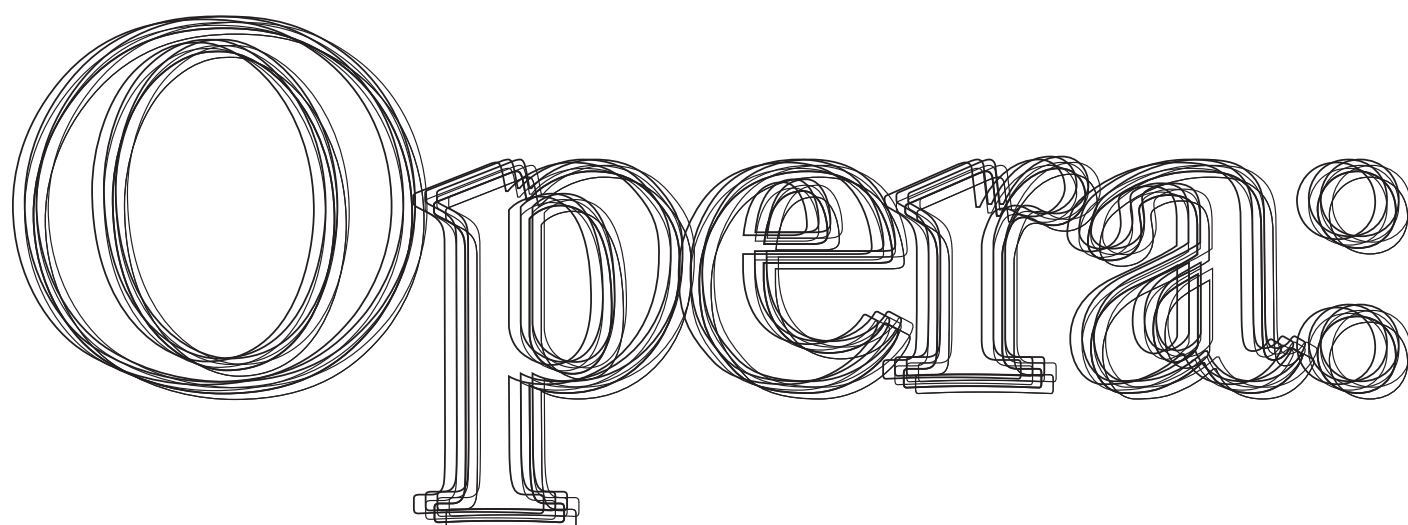




FRIEND OR FOE?

Asking the Right Questions for Opera Music Preparation

CREATED FOR THE MAJOR ORCHESTRA LIBRARIANS' ASSOCIATION
27TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE, WASHINGTON, DC

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Opera: Friend or Foe?

Asking the Right Questions for Opera Music Preparation

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This opera pamphlet has been assembled for any person involved with the preparation of material for opera or opera excerpts. Its aim is to guide the reader to ask the right questions as opposed to providing the right answers.



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PREPARING COMPLETE OPERA MATERIALS

PREPARING COMPLETE OPERA MATERIALS

WHICH VERSION OF THE OPERA WILL BE PERFORMED?

Different opera houses have differing procedures for determining which version of an opera to perform. (Nearly all operas can be performed in different versions. It is best not to assume an opera exists in only one performing version.) In some the music director or conductor in consultation with the director will decide. In others the director in consultation with the conductor decides. There are opera houses in which the company itself may insist on a particular edition for financial reasons. Preparation cannot begin until this decision has been made.

It may fall to the librarian to research all available editions and/or versions, including the copyright status of each, and provide reference material to the conductor, director and/or general manager to enable them to start the process.

Is the version under copyright or in the public domain?

The choice of which version of an opera will be used can have considerable impact on a budget. If a version is chosen for which all material is in the public domain, only the purchase/rental of vocal, choral and orchestral material will be incurred.

If a version is chosen that utilizes an edition under copyright, or if the work itself is still under copyright, Grand Rights will apply and will need to be negotiated.

Grand Rights involves paying a percentage of the gross box office revenue to the copyright holder or authorized agent for the performance of the work, in addition to rental fees for the performance material. These negotiations can be protracted and the copyright holder has the right to refuse permission for a company to perform a work. One will also need to provide information concerning venue, number of seats, anticipated box office revenue, and number of performances in advance of negotiating said rights.

Critical editions, while under copyright, do not necessarily require the payment of Grand Rights. This can be a contentious issue and research is necessary before and during negotiations. There will always be a rental fee charged, regardless of whether Grand Rights are deemed appropriate or not.



An excellent book for anyone considering negotiating Grand Rights is *The Art Of Music Licensing* by Al Kohn and Bob Kohn, ISBN-13: 9780130687920. The chapter entitled “The Grand Rights Controversy” is particularly interesting.

For a more complete explanation of rentals, rights and royalties, refer to the pamphlet published by MOLA entitled *The Music We Perform: An Overview of Royalties, Rentals and Rights* found at mola-inc.org/resource-categories/publications

VOCAL SCORE

A major difference between the preparation of symphonic and opera repertoire is the importance of the piano/vocal score. Piano/vocal scores contain music and text of all vocal lines, including solo characters, chorus, and off-stage singers. The orchestra is reduced to a two-line staff played on a piano.

When preparing operas it is essential that company members work together well in advance of a production to decide on an “official vocal score.” Choice of score may be based on conventions of a company, requests of conductors or directors, or to match an existing production.

One may wonder what factors usually influence this choice. For a new production, the conductor and director will usually make the decision. In some cases a “performing edition” may have been created for a specific production. For an existing production the choice of score may be production-driven in order to coordinate the artistic and technical aspects. (Directors, the technical department, and stage managers may have spent countless hours marking cues and blocking into their respective scores.)

If a company is performing a work in a language that is not familiar to the artists who have been engaged, a transliterated vocal score may be necessary. What is commonly called “transliteration” in opera circles is technically considered “transcription” in linguistic circles. Most systems of (operatic) transliteration map the letters of the source script to letters pronounced similarly in the goal script. For example, a text in Cyrillic will be written in Roman characters that should result in the word sounding the same despite being written in an different alphabet. Transliterations are usually works under copyright by the person who did the transliteration and a fee may be payable for the right to reproduce.

If a company is performing a work in a translation, one must either ensure that the translation is in the public domain or negotiate rights for the use of the translation. (Grand Rights can apply.)

It is possible that alternate versions of arias or ensembles may be chosen for a production. In some cases the alternate versions will have a different publisher or copyright status than the main material being used.

PREPARING COMPLETE
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Once the “official vocal score” has been decided it is necessary to circulate to the company members the publisher of the official vocal score and the plate number listed at the bottom of each page. As an example “For the Acme Opera Company’s 2009-10 Production of G. Verdi’s *Il Trovatore* the official vocal score will be the Ricordi plate #109460.” A librarian may be expected to provide sources for purchase of the score, or have copies available to loan.

Take note that even though an opera librarian may go to great lengths to identify the official vocal score to his or her colleagues, plate numbers can be elusive. It is not enough to simply mention a publisher’s name. Many publishers have released vocal scores in different versions and printings of the same opera, which all may bear the same plate number. The same publisher may have also added a critical edition to the list of existing publications which is not compatible with previous printings.

To confuse the issue even further, some publishers have, within recent years, revised many of their piano/vocal scores, sometimes to simplify the piano reductions, other times to reflect more recent musicological research, but have not changed the plate numbers and/or catalog numbers. In those cases it is necessary to cite an editor or year of copyright in addition to the publisher and plate number.

For operas in which multiple piano/vocal editions are in common usage (*Barber of Seville* or *Tosca*, for example) some individuals will request a cut list for their edition even if it is not the “official vocal score” in use for the production. It is usually up to the discretion of the librarian whether or not to create such a list.

VOCAL SCORE PREPARATION

It is wise to retain at least one dedicated library reference vocal score marked with all cuts, alterations, transpositions, and rehearsal figures to match orchestral material, and to maintain this score throughout the production’s run. It will serve as a valuable reference when changes occur or questions arise.

Opera productions are planned many years in advance. Singers require time to memorize and assimilate a role, and they are often booked for long periods, leaving them limited time for new role preparation. Coordinating orchestra, chorus, technical requirements, and titles requires significant advance planning. Therefore it is recommended that when the official vocal score is decided that the proper information be circulated as soon as possible.

If the official vocal score is in the public domain, it is useful to extract only the pages necessary for the chorus and less-involved solo roles. This practice cannot be followed for works under copyright unless specific permission has been negotiated and granted (and fees paid).

CUT LIST NOMENCLATURE

Cuts are typically generated by the conductor in consultation with the artists, director, and music staff involved in a production. The cut list which is consequently circulated may be generated by the music librarian, by the music staff, the dramaturg, or the technical staff (depending on the conventions of the opera company) and as such must be written in a language familiar to everyone involved in the production, including stage managers, directors, coaches, singers, and librarians. The cut list is generated after the official vocal score has been decided and includes all the relevant information about a production including the publisher, plate number, language, or any more precise identifying information such as publication year, editor, translator or transliterator.

Cuts, in addition to listing the placement within the opera, are written in the standard format of page number/system/beginning of measure (/beginning of beat, if applicable).

134/2/3 to 137/1/3 indicates that the cut begins on page 134 of the approved score, the second system from the top of the page, beginning of the third measure of that system, then cut to page 137, first system on the page, and beginning of the third measure of that system. Occasionally text and music will need to be altered in order for the cut to be seamless. As cuts can commonly be opened during the run of a production, it is important that the material remain readily available for those situations.

In some operas vocal lines will be reassigned to different roles than originally published. There may be changes in text. There may be a need for production-specific dialog between musical numbers. There may also be significant vocal score errata. This information should be included with the cut list.

Once the library reference piano/vocal score is marked, the cuts can be transferred into the full score, and if necessary a library-specific cut list can be created. It is not uncommon that the orchestra materials and full score contain rehearsal figures that are either not present in, or different from the published piano/vocal score, and should therefore be adjusted or added. This will aid in determining the cuts in the orchestral materials.

PREPARING COMPLETE
OPERA MATERIALS

FULL SCORE PREPARATION

A major difference between symphonic works and operas is that full scores, especially larger format scores, can be scarce. They are frequently very large and may come in multiple volumes. Book repair and binding techniques are particularly useful for an opera librarian. The Center for Book Arts in New York City is an excellent resource for bookbinding (centerforbookarts.org) and the Guild of Book Workers has regional chapters across the US (guildofbookworkers.org/chapters).

A listing of bookbinders in London can be found at londononline.co.uk/local/Media/Book_Binders/ as well as throughout the UK and a few throughout the world on the Society of Bookbinders website (societyofbookbinders.com).

It is recommended that a reference full score be designated in the library that contains all cuts and alterations so that if absolutely necessary a substitute conductor could use it in performance. This reference score is useful for questions or rescoring.

ORCHESTRAL MATERIAL PREPARATION

Whatever orchestral material is chosen, the “road map” must conform exactly to the official piano/vocal score. There are many examples of operas for which the orchestral material contains too much or too little music (Massenet’s *Cendrillon* and Giordano’s *Andrea Chénier* are two such examples). It then becomes the job of the librarian to remove or add the bars as necessary.

There are also occasions when alternate arias or scenes are being performed that may appear in the appendix or *anhang*, or not at all.

Especially when a company has not performed an opera previously, a bar by bar comparison of an orchestral part to the piano/vocal score can expose discrepancies that need adjustment. Particular attention should be paid to French opera where revisions were frequently made.

Rehearsal systems **must** be coordinated among full score, orchestral material, and vocal score. Many operas do not have any rehearsal systems printed at all in the orchestral material. A rehearsal system is generally a more efficient and pragmatic approach to rehearsal management than numbered measures. Having both is optimal but takes a long time to insert into the performance material.

When marking cuts each company may have a “house style.” Priority in cut marking should always be to draw the player’s eye to the right place. Remember not to mark any cut lines through music that is being played, or through bowings that may be useful when the cut is opened. Also, consider whether after the cut the player may need a courtesy reminder of instrument, transposition, clef, key signature, or meter, or a page-turn fix.

When closing several pages at once Post-It© Note Tape (paper tape with removable adhesive) can be quite useful, or simply two paperclips can work. When opening any taped pages remember to rub off any leftover adhesive, as if left this may cause two pages to stick together at an inopportune moment.

Opera librarians, similar to symphonic librarians, are requested to add specific edits and bowings. Caesuras, fermatas, and other such stylistic edits can be very important to an opera orchestra player, especially if the “book” is shared by multiple players.

GENERATING TRANSPOSITIONS

The word “transposition” can be cause for alarm in the workday of an opera librarian. Opera has many traditions in this realm. It is safe to say that tenors frequently ask for lowered keys to avoid uncomfortable top notes; sometimes sopranos and mezzos will do the same, but there are no rules. It is often simply expected that the opera librarian will supply, one way or another, a transposition.

The Italian terms *trasporto* (transposition) and *in tono* (in the original key) are frequently used in these situations.

The first thing to do is to clarify exactly where the transposition will begin. Does there need to be any harmonic adjustment to get into the new key? How long will the transposition last? Adjustments are often 1/2 step or 1 whole step but sometimes more.

Do your vocal coaches or singers need the piano/vocal score transposed? If needed, the first step must be to make available the piano/vocal pages with the correct transposition (including any necessary adjustments). When a transposition is more traditional the transposed vocal material may already exist. If not, computer engraving skills or hand copying are necessary. Ideally the pagination will fit exactly over the original pages.

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Preparing the transposition with music engraving software permits one to alter the key relatively easily if changes are made.

Focus must then be turned to the orchestral material. First assess whether there are any instruments that need extra time in which to mark a part, such as a harp or timpani (and for which bowings are not likely to change). It makes sense to transpose these parts first. Does any instrument have a solo that will now be in a new key? It is best to alert the player(s) to this as well.

If the piece needing transposition is tonal and the key signature is in a “sharp key,” it is possible to create the transposition by hand more quickly if you are transposing down by a half step. For instance, E major to E-flat major can be transposed by changing the key signature; any notes with a sharp in the original are turned into naturals in the transposition.

One will not always be so lucky. If you desire to transpose by hand, whiting out then transposing each note-head or adding a flat or sharp as necessary can be a method that preserves the layout.

Hand copying a completely new part, preferably preserving the layout, is yet another method.

Computer engraving, as discussed earlier, can be a very quick and useful method which allows the most options. This is not the forum for the merits of any one computer-engraving program over another, but the skills are extremely useful for an opera librarian.

Proofreading is an obvious next step. Sometimes the computer is not good at deciding the best enharmonic spelling, though most programs do have range-checkers. Has anything gone out of range? If so is rescoring necessary? What about respelling of notes? How does one resolve differences between parts and score?

Finally, while mounting the pages in the parts, it makes sense to label each page in case it becomes liberated from the set of parts. It is then immediately obvious which opera, instrument, date, and transposition the page contains.

PREPARING COMPLETE OPERA MATERIALS

PROBLEMATIC OPERAS

There are many operas with multiple versions. One must do one's research when determining the "official" version. Will you perform the French versus Italian version of an opera (with or without ballet)? Will you perform an early version versus a later revision? Did the composer actually complete the opera or was it completed by others based on fragments? These are questions that need to be resolved when determining the "official" versions and score.

That said here are a few that are guaranteed to require a lot of attention by a librarian.

Carmen – spoken or sung (accompanied) recitative? The traditional version, published by Choudens (or reprints thereof), contain sung recitatives (by the composer Guiraud, not by Bizet). The Alkor (Bärenreiter) edition has both spoken dialog and sung recitatives as well as additional musical material (and rental fees). Eulenberg publishes an excellent full score but no performance material. Verlagsgruppe Hermann has prepared a new edition of *Carmen*. There are a number of interesting articles published concerning the source material for *Carmen*. Winton Dean's excellent essay "The True *Carmen*?" (1965) can be found in *Essays on Opera* published by Clarendon Press, Oxford ISBN 0 -19-816384-3 (1990).

Les Contes d'Hoffmann – There are multiple versions of this opera, some bearing little relationship to others other than the story line. Acts can be performed in a different order. Some of the most popular tunes do not exist in more recent editions.

Boris Godunov – There are multiple versions with differing orchestrations, several called "original." The version edited by Lamm in 1928 utilizes Mussorgsky's instrumentation, while Rimsky-Korsakov both re-barred and re-orchestrated the opera. Shostakovich orchestrated the opera from the vocal score reduction, and many others have tried their hand at "improving" the work as well.

Il Barbiere di Siviglia – There are multiple versions published by Ricordi with slightly different orchestrations, all bearing the same plate number, which were then superseded by a critical edition by A. Zedda. Most recently Bärenreiter has published a critical edition. Transpositions may be needed for the roles of Rosina and Don Basilio, depending on casting. A tenor aria (“*Cessa di più*”) may be added depending on the tenor cast as Almaviva.

PREPARING COMPLETE
OPERA MATERIALS

Baroque operas – Keys, versions, editions, roadmaps, instrumentation, and voice types are all issues.

BANDE (ON AND OFF-STAGE MUSIC)

Due to their evolution in opera, bande continue to be, at times, an ambiguous element within the music. While individual instruments in the pit orchestra are usually well marked within the scores, larger on- and off-stage band instrumentation is not. When these bande were originally scored, they employed local musicians and therefore had no set instrumentation. Consequently, the larger stage banda music is notated in the orchestral score in a reduced two-stave form. Occasionally numbers that use only stage banda and no pit musicians will be printed in the pit orchestral parts in a similar instrumentation. If the parts are not found there and are not included as separate parts, they will need to be orchestrated by the librarian to match the specifications of the production. The composer rarely orchestrated performance material for these bande; the material that comes with published parts is not necessarily authentic or practical.

Bande Pitfalls

It is useful from production to production to notate specifically where banda musicians are located whilst playing, as often, due to large sets and staging, there are few options for placement. Also, when players are on stage they will be in costume and may need to memorize their parts, so consideration should be given to those constraints. One might be asked to create miniature parts, which can be held in the palm of a hand, or attached to an instrument with a lyre, for on-stage musicians. (Imagine *Aida* without the herald trumpets in the Triumphant March!)

Frequently material for bande that is commonly available from reprint houses contains antiquated instruments with unworkable transpositions. *Aida* is one such opera where the stage band parts contain bombardinos in E-flat and other oddities for the librarian to resolve.

There are many instances in opera where bells, cannon shots, and other miscellaneous percussion instruments are indicated to be played by a character or someone other than an orchestral musician. Sometimes these references occur in a stage direction only, not as an instrumental staff. While there may be a past performance practice for who will play these instruments, ultimately it should be a question left for the artistic and production team as it may change.

Bande Shortcuts

A common request can be to eliminate the use of the banda altogether and insert the parts into the pit materials. As mentioned, some sets already have the music printed in the pit orchestral materials (in Italian repertoire indicated by *In mancanza della Banda*), and can easily be marked so that the pit musicians play these cues. In other instances it is not so simple and unfortunately there is no quick fix; after careful review of the score the banda part can be inserted into the pit orchestral material either by engraving software or hand manuscript. Some available reductions have already taken care of this issue, so it is always worth checking those resources as well.

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THE OPERA GALA

THE OPERA GALA

When we discuss opera galas we are referring to programs with orchestra and vocal soloists that include sections or highlights of operas performed in concert. Organizing the material for this sort of program is more complicated than it may seem at the outset.

One should expect many changes to the program for an opera gala. In fact the only way to be absolutely certain of the program is to wait until the last note sounds! It is wise when discussing the program with the conductor or administrator to ask as many clarifying questions as possible. There can be variations in what the excerpt is called. For instance, the soprano excerpt at the end of Act I of *La Traviata* is commonly called “*Sempre libera*” but is also referred to as “*A fors’è lui*” or “*È strano*” depending on the starting place.

Set pieces generally present fewer problems. A set piece is a selection from an opera that has an established beginning and ending, needing no adaptation for concert use.

Many pieces on a gala are extracted from places in the middle of a scene. The four questions that need to be answered relate to starts, stops, cuts, and keys.

Starts - Where will the excerpt start? The librarian will need to draw attention to this spot if it is not clear. If it occurs in the middle of a line then you may need to remind the player of clef, key signature, meter, tempo, and transposition as applicable. Will the preceding recitative be performed? Is a pitch necessary if the vocalist sings at the very beginning? Will an interpolated introduction be added at the beginning from other music in the opera?

Stops – Do you need to mark a *fine* where the excerpt stops? A fermata? What about a concert ending or an alteration in harmony?

Cuts – Will there be any cuts within the excerpt? Regarding road map, will all repeats be taken? Sometimes in solo selections there is material from other characters in the opera that may need to be cut, taceted, or scored for an orchestral instrument.

Keys – Is there a transposition involved? Is this transposition for the entire selection or does transposing start later? Be aware that such arias as “*Una voce poco fa*” or “*La Calunnia*” from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (and many others) have alternate keys.



Changes will be inevitable with the opera gala. It is advisable to work as far ahead as possible so that when new repertoire is requested one will have time available to deal with unwelcome changes. For instance, if there is a possibility of a rental work on the program, it might be wise to alert the publisher or vendor of your possible need.

THE OPERA GALA

When purchasing excerpts for an opera gala one must be especially vigilant that what the vendor has supplied contains all the musical material and all parts. In addition, requesting a little more at the beginning and end allows for changes in the starting and stopping place.

When talking with a singer about repertoire, he or she may be more vague than orchestra librarians generally are when talking about details. If someone says “I take the standard cuts” it is not advised to accept this answer. There are many traditional cuts in opera but by no means should assumptions be made without confirmation with a vocal score. This applies to “standard” cadenzas as well.

If a singer is having difficulty describing exactly what key they need for a particular work, then you may ask them what is the top note or what is the last note that they sing. From there usually you can deduce the tonality, especially if you discuss it with a vocal coach.

The rehearsal process can be streamlined if you include a running order sheet, including instrumentation and timings, in the orchestra folders for any gala, and build the folders in program order as well. Maintaining the sheet with a date and time stamp is also essential. Furthermore, be certain that the titles on the sheet conform to what is printed on the front of the parts, since in opera pieces can be called by different names.

It is wise to make a copy of a matching piano/vocal score (with rehearsal system) to keep with the orchestral parts. This can be useful to have readily available, especially when broadcast or media personnel and recording engineers may need them with very little advance notice.

Scanning the vocal score pages and saving them also can avert disaster.

Making such hard and digital copies is only appropriate for material in the public domain, or with the permission of the copyright holder.

ORCHESTRAL REDUCTIONS OF OPERAS

Orchestral reductions can be an extremely useful tool, whether to accommodate a small theatre or younger voices, or for budgetary reasons. Sad to say they often do not come with matching full scores, so conductors are encouraged to see for themselves what's in the parts. Occasionally we have the luxury of the original composer making the reduction but more commonly they are made by conductors or arrangers. Quality varies.

What size should the orchestra be? Historically most conductors try for a balance of about twice as many strings as there are winds and brass. For example, let's suppose that your auditorium has room for 30 in the pit, so you would like 20 strings and 10 winds, brass, and percussion. The strings might be divided 6-5-4-3-2, while a compliment of winds, brass, and percussion might be 1-1-2-1/2-1-1-0/timp. Obviously each work will have unique requirements.

SOME SOURCES FOR ORCHESTRAL REDUCTIONS

Under copyright (check with the publisher or copyright holder):

List of Opera Reductions in the Public Resources section of the MOLA website. Under Instrumentation & Catalog Resources, there is a link to a Google document compiling a list of opera reductions available, including from where to obtain each work. (mola-inc.org/p/public-resources)

Boosey & Hawkes lists its operatic reductions, when available, following the listing of original instrumentation. (boosey.com)

Casa Ricordi has excellent reductions for Puccini's *Fanciulla del West*, *Madama Butterfly*, and *Il Trittico* made by the conductor Ettore Panizza. They are extremely well made and are available from both Boosey & Hawkes and Kalmus in matching engraved full scores and parts. (boosey.com and kalmus.com)

Public domain:

IMSLP has some reductions available for purchase. Look under the "Arrangements and Transcriptions" tab for each work. (imslp.org)

Lucks Music Library has many reductions of common operas. (lucksmusic.com)



Edwin F. Kalmus has several reductions available. (kalmus.com)

New York Public Library has been gifted the 24 orchestral reductions of the Mapleson Music Library, most of them standard repertoire.
(nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/circulating-collections/orchestra)

Pocket Publications is a specialist British publisher of orchestral reductions of opera scores which supplies clients worldwide. Established by Tony Burke, former librarian of the Welsh National Opera, they produce various types of reductions and have an extensive catalogue that can be accessed online.
(pocket-publications.com)

Opera Orchestrations is a list of reduced opera orchestrations written by Jonathan Lyness and commissioned for performance by Opera Project, one of Britain's leading touring opera companies. (operaorchestrations.co.uk)

The following offer reduced versions of some standard, public domain opera repertoire:

Motet Music Publishing
motetmusic.com

Gilbert & Sullivan original orchestrations are small to begin with, but there are many reductions available. The Gilbert and Sullivan Archive is a comprehensive website listing almost anything you would like to know about G&S, showing many other sites where reductions are available.
(gsarchive.net)

OPERA RESOURCES

OPERA RESOURCES ON THE WEB

All About Opera

News, links, and other opera-related material.
(allaboutopera.com)

Stanford University Opera Resources links

opera.stanford.edu/links.html

OperaGlass

Links to all sorts of opera-related information, including libretti, synopses, and performance histories. (opera.stanford.edu)

Guide to Light Opera and Operetta

musicaltheatreguide.com/menu/introduction.htm

Italian Opera Links

Links to sites for (mostly) Italian opera, composers, and singers.
(italiansrus.com/resources/opera.htm)

LIBRETTI, SONG TEXTS, AND TRANSLATIONS

Aria database

Contains a wealth of information about individual arias, including synopsis, voice part and range, publishers, and much more.
(aria-database.com)

The LeiderNet Archive

A reference archive of texts and translations of art songs and choral works. (lieder.net)

Libretto homepage

Links to libretto sites, including for specific composers.
(opera.stanford.edu/iu/librettim.html)

Naxos Glossary of Musical Terms

naxosforeducation.com

On-Line Multiple Language Dictionaries

wordreference.com



DATABASES OF PERFORMANCE AND ARTIST INFORMATION

MetOpera database

Links to archives, performance history, etc. of the Metropolitan Opera, New York. (metopera.org/discover/archives)

Opera America

operaamerica.org

Operabase

operabase.com

Operissimo Concertissimo

Opera and concert database, searchable in a variety of ways. (operissimo.com)

Royal Opera House Collections Online

Performance database and archival collections of the three theatres that have stood on the Covent Garden site since 1732. (rohcollections.org.uk/)

OPERA RESOURCES

ACADEMIC AND OTHER LIBRARY SITES [NORTH AMERICA]

Indiana University Libraries

Collected links to various resources. (guides.libraries.indiana.edu/findingmusic/databases)

WorldCat

Searches public and academic libraries worldwide, including academic music libraries. (worldcat.org)

Fleisher Collection

libfreelibrary.org/locations/departments/fleisher-collection

Harvard University score library

Loeb Music Library's digital collection of scores and libretti, selected for their rare or unique natures and their popularity as objects of research and teaching, including Mozart and Verdi. (library.harvard.edu/libraries/loeb-music)

Indiana University

Offers a small selection of scanned, indexed, and printable public domain full and vocal scores. (dlib.indiana.edu/variations/scores/scores.html)

Petrucci Music Library International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP)

Includes articles, scanned scores, and audio files of selected public domain works. (imslp.org)

OPERA RESOURCES

Library of Congress

Searches of their comprehensive catalog provide useful copyright information. (loc.gov)

Newberry Library

newberry.org/collection/research-guide/music

Peabody Music Library

peabody.jhu.edu/library

The Rokahr Family Archive

Donated to the University of Nebraska–Lincoln by Jack Rokahr, houses an eclectic collection of more than 4,500 scores of operas, operettas, and musicals dating from 1764 to current issues. All major opera composers from this period, and many minor ones, are represented in the collection. (libraries.unl.edu/music-library-special-collections/)

University of Chicago Press

Variety of music books, as well as performing materials of selected Bellini, Donizetti, Rossini, and Verdi operas (in conjunction with Casa Ricordi). (press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/subject/su43/su43_3.html)
The site also has comprehensive information about the Verdi critical editions. (press.uchicago.edu/sites/verdi/index.html)

Center for Italian Opera Studies

Also has links to information about University of Chicago Press critical editions of Rossini's music. (uchicago.edu/education-and-research/center/center_for_italian_opera_studies)

PARTIAL LIST OF PUBLISHERS

This is not intended as an endorsement of or advertisement for any particular company, merely as a list of available resources.

OPERA RESOURCES

Classical Vocal Reprints

Offers a large catalog of printed vocal music. Source for some out-of-print public domain material that may not be available through other retailers. (classicalvocalrep.com)

Educational Music Service

Broad-based music retailer and home of the Mapleson collection of opera materials, including excerpts and reduced orchestrations. (emsmusic.com)

Ipsilon Music Press

Music preparation and publication specializing in vocal works. Has an extensive catalogue of arias and scenes, and offers services to extract opera selections. (ipsilonmusic.com)

Prima La Musica

Source for baroque opera material, including the catalogue from Clifford Barlett's The Early Music Company (formally King's music). (primalamusica.com)

SPECIAL INTEREST

Tom Kaufmann's Saverio Mercadante and Giovanni Pacini page
oocities.org/Vienna/8917

Zarzuela site

An entry point into the a world of lyric theatre which remiains little known to many especially outside the Hispanic world. (zarzuela.net)

OTHER RESOURCES

Choral Public Domain Library

Choral sheet music (cpdl.org/wiki)

Opera with Opera News (UK)

Membership required for some features, but much content is free.
(opera.co.uk)

OPERA RESOURCES

Symphony Orchestra Library Center (OLC) opera orchestrations

orchestralibrary.com/cgi-bin/operadb/operalist.cgi

Wikipedia

(wikipedia.org)

Often a simple internet search for the composer's name and the title of the work can lead you to information you might otherwise have missed. Putting the name or phrase in quotes will search for the phrase as a unit, and adding "site:.edu" to Google searches, for example, will limit the results to those hosted by educational institutions.

BOOKS

Arias, Ensembles & Choruses by John Yaffé & David Daniels

Da Capo Opera Manual by Nicholas Ivor Martin

Da Capo Catalog of Classical Music Compositions by Jerzy Chwiłkowski

New Penguin Opera Guide ed. Amanda Holden

Opera Production (A handbook) I & II by Quaintance Eaton (*The Opera Companion: A Guide for the Casual Operagoer* by George [Whitney] Martin

The Metropolitan Opera Stories of the Great Operas by John W. Freeman

The New Kobbe's Opera Book ed. The Earl of Harewood & Anthony Peattie

Recent American Opera: A Production Guide By Rebecca Hodell Kornick

Operas in One Act: A Production Guide by W. Franklin Summers

The New Grove Dictionary of Opera (4 volumes) ed. Stanley Sadie and Christine Bashford

The Grove Book of Operas (1 volume) ed. Stanley Sadie, revised by Laura Macy

OPERA RESOURCES

Operas in English by Margaret Ross Griffel

The Complete Book of Light Opera by Mark Lubbock

Opera: A Research and Information Guide by Guy A. Marco



ADDENDUM

ROBERT'S (SUTHERLAND) RULES FOR OPERA GALA PREPARATION

1. The final program and program order will not be confirmed until the performance is over.
2. Expect to prepare 50% to 100% more material than will be performed.
3. Always remember: starts, stops, cuts, keys.
4. No matter how many times a work has been performed, someone will always want to start before, or end after, the existing printed material.
5. Just because an artist or the artist's agent, secretary, etc. provides orchestral music it does not necessarily follow that it is the correct music, or that it can be performed as provided.
6. The title given by the artist or artist management rarely matches the title used by the publisher.
7. The same title may be used for different pieces, or alternate versions of an aria. It is best not to assume all titles are unique.¹
8. The quality of music received is usually inversely proportional to the amount of time the material is received before the first rehearsal/performance—music received at the last minute usually always requires work.
9. Always have a vocal score that matches the orchestral material for any given piece.
10. Always create a vocal score reference book containing all the pieces on the program. Have an extra copy for the accompanist who may, or may not, have been hired for the rehearsal that may, or may not, have been scheduled with artist and conductor.
11. Beware of selections composed with off stage music. It is not always cued into the regular orchestra material.



12. Remember to ask about possible encores. With some artists, the list can be as long as the printed program, with said artist reserving the right to choose which piece or pieces at the last minute.
13. When feeling frustrated and angry after yet another last minute change and wondering, “why do opera galas/singers have to be this way?”, well, they are that way and are not likely to change. They certainly have not for me. Frankly I find a nice glass of wine helps...after work only, of course!

¹*“Deh vieni”: from Nozze di Figaro or Don Giovanni?, “Fuor del mar”: from Idomeneo – which of the two composed versions?, “Lisa’s aria” from Pique Dame – Act I or Act III? [Actually one is an aria, the other an arioso, but they are both often referred to as “Lisa’s aria”. There are many such examples.]*

BUT WHAT IF I DON’T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT OPERA?

If you do not have an extensive background in opera, it can be very useful to get acquainted with an opera coach or vocal accompanist, if you can find one. While such a person may not have the knowledge of the preparation of orchestral materials that you have, he or she could be very useful in pointing out problems that might occur when preparing a program of opera excerpts (and there are always problems).

Here are a few of the ways that such a person could be helpful to you:

Is it the right piece?

Agents and administrators will sometimes refer to a piece by a nickname, such as “*The Jewel Song*”; a coach could warn you that this is not the same as “*The Diamond Aria*.” Mozart wrote two arias that begin with the words “*Deh vieni*”; a coach could help you determine which is wanted. However, even if you do get advice from opera people, you should make a list of the repertoire that you have found with the titles as you think they are, and then send it to the singer or agent to make sure that you are on the right track. (Depending on the structure of your administration, it may be that you are not able to contact the singer or agent directly, but must go through another member of your organization. If you are unable to circumvent this, then be especially careful, since every time information is passed from one person to another, it can be inadvertently altered. The ideal situation is one where you can talk to the singer directly, but that is not always possible, especially in the case of well-known singers.)

Keys

Many opera excerpts are done in a variety of keys; this can be one of your biggest problems. A coach can warn you about some of these problems, but will not necessarily be able to give you a definitive answer. If an agent or someone else tells you something like “the standard key,” “the way it is in the opera,” “the way it is in the anthology,” “the key Signor X uses,” or “the high key,” this is still not enough information. You will need to confirm exactly what key is being requested. This can be difficult, since some arias have an introductory recitative in one key signature and then the actual aria in another.

ADDENDUM

Where do I start?

Some arias have a variety of starting points. A coach can help you determine where these might be, but that is no guarantee that you will have the right point. Even the phrase “with the recitative” is sometimes not exact enough. No matter what you do, at some point in your life somebody is going to say “Oh, I think that we should start eight bars earlier.” Always try to provide as much music as possible at the beginning of a piece; it’s relatively easy to tell players to make a late start.

May I stop now?

While not as much of an issue as the start, the end of an aria can also provide problems. In an opera, some arias do not end in the conventional sense, but rather blend into an ensemble section. The orchestral material you receive may have been adjusted so that the piece has a satisfying conclusion, or it may not; if the music you receive has not been adjusted, it’s up to you and the conductor to create something. Asking a coach what is done in piano arrangements of the aria might make your life easier.

Cuts

One problem regarding cuts that is particular to opera occurs when an aria consists of more than one section; the final section in this case is sometimes termed a “cabaletta.” If the cabaletta is to be included, this will sometimes require you to make a large cut or, possibly, do a bit of rewriting. This is due to the fact that there is often material for other singers between the first section of the aria and the cabaletta. Some published aria extractions have already been adjusted to omit this material; if your materials have not been adjusted an appropriate way to do it must be determined. Ask a coach how such a thing has been done in piano/vocal anthologies of opera arias.

CREDITS

2009 (ORIGINAL)

SARA BAGUYOS, formerly Washington National Opera

PAUL BECK, Metropolitan Opera

SHELLEY FRIEDMAN, Washington National Opera

TONY RICKARD, Royal Opera House

WENDY SKOCZEN, Lyric Opera of Chicago

ROSEMARY SUMMERS, Metropolitan Opera

ROBERT SUTHERLAND, Metropolitan Opera

TIM TULL, Houston Grand Opera

WAYNE VOGAN, Canadian Opera Company

ROBERT WILLOUGHBY JONES, Los Angeles Opera

2026 UPDATE

LAURA CONRAD, Santa Fe Opera

KATIE KLICH, University of Michigan

BENJIMEN NEAL, Jacksonville Symphony

