



Listen To My Story

an opera for ages 8 - 12

Welcome to *Listen To My Story*, a brand new opera created for children aged 8 - 12.

The teaching resources are presented in two PDFs. The first one is for use prior to the workshop and includes background information and activities to introduce students to opera. The second one has classroom activities to explore and prepare for *Listen To My Story*, and includes suggestions for follow up writing activities.

We are so excited to share *Listen To My Story* with you and look forward to seeing you soon.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Joshua van Konkelenberg".

Joshua van Konkelenberg
Artistic Director
Co-Opera



Supported by
Government of South Australia
Department for Education

Listen To My Story

Before the Workshop

Teaching Resource 1 of 2

Introduction

Background information for teachers

The Story Of Co-Opera	3
Listen To My Story	3
Curriculum Links	4

The Story Of Opera

Ideas designed to engage and introduce your students to opera and opera singing with listening and singing activities. Select and adapt as required to suit your students.

Where Does Opera Come From?	5
How Do Opera Singers Sing?	6
What Are The Voices In Opera?	7

Introduction

The Story Of Co-Opera

Co-Opera has been an integral part of South Australia's artistic life since 1990. With a commitment to bringing opera to regional and remote Australian communities, the company creates touring productions that are fresh, accessible and entertaining. Co-Opera also provides valuable professional opportunities for young singers by engaging emerging artists from South Australia and beyond.

The company has toured beloved and well known operas to Australian and overseas including *Pagliacci*, *The Magic Flute*, *La bohème*, *Carmen* and *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Madama Butterfly*, *La traviata*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Così fan tutte*, *Tosca*, *Don Giovanni*, *Kiss Me, Kate*, *Die Fledermaus* and *The Barber of Seville*.

In 2005 Co-Opera produced its first commissioned work *The Portrait* by Becky Llewellyn. Other new operas include *Black Water* by Jeremy Beck and the world première of *Amongst the Trees* by Joshua Van Konkelenberg in 2019.

Co-Opera has had extensive outreach programs and is excited to be touring Listen To My Story to South Australian schools in 2021, supported by the Department for Education.

Listen To My Story

Listen To My Story is a new opera composed for children by Joshua Van Konkelenberg with libretto by Emma Muir-Smith. Students will have an opportunity to meet Joshua in the workshop and at the opera. *Listen To My Story* is 40 minutes in length with four singers covering nine characters. The music features solo and ensemble songs with spoken dialogue between the musical numbers.

Listen To My Story begins with a celebration for Sam's birthday. Her friends ask if her story has arrived, which normally happens on this particular birthday. Sam didn't receive a story, instead she was given a polaroid camera. Through Sam's quest to find her own story, we meet a variety of interesting characters, each with their own story and way of telling it.

The opera explores how we experience and describe identity, how we understand ourselves and our place in the world. The story resolves as Sam realises the people she met on her adventure (the story we experience in the show) become her story, which she documents with the photos she has taken. Through Sam's experience, we learn identity is created through connections to family, community, activity, friends and environment, and discovered through research - listening, observing, feeling and doing.

Joshua's score incorporates musical themes and ideas ranging from the earliest operas to contemporary music theatre, with references to Sondheim, Disney, Joplin, Ravel, Monteverdi and more.

Curriculum Links

Year 3 and 4

Music

Develop aural skills by exploring, imitating and recognising elements of music including dynamics, pitch and rhythm patterns ([ACAMUM084](#))

Practise singing, playing instruments and improvising music, using elements of music including rhythm, pitch, dynamics and form in a range of pieces, including in music from the local community ([ACAMUM085](#))

Create, perform and record compositions by selecting and organising sounds, silence, tempo and volume ([ACAMUM086](#))

Identify intended purposes and meanings as they listen to music using the elements of music to make comparisons, starting with Australian music, including music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples ([ACAMUR087](#))

Year 5 and 6

Music

Explore dynamics and expression, using aural skills to identify and perform rhythm and pitch patterns ([ACAMUM088](#))

Develop technical and expressive skills in singing and playing instruments with understanding of rhythm, pitch and form in a range of pieces, including in music from the community ([ACAMUM089](#))

Rehearse and perform music including music they have composed by improvising, sourcing and arranging ideas and making decisions to engage an audience ([ACAMUM090](#))

Explain how the elements of music communicate meaning by comparing music from different social, cultural and historical contexts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music ([ACAMUR091](#))

Australian Curriculum Capabilities

The themes in *Listen To My Story* of understanding identity in terms of connection to place and people tie into the Personal And Social Capability within the Australian Curriculum.

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/personal-and-social-capability/>

The Story Of Opera

Where Does Opera Come From?

exploring the development of operatic style in terms of music technology

5 - 10 mins

TEACHER - There is music in our lives. Where do you hear music, what are you doing?

prompt as needed to create a list of students' answers on white board, or have students write their answer on a card or similar and have everyone stand in a circle with their answer displayed.

(eg watching TV/youtube, on tiktok, at the movies, in the car, on phones, in games, piano practice, choir) Use this list to guide students to notice how much music there is in our lives, and reflect on what this might show us about the importance of music.

Now let's imagine back in time to over 400 years. There were

no phones - the phones we have now were invented 30 years ago, so no youtube

erase pertinent items if on white board, or have students sit who are holding these items

no computers - the first desktop computer was invented 47 years ago and the first TVs for people's homes were made 61 years ago, so no games and no TV shows

remove items

no music in cars - the first radio was put in a car 97 years ago

remove items

no recording studios - the first one was built 130 years ago

continue until only live music examples are left on the board/standing

and no microphones - the microphone is 145 years old so it hadn't been invented yet. (leave this one for last because this is important to operatic singing style)

have students decide if the live examples left on the list use microphones/amplification and remove them if they do. If any students are still standing collect their cards and let them sit.

We know people need music, how did people hear music 400 years ago, what's left?

examine the remaining items/cards and prompt as needed to have students articulate that singing and acoustic instruments (there wasn't a piano, but there was an instrument like a piano) were used.

Let's look at a recording of one of the first operas ever written, composed 412 years ago in Italy. The words are in Italian and the character is sharing the exciting news that two characters are about to get married.

<https://youtu.be/rSGK7vn1INw?t=621> from 10'21 to 11'21

EXTENSION - You may wish to finish this session by identifying some of the aspects of this opera - singers, costumes, instruments, conductor, set in a theatre etc.

MORE - If students are curious about the theorbo... https://youtu.be/KOsiUhdAQ_U

The Story Of Opera

How Do Opera Singers Sing?

practising singing and applying a vocal technique

10 - 15 mins

Prompt students to recall that dynamics are a musical element.

LISTEN - Ask students to listen to the dynamics of the singer from 10'21 to 10'30. Notice that he sings both quietly and loudly. When he sings loudly is he shouting or singing? Play again as required.

TEACHER - opera singers learn special ways of singing so that they can sing quietly and loudly, without ever shouting, and still be heard without a microphone. Look at this singers' mouth. What is he doing with his lips?

watch 10'21 to 10'44 observing the singer's lips.

REFLECTION - Ask students what they observed.



TEACHER - This is one technique some opera singers use to be heard. It's called fish lips. (If you have band musicians in your class you may want to talk about this as an *embouchure* for singing.)

ACTIVITY - model and have students copy you firstly silently and then applied to a known song. If needed, steer students away from artificially sounding 'operatic'. Fish lips mean we can just sing normally and be heard.

If it suits your class, have the students split into two groups and move some meters away from each other, with the two groups facing. The groups take it in turns to sing this known song with and without fish lips at various volumes, while the other group listens to any differences.

FURTHER INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

For more information on fish lips technique <https://youtu.be/lttIOAK1ZIo> * this is pitched to adults.

The Story Of Opera

What Are The Voices In Opera?

listening to different voice types and experimenting with own voice

10 - 15 mins

You may wish to start this discussion with examples of differently pitched instruments your students are familiar with, or a recap of high and low pitch.

TEACHER - Voices are like other instruments - some are high and some are low. In operas, composers decide which voices to use to suit the characters and tell the story. There are four main voice types in opera.

Soprano

Sopranos have the highest voices. This character is called The Queen Of The Night.

<https://youtu.be/YuBeBjqKSGQ?t=34> this link starts at 34 seconds. (There is a character holding a knife after 58 seconds in this video).

The costume, acting and staging let us know what sort of character this Queen is. She is (as students will probably identify) up to evil plans. Here she is trying to convince someone else to take revenge on an enemy. What does her high singing sound like? (like a villain's evil laughing? Like she's having a tantrum?) If it suits your class you could experiment with similar, high pitched vocalisation and create a vengeful tone.

Mezzo

Mezzos have the next highest voice. This character is called Ježibaba

<https://youtu.be/SvMI6-cLiwg?t=85> this link starts at 1.25

This character is making a potion for a water nymph who wants to live on land with humans and be with the prince she has fallen in love with. (Sound familiar?) Listen to the sound of her voice. Does Ježibaba sound like The Little Mermaid's Ursula? (<https://youtu.be/xfkkMHieqcl>)

Tenor

This tenor is not in a show, he's singing by himself standing on the roof.

<https://youtu.be/XQTDIQU8U9c?t=65> this link starts at 1.05

In this song the character has just discovered that the person he is in love with feels the same way about him. Traditionally men are tenors and they sound high in their voices. If it suits your students you could use text such as 'I just discovered the most amazing and wonderful news' and try speaking it high and low and see how more believable the emotion is pitched higher in the voice.

Baritone

Baritones have low voices. <https://youtu.be/U6S9cQNbENI?t=20> This link start at 20

In this song the character is the 'bird catcher' and sings about how good he is at catching birds. Is he telling the truth or boasting? Does a low voice work for boasting? If it suits your students, you could experiment with boasting in a low and high voice to experiment.