

# Loudoun Lyric Opera

## Opera FAQ's – Dave Butler

### **Q: I don't think I like opera! Why should I go to this one?**

A: I used to think that too. My wife, though, loves to perform opera so I've had no choice but to go. I've been to way more than my life's quota, but what I've found out is that it can actually be fun! Operas are kind of like wine. When you first start to drink wine, don't drink a heavy, dry red. You may never drink wine again! Most folks start with something like a white zinfandel. Hated by wine snobs, but loved by most folks, especially those that don't drink much wine.

### **Q: What's "lyric" opera?**

A: There are three styles of opera. "Grand Operas" are huge productions with sweeping story lines, big orchestras, and are often very long. (Think your stereotypical large sopranos wearing Viking horns and shattering wine glasses.) Definitely a "dry red". One grand opera a year is about all I need. "Comic Operas" (sometimes called "Light Operas") are the "sweet whites" of opera. There's dialogue, not just singing, the plots are almost always funny (sometimes stupidly so), and they're not very long, 2½ hours tops. Gilbert and Sullivan operas are the most common of these. "Lyric Operas" are in between. Usually romantic, sometimes serious but more often a comedy, often with a small chorus (or even no chorus), these operas go with meat or fish, will earn you bonus points with your significant other, and often leave you hungry for more.

### **Q: Aren't operas usually in Italian? I don't speak Italian!**

A: Not to worry! They have titles! If the opera isn't in English (and sometimes even when it is), the words are flashed either above the stage (super titles) or beside the stage (side titles). I've been to operas in French, Italian, German, and Russian, and never had a problem.

### **Q: Why don't they just translate them into English?**

A: They sometimes do, but different languages have different styles. For instance, since almost all Italian words end in a vowel, it's easier to sing romantically than in English.

### **Q: Is there always an intermission?**

A: Almost always at least one. I was at a "dry red" opera once that had four! My wife says that the singers need intermissions to rest their voices and change their costumes, and the stage hands need to change the sets. I think it's so the audience will buy more snacks. Unlike a movie, you can't take the food in with you, so you need an intermission to spend your money. At movies, they sell soda, popcorn, and candy bars. At operas, they often sell wine, almonds, and Swiss chocolate!

### **Q: Why are Les Miserables and Phantom of the Opera called musicals and not operas?**

A: Two reasons: (1) The singing style is different. Broadway types sing from "higher up" in their body, opera types from "lower down". (2) Marketing. More people are familiar with musicals. If this company was called Loudoun Lyric Musical, I probably wouldn't need to write this! Most musicals, of course, have dialogue and most operas (not all) are all singing.

### **Q: Will I know any of the songs?**

A: Did you watch Bugs Bunny growing up? Yes? Then you know many opera songs! I guarantee that you know the overture from Rossini's Barber of Seville. (See Bugs Bunny "Rabbit of Seville".) Also remember, "Kill the Wabbit, kill the WABbit, kill the WAAAAAAbiit". I'm sure you know about half the songs in Bizet's Carmen, and no doubt you've heard "La Donna e Mobile" from Verdi's 'Rigoletto'. I think it sounds like "Ta-Ra-Ra Boom De Ay". My wife thinks I'm an idiot.

### **Q: I've never heard of most of the operas.**

A: Have you heard of "Rent"? That's the updated version of Puccini's "La Boheme". Have you heard of "Miss Saigon"? That's the updated version of Puccini's "Madame Butterfly". How about "Hot Mikado"? That's based on Gilbert & Sullivan's "Mikado". I've seen them all and liked them all!

### **Q: What's "Don Giovanni" about?**

A: A satire of "Don Juan", it's a ~~comedy~~, I mean a ~~tragedy~~, I mean...well, let's just say it's got funny parts and not so funny parts. Don G. runs around taking advantage of unsuspecting young women. This is a fine life (for him) until he goes a bit overboard leaving one woman high-and-dry, attempting to force himself on another, and abducting a third. This makes them angry (can't imagine why), and they vow revenge! How does it end? You'll just have to watch!

### **Q: It sounds kind of serious!**

A: Yes and no. Serious subject, but essentially a spoof. Not unlike a lot of movies.

### **Q: Yeah, but it doesn't cost me \$25 to see a movie.**

A: Yeah, but this is live. All live performances cost more. Sit this close at a Nationals game and it'll cost you \$400. And you won't even have to take the Metro or drive on 66!

### **Q: Are the singers any good?**

A: You'll be surprised. I heard them and they're awesome! And the piano player is phenomenal.

### **Q: Do I have to dress up?**

A: For the Kennedy Center on a Saturday evening when Domingo is singing, YES! A tux would not be out of place. For Loudoun Lyric Opera, NO! I don't think I'd wear holey jeans and a grungy tee shirt, but nice shorts and a polo shirt would be fine.

### **Q: Can I bring my kids?**

A: If they're quiet. And if they're old enough to know why Don Giovanni is a "bad person". I have an 11 year old that loves to go and he'll be fine. My 9 year old? He probably won't be going.

### **Q: How many performances of "Don G." will you have to go to?**

A: More than my life's quota. See you there!