



# DUNEDIN CONSORT

## The Dunedin Consort Guide to Opera



### Creating an Opera – Part 3 (25 minutes)

Today you are going to be writing the lyrics for two different songs in your very own opera!

The types of songs in operas that we will be focusing on are **RECITATIVES** and **ARIAS**.

A **RECITATIVE** is where the composer tries to fit in as much of the storyline as possible, to explain what is happening in the opera. It is usually sung in a spoken style, and is a bit like someone ‘reciting’ poetry, or narrating a play.

An **ARIA** is where one (or more) of the main singers gets the opportunity to take centre stage and really show off their singing skills! The words are short and much more simple. Instead of being about telling the story, they might be more about how the singer *feels* about what’s happening in the story at that time.

### Warm-up exercise 1:

To get us in the mood for writing our recitative and aria, we are going to plan a few things in advance.

Our recitative will be **THREE** sentences long, and will explain what is happening in the opera scene. Let’s plan what it will be about... On the next page are some things to think about. If you have done exercise 1 and 2 from our opera series, you might want to include the same characters and storylines you used before.

What character or characters will your songs will be about? Are they good characters or evil characters? If you have picked more than one character, do they get on with each other?

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.....

Where is the recitative taking place? It could be a dark gloomy cave, or a beautiful castle with tall towers... use your imagination!

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What has happened to the character/s to make them want to burst into song? Perhaps they have encountered an obstacle on their journey? Perhaps something has happened to a different character that affects them too? Maybe they are expected to do something they really don't want to do!

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Remember that you will be telling an entertaining story, not writing a report! To spice up the language a bit we are going to make a **scribble box** of **ADJECTIVES**, which are *describing* words that help create a more vivid picture of what's going on. Circle any words that you like from the scribble box to use in your recitative and aria, and try to add some of your own too - they can be as outrageous as you like!

scary	beautiful	mischievous
gruesome	clumsy	silly
stunning	charming	smelly
clever	gracefully	excited
absurd	carefree	monstrous
		glowing
		magnificent

## Bonus

When writing stories, to make the audience feel like they are really *living* the experience, it can be very effective to write about what your different **SENSES** experience. Do you know what your senses are?

People usually have FIVE senses - **sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch**

People often write about what they see, but don't forget to include some of the other senses! You might want to describe the sound of something in the distance, the smell in the air, or the feeling of an object your character touches.

## Main exercise, part 1:

Now we are ready to write our three sentences of **RECITATIVE**. Use the spaces below to write each of your sentences.

Sentence 1: Describe where the scene is taking place. (Don't forget to use your adjectives and describe different senses!)

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Sentence 2: Describe who is in the scene and how they are feeling.

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Sentence 3: Describe how your character/s react to the situation and what they decide to do about it.

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.....

.....

## Main exercise, part 2:

Now let's move on to the **ARIA**. The words in an aria can often be a *reaction* to what has just happened in the previous recitative. For example, if a recitative tells the story of a beautiful princess who gets hit by an arrow from cupid and accidentally falls in love with a mushroom, the aria that follows it might be the princess lamenting about how she misses her beloved mushroom, or it might be a love song to the mushroom!

How does what has happened in your recitative make your character/s feel? Are they happy, excited? Scared or angry?

.....

.....

The words in an aria are very simple, so that the singer/s have a chance to do complicated singing over the words. For example, in Handel's opera *Semele*, Semele sings about how fantastic she thinks she is, for a 3 whole minutes, using just the four lines of text below:

Myself I shall adore,  
If I persist in gazing.  
No object sure before  
Was ever half so pleasing.

Can you see that *adore* and *before* rhyme, and *gazing* and *pleasing* sound (a bit) similar? Maybe we can do a better job with the rhymes in our aria! Let's do another **scribble box**, but this time, try to come up with pairs of rhyming words.

Circle any you like, and try to add some of your own too. As a starting point, you can use the names of characters or objects that appear in your recitative as the first word in each pair. After that try to find some rhyming adjectives.

## Top Tip

*Coming up with rhymes can be hard. If you get stuck try to replace the first letter of your first word with a different letter of the alphabet - do you stumble across any different words this way?*

*OR*

*If that doesn't work, forget about the spelling altogether, and focus on the sound of the word. Can you think of any other things that sound similar?*

**book, took**

**hill, fill**

**tree, he**

**climbing, timing**

**knight, fight**

**exciting, lighting**

**true, blue**

**sword, lord**

**crafty, nasty**

**tower, power**

**octopus, wealthiness**

Pick two of your favourite rhymes from the above scribble box to use in your aria. These will be the LAST words in each line of text. You can mix them by using either of the two structures below:

..... rhyming pair 1, word 1	OR	..... rhyming pair 1, word 1
..... rhyming pair 1, word 2		..... rhyming pair 2, word 1
..... rhyming pair 2, word 1		..... rhyming pair 1, word 2
..... rhyming pair 2, word 2		..... rhyming pair 2, word 2

Now all you have to do is fill in the gaps! To help you, remember what has just happened in the recitative.

- 1) .....
- 2) .....
- 3) .....
- 4) .....