OTELLO

Nashville Opera

HOT SEASON FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
TEACHER GUIDEBOOK
For over 125 years Regions has been proud to be a part of the Middle Tennessee community, growing and thriving as our area has. From the opening of our doors on September 1, 1883, we have committed to this community and our customers.

One area that we are strongly committed to is the education of our students. We are proud to support TPAC’s Humanities Outreach in Tennessee Program. What an important sponsorship this is – reaching over 25,000 students and teachers – some students would never see a performing arts production without this program. Regions continues to reinforce its commitment to the communities it serves and in addition to supporting programs such as HOT, we have close to 200 associates teaching financial literacy in classrooms this year.

Thank you, teachers, for giving your students this wonderful opportunity. They will certainly enjoy the experience. You are creating memories of a lifetime, and Regions is proud to be able to help make this opportunity possible.

Jim Schmitz
Executive Vice President
Area Executive
Middle Tennessee Area
Dear Teachers~

We are so pleased to be able to partner with Nashville Opera to bring students to the invited dress rehearsal of Giuseppe Verdi's Otello.

We thank Nashville Opera for the use of their extensive study guide for adults. It will help you prepare your students for the performance with a synopsis, opera background, and musical information. Additional information and short explorations are included in this booklet for you to share with students.

Please look particularly at the opera rehearsal information, which will help students understand the special factors present in an invited dress rehearsal.

Enjoy!

TPAC Education

The Greek and Turkish island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean Sea is the setting of Otello. Visitors can still climb the Kyrenia mountains to see these ruins of a medieval abbey outside the town of Bellepatis.

With thanks to TimeOut London
Most final dress rehearsals are almost exactly like a performance. The director will stop the action if needed, but it is exceedingly rare and generally only for a technical malfunction on the stage. As in theatre, an opera dress rehearsal is the final chance before the performance to make a complicated collaboration come together seamlessly.

The Nashville Opera’s rehearsal schedule begins with two weeks at the opera rehearsal space in the new Noah Liff Opera Center. Stage action is mapped out, the performers experiment with their characters, and the director’s ideas for the flow of the opera are shared with the cast. The time period may seem short for such a large production. It only works because opera singers begin rehearsals knowing every bit of their music by heart and having rehearsed it themselves over a period of months, sometimes years. If they do not know the role on the first day, the director has the right to replace them immediately. The opera company will fly in a new singer to take over their part. Once opera singers learn a particular role, they keep it in their repertory and play the role many more times at different opera companies around the world.

Four to five days before the first performance, the set is “loaded in” to the theater, and the lights are hung and focused. Students will notice a table in the middle of the orchestra level seats for the stage manager, the director, and the designers. This serves as a central location for communicating with the singers onstage, the crew backstage, the conductor in the orchestra pit, and the technicians in the lighting booth. During the final dress rehearsal, students may notice lighting changes if the designer makes final adjustments.

Opera rehearsals use a skilled piano accompanist, but once the company moves into the theater, the performers will have a Sitzprobe rehearsal (a German word meaning to sit and try out.) The Sitzprobe is a “sing-thru” with the orchestra and conductor, concentrating on the nuances of the music only, without staging. It is the first time that the orchestra and singers will come together to combine the interpretive work that they have been practicing separately.

A piano tech rehearsal is held without costumes to let the singers get used to the set and give the set crew their first chance to practice scene changes. The next rehearsal is a piano dress rehearsal that adds costumes. Finally, the orchestra dress rehearsal puts all the elements together: lighting, set changes, costumes, the orchestra, and the supertitles (the English translations of the words to the opera, called the libretto.) The supertitles will also be in operation at the final invited dress rehearsal.

The final dress rehearsal allows the last polish before the performance, and invited dress rehearsals add the final important element to the opera, an audience. Because of the strenuous nature of the singing, singers may choose to “mark” on the final dress rehearsal in order to preserve their voices for all the performances. “Marking” does not have the same meaning in opera as it does in theatre. In theatre, it means just going through the blocking and the words of the lines.

In opera, it specifically means that the singer may choose not to sing at full volume and not to push their voice to the utmost. All of their acting and vocal expression will be at full power, however, with all the passion and conviction that opera requires. You will be their first audience; they are ready and excited to give you the story and the music.
Step 1~Know the story!

In opera, it is important to know as much as possible about what is going on beforehand, including the ending. By all means, read the synopsis and libretto; listen to a recording! Once the music, the voices, the setting, the lights, and the dramatic staging come together at the performance, audience members will be better able to fit all the elements seamlessly together into the plot. The plot then becomes the springboard for the real power of opera - the music.

Step 2~Experience the music!

Composers use many tools to communicate with music. They create melodies that evoke a variety of emotions. They use tempos (how slow or fast) and dynamics (how loud or soft) and rhythms (the frequency and pattern of beat). They choose particular instruments to add color to the music they have written. Think of instrument choice as a type of painting for your ears! The term “soundscape” is often used in describing the music of an opera, and it can set the atmosphere and give information about character and plot. What is it telling you?

Step 3 ~Understand the singers!

Opera singers are vocal athletes. They practice every day to exercise their vocal chords and their extensive breath control. The combinations of notes that they have to sing are very difficult, and the things that they can do with their voices are extreme. You can easily compare a regular singing voice and an opera singing voice to a weekend jogger and a gold-medal-winning Olympic track champion! BUT, the reason that their voices are prized is that they can express so much emotion on a grand scale.

Step 4~Plunge in!

This is the most important step. Everything about opera is over-the-top, on the edge, enormous in every way. It’s an art form that thrives on its intensity and passion. Opera stories portray people at their most extreme, and the singers and the music communicate in ways that words alone cannot. You have to let go, allow yourself to stop thinking and analyzing and simply FEEL THE EMOTION!

(with acknowledgements to Opera 101 by Fred Plotkin for idea organization above)
Breathe like Singers

The power of opera singer’s breath control is formidable. They must be able to sing very complicated musical passages, to sustain long notes, and to project their voices without microphones. They work all the time on their abdominal muscles, particularly the diaphragm muscle which runs along the bottom of the ribcage.

Pay attention to your breathing. What part of your body is moving? Place your hands on your stomach just below your ribcage and try to push them out slightly as you breathe in.

Keep your hands in place, take a breath in, and say “ha!” You should feel your diaphragm jump.

Try to fill your lungs with the biggest breath you can, and let it out as slowly as you can with a hissing sound.

Try it again and while you are hissing have a partner count how long you can make the hissing sound or (harder) how long you can make the sound “ahhh.” If you were to practice this every day, you would build the muscle and be able to make sound for longer periods of time, as opera singers can.

Every once in a while during the performance, try to pay attention to which passages seem to require the most breath control.

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Play to Opera: what does it take to transfer the story into another art form?

Many people are familiar with William Shakespeare’s play, *Othello*. Why do you think that Giuseppe Verdi wanted to turn this play into an opera, or rather, to write an opera based on this play?

Think of other examples that you know of a work of visual, written, or performing art that has been transformed into a different art form. Moving from book to movie is probably the most common modern example, but look also at movie to musical, or book to play. What must be adapted from the story to suit its new medium? What do you think Verdi had to do to make *Othello* as good an opera as it was a play? What would he have to keep, and what would he have to discard? Another way to imagine the process is to ask what parts will become more important and which ones will be less important.

Pick a book or a movie and make an plan of action for turning it into a work for the stage: a play, musical, opera, or even a song. What moves you or attracts you to the original that you want most to keep in your new version? Think about which of the following would have to be in your new work: plot, themes, style, characters, mood, setting. What are the key characteristics of the art form to which you are moving? How will you innovate?

What did Verdi do? He chose to keep the characters and the plot, but not Shakespeare’s language. He used melody and structure to capture the escalating tension and suspense that is created by poetic verse in the play. Verdi challenged traditional opera form by blurring the distinctions between *aria* (solo pieces with which characters express emotion - the “songs” of opera) and *recitative* (words and music that feel more conversational - the sung “dialogue” in opera.) The musical effect of blending these structures pulls the audience into the accelerating emotional momentum towards the final tragedy.
Nashville Opera
Presents
Otello

Music by Giuseppe Verdi
Libretto by Arrigo Boito
Based on the Shakespeare tragedy
First performance: Teatro alla Scala, Milan on February 5, 1887

Director
John Hoomes

Conductor
Chris Larkin

Cast

Otello, a Moorish General................................................................. Clifton Forbis, tenor
Desdemona, his wife........................................................................... Mary Dunleavy, soprano
Iago, Otello’s ensign .......................................................................... Malcolm MacKenzie, baritone
Emilia, wife of Iago, maid of Desdemona........................................... Amy Oraftik, mezzo-soprano
Cassio, Otello’s captain ....................................................................... Jason Slayden, tenor
Roderigo, a gentleman of Venice ........................................................ Zac Engle, tenor
Lodovico, ambassador of the Venetian Republic................................. James Harrington, bass-baritone
Montano, former governor of Cyprus ............................................... Jeffrey Williams, baritone
Herald .................................................................................................. Jeffrey Williams, baritone

Performances
Friday, April 11, 2014, 8pm
Sunday, April 13, 2014, 2pm
Tuesday, April 15, 2014, 7pm

James. Polk Theatre
Tennessee Performing Arts Center
Nashville, Tennessee

Featuring the Nashville Opera Orchestra
Opera Insights Preview Talks 1 hour before each performance in the theatre.

Nashville Opera will perform Otello in the original language, Italian, but an English translation will be projected on a screen above the stage. With these Supertitles, audiences can experience the beauty of opera in the original language, yet still understand the meaning of all that is being sung.
The Story

Time- The late 1400’s
Place- A coastal city on the island of Cyprus

Act I- Cyprus, late fifteenth century. A huge storm is raging. The Moor Otello, governor of the island and general in the Venetian army, arrives following a violent journey at sea. Although there is much celebration, Iago, Otello’s ensign, confers with Roderigo, and becomes outraged and vengeful when he hears that Otello has made Cassio his lieutenant. Iago plots a scheme to ruin Otello, and his plan begins with getting Cassio drunk during the revelry. A sword fight soon ensues and Cassio injures another officer. Otello enters, stops the fight, and angrily demotes Cassio. He orders all to disperse. Otello’s wife, Desdemona, enters and a love scene begins. The two retire to the castle.

Act II- Iago convinces Cassio to implore Desdemona to ask Otello to reinstate him as lieutenant. While Cassio searches for Desdemona, Iago places thoughts of jealousy in Otello’s head. Once alone, Iago’s true self is exposed to the audience as he sings his “Credo,” in which he praises evil and denounces goodness. Iago tells Otello that he saw Cassio with the wedding handkerchief given to Desdemona by Otello. Otello sings of his despair and jealously vows to find out the truth of his wife’s fidelity. If he discovers she has been unfaithful, there will be hell to pay. Iago offers to help Otello vent his wrath upon the guilty parties.

Act III- Desdemona asks Otello to reinstate Cassio. He feels his suspicions about Cassio and her are now confirmed. Otello, heartbroken, discusses his feelings with Iago, and Iago continues to urge the jealous Otello on. Iago agrees to arrange a conversation between himself and Cassio (while Otello remains hidden) to confirm Otello’s suspicions. Afterwards, Otello commits to slaying his wife as Iago commits to slaying Cassio. Lodovico arrives to great fanfare with a message for Otello. To add to Otello’s anguish, the message is that he has been deposed and that Cassio is to replace him. Otello vents his jealous fury towards Desdemona, much to the horror of the onlookers. After she begs forgiveness for anything she might have done to offend him, Otello curses Desdemona and slaps her to the ground. Otello clears the room. As Otello falls senseless to the ground, Iago revels in Otello’s humiliation and despair.

Act IV- Desdemona retires to her bedroom with her maid Emilia. Emilia exits as Desdemona prays before the Madonna. A jealous rage has now completely overtaken Otello. Otello enters her room after she has fallen asleep and awakens her with a kiss. Once again he questions her on her unfaithfulness. Enraged at her denials, he smother her. Emilia enters to see Desdemona’s lifeless body and screams. Iago and the others enter. Emilia denounces Iago and tells everyone that Desdemona was innocent. Emilia explains that Iago took the handkerchief from her and gave it to Cassio. Iago flees the scene. Otello, in shame and despair over his actions, stabs himself. He drags his body toward Desdemona to give her one last kiss but dies before reaching her.
About the Opera: Composition

**Verdi's early retirement:** After the completion and premiere of the opera Aida in 1871, Verdi decided that it was time for him to end his successful career as a composer of opera, though he was easily the most popular, and possibly the wealthiest, composer in Italy during the time, much as Rossini had done after the completion of the opera William Tell.

**Ricordi and the “plot” to end Verdi's retirement:** Because of the immense popularity of Verdi's music in Italy by the 1870's, Verdi's retirement seemed to his publisher, Ricordi, to be a waste of talent and possible profits. Thus a plot of sorts was hatched in order to coax the composer out of retirement to write another opera. Because of the importance of the dramatic aspects of opera to the composer, Verdi was especially selective in his choice of subjects. Consequently, if he were to agree to create another opera after a decade of retirement, the libretto would need to be one that would capture his interest. It was generally known that Verdi admired the dramatic works of Shakespeare and had, throughout his career, desired to create operas based on Shakespearian plays. However, his one attempt at doing so, MacBeth (1847), although initially successful, was not well received when revised for performance in Paris in 1865. Because of its relatively straightforward story, the play Othello was selected as a likely target.

**Proposal and Arrigo Boito:** Finally, after some plotting, Ricordi, in conjunction with Verdi's friend, the conductor Franco Faccio, subtly introduced the idea of a new opera to Verdi. During a dinner at Verdi's Milan residence during the summer of 1879, Ricordi and Faccio guided the conversation towards Shakespeare’s plays Othello and to the librettist Arrigo Boito (whom Ricordi claimed to be a great fan of the play also). Suggestions were made, despite initial skepticism on the part of the composer, that Boito would be interested in creating a new libretto for an opera play. Within several days, Boito was brought to meet Verdi and present him with an outline of a libretto for an opera based on Othello. However, Verdi, still maintaining that his career had ended with the composition of Aida, made very little progress on the work. Nonetheless, collaborations with Boito in the revision of the earlier opera Simon Boccanegra helped to convince Verdi of Boito’s ability as a librettist. Finally, production began on the opera, which Verdi initially referred to as Iago.

**Completion and Production:** As the Italian public became aware that the retired Verdi was composing another opera, rumors about it abounded. At the same time, many of the most illustrious conductors, singers and opera house managers in Europe were vying for an opportunity to play a part in Otello’s premiere, despite the fact that Faccio and La Scala, Milan, had already been selected as a conductor and the venue for the first performance. The two male protagonists had been selected, too: Italy's foremost dramatic tenor, Francesca Tamagno, was to sing Otello while the esteemed French singing-actor Victor Maurel would assume the villainous baritone role of Iago. Romilda Pantaleoni, a well known singing actress, was assigned Desdemona’s soprano part.

Upon the completion of the opera, preparations for the initial performance were conducted in absolute secrecy and Verdi reserved the right to cancel the premiere up to the last minute. Verdi need not have worried: Otello’s debut proved to be a resounding success. The audience’s enthusiasm for Verdi was shown by the 20 curtain calls!
What to Listen For

Act I

**Love Duet (“Già nella note densa”)** - Otello and Desdemona recall why they fell in love. Otello, in an ecstasy of joy, invites death, fearing that he will never know such happiness again. Desdemona prays that their love will remain unchanged. They kiss, overcome with love for each other.

Act II

**Iago’s “Credo”** - Iago voices his nihilistic beliefs and hatred of humankind. Sung in the beginning of Act II of Verdi’s opera, Otello, Iago starts crafting his plan by advising Cassio to get back in Otello’s good graces. He tells Cassio to speak with Otello’s wife, Desdemona. If all goes according to play, Desdemona will help change the mind of her husband by speaking on behalf of Cassio. Finally, when Cassio leaves and Iago is alone, Iago reveals his true nature in this frightening aria which translates to, "I believe in a cruel God.

**Oath Duet (“Si, pel ciel marmorero guiro”)** - Otello begins to grow suspicious of Desdemona. Iago fans the flames and tells Otello that he heard Cassio speak of Desdemona in his sleep and he saw him carrying her handkerchief. Exploding with rage and jealousy, Otello swears revenge and Iago joins in the oath.

Act IV

**Desdemona’s “Willow Song” and “Ave Maria”** - Desdemona reflects on her troubled relationship with the man she loves. She tells Emilia that Otello has become calmer, but she still has a premonition of death. In the Willow Song, Desdemona sings about a girl who was abandoned by her lover. As Emilia prepares to go, the restraint Desdemona has heretofore shown gives way to an outpouring of emotion as she bids Emilia an impassioned farewell. Finally, Desdemona offers a prayer to the Virgin Mary as her last act before Otello’s fateful appearance.

**Recommended Recordings**

- "OTELLO." Mario del Monaco, Renata Tebaldi, Aldo Protti; Vienna Philharmonic, conducted by Herbert von Karajan (Decca 411 618-2; two CD’s).
- "OTELLO." Jon Vickers, Leonie Rysanek, Tito Gobbi; Rome Opera House Chorus and Orchestra, conducted by Tullio Serafin (RCA Victor 09026-63180-2; two CD’s).
- "OTELLO." Plácido Domingo, Cheryl Studer, Sergei Leiferkus; Bastille Opera Orchestra & Choir, conducted by Myung-Whun Chung (RCA 1994; two CD’s).
Background

Shakespearean influences are widespread in just about every form of entertainment imaginable. Operas, ballets, symphonies, films, and even rock songs are inspired by his classic tales. Astoundingly, Verdi’s Shakespearean operas are musical oddities. While hundreds of operas are based on the works of Shakespeare, only a few can be called opera house staples. Charles Gounod’s Romeo and Juliet is one, as is Benjamin Britten’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream. The rest may all be Verdi’s: Macbeth, Falstaff, and Otello.

After the completion and premiere of his opera Aida in 1871, Verdi decided that it was time for him to end his successful career as a composer, though he was easily the most popular, and perhaps wealthiest, composer in Italy at the time. Because of his immense popularity, Verdi’s publisher hatched a plot to coax the composer out of retirement to write another opera. Since the dramatic aspects of an opera are so important to the composer, Verdi was especially selective in his choice of subjects. His publisher, Giulio Ricordi, knew that Verdi was a great admirer of Shakespeare, so he invited Verdi and a composer friend to dinner one evening during which he casually steered the conversation towards Shakespeare’s tragedy Othello and the librettist Arrigo Boito. Suggestions were made that Boito was interested in writing a libretto based on the play. Within several days, Boito was brought to meet Verdi and present him with an outline of a libretto for an opera based on Othello. Soon after, production began on the opera, which Verdi originally referred to as Iago.

As the Italian people became aware that the retired Verdi was composing another opera, rumors began to abound. Upon completion of the opera, preparations for the premiere were conducted in absolute secrecy and Verdi maintained the right to cancel the show until the very last minute. He need not have worried. The audience’s enthusiasm for Otello was demonstrated by the twenty curtain calls that he took at the end of the show!

Verdi only wrote one more opera before his death, Falstaff, another Shakespeare adaptation. To this day, Verdi’s Shakespearean operas are considered some of the best adaptations of Shakespeare of all time, none so more than Otello.
About the Composer

Quick Stats
Full Name: Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi
Life: October 10, 1813 - January 27, 1901
Nationality: Italian

Life and Career

Giuseppe Verdi was born in a small village in the province of Parma in northern Italy. At the time, the town was a part of the First French Empire, so officially Verdi was born a Frenchman. When he was twenty, Verdi moved to Milan to continue his studies. He took private lessons in counterpoint while attending operatic performances and concerts. After his education, he returned to his home town and became the town music master. With the support of Antonio Barezzi, a local merchant and music lover, Verdi gave his first public performance at Barezzi's home in 1830.

The Milan production of Verdi's first opera, Oberto, achieved a degree of success, and La Scala's impresario, Bartolomeo Merelli, offered Verdi a contract for three more years. It was while he was working on his second opera that Verdi's wife died. The opera was a flop, and he fell into a deep despair and vowed to give up musical composition forever. However, Merelli convinced him to write another opera, Nabucco. Its opening performance in 1842 made Verdi famous. During the next decade, Verdi did nothing but compose. For some, the most original and important opera that Verdi wrote during this time is Macbeth in 1847. For the first time, Verdi attempted an opera without a love story, breaking a basic convention in 19th-century Italian opera.

In 1851, Verdi composed one of his greatest masterpieces, Rigoletto. With Rigoletto, Verdi sets up his original idea of musical drama as a cocktail of heterogeneous elements, embodying social and cultural complexity from a distinctive mixture of comedy and tragedy. In 1874, Verdi composed his Requiem Mass honoring the famous novelist and poet Alessandro Manzoni. His grand opera Aida opened in Cairo in 1871.

Otello premiered in Milan in 1887. Many critics consider it Verdi's greatest tragic opera, containing some of his most beautiful, expressive music and some of his richest characterizations. Verdi's last opera, Falstaff, was based on Shakespeare's Merry Wives of Windsor and Henry IV, Part 1. It was an international success and is one of the supreme comic operas which demonstrate Verdi's genius as a contrapuntist.

Verdi died of a stroke on January 27, 1901. He continues to be regarded as one of the greatest composers in history.
Of Further Interest

- Verdi intended to name the opera *Iago*. Verdi, who always seemed to identify with the baritone roles in his operas (notably *Simon Boccanegra*, *Rigoletto*, *Di Luna*, *Renato*, and *Falstaff*) was fascinated by the dual nature of *Iago*; outwardly, a devoted friend to both Otello and Cassio, but inwardly consumed with hatred for both and pledged to their mutual destruction. Many of Verdi’s greatest characters possess such a Jekyll-and-Hyde persona.

- In Puccini’s *Tosca*, the evil Baron Scarpia makes a reference to the equally evil *Iago* and his handkerchief, and plays on Tosca’s jealousy in the same manner, only with a fan!

- After Plácido Domingo performed the title role in Verdi’s *Otello* in Vienna on July 30, 1991, the audience clapped for one hour and 20 minutes (and 101 curtain calls), setting a new world record for the longest applause ever.

- In 2013, Karen Saillant, artistic director and stage director of the International Opera Theater, along with Italian composer Carlo Pedini and librettist Lucio Lironi wrote a sequel to Verdi’s *Otello* entitled *Iago*. The story of *Iago* picks up 15 years after the ending of *Otello*. *Iago* is about 55 years old and has been in solitary confinement in his Cyprus prison. He has remained silent for a decade and a half, and it is two days prior to his scheduled execution.

The Play vs. the Opera: A Comparison

Shakespeare’s *Othello*, one of the masterpieces of dramatic literature had nearly 3,500 lines. Verdi’s *Otello*, one of the masterpieces of operatic literature has fewer the 800. How could Boito, the librettist, have taken a great masterpiece, eviscerated it, and produced another great masterpiece? The answer of course, is the music. Boito reduced the play to its essentials, knowing that Verdi’s music would fill the gaps. At first glance, the cuts seem drastic; for example, the entire first act is gone. Yet a careful comparison of the two texts shows that almost everything in the play appears, or is referenced, in the opera. The gist of Shakespeare’s opening conversation between *Iago* and *Roderigo* appears during Act I of the opera. Othello’s description to the Senate of how *Desdemona* fell in love with him is part of their love duet.

With a few exceptions, all of the play’s story elements appear in the opera; there are minor differences. In the play, *Iago* kills *Roderigo* and wounds Cassio; in the opera Cassio kills Roderigo. *Iago* tries to escape at the end of the play but is captured and ordered to be tortured. Verdi’s *Iago* runs off; we do not know what happens to him. In the play, *Desdemona*’s “Willow” song and her murder by Othello occur in two separate acts (the “Willow” song scene is the final scene of Act IV; the murder occurs in the second scene of Act V). Before the murder, Othello asks her if she has prayed and she replies that she has. Since, in the opera, these two scenes are combined into one, it is necessary for Desdemona to be seen to pray before retiring to bed.
On Operatic Voices

All classical singers fall into one of the categories listed below. A singer cannot choose his/her voice-type…it is something they are born with. Composers usually assign a voice type to a character based on his/her personality or age. Read these descriptions for specific examples.

**Women**

**Soprano:** The highest female voice, with a range similar to a violin. In opera, the soprano most often plays the young girl or the heroine (sometimes called the Prima Donna), since a high bright voice traditionally suggests femininity, virtue, and innocence. The normal range of a soprano is two octaves up from middle C, sometimes with extra top notes. Most women are sopranos. The role of *Desdemona* is sung by a soprano.

**Mezzo-Soprano:** Also called a mezzo; the middle female voice similar to an oboe in range. A mezzo’s sound is often darker and warmer than a soprano’s. In opera, composers generally use a mezzo to portray older women, villainesses, seductive heroines, and sometimes even young boys. (This is a special operatic convention, called a “trouser role” or a “pants role”) The mezzo’s normal range is from the A below middle C to the A two octaves above it. The mezzo in *Otello* is Emilia.

**Contralto:** The lowest female voice, similar in range to a clarinet. Contraltos usually sing the roles of older females or special character parts such as witches and old gypsies. The range is two octaves from F below middle C to the top line of the treble clef. A true contralto is very rare – some believe they don’t exist at all!

**Men**

**Counter-tenor:** The highest male voice, which was mainly used in very early opera and oratorio (a genre of classical vocal music similar to opera but generally based on a religious topic and accompanied by a choir). The voice of a countertenor sounds very much like a mezzo-soprano’s voice and they often sing the same repertoire. Like the contralto, true countertenors are very rare. There is no countertenor in *Otello*.

**Tenor:** Usually the highest male voice in an opera. It is similar to a trumpet in range, tone, color, and acoustical ring. The tenor typically plays the hero or the love interest in an opera. The role of *Otello*, *Cassio and Roderigo* are sung by tenors. His voice ranges from the A below middle C to the G above.

**Baritone:** The middle male voice, close to a French horn in range and tone color. The baritone usually plays villainous roles or father-figures. In *Otello*, *Iago and the Herald* are baritones.

**Bass:** The lowest male voice, it is similar to a trombone or bassoon in range and color. In serious opera, low voices usually suggest age and wisdom. In *Otello*, the character of *Lodovico and Montano* are basses.
**Opera Etiquette**

**ALWAYS BE EARLY!** It is always a good idea to arrive early to the opera to ensure you are able to find your seat and get settled before the performance begins. The orchestra may be tuning, so it is important that you find a seat as quickly and quietly as possible. If you are late, you may miss the first overture or even the first act!

**OPERA IS FOR ALL AGES TO ENJOY!** – Opera is full of emotion, passion, human conflict and discovery. Whether it is your first time, or a die-hard opera fan, you will have a great time. Especially with the invention of the ‘Supertitle,’ where the text is projected above the stage on a screen, you are able to follow everything being sung on stage. All operas are performed in their original language.

**WHAT TO WEAR:** Many people think of a night at the opera as a glamorous event and an excuse to bring out the fancy attire. But, it is also acceptable to dress comfortably and be you. If a sequined dress or a tux isn’t your thing, come in whatever you think is appropriate for an evening out. For dress rehearsals, the casual attire that students wear to school is perfectly acceptable. A light jacket is suggested because the theatre is air-conditioned.

**USE THE RESTROOM.** Once in the theatre it is courteous to remain seated and involved in the production until intermission. Please do not leave the theatre unless there is an emergency.

**PLEASE BE COURTEOUS to everyone in the audience and on stage.** Theatre is live performance, so any talking, cell-phone use (including texting) or other noise/light disruption takes away from everyone’s experience at the opera. Remember that this is a live performance and unlike many staged performances, the opera singers do not use microphones. This makes it essential to wait until intermission to unwrap gum/candy, talk to your neighbor or use electronic devices that may distract others. Be sure to turn off cell phone and pagers.

**APPLAUSE WELCOME!** There are several times during a performance when it is appropriate to applaud the performers. The first opportunity to applaud takes place when the conductor takes the podium at the very beginning of the performance and when he/she returns to the podium following intermission(s). It is also acceptable to applaud after an overture or aria in the middle of a performance. Applaud when the performance moves you. If you are not sure when it is appropriate for applause, follow the lead of the rest of the audience. When you feel comfortable at a performance you may show your appreciation to the performers by shouting “Bravo!” for a male performer, “Brava!” for a female performer, or “Bravi!” for an ensemble. At the conclusion of the performance, singers who performed principal roles in the opera will take their “curtain call.” It is appropriate to continue applauding until all singers have stepped forward to accept their applause. Sometimes, when audience members are so impressed with the overall performance of the opera they will stand and applaud the entire ensemble, which is referred to as a “standing ovation.”

**NO FOOD, DRINKS, OR GUM IN THE THEATRE.** This rule is strictly enforced.

**NO CAMERAS OR TAPE RECORDERS:** the artists’ images and performances belong to them and we ask you to respect that by refraining from recording their work in any way.
About our Cast

The Nashville Opera Association is honored to present the following artists in this production of Otello

Director
John Hoomes, Artistic & General Director of Nashville Opera
Nashville Opera Credits: The Magic Flute, Salome, Lucia di Lammermoor, La Voix Humaine, The Lighthouse, Faust, Surrender Road
Other appearances: Florentine Opera, Augusta Opera, Nevada Opera, Sarasota Opera, Indianapolis Opera, Arizona Opera, Opera Carolina, Opera New Jersey

Conductor
Chris Larkin
Nashville Opera Credits: Otello, Madame Butterfly, La Bohème
Other appearances: Florentine Opera, Fort Worth Opera, Utah Opera, Brevard Music Center, Oberlin Conservatory

Otello
Clifton Forbis, tenor
Nashville Opera Credits: Pagliacci
Other appearances: Metropolitan Opera, Opéra National de Paris, Canadian Opera Company, and Teatro alla Scala

Iago
Malcom MacKenzie, baritone
Nashville Opera Credits: The Girl of the Golden West
Other appearances: Metropolitan Opera, Paris Opera, Los Angeles Opera, San Diego Opera, Glimmerglass Opera

Desdemona
Mary Dunleavy, soprano
Nashville Opera Credits: Nashville Opera Debut
Other appearances: Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, New York City Opera, Glimmerglass Opera

Cassio
Jason Slayden, tenor
Nashville Opera Credits: Nashville Opera Debut
Other appearances: Sante Fe Opera, Minneapolis Opera, Seattle Opera, Wolf Trap Opera
Lodovico
James Harrington, bass
**Nashville Opera Credits:** *The Girl of the Golden West, La Traviata*
**Other appearances:** Utah Opera Festival, Boston Lyric Opera, Sarasota Opera, Opera New Jersey

Emilia
Amy Oraftik, mezzo soprano
**Nashville Opera Credits:** *Billy Goats Gruff, La Bella Notte Soloist*
**Other appearances:** Central City Opera, Sarasota Opera, Opera Fayetteville

Roderigo
Zac Engle, tenor
**Nashville Opera Credits:** *Barber of Seville, Billy Goats Gruff, La Bella Notte Soloist*
**Other appearances:** Ft. Worth Opera, Tulsa Opera, Boston Opera Collaborative

Montano/Herald
Jeffrey Williams, baritone
**Nashville Opera Credits:** *Barber of Seville, Billy Goats Gruff, La Bella Notte Soloist*
**Other appearances:** Ft. Worth Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Seagle Music Colony
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