



Opera Starts with Oh!

“Performing in the time of Pergolesi”

JANUARY 2023 PLAY-ON Materials

INTRODUCTION || Giovanni Battista Pergolesi

Giovanni Battista Draghi, or **Pergolesi** was an Italian Baroque composer, violinist, and organist born in 1710! Pergolesi sometimes put poems to music, like the *Stabat Mater*, which is a more serious religious poem, and Pergolesi’s version is among one of the most famous set to music.

Music can help us understand the words we read. It also can help us feel the emotions behind the words. **Do you have a song that you really love because it gets you excited or makes you happy?**

Pergolesi also wrote comic opera, or **opera buffa** in Italian! Do you know what a **comedy** is? Yes, it makes you laugh, like a comedian does!! *La Servante Maîtresse* (french translation of the original Italian version, *La serva padrona*) is a 1733 **intermezzo** (musical act during intermission of a larger show) by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi. Opera Lafayette is performing the french translation of the original!

FUN FACTS:

- When Pergolesi wrote the comedic opera, *La Servante Maîtresse* ([La serva padrona](#)), it was actually performed during the intermission of a more serious opera. **Intermission** is the break during a play, opera, or musical that gives everyone a chance to get water, go to the restroom, talk about what they’ve seen, and then dive right back into the show! Pergolesi wrote *La Servante Maîtresse* as a chance to laugh and help audiences forget their troubles!
- Pergolesi wrote this comedic opera about a year after a big earthquake had shut all the theaters down. Now, we all know what it’s like to have school, theater, and our activities closed because we’re trying to stay safe. And I don’t know about you, but I sure was excited when everything opened up again, and I’m sure the audience members who saw *La Servante Maîtresse* were, too!
- Pergolesi’s work was so good that it sparked a multi-year argument between opera fanatics over whether Italian or French opera was better!

CHECK OUT THESE LINKS TO EXPLORE MORE!

- Here are a few videos of Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater*:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9ZET0kU9qs>
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzOmPUu-F_M
- And a few of *La Servante Maitresse*:
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jp6NEB_aiKU
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XaBaoawlgOI>

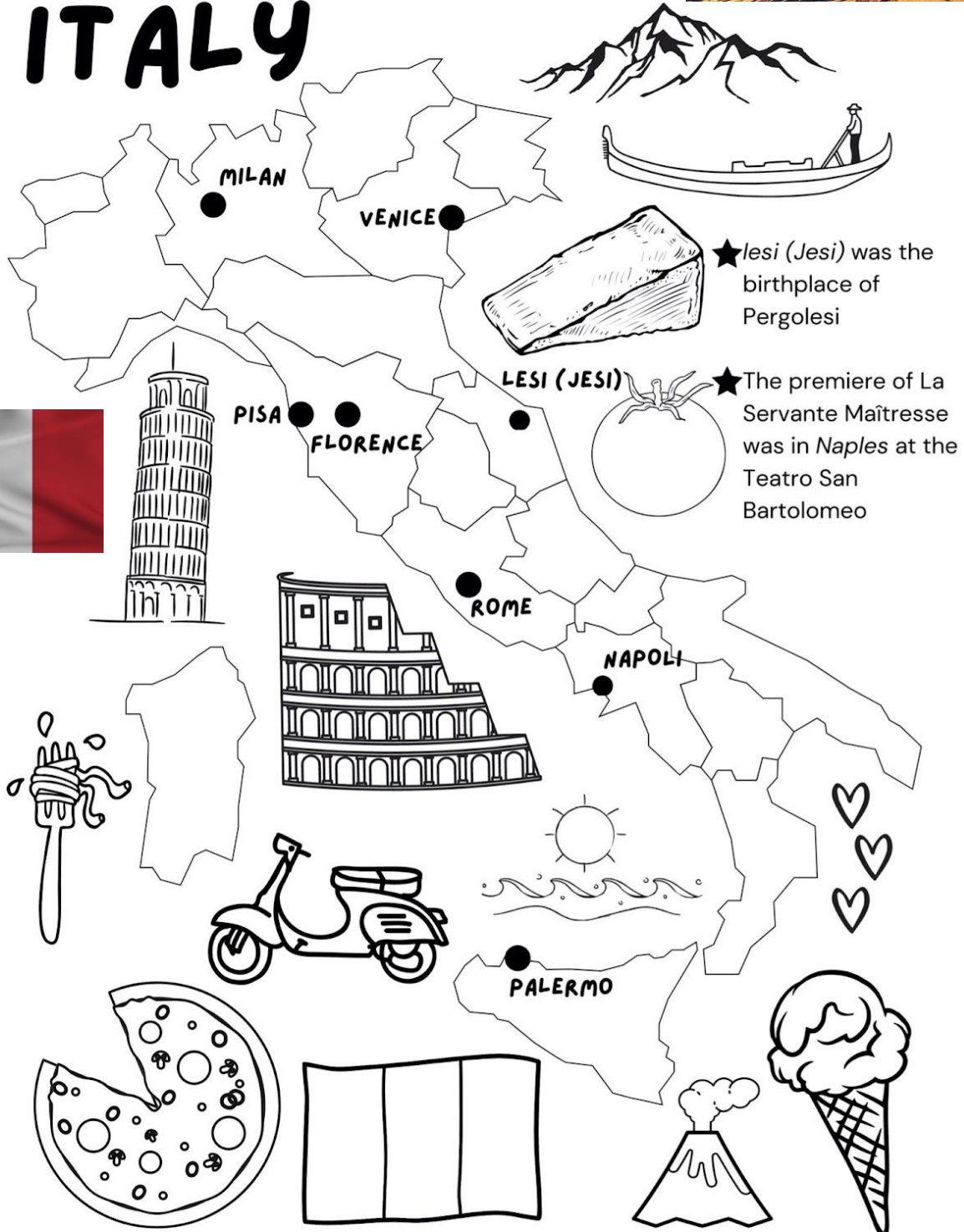


CHECK OUT THE COLORING MAP SHEET BELOW OF ITALY!

- Can you color all the different cities and monuments?
- What colors make up the Italian Flag?
 - That's right, Red-White-Green!
- In Italy ice cream is called Gelato!
 - What's your favorite flavor of ice cream?



ITALY





WHO'S WHO || Characters in *La Servante Maîtresse*

Uberto, an old man, the head of the household, bass vocal part

Serpina, his maid, soprano vocal part

Vespone/Tempesta, his servant/military man, silent actor

The STORY || *La Servante Maîtresse*

Uberto is an older man with a house. Uberto has trouble doing everything on his own, so Uberto has help from a maidservant named Serpina. Serpina is very independent and likes to do things her own way. She doesn't like to be bossed around by Uberto and sometimes she gets distracted by her own activities and thinks it's her house! Uberto has asked for chocolate and Serpina hasn't brought it to him yet, so Uberto gets angry and impatient with Serpina. So, Uberto calls on Serpina to bring him his hat, wig, and coat, but when he does, Serpina says he's not allowed to leave the house! Serpina tells Uberto that from now on, she runs the house and Uberto must listen to her!

Now, Uberto does not take this well, so he orders his other servant, Vespone (who is a silent character) to find a woman for Uberto to marry. Uberto's plan is if he marries someone who will help him, he won't need Serpina's help any longer.

Serpina sees this plot and decides to create a plot of her own. Serpina tells Vespone that she needs his help in tricking Uberto into marrying her, so that she can officially run the house. Serpina, with the help of Vespone, tells a lie to Uberto that she is going to marry a military man named Tempesta. She continues her lie and tells Uberto that because she's marrying Tempesta, she will be leaving the home and apologizes for her behavior (wink wink). Vespone, disguised as Tempesta the military man, shows up at Uberto's house, and without saying a word (because he's a silent actor), demands 4,000 crowns (which is a lot of money), for Serpina's dowry (or the money & gifts you had to give someone to marry a woman of your house).

Serpina knew Uberto wouldn't want to pay, and just like they expect, Uberto refuses to pay 4,000 crowns to Tempesta, so Tempesta says either *pay up* or *marry Serpina*. Uberto agrees to marry Serpina. Serpina & Vespone reveal their trick to Uberto, but Uberto realizes in that moment that he has loved Serpina all along! He decides that he will marry Serpina, and they will run the house together! Ta da!

PLAY ON!

1. After reading this story, what words would you use to describe the characters? (for example, “secretive” or “proud”)
2. What do you think each character wants in this story?
3. Now, if you could give each character a special walk, what would it look like?
4. What about a special movement with their arms?

When you combine how your character moves, with what they’re trying to get from the other characters, all set to music, you are ready for the stage! Theaters can be really big, and your voice and movements must be big so that everyone in the audience can see and hear you! Check out the Teatro della Pergola, a theater in Florence that was built when Pergolesi was alive:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dd9azUXhUn4>



CREATE || BLOB Opera

In music, there are four main vocal parts that singers are divided into, based on how high or low they sing in the music. Together, all four parts make pleasing sounds that create beautiful music, which is called **harmony**. The four parts are:

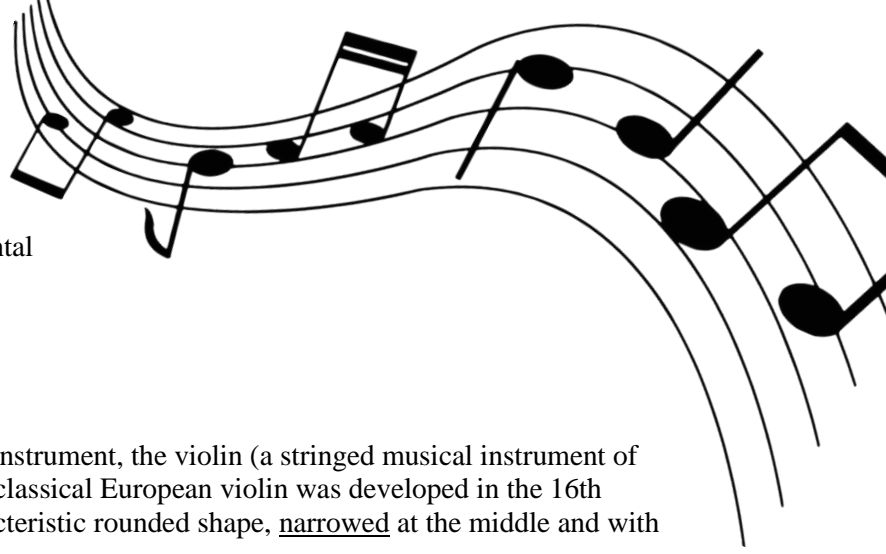
Soprano: the highest of the four standard singing parts

Alto: the second highest of the four standard singing parts (usually lowest part of most women's music)

Tenor: the singing part between alto and bass (usually highest part of most men's music)

Bass: lowest of the four standard singing parts

...:Other musical terms:...:



Music: the art of combining vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion

Lyrics: the words in a song or musical piece

Violinist: someone who plays a more popular instrument, the violin (a stringed musical instrument of treble pitch, played with a horsehair bow. The classical European violin was developed in the 16th century. It has four strings and a body of characteristic rounded shape, narrowed at the middle and with two f-shaped sound holes.).

Organist: someone who plays the organ (large musical instrument having rows of tuned pipes sounded by compressed air, and played using one or more keyboards to produce a wide range of musical effects)

****La Servante Maîtresse was written for a soprano, bass, violin, and organ****

CREATE YOUR OWN OPERA with BLOB Opera HERE!

<https://artsandculture.google.com/experiment/blob-opera/AAHWrq360NcGbw>

Check out this experiment, **where you can create and record your own opera!** Listen to how each voice part (**soprano, alto, tenor, bass**) works together to create **harmonies**. You can take your BLOB opera around the world, and learn lots of famous songs in four-part harmony!

GROUP GAME || Storytelling to Music

1. Print out the sheets provided below and cut the boxes out.
2. Add words of all kinds to your strips of paper (people, places, things, verbs - actions, adjectives - words to describe).
3. Mix them up in a bowl.
4. Choose one person to be the “judge” for this round!
5. Everyone chooses 5 strips of paper.
6. Set a timer for 1 minute and create your own lyrics with 1-2 sentences using the words you chose!
7. Perform them for the judge, letting the judge decide which one makes them laugh the most!
8. Whoever wins gets to be the “judge” next round!

You can also play this on your own as inspiration to create a song! Once you have written a few lines of lyrics, try singing them in different ways! There are a thousand different ways you could create a melody, so have fun trying out new ones each time!

rabbit	tail	rhinoceros
hello	games	New York City
journey	cow	river
goodness	please	hello
baby	why	restaurant
stage	birdseed	brick
running	hopping	backpack
painter	surfing	fifteen
crafts	sparkly	watering
silly	popcorn	cranberries
desk	sunshine	microscope
exploring	without	beautiful
roses	ocean	cottage
tip-toeing	twelve	mustard
watermelon	zig zag	turning
love	explaining	laughing
above	puffin	twenty-five
to	Alaska	beside
deer	celebrate	chartreuse
friendly	cheese	spicy

road	patient	around
dreamer	change	like
positive	flamingo	penguin
radiant	world	living

COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE || Italian Comedy

The Italian theatrical form known as commedia dell'arte (comedy of art) flourished throughout Europe from the 16th through the 18th century.

The commedia dell'arte was a form of popular theater that emphasized ensemble acting; its improvisations were set in a firm framework of masks and common “stock” situations (the mistaken identity, the 'love triangle', the last-minute rescue, and love at first sight.), and its plots were frequently borrowed from the classical literary tradition of the commedia erudita, or literary drama. Professional players who specialized in one role developed an unmatched comic acting technique, which contributed to the popularity of the touring commedia troupes that traveled throughout Europe.

<https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/commedia-dellarte/34381>

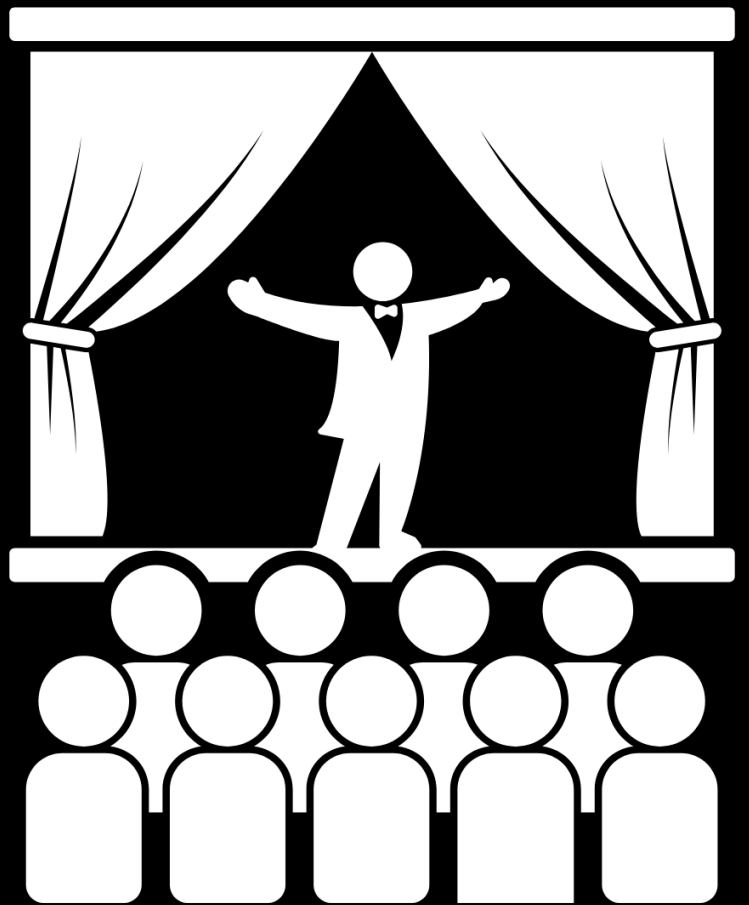
Learn how to create your own comedic “bit” or funny activity onstage with the company members of **Faction of Fools**, a DC-based Commedia Dell'Arte and physical theater company!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okd-Z9AmfLE&t=59s>

COLOR YOUR OWN COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE MASK!



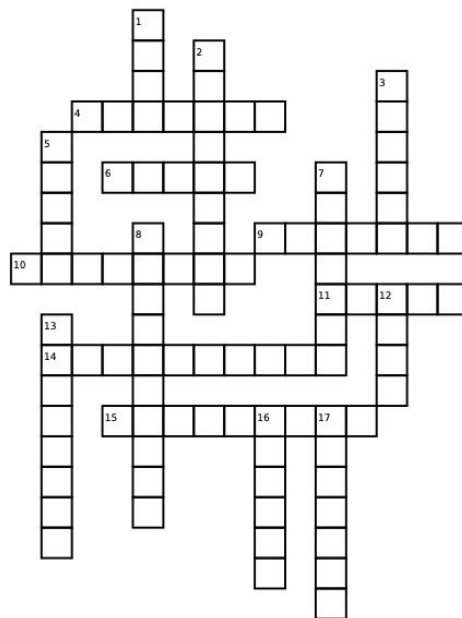
COLOR THE OPERA STAR AND STAGE!



CROSSWORD || Put It All Together!

Check out the crossword puzzle on the next page to test your knowledge of Opera during the time of Giovanni Battista Pergolesi!

Crossword Puzzle



Down:

1. the lowest of the four standard vocal parts
2. someone who plays a more popular string instrument
3. an old man and head of the household in La Servante Maîtresse
5. the vocal part in between alto and bass
7. the maid of the household in La Servante Maîtresse
8. musical act during intermission of a larger show
12. the second highest of the four standard vocal parts
13. someone who writes music
16. the words of music
17. the highest of the four standard vocal parts

Across:

4. the silent servant in La Servante Maîtresse
6. the art of combining vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion
9. when singing parts are put together to make a pleasing sound
10. someone who plays the organ
11. European country home to Pergolesi and many famous operas
14. Italian for comic opera
15. Italian composer famous for La Servante Maîtresse and Sabat Mater