

Activity Sheet for *The Journey*, Grade 6-8, Music

1. Read the text about the musical genres, opera, and oratorio.
2. Underline the most important facts.
3. Compare these facts in a table.

Opera or Music drama

An opera is a musical and dramatic art form that brings together lyrics, instrumental music, singing and acting. Opera involves soloist singers, an orchestra and usually a choir. The first operas date from about 1600. Monteverdi was one of the opera composers of this time. Other much known composers of operas were: Georg Friedrich Haendel (1685-1759), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1765-1791) and Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901). The lyrics in an opera are called the libretto.

An opera is comprised of different pieces such as ensembles like duets or trios, the solo airs and choir pieces. An orchestra piece, called the overture, usually happens at the beginning of operas.

Opera singers have different voices according to their range of tones and their volume. Men's voices are divided into the deep voice of the bass and the high voice of the tenor. The voice that lies in between both is named the baritone. For women the deep voice is called alto, the high voice is a soprano and the one in between is the mezzo-soprano. In terms of volume the voices can be light, lyric or dramatic in their nature. In the classical operas from recent centuries there are from about 5 to 10 solo singers.

The size of the orchestra increased over the centuries. In the 18th century the orchestra was quite small, made up of string instruments, woodwind instruments, and a Continuo instrument like a harpsichord (or organ). In the late 19th century and early 20th century the symphony orchestra became big including more string instruments, all wood wind and brass wind instruments, diverse percussion instruments, and harp.

Oratorio

An oratorio is a sacred composition that involves solo singers, an orchestra and a choir. This setting resembles the opera. But an oratorio is not staged. There is usually no interaction between the characters on stage. Further, it has no costume design.

The texts of an oratorio have religious origin. In the oratorios from the 18th and 19th century texts are based on the bible. An oratorio involves Solo-arias and choir parts, ensemble pieces like duets and recitatives. Recitatives are a mixture of sung and spoken recitals. In the recitatives the most part of the story is told, whereas in the arias some phrases that express certain emotions are repeated several times.

Well known oratorios are *The Messiah* by Georg Friedrich Haendel or the Christmas oratorio by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750).

An oratorio is usually performed in a concert setting, e.g. in a concert hall or a church.

The Journey

Composer Melissa Hui is seeking the form of a semi-staged oratorio for *The Journey*. Others call it a music drama. The mythological text in *The Journey* is the equivalent to a religious text. The fact that the piece is staged reminds us more of an opera.

In contemporary music the limits of the genres are broadened. The genres seem to be changed, developed or fused together. Defining and categorizing becomes more difficult.

Compare the genres “opera” and “oratorio”.

Opera	Oratorio

Please describe in your own words what is special about *The Journey*?

Work in pairs. Read the list of Terminology. Then ask your neighbour to describe a word without looking at the sheet.

List of Music Terminology

Alto is the name for the female low voice.

An **Aria** is a piece for solo singer from an opera or an oratorio.

Baritone is the name for the male voice that lies in between the Tenor and the Bass voice.

Bass is the name for the male low voice.

A **Duet** is an ensemble for two singers.

Ensemble has two meanings. It can be an Ensemble of musicians that play music together.

In an opera or oratorio it is any musical piece where two or more solo-singers are involved.

Harmony is the term for the chord structure of music.

A **Libretto** is the text for a dramatic work like an opera.

Mezzo-soprano is the name for the female voice in between a soprano and an alto.

An **Opera** is a musical composition that involves solo singers, an orchestra and mostly a choir. It combines music and drama. So, it is fully staged and performed with costumes and stage design.

An **Oratorio** is a musical composition that involves solo singers, a choir and an orchestra. It is based on a sacred text, mostly from the Bible. It is usually not staged but presented in concert-form.

An **Overture** is the opening orchestral work of an opera or oratorio.

A **Recitative** is a mixture of sung and spoken recital in an opera or oratorio.

Soprano is the name for the female high voice.

SATB choir is the name for a choir with the four types of voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass.

Tenor is the name for the male high voice.