective arrives with the coroner, questioning Serena about the murder. She claims to know nothing, so they take Porgy down to the morgue to identify the body. Porgy is terrified to do so because he believes (as does Sportin' Life) that if Crown's murderer looks upon his body, his wounds will begin to bleed. The police finally drag him away to the station. Once Porgy is gone, Sportin' Life invites Bess once again to come with him to New York ("There's a boat dat's leavin' soon for New York"). She refuses at first but her cravings for drugs and high living soon get the better of her.

#### **Scene III – Catfish Row**

A week later, Porgy returns to Catfish Row. He happily announces that he kept his eyes closed, never looking at Crown's body. For refusing to identify the body, Porgy had been jailed. While in jail, Porgy won money at craps and bought presents for many of his friends. Feeling bad for him, no one will accept the gifts, however. He gradually realizes why people pity him and that Bess is not coming to welcome him home. At first he thinks that Bess is dead, but he is soon informed that she has gone off to New York. Porgy calls for his goat and cart and announces that he is setting off for New York to find Bess. Porgy starts off through the gate, heading north ("Oh Lawd, I'm on my way").

## MEET THE CAST

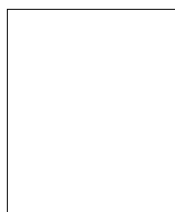


### **Craig Kier**

*Conductor (Student Shorts performances)*

Atlanta Opera Debut: *Carmen*, 2004

Craig Kier is currently the Associate Conductor and Assistant Chorus Master for Houston Grand Opera. Prior to his position with Houston Grand Opera, Mr. Kier spent six seasons as Principal Coach/Accompanist and Assistant Conductor for The Atlanta Opera. Mr. Kier served on Seattle Opera's music staff for several seasons in a variety of roles including Coach/Accompanist, Chorus Master and Assistant Conductor. He has a wide variety of experience with other companies including Cincinnati Opera, Opera Colorado, Berkshire Opera, Opera New Jersey, Opera Birmingham and Des Moines Metro Opera. Mr. Kier also spent six summers on the faculty of the Opera Theater of the Rockies Vocal Arts Symposium in Colorado Springs, CO. Mr. Kier made his conducting debut leading Gianni Schicchi in a joint project between Seattle Opera and the Yakima Symphony Orchestra. In 2009, he conducted The Atlanta Opera's student matinee performances of Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* and *Die Zauberflöte* in 2010. This spring, Mr. Kier makes his conducting debut with Houston Grand Opera leading performances of *Madama Butterfly* and returns to The Atlanta Opera to conduct student matinee performances of *Porgy & Bess*. In 2009, Mr. Kier joined The Santa Fe Opera music staff, assisting with their mainstage productions as well as coaching the apprentice artists and will return to Santa Fe in 2011 as cover conductor for Vivaldi's *Griselda* and children's chorus master for *La Bohème*. Mr. Kier earned his Master of Music degree in Accompanying from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music and his Bachelor of Music Education from the State University of New York College at Fredonia.



### **Richard Kagey**

*Stage Director (Student Shorts performances)*

Atlanta Opera Debut: *Spring Gala Concert*, 2007

Richard Kagey has directed and/or designed over 150 productions of operas, musicals and plays for professional regional companies, national tours and universities. He worked in the Broadway Theatre for six years on productions that included: *Evita*, *Sweeney Todd*, *The Gin Game* and *Merrily We Roll Along*. Kagey designed The Atlanta Opera production of *Porgy and Bess* at the University of Kentucky where he has been a guest artist. He will be designing the *Mikado* for Fort Worth Opera in 2011. Kagey has also directed several Atlanta Opera Studio Tour productions. He has had a strong relationship with American contemporary opera including directing/designing the premiere of *The Hotel Casablanca* in a co-production between the University of Kentucky and The San Francisco Opera Merola Program. He is currently working on a new opera based on *A Wrinkle in Time* by composer Libby Larson which is in development with the University of Kentucky Opera Theatre and The Fort Worth Opera. Other contemporary works include Carlyle Floyd's *Of Mice and Men* for the Fort Worth Opera, The Atlanta Opera production of Phillip Glass' *Akhmaten*, and Marc Adamo's *Little Women* and *Lysistrada*. He has also designed and directed several workshop productions of new works for composers including Ricky Ian Gordon's *Morning Star*, Thomas Pasatieri's *John Marcher* and Joseph Illick's *Bliss*. He is equally at home with classical opera repertoire including *Pagliacci* for Opera of North Carolina, *Lucia de Lamamour* for Kentucky Opera, *Amahl and The Night Visitors* in Sante Fe, and *Don Giovanni* for the Fort Worth Opera. Kagey returns each year to The Seagle Music Colony, a summer festival for young opera singers, where he is director of productions.

## MEET THE CAST (cont.)



### **Walter Huff**

*Chorus master*

Atlanta Opera Debut: *Tosca*, 1988

Walter Huff has been Chorus Master for The Atlanta Opera for twenty-one years. Mr. Huff studied piano with Sarah Martin, Peter Takacs and Lillian Freundlich. He has performed with singers throughout Europe and the United States and served as coach with the Peabody Opera Theatre, The Washington Opera, and Baltimore Opera Company. Mr. Huff has performed in master classes given by renowned singers and pianists such as Sir Peter Pears, Licia Albanese, Eileen Farrell, Dalton Baldwin, Leon Fleisher, and Elly Ameling. In 1984, he received Tanglewood's C.D. Jackson Master Award for Excellence, presented by Seiji Ozawa and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He has been musical director for The Atlanta Opera Studio, Georgia State University Opera, and Actor's Express. Also, Mr. Huff was one of four Atlanta artists who were chosen for the first Loridans Arts Awards, given to Atlanta artists who have made exceptional contributions to the arts life of Atlanta over a long period of time. In 2008, The Atlanta Opera Chorus under Mr. Huff's direction sang critically acclaimed performances of *Porgy and Bess* at the Opéra-Comique in Paris and on tour in Granada, Normandy, and Luxembourg.



### **Maria Clark**

*Bess (Student Shorts performances)*

Atlanta Opera Debut

Maria Clark graduated from Manhattan School of Music with a Bachelor of Vocal Performance, and from GA State University's School of Music with a Master of Vocal Performance. She has completed a US tour of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, while playing the principle role of Clara. She has also sung in several other operatic productions such as Miss Silverpeal in *The Impresario*, Susannah in *The Marriage of Figaro*, and Monica in *The Medium*. Additionally, Maria has appeared with the Irene Harrower Opera Workshop, during which she performed the role of the Countess in *The Marriage of Figaro*, and Annina in the *Saint of Bleeker Street*. She has also performed with GA State University's production of *Tales of Hoffman* while playing the role of Antonia, and most recently has performed Violetta, in their production of *La Traviata*. Maria has also performed with the ensemble of Atlanta Opera in their 2005 production of *Carmen*. She went on to play the role of Strawberry Woman with The Atlanta Opera's *Porgy and Bess* in 2005. Ms. Clark was a first prize winner in the Barry Alexander International Vocal Competition of 2008 and made a Carnegie Hall/Weill Recital Hall Debut in New York City the same year. She was the Oxnard Gold Medalist winner in the 2004 American Traditions Competition at the Savannah Music Festival, and is a past winner in the West Palm Beach Opera Competition and NATS vocal competitions, the Mobile Opera, and D'Angelo Vocal Competitions. Ms. Clark sang the role of Strawberry Woman in The Atlanta Opera and Opéra-Comique 2008 production of *Porgy and Bess* that toured in France, Spain, and Luxembourg.

## MEET THE CAST (cont.)



### **Justin Lee Miller**

*Porgy (Student Shorts performances)*

Atlanta Opera Debut

Mr. Miller has performed all of the bass and baritone roles in *Porgy and Bess*. He made his debut in the role of Porgy at the Teatro Alighieri in Ravenna, Italy, in 2005 at the age of 28. He can be heard singing Jim and the Undertaker on the new Decca recording of *Porgy and Bess* with the Nashville Symphony, conducted by John Mauceri. Last year, he performed in Atlanta at the Fox Theater in the National Tour of *The Phantom of the Opera*. He also recently performed the Russian premiere of works by Atlanta-based composer Uzee Brown, Jr. with the Moscow Conservatory Choir in Moscow, Russia. He has appeared with Los Angeles Opera, Lyric Opera Chicago, Opéra-Comique Paris, the Bard Music Festival, Sarasota Symphony, Nashville Symphony, City Center Encores!, North Shore Music Theater, Paper Mill Playhouse, Weston Playhouse, Fulton Opera House, and Music Theater of Wichita. He received his training at the University of Michigan where he studied with Shirley Verrett. He is a proud member of both Actors Equity and AGMA, the trade unions of professional stage artists.



### **Eric Greene**

*Crown*

Atlanta Opera Debut

Baritone Eric Greene has been praised for his fine musicianship and resonant baritone voice. Over the past few seasons, Mr. Greene made debuts around the world with noted companies such as Théâtre National de l'Opéra-Comique, the Granada International Festival in Spain, Grand Théâtre in Luxembourg, Lyric Opera of Chicago, San Francisco Opera, Opera Company of Philadelphia, Washington National Opera, Santa Fe Symphony, and the Los Angeles Opera as Jake in *Porgy and Bess*. Mr. Greene's most recent performances include Amonasro in *Aida* at Opera Memphis; Ping in *Turandot* with Opera Company of Philadelphia and Opera Carolina; Escamillo in *Carmen* with Virginia Opera and Amarillo Opera; his role debut as Germont in *La Traviata* at the Pine Mountain Festival; Escamillo in *La Tragedie de Carmen* with Augusta Opera; Schaunard in *La Bohème* at Opera Carolina; Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly* with Eugene Opera; Robert Garner in the world premiere of Richard Danielpour's *Margaret Garner* at the Michigan Opera Theater, Opera Company of Philadelphia and Opera Carolina; and baritone soloist in Richard Danielpour's *Pastime* at Northwestern University. In concert and recital, Mr. Greene has performed around the world including Australia, Fiji, Manilla, Guam, Hong Kong and the Soloman Islands, the Virgin Islands, and with Manny Fox in Puerto Rico. He was the winner in the Leontyne Price Vocal Competition in Maryland, the first place winner in Rosa Ponselle's All Marylanders Competition, the first place in the NAACP ACT-SO competition, and was awarded the Gluck Foundation scholarship.

## MEET THE CAST (cont.)



### **Chauncey Packer**

*Sportin' Life*

Atlanta Opera Debut: *Sportin' Life*, *Porgy & Bess*, 2005

American tenor Chauncey Packer is an exciting talent on the stages of opera houses in Europe and the United States. He has recently performed the roles of Amon (*Akhmaten*) with Atlanta Opera, Edmondo (*Manon Lescaut*) with Shreveport Opera and Remendado (*Carmen*) with New Orleans Opera. In past seasons he performed the roles of Alfredo (*La Traviata*) with Pensacola Opera, Rodolfo (*La Bohème*) with Mobile Opera, and Arturo (*Lucia di Lammermoor*) with New Orleans Opera. Mr. Packer is also one of the most in-demand artists for his captivating portrayal of Sportin' Life (*Porgy and Bess*). This year he made his San Francisco Opera debut in the role to rave reviews. He has performed the role with Mobile Opera, Opera Grand Rapid, Tulsa Opera and this season in many major European cities with the Munich-based New York Harlem Productions tour, with whom he has also performed in Japan. Mr. Packer performed with an additional tour of *Porgy and Bess* with the Opéra Comique where he sang Mingo and covered Sportin' Life in Paris, Caen, and Luxembourg. A recent concert performance of the same work with the Nashville Symphony, conducted by John Mauceri, was recorded and released on the Decca label. In addition to the companies already mentioned, Mr. Packer has also performed with the Utah Festival Opera, Opera Grand Rapids, Des Moines Metro Opera and LSU Opera. He has also performed concerts with Edmonton Opera, Baton Rouge Symphony, Mobile Symphony, Gulf Coast Opera, Shreveport Opera, and Pensacola Symphony. Mr. Packer has performed in outreach programs for Mobile Opera and Pensacola Opera and participated in young artist programs with Utah Festival Opera and Des Moines Metro Opera. He was the recipient of the Huel Perkins Fellowship at Louisiana State University for his doctoral studies and has won the National Associations of Teacher's Singing Competition, Rose Palmat-Tenser Competition, and Shreveport Singer of the Year. Mr. Parker was a finalist in Ducrest International Competition and placed several times in the regional finals of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and in 2005, won at the regional level and was a national semi-finalist. Chauncey Packer received his undergraduate degree from University of Mobile and his master's degree in music from University of New Orleans.

## MEET THE COMPOSER



George Gershwin

### George Gershwin (1898-1937)

George Gershwin was born on September 26, 1898 on New York City's Lower East Side. Though he preferred sports as a young child, Gershwin discovered music when his parents bought a piano when he was 12 years old. His talent developed quickly and he left school at age 15 to pursue a career in music.

Gershwin got his first job as a "song-plugger" for a sheet music company on Tin Pan Alley, demonstrating new music. Gershwin spent the day playing through the latest hit songs on the piano. He quickly became a favorite among customers because he wove his own musical ideas in to the songs to make them more interesting. One customer, a young dancer named Fred Astaire, admired his playing and they soon became good friends. Gershwin published his first song, "When you want 'em, you can't get 'em, when you got 'em, you don't want 'em," in 1916 and, after contributing songs to many other Broadway musicals, finished his own musical, *La La Lucille*, in 1919. Gershwin became the star of Tin Pan Alley in 1920 when his song "Swanee" was recorded and became a smash hit.

Despite the success he achieved as a popular song composer, Gershwin longed to compose more "serious" music. This aspect of his career was advanced when he was commissioned by band leader Paul Whiteman in 1924 to write his first major classical work, *Rhapsody in Blue*, which premiered with Gershwin as soloist. This performance caused a great sensation in the realm of American music. Finally, an American composer composed music that sounded genuinely American. Because of his limited training in music theory and music notation, this work was orchestrated by a colleague, Ferde Grofé. Though Gershwin claimed orchestrate all of his later works, he may have received assistance, particularly from his teacher Joseph Schillinger.

The success of *Rhapsody in Blue* led to other commissions, including *An American in Paris* in 1928, which was inspired by the time Gershwin spent in Paris in 1928. He went to Paris to study composition with Nadia Boulanger or Maurice Ravel, but neither would take him on as a student. They were afraid that rigorous classical study would ruin his jazz-influenced style. While in Paris, Gershwin discovered a new culture and a new range of sounds and experiences. He incorporated these into this orchestral work, even using an authentic Parisian taxi horn. The audience loved the piece, while the critics claimed it to be the work of an amateur who lacked the structure and discipline of his contemporaries.

## MEET THE COMPOSER (cont.)

Determined to convince everyone that he was a serious composer, Gershwin gladly accepted a commission to write a piano concerto for the New York Symphony Orchestra in 1925. After much studying, he wrote a concerto that fit into the traditional format. The audience cherished his first performance, but the critics felt that Gershwin should stick to writing jazz and songs.

Due to the stock market crash of 1929, the fate of his upcoming musical, *Girl Crazy*, was uncertain. Nobody could afford to produce or see the musical, but Gershwin pressed on. He hired two unknown actresses who later became huge stars, Ethel Merman and Ginger Rogers. While the rest of America struggled financially, George and his lyricist brother Ira were paid \$100,000 to produce the music for a new Hollywood film called *Delicious*. Returning to New York, Gershwin recycled some of the music from the film and placed it in a new concert piece for piano and orchestra called *Second Rhapsody*. It was meant to describe the noise and energy of life on the streets of Manhattan. It was a great display of the musical knowledge Gershwin had gained, but lacked the spark of *Rhapsody in Blue*.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Gershwins wrote a series of musicals and film scores, including 1932's *Of Thee I Sing*. This musical, featuring stars of the day Fred and Adele Astaire, Gertrude Lawrence, Red Nichols, Ethel Merman and Ginger Rogers, became the first musical to win the Pulitzer Prize in drama.

Gershwin struggled throughout his career to be accepted as a classical composer. He accepted composing and performing jobs with the New York Philharmonic and other classical groups but continuously found his greatest successes working in the jazz and Broadway genres.

One of Gershwin's long-standing professional ambitions was to compose a folk opera. George and Ira worked with playwrights DuBose and Dorothy Heyward to adapt their play *Porgy and Bess* (based on the novel *Porgy*) for the operatic stage. Gershwin did a great deal of research on African American culture and folk music, and even spent time living on a small island off the coast of South Carolina during the writing process. Gershwin believed that this work was the most important one he had, blending classical forms with folk melodies and dialect. He insisted on casting trained classical singers, as it was important to him that it be viewed as an opera, rather than as a work of musical theater. After its premier in 1935, reactions were mixed, from both critics and audience members. Some felt it was an innovative entry into folk music operas, a strong reflection on American culture and an important step forward for American opera, while others condemned the piece for being stereotypical of blacks and for being just a series of hit songs. Even though it was not appreciated in Gershwin's lifetime and the opera vs. musical theater debate rages on today, *Porgy and Bess* is regarded by many as the greatest American opera and is performed in opera houses around the world.

## MEET THE COMPOSER (cont.)

Gershwin fell ill in 1937, blacking out during a performance in February. Though doctors could not diagnose him at the time, his health failed bringing on dizzy spells, severe headaches and a short temper. When he fell into a coma in July, doctors discovered a brain tumor. Though they operated immediately, the tumor had grown too much and Gershwin died during surgery on July 11, 1937 at the age of 39.

Throughout his career, Gershwin wrote popular tunes, which he improvised easily and quickly. His melodies are pleasing to the ear and often highly memorable, with simple, straightforward AABA or ABAC form. Elements of jazz such as syncopation, “walking” bass lines and flattened 3<sup>rd</sup>s and 7<sup>th</sup>s are often heard, as are elements of Jewish music such as melismatic passages (reminiscent of religious chants) and rhythmic repetitions common in Jewish folk dances. Gershwin’s “serious” music uses similar devices including dramatic chromaticism, syncopation and other rhythmic shifts and simple, repetitive forms. The idiosyncrasies and simplistic devices in Gershwin’s music do not make it appear technically inferior, however, as it is highly reflective of contemporary jazz music. Gershwin’s music stands alone, yet to be copied or emulated and has become accepted throughout the world as emblematic of American music and culture.



The cast of *Porgy and Bess* during the Boston try-out prior to the Broadway opening.



# A BRIEF HISTORY OF OPERA

## The Birth of Opera

In the late 16th century, a small group of intellectuals in Florence, Italy gave birth to the dramatic musical form we now call opera. These writers and musicians, known as the Florentine Camerata, emphasized the emotions of the text by using the solo voice as a vehicle for expressing that emotion.

One of the first operatic composers, Claudio Monteverdi (1576 – 1643), used a series of recitatives and arias in his operas. The recitatives closely followed the accents and rhythms of natural speech and advanced the plot of the opera. Arias were more melodic solos in which a character could elaborate on his/her feelings and thoughts.



## Early Opera

In the Baroque era (1600 – 1750), the main focus of operas was the music and the staging of the story while plots were almost an afterthought. Emphasis was on spectacular stage effects and virtuoso singing with flashy ornamentation. Brief operas were programmed between acts in order to keep the audiences engaged. These comic scenes later gave rise to a new genre, opera buffa, or comic opera.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 – 1791) gradually abandoned the strict rules of the Baroque composers and created stories around realistic characters and situations. His musical genius was instrumental in charting the course of Western music from that time forward.

## Italian Opera

In Italy, composers such as Gioacchino Rossini (1792 – 1868) and Vincenzo Bellini (1801 – 1835) developed a musical style known as *bel canto* or “beautiful singing.” This style featured flowing melodies, long, open vowels, and vocal acrobatics. Giuseppe Verdi (1813 – 1901) built on that tradition with his prolific outpouring of operas. Not only was his music vibrant and beautiful, but the plots of his operas addressed the social and political issues of his day. Verdi also loved the plays of Shakespeare and wrote operas based on Macbeth, Othello, and Flastaff. Later, Giacomo Puccini (1858 – 1924) continued the Italian tradition of operatic composition with such famous works as *La bohème* and *Tosca*.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF OPERA (cont.)

### German Opera

In this country of great philosophers and scholars, operas grappled with universal themes of human existence. Richard Wagner (1813 – 1883) looked to legends as the best sources of dramatic material for his emotionally charged music. Richard Strauss (1864 – 1949) brought German opera into the 20th century by stretching the limits of musical style and by presenting stories that were considered quite “racy” in his day.

### French Opera

Early French opera reflected the interests of the Parisian audiences, featuring great spectacles: huge crowd scenes, large ballets, elaborate sets and costumes. This style became known as grand opera, and Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791 – 1864) was its most famous practitioner. Camille Saint-Saëns (1835 – 1921) moved away from spectacle toward a more lyrical style in the creation of such works as *Samson and Delilah*. Georges Bizet's (1838 – 1875) *Carmen* was a milestone in the history of French opera as it focused on starkly realistic characters and action.

### Opera in the 20th Century

Opera has continued its path of modification as it has spread around the world. In England, a form of light, comic opera known as operetta evolved through the works of W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan (*The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Mikado*). A similar form known as the zarzuela is popular in Spain and Mexico. In the United States, operas show the influence of such American musical forms as jazz, ragtime and spirituals, and have been set in such distinctly American locales as the Appalachian Mountains and the plains of the mid-west.

The American invention of musical theater developed from a variety of styles ranging from vaudeville to opera. Though originally a spoken play with occasional songs, musical theater has shown a recent trend toward a more “operatic” style with such musicals as *Les Misérables* and *Phantom of the Opera*. Two musicals, *Miss Saigon* and *Rent*, are even based directly on two Puccini operas, *Madama Butterfly* and *La bohème* respectively.

# OPERA VOCABULARY

## Opera Terms You Should Know

**ARIA** (AH-ree-yah): a song for solo voice with instrumental accompaniment; generally expresses a state of mind rather than propelling the action forward.

**RECITATIVE** (retch-ee-tah-TEEF): a musical form within an opera which, by imitating rapid speech, advances the plot; this is not the same as parlando, which is a style of singing, but rather a formal device, which links together the arias and choruses.

**LIBRETTO** (lib-REH-toe): the text of an opera.

**SCORE:** the written text and musical notation of an opera.

**BAROQUE** (bah-ROKE): the period of music that goes roughly from 1600 to 1759; baroque operas were highly stylized presentations, with elaborate vocal requirements and fanciful plots.

**CLASSICAL:** the period in music which comes after the baroque period and before the romantic; the dates are roughly 1756 (which is the birth of Mozart) to 1830 (three years after the death of Beethoven).

**ROMANTIC:** the period of music between 1830 and the turn of the 20th century; composers of romantic music frequently found inspiration in other-than-musical ideas, such as nature, painting, birdcalls and rainstorms.

## *On Stage & In the Orchestra Pit*

**CAST:** all singers and actors who appear onstage.

**ACTORS:** performers who have dialogue or significant action, but do not sing.

**PRINCIPAL:** a singer who performs a large role in the opera.

**COMPRIMARIO** (cahm-prih-MA-ree-oh): a singer who specializes in the small character roles of opera, from the Italian, meaning "next to the first."

**SUPERNUMERARY** (soo-per-NOO-mih-rare-ee) or **SUPER:** an actor who participates in the action but does not speak.

**DANCERS:** performers who dance or move to preset movement.

## OPERA VOCABULARY (cont.)

**CHORUS:** a group of singers who mostly sing together; sometimes this group contains actors and dancers who do not sing, but who are part of the group as a whole.

**PROSCENIUM ARCH** (pre-SEE-nee-um): the architectural arch which frames the main curtain.

**APRON:** the front part of the stage, between the curtain and the orchestra pit.

**BLOCKING:** the moving of people about on stage; in opera rehearsals, these pattern of movements are created by the stage director.

**UPSTAGE/DOWNSTAGE:** the position on the stage farthest (upstage) or nearest (downstage) the audience. Because of the "raked" stage, which was so prevalent in early opera houses, the farther "back" a singer went on the stage, the "higher" he seemed to become in stature.

**COLORATURA** (coe-low-rah-TOOR-ah): a type of soprano, generally, but also the description of singing which pertains to great feats of agility: fast singing, high singing, trills, embellishments and so forth.

**SOPRANO:** the highest range of the female voice; the soprano voice ranges from lyric (a light, graceful quality) to dramatic (obviously fuller and heavier in tone).

**MEZZO-SOPRANO or MEZZO** (MED-zoe): the female voice range which lies between the soprano, which is the highest, and the contralto; the tone of a mezzo-soprano can either be voluptuous or it can be thinner and more agile.

**CONTRALTO:** the lowest female voice; the term itself comes from two Italian words which signify against ("contra") the high ("alto") voice.

**TENOR:** a high male voice.

**BARITONE:** the male voice which lies between the low bass voice and the higher tenor voice; most baritone parts call for expressive, romantic singing.

**BASS** (base): the lowest male voice.

**MAESTRO** (My-stroe): a title of courtesy, given to conductors, composers and directors.

**THE ORCHESTRA:** the musicians who play the musical instruments.

## OPERA VOCABULARY (cont.)

### *Backstage*

**ARTISTIC DIRECTOR:** the head of the opera who makes all of the final artistic decisions.

**STAGE DIRECTOR:** handles the acting portion of the opera, helps the singers become effective actors, and shows them how to move and gesture.

**MUSIC DIRECTOR:** instructs singers on singing and musical style. Leads music rehearsals.

**PRODUCTION MANAGER:** coordinates between the artistic and business aspects of production.

**TECHNICAL DIRECTOR:** coordinates the lighting, set and costumes, and the crews for each area.

**STAGE MANAGER:** assists the singers and the technical staff during rehearsals and performances.

**SET DESIGNER:** plans or designs the sets and scenery. Supervises the set construction.

**LIGHTING DESIGNER:** plans or designs the color, intensity and frequency of the light onstage.

**COSTUME DESIGNER:** plans or designs the costumes and supervises their construction.

**WARDROBE MISTRESS:** assists with the costumes and their care and helps dressers keep track of costume assignments and changes.

**DRESSER:** helps performers dress in their costumes properly.

**WIGS and MAKE-UP DESIGNER:** designs and oversees hairstyles, wigs and make-up.

**PROPERTIES MASTER:** designs and oversees all moveable objects that are not part of the set or costumes (props).

**CHOREOGRAPHER:** creates dances and movements and teaches them to dancers and/or cast members.

**CREW or STAGEHANDS:** carpenters, electricians, riggers, flymen, and prop runners who assist in the construction and installation of the set, lights, and props, and the running of the performance.

## CHARLESTON - THE HOME OF *PORGY & BESS*



Charles Town, established in 1670 on the tip of a peninsula between the Ashley and Cooper Rivers where they flowed into the Atlantic Ocean, was the first permanent town in Carolina. The name was changed to Charleston in 1783, and it remained the state capital for another three years.

The South Carolina Low Country, which is centered around Charleston, is a tidewater zone of bays, estuaries and inlets, laced with rivers and swamps. Soon after the first settlers arrived, they discovered this type of terrain was ideal for growing rice. Before long, rice became the principal crop in the area, and many of the Carolina settlers became wealthy plantation owners. By the mid 1700s, over ninety percent of the population lived in this tidewater zone, and more than two-thirds were blacks from Africa who were brought to America as slaves to work on the plantations. South Carolina was the most heavily slave-based, gentry-dominated society in America.

Charles Town was the center of regional life. It was a healthier place than most other New World settlements, since its location on the peninsula kept it safe from the worst diseases, including malaria. Planters and city officials built residences on the tree-lined city streets. The residents of Charles Town traded with Great Britain and sent their sons there to be educated until the Revolutionary War. During the busy social season they raced their horses and attended balls. It was a good place to live except for the constant threat of hurricanes.

Charleston was where the Civil War started on April 12, 1861, when Confederate batteries on James Island began bombarding Union forces at Fort Sumter. After the war, the economy began to recover. Then, in 1886, a hurricane and a major earthquake struck within a week of each other and almost destroyed Charleston. But the city was rebuilt and now stands as a monument to 18th- and 19th-century architecture.

The Gullah people that DuBose Heyward wrote about (and whose dialect he used in *Porgy*) were descendants of the African slaves who were brought to the Carolinas. Over the years, they retained their culture and language by living self-sufficient, isolated lives on the sea islands. Today, the Gullah dialect is still spoken by about a quarter of a million African Americans in the South, and the rich Gullah heritage is celebrated through music, art and festivals. *Used by permission of Indianapolis Opera.*

# THE MAKING OF AN AMERICAN CLASSIC

By Robert Cable

*“When I first began work on the music I decided against the use of original folk material because I wanted the music to be all one piece. Therefore I wrote my own spirituals and folk songs. But they are still folk music...If in doing this, I have created a new form which combines opera with the theatre, this new form has come naturally out of the material...”* — George Gershwin

George Gershwin wrote these words to describe ***Porgy and Bess*** which, being unlike anything he had written before, seemed to defy classification. Folk opera was the term that Gershwin attributed to ***Porgy and Bess***. Never before had an opera come from purely American traditions and never before had a composer so perfectly exemplified this through music.

The odyssey of ***Porgy and Bess*** began in South Carolina with DuBose Heyward’s novel *Porgy*. Published in 1925, the book is loosely based on Heyward’s childhood memories of a crippled beggar called Goat Sammy, who supposedly traveled through the streets of Charleston in a goat-drawn wagon. It was after reading *Porgy* that Gershwin became inspired to write an opera based on the story.

Heyward converted his *Porgy* into a play which premiered in New York in 1927. Its success further encouraged Gershwin to write the opera. The moving story of a passionate Southern black community seemed to Gershwin the perfect basis for a true American opera. Committed to several other projects at the time, Gershwin was not able to contact Heyward until 1932. Heyward replied enthusiastically to Gershwin’s interest and, with the help of George’s brother Ira, he began preparing the libretto.

George abandoned his New York apartment and relocated to a rented shack in Charleston, South Carolina. There he studied the natives who spoke the “Gullah” dialect upon which Heyward’s *Porgy* was based. He observed their speaking patterns and customs. These elements were incorporated into his opera. For twenty months he worked on nothing else.

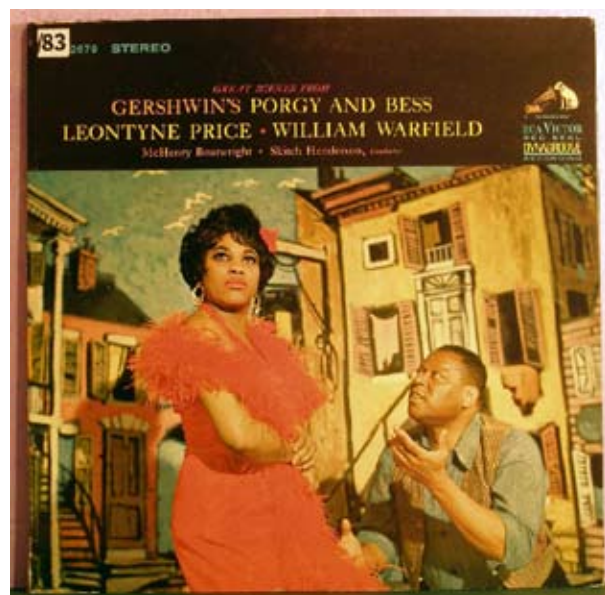
The world premiere of ***Porgy and Bess*** took place in Boston on September 30, 1935. The audience received it wildly, applauding Gershwin and the cast for fifteen minutes. Then, on October 10th, came the Broadway premiere. The result, however, was not an unqualified success. The work was criticized for being neither an opera nor a musical comedy, but something in between. As has often been the case, critics were not ready when opera took a new direction. This, combined with the high production cost, forced the show to close after 124 performances.

## THE MAKING OF AN AMERICAN CLASSIC (cont.)

Gershwin's faith in the work never faltered, but, sadly, he would never witness the ultimate success of **Porgy and Bess**. After his death in 1937, interest in his opera increased due in large part to the public's growing familiarity with the melodies which began appearing on records. By 1941, the songs from **Porgy and Bess** were so well known that it was practically forgotten that its premiere was a failure. On January 21, 1942, a revived **Porgy and Bess** was unveiled on Broadway. A huge success, it ran for 285 performances. In 1943, the opera crossed the Atlantic and made its European premiere in Denmark where the opera became a symbol of resistance to Nazi invaders until it was forced to close due to bomb threats.

The opera's popularity grew still more when it was revived in 1952. This production launched the career of young American soprano Leontyne Price and toured to all the capitals of Europe, making history when it became the first American opera to be heard at the La Scala Opera house in Milan. This production did not close until it completed a tour of the Soviet Union in 1956. In 1959, a film version of **Porgy and Bess** was made starring Sydney Poitier and Clevelander Dorothy Dandridge and featured such notable stars as Diahann Carroll, Pearl Bailey and Sammy Davis, Jr.

In 1976, Houston Grand Opera mounted a new production of **Porgy and Bess**, one which restored the original recitatives and previously dropped musical numbers to the opera. This landmark production was hailed as a revelation and was the first time in forty years that the work was seen as it was "first envisioned"—as an opera, not a modified Broadway musical. This generated new recordings and helped to establish **Porgy and Bess** as an American classic.





## THE ROARING TWENTIES

History is much more than just a class we have to take in school. Everyone has a personal history that is affected by the time in which he or she lives. The 1920s have been described as a time of American prosperity with unprecedented industrial growth, inventions and discoveries, accelerated consumer demand and aspirations, and significant changes in lifestyle. Around the world, the 1920s were a time of social, artistic and cultural energy. Take a look at some of the events listed below that helped shape this decade of George Gershwin and *Porgy and Bess*.



Atlanta in 1920

**1920:** Prohibition laws make it illegal to sell, make, transport or drink alcohol; First radio broadcast; Warren Harding elected 29th President of the United States; First election for women voting; NAACP Conference held in Atlanta, GA; Arturo Toscanini and the La Scala Orchestra give their first American performances; Negro National Baseball League is formed

**1921:** Baseball World Series is broadcast on the radio for the first time – New York Giants defeat the New York Yankees five games to three; Congress passes immigration restrictions for the first time, creating a quota for European immigration to the U.S.

**1922:** Archaeologist Howard Carter finds tomb of Tutankhamen near Luxor, Egypt

**1923:** President Warren G. Harding dies of stroke in a San Francisco hotel room. Vice President Calvin Coolidge ascends to presidency; Yankee Stadium, "The House that Ruth Built," is constructed in the Bronx, New York

## THE ROARING TWENTIES (cont.)

**1924:** Former President Woodrow Wilson dies; John Calvin Coolidge, Jr. is sworn in as 30th President of the United States; the market capitalization of Ford Motor Company exceeds \$1 billion; *Lady, Be Good!* opens with songs by George and Ira Gershwin; it stars Fred and Adele Astaire.

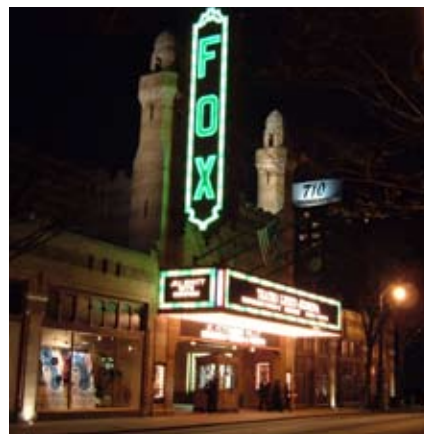
**1925:** F. Scott Fitzgerald publishes *The Great Gatsby*; Scottish inventor John Baird invents the first form of a television; George Gershwin's *Concerto in F for Piano and Orchestra* has its premiere at Carnegie Hall, New York

**1926:** The United States passes the Air Commerce Act, licensing pilots and planes; DeFord Bailey is the first African-American to perform on Nashville's Grand Ole Opry; Allen Alexander Milne's book *Winnie-The-Pooh* is published.

**1927:** Aviator Charles Lindbergh completes the first solo transatlantic flight, landing his "Spirit of Saint Louis" in Paris 33 hours after departing from New York; Lindbergh becomes a national hero; First talking movie, *The Jazz Singer* is released

**1928:** First Mickey Mouse talking film, *Steamboat Willie*, is released by Walt Disney; Herbert Hoover, running on a slogan of "A chicken in every pot, a car in every garage," is elected to the presidency, crushing Catholic Democrat Al Smith to maintain Republican dominance of the Oval Office; The Oxford English Dictionary is published

**1929:** The American stock market collapses, signaling the onset of the Great Depression. The Dow Jones Industrial Average peaks in September 1929 at 381.17—a level that it will not reach again until 1954. The Dow will bottom out at a Depression-era low of just 41.22 in 1932; Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* is published; Museum of Modern in New York City opens to the public; The Fox Theater opens in Atlanta, GA



## **THE ROARING TWENTIES (cont.)**

### **MAKE CONNECTIONS**

Gershwin does not specify a particular year during which *Porgy and Bess* is set, we know only that it is the “recent past.” From that, we can infer that it takes place during Gershwin’s life and prior to the premiere in 1935. How might the events on this timeline changed the lives of people living during the Roaring Twenties? Pick one or two events from the list below that you think best signifies the attitude and time of the “Roaring Twenties” and explain your choice(s). How have the events on the time line affected your life?

Think about five important world events that have happened during you lifetime. How have these events affected the way that you live? How have the events affected the lives of others? How do work events affect your life differently than they affected the lives of your parents? Grandparents? Great-grandparents?

### **GEORGIA PERFORMANCE STANDARDS**

**SOCIAL STUDIES: United States History** - The student will identify key developments in the aftermath of WW I; The student will analyze the causes and consequences of the Great Depression.

**SOCIAL STUDIES: Sociology - Culture and Social Structure:** Students will explain the development and importance of culture; Students will evaluate how cultures develop and evolve; Students will analyze social structure and interaction within society.**Social Inequalities and Change:** Students will analyze forms of social inequality; Students will analyze social change processes in a society.

**SOCIAL STUDIES: American Government/Civics** - The student will demonstrate knowledge of civil liberties and civil rights; The student will describe the qualifications for becoming President of the United States; The student will analyze the important events that occurred after World War I and their impact on Georgia.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

The following discussion topics and activities are designed to build such skills as creative writing, observing, vocabulary development and critical thinking. They can be used independently of each other and are not intended for use in any particular sequence. You can choose the activities that are most appropriate for your curriculum.

### Language Arts & Reading

- Have students read a variety of performing arts criticisms both online and in print. Discuss as a class the type of reporting observed by arts critics. Have the students write a critique of The Atlanta Opera's production of ***Porgy and Bess***. Would the style of critique be different in print than online? Remember that a critic reports both the positive and negative features of a production. Students may want to focus on one part of the opera that they particularly liked or disliked. Keep in mind that reviews express the opinions of the person who writes the review and different people will often have different ideas about the same performance. Students may submit their critiques to The Atlanta Opera by email, [education@atlantaopera.org](mailto:education@atlantaopera.org).
- Tell students that there is a job opening for a dock-worker following the death of Crown. Ask your students to write letters of application and a brief resume or biographical sketch.
- Students, in the roles of Bess and Porgy, will be leaving home and relocating to New York. Before they can go, they must figure out where they will live and work when they get there. Ask the students to write letters of application and brief resume or biographical sketch for potential employers and/or landlords.
- As the best friend of Porgy and Bess, students write a letter offering support, encouragement or guidance as they move to New York. For example, students might write sympathy and advice to Bess as she tries to build a new life, they may write compassion and concern to Porgy as he tries to find Bess in the new city.
- Listen to a selection from the opera ***Porgy and Bess*** and then one from Miles Davis' "Porgy and Bess." Have students compare and contrast what they hear in both selections. Discuss as a class or have students fill in a chart.
- When ***Porgy and Bess*** premiered, it was an edited version more like a musical than the opera it truly is. Why do you think Gershwin made the decision to edit the opera for its premiere? Would you think differently of the story if it were presented as a musical rather than an opera?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES (cont.)

- What do you think happens to Porgy at the end of the opera? Write an Act IV to this opera following Porgy, Bess and Sportin' Life to New York City (or wherever you think they may end up).
- Have the students read *Porgy*, the novel by DuBose Heyward. Compare and contrast the novel to Gershwin's opera.

### History and Social Studies

- Many contemporaries of ***Porgy and Bess*** viewed this opera as racist, feeling that it portrayed the black community of Catfish Row in a poor light, drawing on local stereotypes. Debate the validity of this argument as if you were Gershwin's contemporary and again in light of events around the world today.
- Consider the dialect in which ***Porgy and Bess*** was written. How does it help establish the characters and setting? How might the opera be compromised or improved if the dialect was removed. Do you think that the dialect helped or hindered audience's acceptance of this opera?
- Discuss the timelessness of the opera. Are the events and characters and settings relevant today? If you were to rewrite and modernize this opera, how much would need to change and how?
- The opera was seen as a symbol of resistance to Nazi invaders while at the same time labeled as racist in America. Why do you think people in The United States viewed this opera as racist? Do you agree? What do you think it says about the opera that it can be simultaneously viewed as having such different tones?
- George Gershwin emigrated to The United States from Russia. Do you think his background influenced how he portrayed African-Americans in his opera? Include in class discussions the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Immigration Limitations Act of 1924. Why do you think the government reacted this way to immigration? How is this similar or dissimilar to current discussions regarding immigration?
- Discuss conditions facing African-Americans in the 1920s and 1930s (race riots, discrimination, etc). How do these circumstances show themselves in the opera? How do you imagine American culture at the time influenced mainstream opinions of the opera?
- In the summer of 1934, George Gershwin worked on the opera in Charleston, South Carolina. He drew inspiration from the James Island Gullah community, which he felt had preserved some

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES (cont.)

African musical traditions. This research added to the authenticity of his work. Locate James Island, South Carolina on a map. Have the students research the Gullah culture and history. In what ways is the Gullah culture represented in *Porgy and Bess*?

### Georgia Performance Standards

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: Reading & Literature 1- The student demonstrates comprehension by identifying evidence in a variety of texts representative of different genres and using this evidence as the basis for interpretation.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: Conventions 1 - The student demonstrates understanding and control of the rules of the English language, realizing that usage involves the appropriate application of conventions and grammar in both written and spoken formats.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: Writing 1 - The student produces writing that establishes an appropriate organizational structure, sets a context and engages the reader, maintains a coherent focus throughout, and signals closure.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: Writing 2 - The student demonstrates competence in a variety of genres.

Georgia Performance Standards:

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: Reading & Literature 3 - The student deepens understanding of literary works by relating them to contemporary context of historical background.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: Writing 1: The student produces writing that establishes an appropriate organizational structure, sets a context and engages the reader, maintains a coherent focus throughout, and signals closure.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: Writing 2 -The student demonstrates competence in a variety of genres.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: Conventions 1 -The student demonstrates understanding and control of the rules of the English language, realizing that usage involves the appropriate application of conventions and grammar in both written and spoken formats.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: Listening Speaking and Viewing 1 - The student participates in student-to-teacher, student-to-student, and group verbal interactions.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: Listening Speaking and Viewing 2 - The student formulates reasoned judgments about written and oral communication in various media genres. The student delivers focused, coherent, and polished presentations that convey a clear and distinct perspective, demonstrate solid reasoning, and combine traditional rhetorical strategies of narration, exposition, persuasion, and description.

SOCIAL STUDIES: United States History - The student will identify key developments in the aftermath of WW I; The student will analyze the causes and consequences of the Great Depression.

SOCIAL STUDIES: Sociology - Culture and Social Structure: Students will explain the development and importance of culture; Students will evaluate how cultures develop and evolve; Students will analyze social structure and interaction within society.

Social Inequalities and Change: Students will analyze forms of social inequality; Students will analyze social change processes in a society.

SOCIAL STUDIES: American Government/Civics - The student will demonstrate knowledge of civil liberties and civil rights; The student will describe the qualifications for becoming President of the United States; The student will analyze the important events that occurred after World War I and their impact on Georgia.

# IT'S ALL IN HOW YOU SAY IT: CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**Objective:** Students will learn about different characteristics through experimenting with vocal interpretations. Students will then analyze character traits of Porgy, Bess, Crown and Sportin' Life from the opera Porgy and Bess.

## I. CHARACTERIZING THROUGH VOCALIZATION

When trying to characterize people in books or plays, we not only look at what they say, but we listen to how they say it. Sometimes, the inflection in the voice can change the meaning of a simple sentence. In opera or musical theater, the inflection can be dictated through the musical line: for example, an "ah" sung in a very high register and very loud could be an exclamation of fear or surprise, while the same "ah" sung in a low register and quietly could be a sigh or contentment or sadness.

**A.** Have your students take a simple phrase like "Well, that's the way it is" or "I don't know about that" or a sentence of your choosing, and say it with different inflections to change the meaning. Students may refer to the character list on the following page to give them ideas about how to deliver the line. Remember that more than one characteristic can fit an inflection. Go around the room and have each student deliver a line choosing a characteristic and then discuss the different ways to say it.

**B.** Write a brief, 4-8 line dialogue between two characters. (Use simple, emotion-neutral statements such as "Hello. How are you? Some weather we're having.>"). Have pairs of students interpret and deliver this same dialogue. Discuss how each group interpreted and delivered the scene differently. What did the different interpretations tell us about the relationship between the characters, their moods, their characters, etc.

**C.** On the blackboard, list the different emotions the students demonstrated and discuss how these emotions could help them make judgments about different people's character.

## II. CHARACTER ANALYSIS

When going to see an opera, it is important for the students to know the story before they get to the theater so they can understand what's going on onstage. Knowing the characters and how they react to one another is an important aspect of understanding a story.

## IT'S ALL IN HOW YOU SAY IT: CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**A.** Have students read the synopsis of *Porgy and Bess*. Discuss the students' impressions of the characters and storyline. For example, Crown is portrayed as an abusive bully. How do the students think Crown will be portrayed in The Atlanta Opera production? How could the interpretation of Crown change the landscape of the entire opera?

**B.** Divide the students in to four groups and assign each group one of the following characters: Porgy, Bess, Crown and Sportin' Life. Have each group perform a character analysis of their character, including their motivation and predictions on their future.

### III. FOLLOW UP

After attending the opera, have the students revisit their character analyses. Did The Atlanta Opera portray the characters as they had expected? Did the Opera's production shed new or different light on the individuals?

### GEORGIA PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

#### ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: READING AND LITERATURE

The student identifies, analyzes, and applies knowledge of theme in literary works and provides evidence from the works to support understanding.

The student demonstrates comprehension and shows evidence of a warranted and responsible explanation of a variety of literary and informational texts.

#### ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS: WRITING

The student demonstrates competence in a variety of genres.



## A LIST OF CHARACTER TRAITS

absent-minded	friendly	sad
adventurous	funny	self-centered
ambitious	fussy	selfish
awkward	generous	sensitive
boastful	gentle	sentimental
bold	gloomy	serious
bossy	greedy	sharp-witted
bright	helpful	shiftless
brave	honest	short
calm	humble	shrewd
careless	humorous	shy
care-free	intelligent	sneaky
cautious	jolly	soft-hearted
changeable	keen	spunky
charming	kind	stern
clever	lazy	stingy
conceited	leader	stubborn
confused	light-hearted	superstitious
contented	loud	suspicious
cooperative	loyal	talkative
courageous	mischievous	tall
cowardly	nagging	thin
coy	neat	thoughtful
cruel	obedient	timid
hard-working	organized	tough
curious	outspoken	trusting
dainty	patient	understanding
daring	playful	unfriendly
dark	pleasant	unkind
demanding	polite	wise
dependable	poor	withdrawn
determined	quarrelsome	witty
dreamy	quick-tempered	zany
dull	quiet	
expert	reasonable	
fat	reckless	
fearful	relaxed	
fierce	respectful	
follower	restless	
forgetful	rich	
forgiving	rude	

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