

HOW TO LEARN AN OPERA

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1. Read the entire libretto once, twice, and three times; and read it again throughout the process. Each time you read it, make notes of what information you learn and what new responses and ideas you may have about the work and your role.
2. Watch a video or listen to a recording once, twice, and three times; and listen to more recordings and videos again throughout the process. If you listen to one recording, listen to at least a dozen. If you watch one video, watch as many as you can find. Each time you watch or listen to a new recording, make notes of what information you learn and what new responses and ideas you may have about the work and your role.
3. Read about the work. Do research on the time period (of both the work and when the story takes place), source material, and the composer and librettist. You may include research on the artists who originated the role, as well as previous productions.
4. Translate your text and get an IPA and word-for-word translation. Know your own text and any text being spoken on stage while you're on stage. Know what is going on in scenes when you're not on stage. Write your translation and IPA into your score, and also memorize it. You should be able to perform all of your text as a complete monologue. You should also be able to translate the meaning of any specific word or phrase into your own words, as well as provide subtext.
5. Learn the music. See "Steps to Learning Music" for a step-by-step approach to this crucial process, which includes making important dramatic discoveries about WHY the composer set the words the way s/he did. Once you can accurately perform what the composer intended, to further your understanding of the work and deepen your connection to the music, repeatedly ask yourself the following questions about every note and gesture: WHY? WHY NOT? and WHAT IF?
6. Research your character. See the "Character Study Guide" for a step-by-step approach to this crucial process, which includes synthesizing much of the work you've done already and beginning to feel the character in your own body.
7. Coach the role with a diction coach, a vocal coach or conductor, your voice teacher, and an acting coach or director. You will have to work steadily at taking their input and making it your own.
8. Stage the work. This can be done on your own or within a production. If you are sufficiently prepared up until this point, the staging process will be enjoyable. You will learn new things from your collaborators and cast members and you will make adjustments and additions to all the work you've done so far.
9. Perform the work. An opera is not fully learned until you perform it. The audience is the final step in understanding how to communicate the work and why. The more you perform the work, the more this step informs your knowledge of the work and the role.

10. Repeat the entire process again. Repetition of each part of this process and the process as a whole is crucial in taking your performance to the next level. Should you perform the role again, repeat the entire process. Teaching the role to someone else will also help strengthen your knowledge of the material.