

SARASOTA **OPERA**

VICTOR DeRENZI, Artistic Director
RICHARD RUSSELL, Executive Director



Rachel J. Peters'
**ROOTABAGA
COUNTRY**

**TEACHER
RESOURCE
GUIDE**

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About The Cover Artwork The artwork on the cover of this guide is by Sarasota Youth Opera member Pablo González. Pablo is currently a junior at Pine View School and has been a Youth Opera member for six years. To see more of Pablo's work, check out his website <https://www.pablogonzalezartist.com>.

THE CAST

Conductor Jesse Martins
Stage Director Martha Collins
Scenic Designer Sheryl Liu
Costume Designer Howard Tsvi Kaplan
Lighting Designer Ken Yunker
Hair & Make-Up Designer Brittany Rappise
Stage Manager Francesca MacBeth

Gimme The Ax an extraordinary man and father (tenor) Tobias Wright *

Please Gimme his son Ashley Lewis (11/12) & Samantha Lane (11/11 & 11/13)

Ax Me No Questions his daughter..... Dominique Cecchetti (11/12) & Aubree Zern(11/11 & 11/13)

Potato Face Blind Man a beggar (bass-baritone) Costas Tsuourakis **

Jason Squiff a plumber Lane Hubbard

Blixie Bimber Jason Squiff's customer Katherine Herbert

The Kernel Jason's unsolicited popcorn kernel guide Astrid McIntyre

Snippo Hike a troublesome boy Ursula Kushner

Bevo Hike Snippo's father..... Leeson Foullon

Mayor Alexandra Garcia

Weatherman Emily Mulling

Doctor Mykayla Krom

Traffic Cop Sam Stahlmann

Henry Hagglyhoagly a balladeer in love Pablo González

Henry's Two Mittens Madeline Blanton & Julia Koren

Susan Slakentwist a princess and Henry's sweetheart Katherine Herbert

Chorus as the Zigzag Railroad and the citizens of Rootabaga country Full & Prep Choruses

* Sarasota Opera Apprentice Artist ** Sarasota Opera Studio Artist
All others performers Sarasota Youth Opera members (ages 8 to 18)

THE STORY



Gimme The Ax

Gimme The Ax and his two children (Please Gimme and Ax Me No Questions) have grown tired of their dull, predictable lives, and the children wish to know more about their mother (Alelia) who died when they were young. Gimme The Ax suggests they sell all their possessions – their pastures, ponies, pitchforks, and pepper pickers – and purchase tickets on the Zigzag Railroad to Alelia's favorite place, Rootabaga Country. With one-way tickets in hand, the family boards the Zigzag Railroad into the sky.

After traveling through the lands of balloons and circus clowns, they reach Rootabaga and head to the post office for a map. They meet the accordion playing Potato Face Blind Man who tells the family there are no postmen and no maps, just him. Rootabagans receive someone else's mail and have to deliver it so everyone meets someone new each day.

The Potato Face Blind Man hands them a letter addressed to the plumber Jason Squiff, and the family finds Jason trying to wash green sludge out of his hair. The letter asks him to remove a clog from Blixie Bimber's cistern, a place Jason knows all too well as he has already cleaned it several times this week. While clearing the clog Jason meets The Kernel (a lifesize popcorn kernel) who proclaims, "Since Jason has a letter Q in his name, his clothes should be covered in popcorn." Without warning, POP! All his clothes are suddenly covered in popcorn.

Though he tries to change clothes, Jason finds it impossible to rid himself the popcorn. The Kernel assures him that the new look is better than his of grime-covered clothing. Jason now feels distinguished in his elegant attire, all due to the letter Q in his name.

The moral; if there's a letter Q in your name, Look out for The Kernel, and stay away from the movies!



The Potato Face Blind Man



Mrs. Axenbax

Confused, Please Gimme and Ax Me No Questions ask their father to explain. He tells them of Alelia's humongous feet that, like the letter Q in Jason's name, were something she never asked for and came in handy when she least expected. She could jump higher and run faster than anyone on the block, and won every three-legged race.

Their next delivery is from Mrs. Axenbax to Bevo Hike requesting a meeting about his son Snippo's poor behavior in school. Bevo soon finds Snippo has gotten himself into additional trouble; he thumbed his nose when the west wind blew and now it is stuck. Bevo seeks the help of the mayor, weatherman, and doctor but no one knows how to set Snippo free. Finally the traffic cop, with the help of his stuffed monkey and her ladder, frees Snippo's thumb with six hits of his special billy club on the nub of Snippo's thumb.

The moral; If you thumb your nose when the west wind blows, be sure to have a monkey and a ladder handy!

Confused again, Please Gimme and Ax Me No Questions ask their father to explain. He reminds them how Alelia would help them whenever they were stuck in a sticky situation – like when Axe Me finger painted one of their goats – just like all the people of the town came together to help Snippo.

Their final delivery is for Henry Hagglyhoagly, a poor minstrel in love with princess Susan Slackentwist. Susan lives in a tower several thousand acres away, where she sings of the numbers seven and four all day. Braving the bitter cold, Henry makes his way to Susan's tower. When he find his fingers are too cold to play his Spanish Spinnish guitar, his two mittens assist him in serenading Susan who falls instantly in love. Please Gimme and Ax Me wish their mother could be with them. Their father reminds them she will always be part of their memories, and sometimes the zigzag path offers a family the best way home.

Having delivered all the Potato Face Blind Man's letters, the family debates where to go next. They realize that they've already found their new home in Rootabaga Country. They may not be four perfect people, but no combination is right or wrong. Anybody rooting for each other, and sticking it out till the storm clouds part, is a family.



Henry Hagglyhoagly

Costume Designs by Howard Tsvi Kaplan

STORY ACTIVITIES

Understanding the plot and characters before attending a performance greatly enhances the experience. The activities below will help your students explore *Rootabaga Country* and prepare them for their live opera experience.

Create A Sequel Write a sequel to *Rootabaga Country* using the same characters from the opera. What happens after the family decides to stay in Rootabaga? What new characters do they encounter?

Readers Theater Divide into small groups and assign each group a part of the synopsis. Within each group designate characters and one narrator. Allow students time to practice their scene. Students will need to create their character's dialogue based on the assigned synopsis.

After they have prepared, the narrator for the group will read their section as the other students act out the story. Groups will perform their part following the sequential order of the opera.

Draw It Out Draw a picture from your favorite part of the plot and explain to the class why it is important to the story.

Create Your Own Props Create props and/or costumes with basic materials (paper, tape, etc.) for specific character using clues from the synopsis

Facebook Character Exploration

Have students explore the characters through the creation of Facebook profiles.

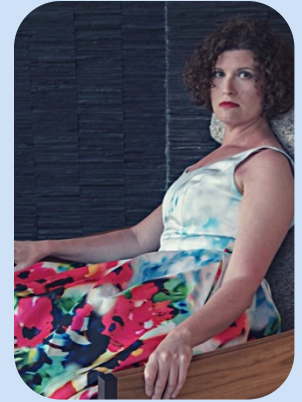
Using clues in the libretto and synopsis, develop profiles that address each characters interests, education, work, philosophy, arts, sports, likes, etc. Include status updates that match the storyline and events in the opera.

Consider; What groups, organizations, bands, celebrities, etc. has the character "liked"? Who are their friends, including characters in *Rootabaga Country*? What level of privacy/security do they have on their Facebook profile?

COMPOSER Q&A

Composer/librettist **Rachel J. Peters** writes all manner of works for the stage. Her new opera, *Rootabaga Country*, premieres at Sarasota Opera this fall. Other operas include *The Wild Beast of the Bungalow* with Royce Vavrek, *Companionship*, *Pie*, *Pith*, and *Palette* with Marvin J. Carlton, and *Monkey Do*.

Rachel is a recent Composer in Residence at Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts, recipient of Anna Sosenko Assist Trust and multiple ASCAPPlus awards, and a proud alumna of New Dramatists Composer-Librettist Studio, American Opera Projects' *Composers and the Voice*, and the John Duffy Composers Institute. She holds a double B.A. from Brandeis University and an MFA from New York University.



Where are you originally from and where do you live now? I grew up in St. Louis, Missouri. After that I lived in Boston, Massachusetts for several years, and now I live in New York City, where I have been since 2003.

Before you were a composer, were you ever a performer? Yes, I sang, danced, and acted in musicals, operas, and plays.

What made you want to become a professional music composer? I specifically wanted to become a composer for the stage because I believe that singing is the most expressive and honest way people communicate. There is an old saying that characters in musicals (and operas!) sing when they have so much to say that speaking is not enough, and I definitely agree!

What kinds of things did you have to study to become a composer? I studied piano, voice, music theory, and music history. While in school, I sang in choirs and played flute and piano in jazz bands. To become a composer for the stage, it was also important for me to study playwriting, acting, dance, and theatre history.

Are there other subjects you studied in school (like math, science or English) that helped you learn to be a composer? English, particularly poetry and anything that expanded my vocabulary was incredibly important because I needed to understand how music and words work together. Math, especially fractions, was

good training because music is all about counting, dividing measures into beats, and dividing beats into even smaller rhythmic units. The more math you know, the more sophisticated music you can write.

Do you only compose opera or do you compose other types of music as well? I also write musicals, scores for plays, ballet, art songs, and cabaret songs. Basically, if it happens in a theatre, I'm writing it!

What are some of the unique challenges a composer faces when writing an opera? Because an opera tells a story, the music must always support the storytelling. I must make sure the words can be understood clearly, which means the musical notes have to emphasize the text correctly, and the orchestra must not overwhelm the singers. The music has to suggest the mood of the situation and the personalities of the characters. The timing must also be exactly right for the action happening onstage.

What do you look for when deciding on a subject for an opera? Composing for the stage is my way of asking an audience, "Are you seeing what I'm seeing? What is the same and what is different about the way you and I understand our world?" I have written operas with singing bread and singing chicken pox in them – you wouldn't expect those things to sing, but when they do, they just might have something to say that you recognize in yourself or someone you know!

What was it about Carl Sandburg's *Rootabaga Stories* that made you think it would make a good opera? I like that the *Rootabaga Stories* ask us to stretch our imaginations as far as we can while being grounded in an American experience that is familiar to everyone.

I have never really been able to relate to many of the most popular fairy tales we usually see, but I grew up in the Midwest so I could easily picture the settings described in the stories. Carl Sandburg took the English language to his own special delicious place, and I knew it would be fun for singers to sing those words and for audiences to hear them.

Finally, I think we don't have enough genuinely silly opera in the world, and we can always use more!

Are there any special moments in the opera that the audience should be watching for or moments you are particularly excited about?

- 1) The music for the train the family takes to the Rootabaga Country.
- 2) When Jason Squiff's clothes turn into popcorn.
- 3) When the whole town counts to get Snippo Hike's thumb unstuck from his nose.
- 4) Henry Hagglyhoagly's love ballad to Susan Slackentwist.
- 5) When the chorus comes together at the end to show the main characters that families come in all forms.

What do you like to do when you are not composing music? I am usually working on many projects at once, and that keeps me very busy! When I can, I practice yoga, read lots of books, go to museums, and I'm not a great cook but I love following new recipes! Playing with other people's dogs is also one of my favorite pastimes.

In your opinion, why should people care about Opera? Nothing is more exciting than being transported to another world by the sheer power of a good piece of music. We all deserve to feel that alive! And because anything can happen in an opera, and an opera can be about anything, it keeps us imagining and asking big questions.

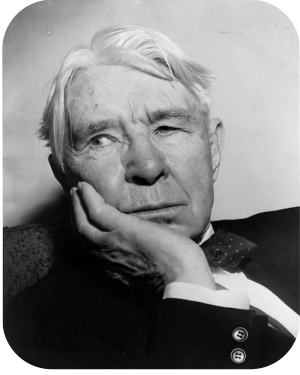
What are some good things for the audience to do before they come see a performance of *Rootabaga Country*? There are many fantastic documentaries about Carl Sandburg, and there are recordings of him reading some of the *Rootabaga Stories* and singing the songs he learned during his travels. Check them out!

Critical Thinking

- Can you identify other people at your school or in your community who are musicians? What makes them a musician?
- Can you explain what a composer does?
- How does a person become a composer?
- What subjects in school does Ms. Peters think are important to study as a composer?



CARL SANDBURG



1878-1967

Early Years Carl August Sandburg was born the son of Swedish immigrants August and Clara Anderson Sandburg in Galesburg, IL, USA, on January

6, 1878. The elder Sandburg, a blacksmith's helper for the nearby Chicago Burlington and Quincy Railroad, purchased a three-room cottage in 1873.

Carl, called "Charlie" by the family, was born the second of seven children. A year later the Sandburgs sold the small cottage in favor of a larger house in Galesburg. Carl Sandburg worked from the time he was a young boy. He quit school following his graduation from eighth grade in 1891 and spent a decade working a variety of jobs. He delivered milk, harvested ice, laid bricks, threshed wheat in Kansas, and shined shoes in Galesburg's Union Hotel before traveling as a hobo in 1897.

His experiences working and traveling greatly influenced his writing and political views. As a hobo he learned a number of folk songs, which he later performed at speaking engagements. He saw firsthand the sharp contrast between rich and poor, a contrast that instilled in him a distrust of capitalism.

When the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898 Sandburg volunteered for service, and at the age of twenty was ordered to Puerto Rico, where he spent days battling only heat and mosquitoes. Upon his return to his hometown later that year, he entered Lombard College, supporting himself as an on-call fireman.

Writer, Political Organizer, Reporter Sandburg honed his writing skills before leaving school in his senior year. He sold stereoscope viewers and wrote poetry for two years before his first book of verse, *In Reckless Ecstasy*, in 1904.

As the first decade of the young century wore on, Sandburg grew increasingly concerned with the plight of the American worker. In 1907 he worked as an organizer for the Wisconsin Social Democratic party, writing and distributing political pamphlets and literature. At party headquarters in Milwaukee, Sandburg met Lilian Steichen, whom he married in 1908.

The responsibilities of marriage and family prompted a career change. Sandburg returned to Illinois and took up journalism. For several years he worked as a reporter for the *Chicago Daily News*, covering mostly labor issues and later writing his own feature.

Internationally Recognized Author Sandburg was virtually unknown to the literary world when, in 1914, a group of his poems appeared in nationally circulated *Poetry* magazine. Two years later his book *Chicago Poems* was published and the thirty-eight-year-old author found himself on the brink of a career that would bring him international acclaim. Sandburg published another volume of poems, *Cornhuskers*, in 1918, and wrote a seething analysis of the 1919 Chicago race riots.

More poetry followed, along with *Rootabaga Stories* (1922), a book of fanciful children's tales. That book prompted Sandburg's publisher to suggest a biography of Abraham Lincoln for children. He researched and wrote for three years, producing not a children's book, but a two-volume biography for adults; *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* (1926). He moved to a new home on the Michigan dunes and devoted the next several years to completing four additional volumes, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1940.

In 1945 the Sandburgs moved with their herd of prize-winning goats and thousands of books to Flat Rock, North Carolina. Sandburg's *Complete Poems* won him a second Pulitzer Prize in 1951.

Carl died on July 22, 1967.

CARL'S CHILDHOOD

Carl's father, August Sandburg, was an immigrant, part of a new wave of people rolling in from the far-off corners of Europe. They came to escape military recruitment and war, find decent wages and equality, and know freedom and justice for the first time. But when they reached America, immigrants often found their golden dreams turned into nightmares.

August Sandburg had come in steerage from Sweden in 1870 or 1871. He, too, hoped to find a better life than the harsh toil of his peasant family at home. But what he found in Galesburg, Illinois, a prairie town in the upper Midwest, was hardly better. A job, yes, on the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad. But it demanded twelve hours a day, six days a week, for very low pay and no vacations.

In Illinois, August met Clara Anderson, a hotel maid fresh from Sweden, bright with the same golden hopes. They married and settled into a three-room cottage close by the roundhouse where August worked as a blacksmith's helper. That was the end of their travels, for they would always stay close to home. They had seven children; Carl was their second child and first son.

There were lots of other Swedes in Galesburg, many of them laborers on the railroad. They came at a time when the nation's industrial life had been transformed by the Civil War. To meet the needs of that struggle, old factories were remade and giant new ones sprang up, using faster and better methods of production. Thousands of miles of railroads and of telegraph wires laced the country together.

Everything was changing. People born into a nation of farmers, independent craftsmen, and small manufacturers had lived largely on the countryside. But now a nation of great capitalists and big factories was massing wage earners in the cities. Right here in Galesburg, George W. Brown,



Sandburg as a young man

What was happening in 1878, the year Carl was born?

- Thomas Edison patented his new device, the phonograph, and made the first recording to be played on it. It was "Mary Had a little lamb."
- The first regular telephone line was opened, in New Haven, Connecticut.
- In England, Gilbert and Sullivan presented their new musical, *HMS Pinafore*.
- In London, electrical street lighting was introduced.
- In America, the first bicycle was manufactured. It was called "wheels."
- The population of the United States was about 50 million (Today it is more than six times that much).

a farm boy turned carpenter, had invented a machine to plant corn. His factory was turning out thousands of corn planters during the war years, increasing food production to help the North win the war. Hundreds of men worked for him, and by the time Carl was born, Mr. Brown was the town mayor.

As immigrants tend to wherever they settle, the Swedes in Galesburg clung together in their own neighborhoods, churches, and lodges, and got their news from a Swedish-language paper. That degree of separation from the larger community made young Carl feel he was different, not really

American. Even "Carl" sounded foreign to him, and he began to call himself "Charles."

Yet there were other minorities in town: many Irish, some Italians, Chinese, and many African Americans who had come north on the Underground Railroad and stayed on amid the pioneers who had created the prairie town in 1837. By the time of Carl's birth, Galesburg's 18,000 people made it the biggest city in Knox County. A fourth of its population held jobs of one kind or another on the railroads. For Galesburg was a railroad hub, which meant trains were constantly crossing, heading east or west with heavy loads of freight.

Carl's mother, Clara, was a lovely, gentle woman, less scarred by years of the long economic depression that had begun in 1873. It was one of



The home where Sandburg was born in Galesburg, Illinois

The very first book Carl remembered seeing was the family Bible. One winter night, when he was four, he heard his father reading aloud to his mother. What was that big heavy thing his father was holding? And why was he saying those strange words? The next day he went to the bureau where the Bible lay on top, and carried it to the nearby window so he could see it better. What did those black marks on white paper mean? How could they be words your eyes could pick up and change into words your tongue could speak? He asked his mother for help. She put her finger on one word, and then on another, and another, and slowly spoke the words the black marks signified. The child had a glimmer of understanding. Wait, his mother

said, you'll soon be going to school where they'll teach you to read.

And they did. He caught on fast. He found what good friends books could be. Stories about the American Revolution thrilled him – the farmers at Lexington shooting from behind stone walls at the British Redcoats, the troops ragged and starving that winter at Valley Forge, Tom Paine writing "These are the times that try men's souls," and the victorious General Washington saying good-bye to his officers at Fraunce's Tavern. He loved the illustrations, too, but was puzzled that the books told you who the author was, but didn't bother to mention the artist.

Critical Thinking

- How is Carl's world in the late 1800's different from your own modern world?
- What were some of the reasons Carl's parents decided to immigrate to the United States?
- Are some of the reasons Carl's parents chose to immigrate still spoken of today? Are there new reasons people immigrate?
- What are some of the cultural influences and contributions of immigrants of all nationalities to today's culture?
- In *Rootabaga Country*, Gimme The Ax and his two children decide to immigrate to Rootabaga. What were some of their reasons for deciding to leave their home for somewhere new?

America's worst crises, throwing every fifth worker out of a job. At least ten million people had gone hungry, with most getting no public relief. Many families, including the Sandburgs, had a hard time staying afloat until the crisis ended.

No wonder August Sandburg was always worrying about money. He denied himself much, smoking only one five-cent cigar a month, wearing his only suit till it almost fell apart. Smile? Laugh? Sing? He was too tired after the long day at the forge, yet would find things that needed doing till bedtime. The children were never read to or talked to, never felt an affectionate pat or heard a sweet word. And a kiss seemed beyond his nature.

When he was in the second grade, his teacher, Miss Maggie Mullen, recognized his love for language and encouraged him to read. The biographies of famous men (few authors chose to write about women in those days) were his favorite. When he was eight, Ulysses S. Grant, the Union Army leader and former President, died, and Galesburg honored the dead hero with a funeral parade. Carl watched the Union veterans from atop his father's shoulders.

At eleven, Carl entered the fifth grade and met another cherished teacher, Miss Lottie Goldquist. He was an A student in all his classes-geography, arithmetic, English. Miss Goldquist told her class about Eugene Field, a poet who had gone to Knox College right there in Galesburg. He wrote folk poetry, weaving in people's customs and talk, and was often very funny. She read Field's "Little Boy Blue" to the class. Good, she said, but I like even more Longfellow's "The Psalm of Life." For years afterward Carl would recite to himself some of the lines from "The Psalm," for they had music and hope in them.

It could have been a very happy year if his father hadn't suffered a financial loss in a complex deal

involving property he had invested in. It saddled him with a debt of about \$800, an enormous burden for a man with seven children who earned about \$1.40 a day. The sum he owed was almost double his annual earnings. He couldn't stop brooding over it. He would sink into long silences and drive himself harder at work, less able than ever to offer the affection his children hungered for.

What could a boy do? Carl found an after-school job to help out. He swept the floor and cleaned the spittoons in the office of a real-estate firm paying twenty-five cents a week. It was the first of many jobs he would have while growing up.

Excerpt from Meltzer, Milton. *Carl Sandburg: A Biography*. Brookfield, CT: Twenty-First Century, 1999. 8-13. Print.

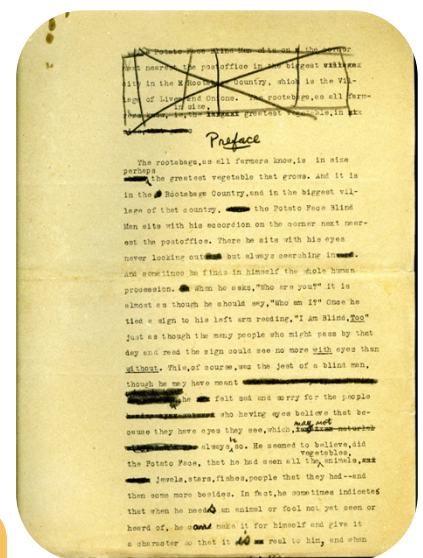
COMPARE & CONTRAST

Ms. Peters' opera, *Rootabaga Country*, is based on Carl Sandburg's book *Rootabaga Stories*.

Written in 1922, the whimsical stories were originally created for his daughters Margaret, Janet and Helga. The stories were born of Sandburg's desire for "American fairy tales" to match American childhood. He felt that the European stories with royalty and knights were inappropriate, and so he set his stories in a fictionalized American Midwest called "the Rootabaga country" filled with farms, trains, and corn fairies.

Below are two excerpts - the first from Sandburg's book, the second from Ms. Peters' opera. Both tell the same story but contain differences...

- What are the similarities? What characters are in both versions?
- Do you like one version more than the other? Why?
- What are the differences? What characters are in Ms. Peters' story, but not in Mr. Sandburg's?
- Who are the most important characters in each story?



Page from Sandburg's original *Rootabaga Stories* manuscript

How They Broke Away to Go to the Rootabaga Country

From *Rootabaga Stories* by Carl Sandburg



Click below to hear Sandburg read
https://youtu.be/Uajkq4mTT_M

Gimme the Ax lived in a house where everything is the same as it always was.

"The chimney sits on top of the house and lets the smoke out," said Gimme the Ax. "The doorknobs

open the doors. The windows are always either open or shut. We are always either upstairs or downstairs in this house. Everything is the same as it always was."

So he decided to let his children name themselves.

"The first words they speak as soon as they learn to make words shall be their names," he said. "They shall name themselves."

When the first boy came to the house of Gimme the Ax, he was named Please Gimme. When the first girl came she was named Ax Me No Questions.

And both of the children had the shadows of valleys by night in their eyes and the lights of early morning, when the sun is coming up, on their foreheads.

And the hair on top of their heads was a dark wild grass. And they loved to turn the doorknobs, open the doors, and run out to have the wind comb their hair and touch their eyes and put its six soft fingers on their foreheads.

And then because no more boys came and no more girls came, Gimme the Ax said to himself, "My first boy is my last and my last girl is my first and they picked their names themselves."

Please Gimme grew up and his ears got longer. Ax Me No Questions grew up and her ears got longer. And they kept on living in the house where everything is the same as it always was. They learned to say just as their father said, "The chimney sits on top of the house and lets the smoke out, the doorknobs open the doors, the windows are always either open or shut, we are always either upstairs or downstairs—everything is the same as it always was."

After a while they began asking each other in the cool of the evening after they had eggs for breakfast in the morning, "Who's who? How much? And what's the answer?"

"It is too much to be too long anywhere," said the tough old man, Gimme the Ax.

And Please Gimme and Ax Me No Questions, the tough son and the tough daughter of Gimme the Ax, answered their father, "It is too much to be too long anywhere."

So they sold everything they had, pigs, pastures, pepper pickers, pitchforks, everything except their ragbags and a few extras.

When their neighbors saw them selling everything they had, the different neighbors said, "They are going to Kansas, to Kokomo, to Canada, to Kankakee, to Kalamazoo, to Kamchatka, to the Chattahoochee."

One little sniffer with his eyes half shut and a mitten on his nose, laughed in his hat five ways and said, "They are going to the moon and when they get there they will find everything is the same as it always was."

All the spot cash money he got for selling everything, pigs, pastures, pepper pickers, pitchforks, Gimme the Ax put in a ragbag and slung on his back like a rag picker going home.

Then he took Please Gimme, his oldest and youngest and only son, and Ax Me No Questions, his oldest and youngest and only daughter, and went to the railroad station.

The ticket agent was sitting at the window selling railroad tickets the same as always.

"Do you wish a ticket to go away and come back or do you wish a ticket to go away and never come back?" the ticket agent asked wiping sleep out of his eyes.

"We wish a ticket to ride where the railroad tracks run off into the sky and never come back—send us far as the railroad rails go and then forty ways farther yet," was the reply of Gimme the Ax.

"So far? So early? So soon?" asked the ticket agent wiping more sleep out his eyes. "Then I will give you a new ticket. It blew in. It is a long slick yellow leather slab ticket with a blue spanch across it."

Gimme the Ax thanked the ticket agent once, thanked the ticket agent twice, and then instead of thanking the ticket agent three times he opened the ragbag and took out all the spot cash money he got for selling everything, pigs, pastures, pepper pickers, pitchforks, and paid the spot cash money to the ticket agent.

Before he put it in his pocket he looked once, twice, three times at the long yellow leather slab ticket with a blue spanch across it.

Then with Please Gimme and Ax Me No Questions he got on the railroad train, showed the conductor his ticket and they started to ride to where the railroad tracks run off into the blue sky and then forty ways farther yet.

The train ran on and on. It came to the place where the railroad tracks run off into the blue sky. And it ran on and on chick chick-a-chick chick-a-chick chick-a-chick.

Sometimes the engineer hooted and tooted the whistle. Sometimes the fireman rang the bell. Sometimes the open-and-shut of the steam hog's nose choked and spit pfisty-pfoost, pfisty-pfoost, pfisty-pfoost. But no matter what happened to the whistle and the bell and the steam hog, the train ran on and on to where the railroad tracks run off into the blue sky. And then it ran on and on more and more.



Illustration from the original book

Opening Scene

From *Rootabaga Country* by Rachel J. Peters

1922. The front yard of a nondescript colorless house in a nondescript colorless town somewhere in Midwestern America. GIMME THE AX and his two children, PLEASE GIMME and AX ME NO QUESTIONS, are doing yard work. PLEASE GIMME is pulling weeds. AX ME NO QUESTIONS rakes leaves...and jumps into the pile. GIMME THE AX mows the lawn with a reel mower.

CHORUS

In a town, in a house
Lives a man called Gimme the Ax
But despite this name, He's not a bad guy

GIMME THE AX

I picked my name myself
I liked the way it sounded:
Gimme the Ax! Gimme the Ax! Gimme the Ax!

CHORUS

Gimme the Ax has two children:
A boy called Please Gimme
And a girl called Ax Me No Questions
Even with these names, they're mostly good kids

PLEASE GIMME AND AX ME NO QUESTIONS

We picked our names ourselves!
We liked the way they sounded:

PLEASE GIMME

Please Gimme!

AX ME NO QUESTIONS

Ax Me No Questions!

CHORUS

Ax Me No Questions has starlight in her eyes
Please Gimme's hair is a dark wild grass
Every night their father sings to them:

GIMME THE AX

My first boy is my last, my last girl is my first
That's the way it is and ever shall be!
Just us three

CHORUS

Until one night, the children ask:

PLEASE GIMME AND AX ME NO QUESTIONS

Just us three? Why not four?
Where is our mother?
Why don't we have a mother?

GIMME THE AX

Life is surprises, not all of them happy
Before your hearts could remember
We were a family of four
Her name was Alelia.
She was just like you, sweet and courageous,
Always wishing and wondering
Accidents happen,
Even in the best-regulated families
Four became three three we must be,
And we will be the greatest three of all the threes!

CHORUS

The years go by, their ears grow longer
The greatest three of all the threes
Still yearning to be four
Still living day to day and wanting more

GIMME THE AX, PLEASE GIMME, and AX ME

The chimney sits on the house
The doorknobs open the doors
The windows open and shut
We are upstairs or downstairs
Everything is the same as it always was
We've been here a long time
We've been here a very long time
As long as we've ever been anywhere!
The chimney sits on the house
The doorknobs open the doors
The windows open and shut
We are upstairs or downstairs
Everything is the same as it always was!

GIMME THE AX

Please Gimme: Ax Me No Questions:
Your ears are now long enough to hear me tell you:
Your mother used to speak of a whimsical place,
Her favorite place to go
Her mother's mother's mother
Told her mother's mother
Told her mother told your mother
Of a place like no other
Called the Rootabaga Country

PLEASE GIMME AND AX ME NO QUESTIONS

The Rootabaga Country!

GIMME THE AX

The Rootabaga Country!

If you want to understand Alelia,

The best way is to see

What she would want to share with you.

I think it's time now for us to find it

And so...

Let's go...

We'll go away and never come back!

I'll sell everything we own:

Our pastures, our ponies,

Our pitchforks, our pepper pickers

PLEASE GIMME AND AX ME NO QUESTIONS

Our pastures, our ponies,

Our pitchforks, our pepper pickers

GIMME THE AX

And buy three tickets to the Zigzag Railroad

GIMME THE AX, PLEASE GIMME, AND AX

We'll ride the Zigzag Railroad!

CHORUS

Where the tracks and the spikes

And the rails are twisted

Zigging and zagging you who-knows-where!

(A TICKET AGENT appears.)

TICKET AGENT

We have one kind of ticket

To go away and come back,

We have another kind of ticket

To go away and never come back

Which do you wish?



Rootabaga County opening scene design by Sheryl Liu

GIMME THE AX

We'll go away and never come back!

TICKET AGENT

Excellent choice! Where to, then?

PLEASE GIMME AND AX ME NO QUESTIONS

Through Kansas, through Kokomo,

Through Canada, through Kankakee,

Through Kalamazoo!

Through the Chattahoochee

GIMME THE AX, PLEASE GIMME, AND AX ME

And through the moon!

GIMME THE AX

We'll ride the Zigzag Railroad

Till it runs into the sky...

To the Rootabaga Country!

TICKET AGENT

We have a very special ticket for that!

A long, slick yellow ticket

With a blue stamp across it!

It gets you as far as the rails go

And forty ways farther yet!

GIMME THE AX

We'll take three!

(GIMME THE AX hands over a large sum of cash.

*The TICKET AGENT hands him three of the
special tickets.)*

TICKET AGENT

All aboard the Zigzag Railroad!

CHORUS

(making the sounds of a train)

Chick chick-a-chick chick-a-chick chick-a-chick

Pfisty-pfoost, pfisty-pfoost, pfisty-pfoost!

Klong! Klong!

Haaaah! Haaaah!

END SCENE

BEYOND THE WORDS

Little Girl, Be Careful What You Say

By Carl Sandburg

Little girl, be careful what you say
when you make talk with words, words—
for words are made of syllables
and syllables, child, are made of air—
and air is so thin—air is the breath of God—
air is finer than fire or mist,
finer than water or moonlight,
finer than spider-webs in the moon,
finer than water-flowers in the morning:

and words are strong, too,
stronger than rocks or steel
stronger than potatoes, corn, fish, cattle,
and soft, too, soft as little pigeon eggs,
soft as the music of hummingbird wings.

So, little girl, when you speak greetings,
when you tell jokes, make wishes or prayers,
be careful, be careless, be careful,
be what you wish to be.

Lyrics from finale of *Rootabaga Country*

Words by Rachel J. Peters

HENRY AND SUSAN

Pauper and princess, Mittens and math

POTATO FACE BLIND MAN

Odd situations

ALL OF THE ABOVE

One thing in common:

Everyone pulling together, becoming a family

POTATO FACE BLIND MAN

Maybe not four perfect people,
No combination is right or wrong
The Makers of the World plotted out a course
The rest we make up as we go along

ALL OF THE ABOVE

Anybody rooting for each other
When the world is cattywompus,
Sticking it out till the storm clouds part
That's a family

GIMME THE AX

Look around, children!
What's whimsical may not be magic
Exciting may not be easy,
But here we have a family of thousands and thousands!

On the left is a poem by Carl Sandburg and an expert from Ms. Peters' *Rootabaga Country* libretto...

- What do you think Mr. Sandburg is trying to tell the reader through his poem?
- What do you think Ms. Peters is trying to tell the audience with the words to her song?
- How are the messages of both similar? How are they different?



Rootabaga Country scenic design by Sheryl Liu

What is a Libretto?

Libretto means "little book" in Italian. It refers to the written text of an opera set to music by the composer.

In earlier times it was often regarded as more important than the music, and it was common for audience members to purchase the libretto to read.

Early composers were usually hired to set music to a pre-existing text. Only later did composers (such as Mozart and Verdi) work in close collaboration with their librettists.

For *Rootabaga Country*, Ms. Peters wrote the music AND the text, meaning she is the composer AND librettist!

CARL'S POEMS

Should children write poetry? At what age should a child begin writing poetry? Carl Sandburg shares his thoughts and reads several of his poems in the YouTube video below:

Young Sea

The sea is never still.
It pounds on the shore
Restless as a young heart,
Hunting.

The sea speaks
And only the stormy hearts
Know what it says:
It is the face
 of a rough mother speaking.

The sea is young.
One storm cleans all the hoar
And loosens the age of it.
I hear it laughing, reckless.

They love the sea,
Men who ride on it
And know they will die
Under the salt of it

Let only the young come,
 Says the sea.
Let them kiss my face
 And hear me.
I am the last word
 And I tell
Where storms and stars come from.

Primer Lesson

Look out how you use proud words.
When you let proud words go, it is
 not easy to call them back.
They wear long boots, hard boots;
 they walk off proud; they can't
 hear you calling—
Look out how you use proud words.



https://youtu.be/eEyvURC_AVc

Buffalo Dusk

The buffaloes are gone.
And those who saw the buffaloes are gone.
Those who saw the buffaloes by thousands and how
 they pawed the prairie sod into dust with their
 hoofs, their great heads down pawing on in a
 great pageant of dusk,
Those who saw the buffaloes are gone.
And the buffaloes are gone.

Phizzog

This face you got,
This here phizzog you carry around,
You never picked it out for yourself
 at all, at all — did you?
This here phizzog — somebody handed it
 to you — am I right?
Somebody said, “Here’s yours, now go see
 what you can do with it.”
Somebody slipped it to you and it was like
 a package marked:
“No goods exchanged after being taken away” —
This face you got.

FOLK SONGS

Carl Sandburg was not only one of America's best-loved poets but also a collector and performer of American folk music. In his travels across the United States, talking about poetry and reading his verse, he frequently used to close the program with a session of songs, providing commentary along the way.

In 1927 he published his collection in *The American Songbag*. The anthology contained sing-able words and music to 290 songs, ballads, and ditties that people have sung in the making of America. In a description of the collection Sandburg wrote:

"The song history of America...will accomplish two things. It will give the feel and atmosphere, the layout and lingo, of regions, of breeds of men, of customs and slogans, in a manner and air not given in regular history, to be read and not sung. And besides such a history would require that the student sing his way through most of the chapters."

Below is one song from the collection of "Railroad and Work Gangs" songs titled **"Poor Paddy Works on the Railway."** The song recounts the work of Irish immigrants on the railways of the American west in the 1840's.

Different artists have recorded this piece over the past 100 year. Here are a few versions:



Ed McCurdy (1961)

<https://youtu.be/zteIVd21uI8>



The Dubliners (1967)

https://youtu.be/hGO_S_NX5Hg



The Pogues (1984)

<https://youtu.be/bGQkp1TLJ38>

Critical Thinking

- What are the differences between composed music and folk music?
- If you wanted to dance to this song, what kind of dance would it be?
- Identify the musical characteristics within the song (tempo, rhythm, instruments, number of singers, dynamics) and how they are similar or different from the other recordings.
- What is the story told in this folk song?

Oh . . in eigh - teen hun-dred and for - ty one My cor - du-roy britch - es

This system of the musical score features a vocal line on a single staff and a piano accompaniment on two staves. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 8/8. The lyrics are 'Oh . . in eigh - teen hun-dred and for - ty one My cor - du-roy britch - es'.

I put on, My cor-du-roy britches I put on, To work up-on the rail - way, the

This system continues the musical score with the same vocal and piano parts. The lyrics are 'I put on, My cor-du-roy britches I put on, To work up-on the rail - way, the'.

rail - way, I'm wea-ry of the rail - way; Oh poor Pad-dy works on the rail - way!

This system concludes the musical score. The lyrics are 'rail - way, I'm wea-ry of the rail - way; Oh poor Pad-dy works on the rail - way!'.

For Teachers: Why we love repetition in music

<http://ed.ted.com/lessons/why-we-love-repetition-in-music-elizabeth-hellmuth-margulis>

How many times does the chorus repeat in your favorite song? How many times have you listened to that chorus? Repetition in music isn't just a feature of Western pop songs, either; it's a global phenomenon. Why? Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis walks us through the basic principles of the 'exposure effect.'



POOR PADDY WORKS ON THE RAILWAY

- 1 Oh in eighteen hundred and forty-one
My corduroy britches I put on,
My corduroy britches I put on,
To work upon the railway, the railway,
I'm weary of the railway;
Oh poor Paddy works on the railway!
- 2 Oh in eighteen hundred and forty-two
I did not know what I should do,
I did not know what I should do,
To work upon the railway, the railway,
I'm weary of the railway;
Oh poor Paddy works on the railway!
- 3 Oh in eighteen hundred and forty-three
I sailed away across the sea,
I sailed away across the sea,
To work upon the railway, the railway,
I'm weary of the railway;
Oh poor Paddy works on the railway!
- 4 Oh in eighteen hundred and forty-four
I landed on Columbia's shore,
I landed on Columbia's shore,
To work upon the railway, the railway,
I'm weary of the railway;
Oh poor Paddy works on the railway!
- 5 Oh in eighteen hundred and forty-five
When Daniel O'Connell he was alive,
When Daniel O'Connell he was alive,
To work upon the railway, the railway,
I'm weary of the railway;
Oh poor Paddy works on the railway!
- 6 Oh in eighteen hundred and forty-six
I changed my trade to carrying bricks,
I changed my trade to carrying bricks,
From working on the railway, the railway,
I was weary of the railway;
Oh poor Paddy worked on the railway!
- 7 Oh in eighteen hundred and forty-seven
Poor Paddy was thinking of going to Heaven,
Poor Paddy was thinking of going to Heaven,
After working on the railway, the railway,
He was weary of the railway;
Oh poor Paddy worked on the railway!

DEFINITIONS

Tempo – the speed at which a passage of music is played.

Rhythm – A flow of sound in music having regular accented beats

Dynamics – The aspect of music relating to degrees of loudness.

Tone – The quality of the sound that distinguishes one instrument from another.

Who is Daniel O'Connell?



Daniel O'Connell (1775 – 1847) was an Irish political leader in the first half of the 19th century. He campaigned for Catholic emancipation – including the right for Catholics to sit in the Westminster Parliament, denied for over 100 years—and repeal of the Act of Union which combined Great Britain and Ireland.

What does "I landed on Columbia's Shore mean?" "Columbia" is a historic and poetic named used for America. It's been in use since the 1730's, and has been used to describe the Thirteen Colonies during that time.



Ellis Island – The port of entry for many immigrants in the 1800's

COSTUME DESIGN

Costumes give the audience important clues about the characters in an opera. Details about the social class, jobs, goals, secrets, and relationships with other characters can all be told by the clothes a character wears.

The **costume designer** plans or designs the costumes and supervises their construction. Through research and careful planning, they make sure the performer's costumes fit the character as well as the time period and location of the opera. They also take into account any "clues" the composer includes in the music which tell how the character might act or physical actions they might do (for example, hide something on their person).

Activity Time Using the sketches below, identify three basic clues about each character, such as age, boy/girl, social class, profession, etc. Then, on a separate paper, create modern day costumes for each character based on these traits.



Costume designer **Howard Tsvi Kaplan's** designs for *The Potato Face Blind Man*, *Ax Me No Questions*, and *Jason Squiff* can be found below. Mr. Kaplan has been Sarasota Opera's resident costume designer since 1998 and has designed for more than 20 different

productions. Other recent endeavors include *The Man of La Mancha* (Olney Theatre - nominated for a Helen Hayes Award); *The Mikado* (Pittsburgh Public Theatre) ; *Il Trovatore* (Opera New Jersey) , *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Werther* (Kentucky Opera), *Siege of Corinth* and *La bohème* (Baltimore Opera).

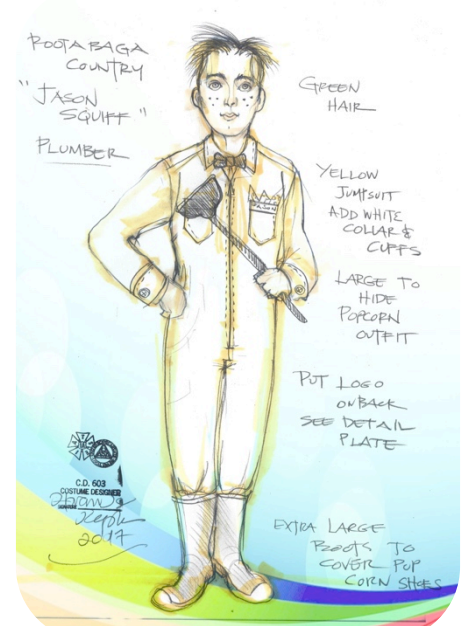
For twelve years, Mr. Kaplan designed for Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey Clown College.



Potato Face Blind Man



Ax Me No Questions



Jason Squiff

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE OPERA



Opera is not a remote art form that only the initiated appreciate. It reflects human conflicts and passions. It has inspired a level of devotion in some people best compared to that of a die-hard sports fan. Just as you do not need to know every statistic to enjoy watching a football game, you do not need to be a music or opera expert to enjoy a performance.

Supertitles Real-time English translations are above the stage, providing immediate understanding of what is happening, helping you to experience the excitement of the performance no matter what the language.

Theater With just under 1,200 seats, there are no 'bad' seats in our theater. Most operagoers love attending opera in our theater because of its intimate size.

What to Wear Dress comfortably, and be yourself. Opera is not the playground of the rich, and we work hard to make sure that everyone feels at home in our theater. At the Sarasota Opera House, "Opera Dress" can be khakis or jeans or evening gowns and tuxedos.

Applause Unlike the symphony or other classical music concert, you can applaud when the performance moves you (similar to a solo at a jazz performance). You can also express your appreciation for the performers by yelling bravo, brava, or bravi.

Eating and drinking During regular performances, food and drinks are available prior to the show and during intermissions. During dress rehearsals and school matinees, our concessions are closed.

Restrooms There are ample restrooms located in the lobby of the theater. We ask that you encourage your students to use the bathroom before the opera begins or during intermissions.

Late Seating If you arrive after the performance has begun or leave while an act of the opera is in progress, you will need to wait until an intermission to re-enter.

Electronics Out of consideration to our performers and patrons, we asked that all cellphones and electronic devices be turned off before the performance begins. Just like at your local movie theatre, the use of any recording devices is strictly prohibited.

OPERA TERMS

The words you hear around an opera house can often be confusing, especially the ITALIAN ones! The following is a list of words you may hear and their definitions.

ARIA	A solo song in an opera
BRAVO	The word the audience yells after a great show!
COLORATURA	A type of singing where the singer sings a lot of notes very quickly
CONDUCTOR	The person who leads the singers and orchestra
COMPOSER	A person who writes music
DUET	A song sung by two people at the same time
FINALE	Italian for "final", a musical number at the end of an act
LIBRETTO	The words of the opera that are then set to music by the composer (literally means "little book")
MAESTRO	Italian for "master" or "teacher", the conductor is often referred to as maestro to show respect
OPERA	A play that is sung rather than spoken
OVERTURE	The musical introduction
PIT	The place in the theater where the orchestra sits; it is in front of and at a lower level than the stage
QUARTET	A musical piece involving four singers or instruments
RECITATIVE	A kind of sung speech; many Mozart operas have this type of sung dialogue
SINGSPIEL	A German word for an opera that has spoken dialogue; <i>The Magic Flute</i> is an example of this.
TRIO	A musical piece involving three singers or instruments

Opera seems to have fancy words for everything and the singers are no exception. There are a lot of different types of voices. The list below gives the basic voice types for men and women.

SOPRANO	The highest female voice; they are usually the heroine or female romantic lead in the opera.
MEZZO-SOPRANO	Mezzo is Italian for "middle", so a mezzo-soprano is the middle female voice type; they often play more character- type roles like witches, old ladies, gypsies and even young boys!
CONTRALTO	The lowest female voice. A real contralto is very rare; the roles written for them are often sung by mezzos who have a strong lower range.
TENOR	The highest male voice; they are generally the hero or male romantic lead.
BARITONE	The middle male voice; with a warm vocal quality they often play comic roles such as Papageno (in <i>The Magic Flute</i>) or fathers.
BASS	The lowest male voice; because of the very low sound they are often villains or the father figure.

OPERA JOBS

Opera requires a huge cast of players both on and off the stage to make everything come together.

Administration

Led by the **Executive Director**, members of the administrative staff work to support the artistic mission of the company through fundraising, donor cultivation, community outreach, patron education, and management of the day-to-day needs of the organization. The Development, Marketing, Finance, and Education departments are some of the areas covered under administration.

Backstage

Artistic Director - Defines the artistic mission of the company and works with the Executive Director and Artistic Administrator to decide which operas will be performed. In many companies, the artistic director is also a conductor.

Artistic Administrator - Works with the artistic director to cast and plan each production.

Stage Director - Tells the singers where to go, instructs them on how to portray their roles, and works with others to create a vibrant story with lights, costumes, sets, and props.

Stage Manager - Assists the director, singers, and backstage crew during rehearsals and performances with the help of several assistant stage managers.

Set Designer - Plans or designs the sets through careful research and study.

Lighting Designer - Plans or designs the color, intensity, and frequency of the lights onstage.

Costume Designer - Plans or designs the costumes and supervises their construction.

Wig & Makeup Designer - Oversees the design of hairstyles, wigs, and makeup.

Stage Crew - Assists in the construction, installation, and changing of sets, costumes, lighting, and props during rehearsals and performances.

On Stage

Cast - All singers and actors who appear onstage.

Principals - Singers who perform the large roles within the opera.

Comprimario - Singers who perform the supporting roles within the opera, from the Italian meaning "next to the first."

Supernumeraries - "Supers" are actors who participate in the action but do not sing or speak.

Conductor - The person who leads the singers and orchestra.

Orchestra - The musicians who play the instrumental parts within the score of the opera.

WRITE A REVIEW

Create Your Own Review Using the worksheet below, and the Sarasota Observer’s review of *The Secret World of Og* as a guide, create a review of the performance.

What are the elements of a review? What areas of the production does the reviewer cover? How does the reviewer speak about the positive and negative aspects of the performance?

	Rating	Notes
Gimme The Ax	☆☆☆☆☆	
Please Gimme	☆☆☆☆☆	
Ax Me No Questions	☆☆☆☆☆	
Potato Face Blind Man	☆☆☆☆☆	
Jason Squiff & Blixie Bimber	☆☆☆☆☆	
The Kernel	☆☆☆☆☆	
Snippo Hike & Bevo Hike	☆☆☆☆☆	
Mayor, Weatherman, Doctor, & Traffic Cop	☆☆☆☆☆	
Henry Hagglyhoagly & Susan Slackentwist	☆☆☆☆☆	
The Music	☆☆☆☆☆	
The Sets	☆☆☆☆☆	
The Staging	☆☆☆☆☆	
The Lighting	☆☆☆☆☆	
The Costumes	☆☆☆☆☆	
The Makeup	☆☆☆☆☆	

OPERA REVIEW: Sarasota Opera shows youth opera at its finest

By Edward Alley, Sarasota Observer / Thursday, November 17, 2016



A fall season highlight is the annual Sarasota Youth Opera production by the Sarasota Opera, arguably the only opera company to present operas by and for youth on its main stage every year. I'm always impressed by the quality of singing and acting and the ingenuity of everyone connected with these splendid productions. Not "children's shows," but fully mounted productions with lighting, costumes, staging, an orchestra and all the stagecraft expected from a regular main-stage production.

This year's journey to "The Secret World of Og", a U.S. premiere, is a prime example of youth opera at its finest. The opera, based on the book by Pierre Burton, has both music and libretto by Dean Burry, whose charming opera "The Hobbit," was produced by Sarasota Youth Opera last year.

The green people of Og live underground and have only one word, "Og", in their vocabulary. Their world is one of make-believe and role playing, drawn from objects and books they have "borrowed" from children of the world above. Penny, Pamela, Patsy, Peter and Paul — known as Pollywog (this opera positively percolates with perky, profound alliteration) are children who delight in playing pretend.

Penny, Peter and Paul follow two of the green people down into a tunnel under their playhouse and are eventually captured by Ogs and rescued by Patsy, Pamela and Cheshire the dog in a series of escapades careening through that make-believe world.

These people of Og, beautifully sung and acted by at least 65 of the 85 youth opera members in the cast, have a great time singing and dancing an extended number using only the word "Og" in every possible permutation, which is priceless, then from time to time comment on the events in true Greek chorus fashion. Their only other words are from those characters in the books they have purloined from the world above and made their own.

The result is a perfect plethora of scenes with Ogs as Wyatt Earp, Captain Hook and Smee from Peter

Pan, and rather famous spies, each scene flowing smoothly from one to the other with nary a pause or break in the mood.

This charming piece was brought to life by a talented group of young singers, including the five peripatetic protagonists: Katherine Herbert as Penny, Aubree Zern as Pamela, Dominique Cecchetti as Patsy, Samantha Lane as Peter and Ursula Kushner as Paul (Pollywog). Hunter Thorkelson is Earless the cat, and Astrid McIntyre is Yukie the dog. Important smaller roles were Griffin Stahlmann as the butcher, Pablo Gonzalez as the sheriff and Sky Stahlmann as Hook. Principal voices were discreetly amplified to help prevent oversinging, and it would have been a help to have the dialogue amplified, as well. The orchestra was ably conducted by Jesse Martins, who didn't miss a cue, using Burry's excellent orchestration commissioned by the Sarasota Opera.

Ken Yunker's lighting of the extremely clever and cartoonish sets by Donna and Mark Buckalter enhanced the atmosphere of the opera from the playhouse of the children to the deep depths and caves of the world of Og. I continue to be astonished by the ingenious staging of Martha Collins as she



directs these productions. All too often the staging of youth operas consists of "controlling traffic," but each person on this stage was a definite character with every movement skillfully timed and executed in mood with the music. Collins' choreography

in the big chorus line was a crowd pleaser.

Burry's score is eclectic but charming, bringing us ever-so-slight reminders of Copland, Prokofiev, a little Poulenc and a lot of Burry. The character scenes are scored in their styles — lifted on purpose from hoe-downs, pirate chanties and even a hint of James Bond — but all still Burry. Melodic lines are certainly within the scope of voices of this age, and they created lovely melodies while keeping the story moving.

It was a delightful evening, and the lower floor of the Opera House was packed with a lot of families, each seeming to have a bouquet of flowers for these young performers. And there is a moral: You can pretend to be whomever you want to be, but in the end —you're only exactly who you are.

SARASOTA OPERA HOUSE

Looking for opportunities to promote the real estate market in Sarasota Arthur B(ritton) Edwards, Sarasota's first mayor, prominent entrepreneur, and real estate investor, decided that downtown needed an attraction, signaling to the world that the city was a destination. The Edwards Theatre, opened in April 1926 would serve the community as a place of entertainment, community resource and finally as an opera house over the next nine decades. Approaching its 91st year in 2017.



The opening night in 1926 was accorded great fanfare in the local press. The performance included a live band, dancers, and an opera singer (Mr. Edwards' daughter). As a mixed-use venue, it also included the silent movie "Skinner's Dress Suit" accompanied by the Robert Morton orchestral organ. Later bill of fare included Will Rogers, the

Ziegfeld Follies, the exotic fan dancer Sally Rand, and touring opera companies. A hurricane in 1929 destroyed the organ and required renovations to the lobby, but performances continued.

Mr. Edwards sold the venue to the Sparks movie theater chain, which renamed it the Florida Theater. Movies became more prominent in future years, especially in 1952 when Cecil B. DeMille's *The Greatest Show on Earth*, largely filmed in Sarasota, had its world premiere, with many of the stars including Charlton Heston and Mr. DeMille in attendance. Live performances in those years included a young Elvis Presley in 1956 (with a top ticket price of \$1.50).

The years took its toll on the Florida Theater and in 1972 it stopped showing films. The front part of the building continued to house offices and a radio school, but in 1979, a new future was destined for the building.

The Asolo Opera Guild, founded in 1960 to support opera performances at the Asolo Theatre on the grounds of the Ringling Museum, needed a new home and arranged to purchase the Florida Theater for \$150,000. Over the next few years the Guild undertook to renovate the building as it raised funds and in 1984 it was ready to reopen as the Sarasota Opera House.

After a subsequent renovation in 2008, with much of its original beauty restored and enhanced, the Sarasota Opera House was called "one of the finest venues for opera in America" by *Musical America*. It seats 1,129 and the orchestra pit accommodates over 75 players. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1984, received the Florida Preservation Award in 2010, and helped spur the revival of downtown Sarasota.

SARASOTA YOUTH OPERA



Since 1984, Sarasota Youth Opera has given young people age eight and up the chance to experience opera first hand through after-school choruses, Sarasota Opera's mainstage productions, summer camps, and fully staged Youth Opera productions.

As the only program in the U.S. committed to presenting annual full-scale opera productions for young voices, SYO is a national model for opera exploration. SYO accepts all who wish to participate regardless of skill level, prior experience, or ability to pay.

Youth Opera Productions

Sarasota Opera's commitment to young people includes producing new operas written for children and young adults.

Five new works have been presented as part of this mission: *Deadline* (1989), Polly Pen's *Her Lightness* (1993), Tom Suta's *Eye of Ra* (1998), John Kennedy's *The Language of Birds* (2004), and Daron Hagen's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (2012). In November 2017, SYO will present its sixth new work, *Rootabaga Country* by Rachel J. Peters, based on the writings of Carl Sandburg.

SYO members take part in the making of each opera complete with professional staging, costumes, lighting, sound, and orchestral accompaniment.



Summer Camp

Each June, SYO offers a three-week summer camp for young people. Under the direction of Sarasota Opera's professional artistic and production staff, campers experience the magic on the stage and behind the scenes as they study the many facets of opera, from music and acting to opera appreciation and production.

Mainstage Productions

In addition to their own productions, SYO members have the opportunity to participate in Sarasota Opera's professional productions as members of the children's chorus, non-singing extras, and in special solo roles written young voices. In recent seasons these have included roles in *The Magic Flute*, *La bohème*, *Tosca*, *Carmen*, and *Turandot*.

STANDARDS & BENCHMARKS

Covered Throughout Guide & Student Matinee

LAFS.K12.L.1.1	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
LAFS.K12.L.1.2	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
LAFS.K12.R.1.2	Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
LAFS.K12.R.1.3	Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
LAFS.K12.R.3.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
LAFS.K12.R.3.9	Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
LAFS.K12.SL.1.1	Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

The Story & Story Activities

TH.1.C.1.2	Draw a picture from a favorite story and share with the class why the scene was important to the story.
TH.1.O.2.1	Describe in words or by drawing a picture, the most exciting part in the story line of a play.
TH.1.S.3.1	Use simple acting techniques to portray a person, place, action, or thing.
TH.2.H.3.1	Create dialogue for characters from a story.
TH.2.S.2.1	Collaborate with others to perform a scene and solve challenges.
TH.3.C.1.1	Create an imaginative costume piece or prop out of everyday items found around the classroom or at home and use it as the basis to tell an original story.

Composer Q&A

MU.3.F.2.1	Identify musicians in the school, community, and media.
MU.1.H.1.2	Explain the work of a composer.
MU.3.H.1.2	Identify significant information about specified composers and one or more of their musical works.

Carl's Childhood

SS.1.A.2.1	Understand history tells the story of people and events of other times and places.
SS.1.A.2.2	Compare life now with life in the past.
SS.2.A.2.5	Identify reasons people came to the United States throughout history.
SS.2.A.2.7	Discuss why immigration continues today.
SS.2.A.2.8	Explain the cultural influences and contributions of immigrants today.
SS.3.G.4.4	Identify contributions from various ethnic groups to the United States.

Compare & Contrast

TH.1.H.3.1	Identify similarities between plays and stories.
TH.2.C.1.1	Describe a character in a story and tell why the character is important to the story.
TH.2.O.1.1	Compare the differences between reading a story and seeing it as a play.

Costume Design

TH.3.O.1.2	Discuss why costumes and makeup are used in a play.
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Folk Songs

MU.1.C.1.2	Respond to music from various sound sources to show awareness of differences in musical ideas.
MU.1.C.3.1	Share different thoughts or feelings people have about selected pieces of music.
MU.1.H.2.1	Identify and perform folk music used to remember and honor America and its cultural heritage.
MU.2.C.1.2	Respond to a piece of music and discuss individual interpretations.
MU.2.C.3.1	Discuss why musical characteristics are important when forming and discussing opinions about music.
MU.2.H.1.2	Identify the primary differences between composed and folk music.
MU.3.C.1.2	Respond to a musical work in a variety of ways and compare individual interpretations.
MU.3.C.3.1	Identify musical characteristics and elements within a piece of music when discussing the value of the work.

What To Expect at the Opera

TH.1.S.1.1	Exhibit appropriate audience etiquette and response.
TH.2.H.1.2	Explain how to respond as an audience member in a different way, depending on the style of performance.
TH.2.S.1.1	Exhibit the behavior necessary to establish audience etiquette, response, and constructive criticism.
TH.3.S.1.1	Demonstrate effective audience etiquette and constructive criticism for a live performance.

Opera Jobs

TH.2.F.2.1	Identify the jobs people can have in a theater.
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Write A Review

TH.1.S.1.3	Explain personal preferences related to a performance.
TH.1.S.3.2	Describe characters and plot development discovered during dramatic play.
TH.2.C.1.2	Respond to a play by drawing and/or writing about a favorite aspect of it.
TH.2.C.2.1	Discuss the purpose of a critique.
TH.2.C.3.1	Identify important characteristics to discuss when sharing opinions about theatre.
TH.2.O.2.1	Re-tell what happened in the beginning, middle, and end of a story after viewing a play.
TH.3.C.1.2	Watch a play and describe how the elements of light, costumes, props, and sound influence the mood of the production.
TH.3.O.2.1	Describe what happened in a play, using age-appropriate theatre terminology.
TH.3.S.1.3	Evaluate a performance, using correct theatre terms, and give specific examples to support personal opinions.