

Lyric
Unlimited



2017/18 Student Backstage Tours Content Guide

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Introductions/Getting Started

Immediately establish a working relationship with the teacher/chaperone.

Introduce yourself to the group and establish how you are to be addressed.

Set ground rules:

- Protocol for students to ask/answer questions
- Stay close together
- Be aware of when it's ok to touch things and when it isn't
- Cameras OK except of cast members, crew, or on catwalk
- Teacher/chaperone always takes up the rear

Opera

Opera is an art form that combines music, drama, visual art, and sometimes dance.

Like TV, movies, plays, books, even popular songs, opera deals with the joys and sorrows of life, reminding us that we all feel these things, and that we all have something in common.

Opera expresses these ideas in an especially powerful way: It weaves a story into music and music into a story. Add amazing scenery, beautiful costumes, pageantry, and performers whose training and skill are equivalent to those of an Olympic athlete, and you've got an art form with an emotional kick that's unlike anything else—and addictive.

The Orchestra Pit

[Stand at the conductor's gate, students to the house-right side]

Orchestra Pit Questions:

- Who plays a musical instrument? Or who would like to?
- How do you think music (musicians) helps tell the story?
 - Different sounds – how would a really angry scene sound?
 - Happy? Sad? Emotional connection?
- How can everything be held together when you have so many different performers?
 - Role of conductor, assistant conductor, and stage manager
- Most operas written/sang in foreign language – what can be used to help understand what you are hearing/seeing?
- What traits do successful musicians have?

Possible Jobs:

- Conductor, musicians, performers, stage manager, director, librarians, prompter

Orchestra Pit Activities:

- Scene creation through sound – what would X emotion sound like?

Musicians:

- Instruments of the orchestra
- The players—among the best in the world
 - Education
 - Childhood start
 - Private lessons
 - Music in school
 - Community music school (like Merit)
 - Music major in college
 - Often advance degrees too
 - Auditions
 - Hundreds apply from all over U.S.
 - Audition process takes days
 - Winner chosen by committee of orchestra members and the conductor
 - Only one chosen

Conductor [he or she!]**—Leads the Music**

- Has the music for all the players and singers in one book (the “score”)
- Keeps orchestra and singers together
- Controls speed
- Controls volume
- Controls the mood

- Watched by everyone on stage and in the pit
- Stands on a tall podium to be seen
- Rehearses the orchestra by itself and with the singers
- Is called “Maestro” (an old tradition—it means “master” or “teacher”)

Projected English Titles

- English translation shows what’s being said (sung, actually)
- Many operas are not in English
- It’s hard to understand words when they’re sung
- Used even for operas in English

Video Camera and Monitors (TV screens)

- Opera singers have to act while they’re singing
- Actors playing a part don’t only look in one direction
- Video allows those onstage to see the conductor wherever they look

Prompter [he or she!]

- Opera singers have a LOT to memorize
 - Where to go
 - What to do
 - When to sing
 - What notes to sing and how to sing them
 - What words to sing
- Prompter has all the music, just like the conductor
- Signals the singers if they’re a little lost
- Whispers or mouths the words
- Hidden from the audience
 - Sometimes in a box downstage center
 - Sometimes out of sight on the side (wings)

Safety Net

- There’s no safety rail at the edge of the stage
- Someone could fall in the pit
- Something could fall in the pit
- The net is covered with black cloth
 - It looks nicer with the cloth over it
 - The cloth blocks some of the light shining from the pit

Red Light Bulbs [under conductor’s music stand]

- The conductor cannot start the opera until everything’s ready to go
- The conductor can’t see backstage

- There's someone that signals the conductor when to start
- The stage manager signals the conductor with the red light
 - When it comes on, it's almost time
 - When it goes out again, it's time to start
- More about the stage manager soon!

Props

ATTENTION: The cabinet on the left is for display only. Many items from the cabinet on the right may be passed around except for the props outlined below.

The following items may be demonstrated but NOT passed around:

- *The safe torch*
- *Glass items*
- *Snow and leaves*
- *Armory items*

Questions to Ask Students:

- What do you see?
- What could you do with X?
- How does use of X help tell a story?
- If we were doing a banquet scene from Harry Potter in the Great Hall, what would you need for the scene?
 - Do you see X?
 - What do we do if we don't have X?
 - Who would have to make X?—**Props Help Tell the Story—**

Props are generally anything onstage that are moveable or portable—in other words, anything other than the walls, ceiling, and floors. Props can be furniture, household objects, personal items, weapons, food—there are endless examples.

- They can help establish a setting—time and place
- They can reveal things about a character's personality
- They can tell you what a character is likely to do
- They can serve both literal and symbolic functions

The director and designer dictate the use and look of every prop in a show.

- Every prop is there for a reason
- Every prop has a specific role in telling the story

Some props can be real, normally functioning items, but most of them are not—they're copies or fakes.

- The designer provides drawings and the director gives instructions for what they want
- The props master and his crew then have to figure out how to make their wishes become real: "The director's choice; the prop maker's challenge"
- Some props can be bought ready for the stage: Reel Blood, fake snow, safe torches, some swords, etc.
- Most props must be created from scratch by Lyric's creative and resourceful and highly-skilled props people
- Some props are built out of re-purposed materials (like a pool-cue staff or a spiked club made of a cutting from a bush)

A lot of different skills—and imagination—are required to create and care for props.

- There are 14 props people
- One specializes in armory (weapons)—he or she also makes other props
- One is an upholsterer
- One is a welder
- There's a painter
- Two are carpenters

A prop's purpose is very different from the item it's supposed to represent.

- For instance, a real dagger is designed to be a weapon for killing—it's made of high-quality steel, it's very sharp, and it's easily concealed
- A prop dagger is designed not as a weapon, but only to be recognized as one by the audience—it's made of cheap metal or even plastic, it's very dull for safety, and it may be larger than normal so it can still be seen from the back row
- A real dagger would make a lousy prop; the prop dagger would make a lousy weapon

Props have to be designed with theatrical criteria in mind:

- Props must be easily recognizable from the audience
 - They're frequently larger than normal so they can be seen from distant seats
 - Their fundamental characteristics may be exaggerated and details are left out
- Props must be easy to handle
 - Big, heavy things are often reproduced in lightweight materials
- Props must be safe
 - Breakable materials usually replaced with materials that don't make shards
 - Bricks and stones are foam rubber—light and soft
- **HOWEVER**, lately directors are getting more and more interested in realism
 - Real items (instead of traditional props) are being used more than before
 - Real food is sometimes used for realism—even if nobody's going to eat it
 - Real flame—despite its inconvenience (listed below)—is being used more (candles, etc.)

Safety is a special concern with fire.

- Any time a real flame is called for, its use must be licensed by the Fire Marshall
- Fire is made using special materials and chemicals that are easily controlled (how long they burn, how much flame, etc.) and don't smoke
- Crew members with fire extinguishers are always near and ready
- Costumes that will be anywhere near flame must be fireproofed
- Sometimes even cast members' skin is fireproofed with a special gel
- Torches have a failsafe that instantly extinguishes the flame if dropped

Safety is also a big concern with weapons!

- Firearms are fake, disabled, or shoot blanks

- Blades are blunt and dull
- Normally heavy items are made of lightweight materials

There are two types of swords used in opera.

- Replicas look like the real thing but are lighter and dull—and would break if used in battle. The vast majority of swords at Lyric are replicas
- Fighting swords are designed for stage fighting—but not real fighting. They're made of sturdy aluminum that can withstand stage-fight blows. But they're still dull and much lighter than the real thing—and would be useless in a real battle

Special stage effects often involve props.

- Many special effects props are created here by our props people
 - Faust sword that falls in half
 - Slasher dagger that squirts Reel Blood
 - Flaming sword (the one with the battery)

Some productions call for weather effects.

- For singer safety, only certain types of fog or smoke can be used
- Snow is a special fireproof theatrical product dispensed from a device above the stage—to protect the singers from dust, the snow is usually not reused
- Wind sounds can be created using a traditional wind machine, but sometimes an electronic sound effect is used instead

Our props people can even make it rain!

- Sometimes it's done with actual water from a sprinkler device above the stage and a grated recovery trough in the floor of the stage
- Sometimes it'd done with rice (to get a more convincing rain sound)

Fake food is a common prop.

- Fake food doesn't spoil
- It can be used over and over again, saving a lot of trips to the grocery store
- It can be made so it doesn't spill or make a mess if it's dropped

Real food is also frequently needed.

- Sometimes an opera calls for someone to actually eat onstage
- Sometimes a director may insist on real food for the sake of realism
- If so, then the props people go shopping or call a caterer
- For safety, food made here is prepared and handled by only one person—the property master
- There are two full kitchens in the Props Dept
- Sometimes even real food isn't necessarily what it seems
- If a singer is eating chicken, it might really be banana or something else easy to swallow
- If a singer has a dietary restriction, then special food has to be made

- There's no alcohol in the liquor (usually)

Lighting:

- The Grim Reaper standing opposite the display is a prop
- The blue light shining on him is a good example of how even a small amount of special lighting can add a lot of emotional effect
- Possible Job – lighting designers are essential to telling the story

Principal Dressing Rooms

The singers who perform the major characters in an opera are called “principals.” Like “stars” in movies and TV, principal opera singers are a very elite and specialized bunch.

Usually, people who have what it takes to become principals start showing exceptional talent at an early age. While still young, they may have the opportunity to develop their talent through:

- Loads of family support and encouragement
- Private lessons
- Encouragement and advice from professionals, teachers
- Success in performance competitions
- Lots of performing experience (community, school, maybe even pro)

Later, they may:

- Attend top-ranked music schools, where they stand out from their peers
- Distinguish themselves in international competitions and company auditions
- Participate in a specialized opera program for young professionals like our Ryan Center

The world’s top singers are represented by one of a very small circle of agents to whom all the major opera companies go for artists.

Principal roles in opera are extremely difficult and require tremendous skill and concentration. Before performing, principals need a private, comfortable place to focus and get ready before a performance—and have a place to unwind and get back in street clothes afterward. Getting ready can include:

- Warming up the voice
- Getting in costume, wig, and makeup
- Preparing mentally

Each principal singer gets his/her own private dressing room. Each dressing room has:

- A piano to help with warming up the voice
- A private bathroom with shower
- A comfy chair
- A humidifier to prevent dry air from affecting sensitive voices
- Locking closets to store personal items between performances

Sometimes principals like—or need—help getting in and out of costume.

- The area outside the rooms (with the chairs) is for “dressers” to wait until they’re needed

In most theaters, the dressing rooms are near the stage so the principals don’t have far to go.

Lyric hires the best singers from all over the world for principal roles

Wardrobe Department

Stock Room first, then the Wardrobe Department.

COSTUMES – DO NOT TOUCH ANYTHING BACKSTAGE

- Reminders will be given on tour days during daily announcements

Wardrobe/Costumes Questions:

- Why do we have so many things that look alike?
- What would happen if we did an opera with adults and then we wanted you all to perform the same Opera with the same costumes?
- What type of character would wear X? What does the costume tell you about them?
- Who takes care of costumes? What jobs? What skills are needed?
- Have you ever worn a costume? Why? How did you feel?

Costumes are a vital part of the beauty and pageantry of opera.

- A character's costume has a big impact on the impression we get of him or her
- (The same is true for regular people and the way they dress...)

Operas can be set in virtually any time and place in history (or even the future!).

- The styles of opera costumes run the gamut from ancient Egypt to today (and beyond)

Our Wardrobe Department fits the costumes to all the people who will be wearing them.

- This is usually a big job
- Everyone onstage wears a costume: the stars, the chorus, the supers, even stagehands and orchestra members if they appear onstage
- Opera casts range in size from one to several hundred
- Possible Jobs: Designer, seamstresses, dressers, launderers, administration (wardrobe head), dying, painting, shoes

Wardrobe/Costume Activities:

- Tie-in wardrobe stop with costume try-on
 - Sometimes the production is brand new, so the costumes are made for the singers who will be wearing them.
- Sometimes the production has been done by opera companies around the world, and a lot of different singers have worn the costumes.
 - In those cases it can be a lot of work altering the costumes to fit new people
 - Sometimes new copies of costumes have to be made in house to get the right fit
 - And sometimes there are not enough costumes for all the chorus or supers
 - In that case, costumes may be borrowed from Lyric's permanent collection
- Before performances, the Wardrobe Department also has to make sure the right costumes are in the right dressing rooms and that no parts are missing or damaged.

- Some costumes are so elaborate it would be impossible to put them on without help!
 - Wardrobe people also help the singers in and out of their costumes
- The day after a performance, wardrobe people collect all the costumes back and inspect them, repair them, and clean them as necessary
- Costumes are only given through dry cleaning after all performances are over
 - The singers usually wear at least one layer under the costume that is laundered after every performance

Catwalk

WARNING: Cameras/phones in pockets; nothing held over the rail!

Switch places with your rear guard chaperone to lead your group back off the catwalk.

For practicality, an opera house needs to have multiple routes for going backstage.

- The most direct route is straight back through the wings or even right across the stage
- However, cutting across the stage or through the wings may not be possible if a rehearsal or performance is going on, or if the way is blocked by scenery
- Most houses have a series of catwalks above the stage area as an alternate route
- Catwalks also allow access to various stage equipment at different levels
- They're called catwalks because they're the kind of place a cat would be comfortable walking on (high and narrow...)

This catwalk is located about halfway up the fly space.

- At 12 stories, this fly space is the tallest of any opera house in the world
- The upper part of the fly is used to store scenery that is not in immediate use
- The lower part of the fly houses scenery that's ready to be lowered into the set
- Lighting instruments are also stored and deployed from the fly
- Machinery for snow and rain effects may also be located here

Everything is suspended from the system of batten pipes, cables, and pulleys described in the materials related to the stage. See the ropes and cables along the stage-right wall.

- Stacks of iron blocks on the cables are to counter-balance the weight of whatever is suspended from the corresponding pipe
- The white ropes don't bear any weight—pulling them just turns the pulleys

Chorus/Chorus Dressing Rooms

If there's another group at Wigs/Makeup when you arrive, take your group around the corner to look in the chorus dressing rooms while you wait. Do not enter!

The members of the chorus play the regular people onstage—crowds, soldiers, whatever the story calls for. They usually sing all together or in groups.

A chorus provides a very different sound and effect than the solo singing of the main characters.

- Choruses can greatly enhance the musical storytelling of an opera
- The size and composition (men/women) of the chorus varies depending on the opera
- Some operas have no chorus at all
- Many operas have one or more big, famous choral numbers

At Lyric, the same choristers sing in every opera that needs one, so they sing a lot of different roles and wear a lot of different costumes—it all depends on the opera.

The singers are among the best in the world

- Education
 - Musical promise from childhood
 - Private lessons
 - Music in school
 - Community music school (like Merit)
 - Music major in college
 - Often advance degrees too
- Auditions
 - Hundreds apply—150-200 are chosen to audition
 - Applicants come from all over U.S.
 - Audition process is usually spread out over a whole month
 - Winners are chosen by the Chorus Master

The Chorus Master is the special conductor who rehearses and prepares the chorus.

Lyric has 48 regular choristers, 12 core supplementary (part-time or as needed). Sometimes even more are hired if needed (supplementary—numbers vary).

Like being in the orchestra, being in the chorus is a full-time job during the season.

Regular choristers re-audition every 3 years; core supplementary every 2 years, supplementary every year.

Wigs/Makeup

Either before or after the wig display cart and video, you may take your group to the Wig and Makeup Department doors to and look in. And remember: none of us go inside, and we don't touch ANYTHING in there.

Wigs and Makeup Questions

- Are things that you see on stage as they really are?
- Take a character (Frankenstein): What do you have to do with wigs and makeup to make the character “real” for the audience?
- Who decides what is done?
- What are some of the characteristics of a good wig?
- If you were tired, what would you need to convey that?
- How long does it take to make a wig? What is the process?
 - Expertise, jobs, lots of tie ins
- What does a wig tell you?
 - Looking different vs. accentuating who we are
 - Wigs/Makeup + Lighting = Total Picture
 - Teamwork! Combo of jobs/art forms
- Possible jobs: Wig builder, cosmetologist, lighting designer, special effects artists

Hairstyle can make a powerful visual impression.

- It's a big part of creating a character's image
- It can make a girl look like a boy or a boy look like a girl
- It can make someone look old or young
- Dignified or shabby; poised or totally crazed

It's vital to get the hairstyle right for the character.

There are a lot of reasons why a wig may be used instead of a person's natural hair.

- People's natural hair can be too difficult to dress into the style that's needed
- A singer's natural hair may not be the right length for the character
- Restyling (cutting, dying, perming) a singer's own hair for a character might change his/her normal appearance radically—not all singers like that
- Styling a singer's own hair takes a lot of time that the singer could spend elsewhere
- Many times a character might have different hair at different points in the opera

Wigs solve all these problems.

- Many of the singers wear wigs with their own hair hidden underneath
- Their own hair must be prepped to be as flat as possible—long hair is put in pin curls

Opera wigs must fit each singer perfectly to look natural.

- Hairstyles have to exactly match the look the designer calls for
- In most cases, a commercially-produced wig wouldn't look right

So all the wigs are made by hand here in our wig shop.

- Most are made of real human hair
- The hair is tied to a mesh base that's custom made to perfectly fit the singer's head
- The front—the hairline—is made of especially thin (and fragile) mesh
- Each wig takes 40-60 hours to make
- Beards are made the same way, but with textured hair or sometimes yak hair
- Some highly stylized wigs (like powdered ones) may also be made from yak hair
- Synthetic hair is cheaper but rarely used—it doesn't look as good or last as long
- Real hair is extremely durable and can be re-used when the base of the wig wears out

Stage makeup is a specialized art in itself. Makeup artists have to be able to create many different effects, depending on the look the designer and director want.

- Many times it is very different from regular makeup
- Traditionally, stage makeup is designed to look good from a distance
- It can look really strange up close
- On the other hand, there is now a trend towards more natural-looking makeup
- Sometimes stage makeup isn't all that different from everyday street makeup
- Stage makeup can make a singer look ill, crazy, older, younger, stronger, dirty, tired, injured, or even something other than human

The stars and the supers are usually made up by staff people; chorus members usually do their own makeup—but they have to follow specific instructions.

All wigs are handled only by staff people—the wigs are fragile and expensive.

The Scenery Handling Area

THIS STOP MAY NOT ALWAYS BE ON THE TOUR—refer to your daily information sheet

WARNING: Stay behind the yellow line!

This cavernous space is the parking area for large pieces of scenery that are not in use onstage.

- Lyric usually has two operas running at once, sometimes three
- Often, yet another opera is rehearsing onstage between performances
- So usually sets for more than one opera can be seen here
- It's a lot of work for the crew moving sets for the different shows over and over
- Most everything is moved solely by people power (i.e. a bunch of guys pushing/pulling)
- The entire area can be sealed off from the stage with a huge door that slides down from above. A similar but smaller (but still big!) door is closest to where you are standing—usually closed. The huge one is right next to it and is usually open on tour days.

The largest elevator in the house is immediately to the right of the elevator you rode down on.

- It's actually a loading dock used for moving sets in and out of offsite storage
- It's big enough for a semi truck to park on—in fact, that's what it's for!
- It can be raised up to street level (Washington) for a truck, then lowered to stage level
- This elevator can also be used to move scenery up two floors into the Mason Rehearsal Room—behind the huge gray sliding door in the wall above

Possible additional information for older or more engaged/interested students:

- When the Civic Opera House was built in 1929, it was a state-of-the-art theater facility
- It included a smaller theater for plays in addition to the big theater for opera
- At that time, opera sets consisted mostly of two-dimensional painted canvas backdrops
- Later in the 20th century, opera designers began to demand more realistic, three-dimensional sets
- The original design of the backstage area allowed for plenty of storage space for rolled-up canvas scenery, but there was no room to store the big new three-dimensional sets
- For a time, Lyric resorted to storing sets under tarpaulins outside on the sidewalk!
- In the mid-1990s, Lyric renovated the whole facility
- During the renovation, we transformed the space occupied by the smaller theater into the scenery handling area, new principal dressing rooms, and the biggest rehearsal room in the facility: The Mason Rehearsal Room (Room 200)
- The scenery handling area occupies what used to be the stage and backstage areas of the small theater
- The new dressing rooms and the Mason Rehearsal Room over them occupy what used to be the seating area of the small theater
- All that remains of the small theater is the proscenium, still visible if there isn't a lot of scenery blocking it from view

Orchestra Lounge/Trap Room

The Orchestra Lounge:

The orchestra members spend a lot of time at the opera house.

- Several performances every week
- At least two operas running at once; sometimes three
- Lots of rehearsals for operas opening soon

They can't spend all their time in that crowded pit!

- They need a nice place to be between rehearsals and before performances
- They need dressing rooms for changing into their concert black (showers included)
- They need lockers for storing clothes and instruments and effects
- And the kitchen and sofas add convenience and comfort

An orchestra can be much louder than you'd think.

- Especially right in front of the trumpets, trombones, or percussion
- It can be loud enough there to cause hearing damage
- So Lyric provides earplugs for any musicians who need them

The Trap Room:

There's a lot of storage space under the stage for pieces of scenery.

- It's also where you end up if a set has a hole in the ground, stairs down to a cellar, or any other downward passage

Many opera houses have a grid system of built-in trap doors.

- Ours has a few permanent traps, most notably the one (with the yellow framework?) in the center
- If a trap is needed in another location, it's usually an easy matter to cut a hole in the floor or re-arrange the decking
- Stairs can be built down, or a portable hydraulic lift can be positioned underneath

Musicians who play large instruments may store them here instead of lugging them back and forth every day.

- The big, numbered lockers are for string basses
- There are similar lockers for cellos in another location
- There is also storage for other large instruments (harp, piano, percussion, tuba)

The musicians reach the pit by walking through this area.

- The pit entrance has a black curtain to block any light from here entering the house
-

MORE INFORMATION (Can be introduced anytime in the tour)

Opera Production:

Most operas call for:

- Principal singers—the stars of the story
- An orchestra—can be small or large
- A chorus—usually—background people in the story: crowds, groups of any sort—even kids
- Dancers—sometimes—ballet or maybe other styles
- Supernumeraries—sometimes—non-singing extra people just for looks or realism—kids too
- Set—scenery—where the story takes place
- Costumes and makeup—to fit the story

It takes a lot of skilled people to make all of this come together.

The company's general director, music director, and other advisors decide which operas the company will do in a given season—usually 5 to 7 years in advance.

- But choosing the opera is only part of the process
- A “production” must also be chosen—or created

Concept:

A stage director studies the opera very carefully until he/she develops a deep understanding of what the music and the story and the characters have to tell us—the main ideas or messages of the opera.

The director then thinks of ways that he/she believes will best communicate those ideas onstage.

A director can work with different aspects of an opera—

- The time
- The place
- The personalities of the characters
- Others?

Composers usually specify most of these basic aspects.

Some directors follow the composer's original ideas (or “concept”); some directors add their own ideas, and some develop completely new ideas.

Usually, the director will then work together with a designer to come up with the general look and setting of the opera.

Set:

There has to be scenery that establishes the setting where the action takes place—the “set”.

- A designer creates drawings that guide the construction of the set
- The set is built by a specialized company
- Possible jobs: Carpentry, welding, painting, upholstery

Costumes:

There have to be costumes to establish and identify the characters.

- A designer (sometimes the same one) creates drawings to guide construction of the costumes
- The costumes are made by a specialized company
- If an opera is set in the present day, its costumes may be bought off the rack

Lighting:

A designer (usually a separate one from set/costume) plans out all the lighting

- There has to be lighting to further identify the setting
 - Time of day or night
 - Dark dungeon or bright rooftop (indoors or outdoors)
 - Set the mood (cheerful, creepy, etc.)

All of these elements combined are what makes up a “production.”

Opera Houses:

It’s an old tradition that opera houses should be beautiful.

- An opera is a beautiful work of art; part of its tradition is to perform it in a place that’s a beautiful work of art, too
- For a long time the tradition has been for opera houses to be opulent and palatial, and for people to dress in their finest clothes to attend
- Opera started out as an entertainment for wealthy people, first done in their luxurious homes
- The first opera houses were designed to be public playgrounds for the wealthy and the aristocracy. They were lavish venues—for a lavish art form
- Then opera houses became symbols of civic or national pride, further contributing to the grandeur of their design
- There’s also a logical cultural expectation associating the fine arts with fine architecture—an opera is a grand and beautiful work of art; it ought to be performed in a grand and beautiful building

Nowadays, lots of people dress casually for the opera—you don’t have to dress up unless you want to (though many people still do).

- Some new opera houses are simpler and less lavish than in the past

The Grand Foyer

Foyer: space in a theater where people can congregate when they're not in their seats.

- People can socialize, buy a drink or a treat, check their coats, buy merchandise—and check out all the other people

There are design/architectural motifs all over the place that hint at the purpose of the space

- Comic/tragic masks
- Musical instruments

The Theater

Opera usually uses no amplification.

Great acoustics are vital to an opera house.

- The acoustics here are so good that when it's quiet, it's possible to have a quiet chat with someone in the upper balcony from onstage

Qualities that contribute to the acoustics:

- The megaphone shape of the hall
- Limited soft surfaces—soft surfaces absorb sound; hard surfaces bounce it back
- The hard walls—either wood or plaster or marble (no cloth or acoustical tile!)
- The bare concrete floor under the chairs

The acoustics are different when the house is full of people

- People (and their clothing, coats, etc.) are soft and absorb sound!

The theater seats 3,563 people

Named after Ardis Krainik, the woman who was the company's second General Director.

- The company's founder and first general director was also a woman—Carol Fox

Stage:

It takes a lot of people with a lot of different skills to run things onstage. Scenery needs to be loaded in, put together, taken down (“struck”), repaired, repainted, moved around, and loaded out again.

- Scenery is constructed from a variety of materials, including wood, metal, plastic, and cloth
- A lot of scenery has machinery involved with it—hand-powered, electrical, or hydraulic
- Scenery can be stored backstage, under the stage, suspended above the stage, or off site
- During a show, scenery may be moved in and out from behind the stage, from the sides (the “wings”), from below on elevators (“traps”), or from cables above (“flies”)

In addition to scenery, a variety of lights and their power cables are mounted all over.

The white ropes along the stage right wall are part of a specialized system common to lots of theaters. A lot of theater technology derived from tall ship technology and there are many similarities

- Each one controls a separate “pipe” or “batten” above the stage from which scenery or lights can be suspended
- There are a little over 100 of them. (106)
- Battens are raised or lowered by pulling on the ropes
- Many of the battens can also be controlled with electric motors
- The controls for the motors are in the glass cases between the Peacock Alley door and the stage manager’s station

Crew:

Lyric employs about 50 people to work on the stage. They’re called the “crew” or “stagehands.”

The crew is divided into three general disciplines:

Carpenters

Carpenters build and strike and alter and repair scenery—and move it around.

They include:

- Shop Carpenter in charge of a full woodworking shop
- Head Welder in charge of a full metalworking shop
- Head Flyman in charge of everything suspended above the stage
- Master Carpenter in charge of all scenery movement and keeping track of stage personnel
- Scenic artist (an artist who paints scenery—he’s actually his own department)

There are about two dozen carpenters at Lyric.

Electricians

Electricians take care of everything electrical. That’s electronics, sound, projection, special effects (like rain and fog), and of course lighting especially, including changing all burned-out light bulbs in the theater and backstage.

They include:

- Head Electrician
- Head Soundman

There are about a dozen electricians at Lyric.

Props

Props people find or build and then take care of all the smaller pieces of scenery like furniture, décor, and all the little details like household objects, food, etc. They include:

- Prop Master
- Prop Crew Head
- Armorer in charge of weapons from daggers to cannons
- Upholsterer for furniture
- 2 carpenters

There are 14 props people at Lyric

Everyone in the crew helps move things around as needed.

The Ryan Opera Center:

Lyric's Ryan Opera Center employs promising young singers and gives them extensive specialized training in being an opera principal.

- Included in this training is the opportunity to sing in Lyric productions
- The Ryan Center holds auditions all over the country and hires just a few singers out of the hundreds who apply
- The ensemble is usually around a dozen singers
- A singer may stay for up to three years

The Rehearsal Department:

The rehearsal process can involve hundreds of people.

The various people and groups start out rehearsing separately:

- Principals
- Chorus
- Supers
- Orchestra

As things progress, the various groups are gradually brought together.

It's a lot of different rehearsals over the course of about 30 days.

- Somebody has to create an efficient schedule for all these rehearsals
- Somebody has to keep track of all these people and tell them when to go where
- Somebody has to help people from out of town make their travel and lodging plans

Development/Fundraising:

Opera is very expensive to produce.

- Fundraising is a vital part of what every opera company does
- Ticket sales only pay for half of what it costs to run this company
- The rest of the budget comes from donations from people, businesses, government, etc.
- About a quarter of Lyric's staff is dedicated solely to fundraising (about 25 people)

IF ASKED: Some donors may choose to have a name displayed on a seat—their own or perhaps that of a friend or relative as a gift or remembrance.

Other Departments and Staffing:

Artistic: 10

Development (fundraising): 28

Finance and Office Services: 12

Facilities/House: 9

plus ushers, security, concessions, janitorial, engineers

General Director/Music Director/Artistic Consultant: 6

Human Resources: 3

Information Technology: 4

Lyric Unlimited (Community Engagement and Education): 6

Marketing/PR: 15

Music Library: 2

Music Staff (reh. pianists, etc.): 14

Ryan Opera Center

3 staff, 10 artists, + coaches, guest singers

Rehearsal Department: 7

Stage Management & Direction: 16

Technical Department: 14

plus about 50 crew

Ticket Department

7 full-time staff + 8 seasonal ticket agents

Wardrobe

3 full-time staff + 10 stitchers + 13 dressers

Wigs/Makeup

7 staff + 10 crew

The Civic Opera House:

Civic Opera House was built by Samuel Insull. He loved opera even when he was a kid—he used to skip lunch to save the money for opera tickets.

When he grew up he became Thomas Edison's assistant. Eventually he made a fortune setting up the first electric system in Chicago

Then he decided to build the best opera house in the U.S.

- His criteria were that it have great acoustics, great sight lines, and great beauty
- He sent his designers/architects to study all the great European houses so they could incorporate their finest features into his house—without imitating them (he wanted his house to be unique)
- He made the opera house part of an office building so that the opera company would have income from renting out office space in the rest of the building
- The building was finished in 1929

1929 was also the beginning of the Great Depression, and Insull and his company went broke.

After that, several opera companies tried and failed here, but finally in 1954, Lyric Opera of Chicago was founded and has been here ever since.

In 1992, Lyric bought the theater and two floors of office space in the building. Lyric also renovated the theater for the first time since it was new.

Closing the Tour:

- Teamwork
- What is Opera? ALL the different art forms, ALL the different jobs
 - So exciting, so emotional!
 - There is a place for you in opera
- Audience is a role in opera as well!

DISCRETIONARY STOPS

For Before and After the Backstage Segments

—pick and choose in any order—

Stage Manager's Station [he or she!]

WARNING: Stay under the canopy!

During an opera performance a lot of different things have to happen.

- A lot of different people do all these things:
 - Someone has to ring the bells in the lobby to let the audience know it's time to sit down
 - Someone has to dim the lights in the house
 - The conductor has to start the music
 - The cast have leave their dressing rooms and go to the stage
 - The cast have to go onstage
 - Someone has to raise the curtain
 - Someone has to turn on the stage lights—and change the lighting as the opera goes along
 - Someone has to make the scenery changes
 - And tons of other things...

All these things have to happen at exactly the right time, every time the opera is performed. There's a single person who's in charge of coordinating everything during a performance and who makes sure everything and everybody is in the right place at the right time.

The Stage Manager! (SM)

- The SM signals or “cues” every one of those events
- Nothing can happen until the SM gives the cue

The SM is in communication with everyone involved in the performance.

- There are several different ways a SM might give a cue:
 - By radio headset
 - By intercom
 - By cue light
 - By hand signal
 - By whispering (if the person being cued is close by)
 - Even by telephone—land line and cell

The SM has to know everything that's happening.

- The SM has a number of ways to keep track of what's going on:
 - By listening to the music and following along in the score (has to be able to read music)
 - Can hear through headset, speakers, or just by the sound from the pit and singers
 - By watching what's happening onstage
 - Can see some from the SM station
 - Video feed from audience
 - Video feed from above the stage
 - Even in the dark with infrared video
 - By watching the conductor on the video
 - By watching the computer readout for the lighting system
 - By keeping an eye on the clock (for intermissions)

Lyric has two stage managers and seven assistant stage managers. Usually there's one stage manager and three assistant stage managers assigned to each production.

Foyer - *Info above*

House - *Info above*

Costume Try-On

You and your students are responsible for tidying up and hanging up costumes after.

Box Seats

6th Floor Balcony—the view from the top!

Unless your students really need the exercise, divide your group in two and take the elevators—you take one elevator and the chaperone takes another.

Video

In the Opera Club.

Fly System Model

Show them how the fly system works

4th Floor Video

Play video on 4th floor that shows overview of many aspects of Opera

Lyric Opera Backstage Tour Guides www.lyricopera.org/education/edcorps.aspx