

Composing Melodies



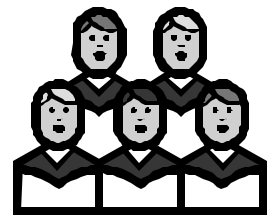
This chapter is intended either for a music specialist or the classroom teacher, if he/she has the training to arrange and notate music.

Although Utah Festival Opera will provide a music specialist for Utah teachers, they and others should be familiar with the method and philosophy of **Opera by Children**, so they also need to study this section. There are many things the classroom teacher can do to prepare the children to compose their melodies. In any case, this process is one that always involves both the music specialist AND the teacher as you will see as you study the pages to follow:

Teachers should:

Sing every day

1. Sing every day with the children. (See Chapter One, "Start With A Song")
2. Stay in the classroom while the music specialist is there.
3. Be part of the process by encouraging the children as they begin to make up tunes.



Let the children own the work

When the teacher has received the finished score and recording, it is his/her sole responsibility to help the children learn the music. This will be easy if the children have written the lyrics and melodies themselves. If they own the work, it will be simple for them to memorize. If the teacher or a parent or specialist have at any time taken over the creative process, it will be difficult for the children to learn it.

Music Specialist:

Refer to "Start with a Song" for singing games and warm-up exercises to get the children happy, relaxed and comfortable singing for you.

Compose

To help the children learn to compose melodies, ask them to sing their names to you. Sing questions to them and ask them to sing their answers. Then have them ask you questions in song that you reply to in the same way. No rhyme or meter is necessary, just the free flow of singing to each other. This is a very natural thing for children to do. Be comfortable singing to them in an easy voice. Encourage the teacher to do the same.



(Teachers should: repeat this exercise throughout the day when the music specialist is not there, so that speaking in song becomes natural to them.)

Music Specialist:



Yawn
Sigh

Ask the children to yawn and sigh. Then yawn and *sing a sigh* as high and low as they can go. Let them feel how easy it is to sing in their high voices when they are relaxed, as with yawning and sighing.

Recitative
Aria
Chorus

Music Specialist: Explain to the students that there are three kinds of singing in an opera: *recitative*, *aria* and *chorus*. Explain that *recitative* is conversation set to music imitating natural speech and that an *aria* is a song for one voice and a *chorus* is a song for an entire group.

Recitative is conversation set to music imitating natural speech. It will be taken directly from the dialogue that the students have already written. Recitative must have words that can be set to rhythm, but it should not rhyme.

Simplify **Teacher:** The children should have already created a libretto that is simple enough to be sung easily. Experience has shown that when children write words for characters, they usually will devise simple phrases. It is an adult's inclination to put in rhyme, meter and complicated sentences. However, if the children have written long involved phrases, it is the teacher's responsibility to have gently guided them to *simplify*. (See page 24, "Adapting Your Story...") The essential goal is to continue to allow the children ownership and control while teaching the principle of simplification.

Thoughts
Personalities
Feelings
Moods
Emotions
Setting
Action
Relationship

Music Specialist:

Be prepared to watch for places in the libretto where it will be appropriate to help the children expand the opera to include arias and choruses. There may be a reflective moment when internal *thoughts* could be expressed that would show the *personality and feelings* of a character. Or a time that would portray a mood or show an emotional peak.

The children may want to use an aria or chorus to explain the setting or action of the story. It is the music specialist's responsibility to assist the children in expanding these parts of the libretto into arias or choruses.

It is essential that the aria be an important part of the opera, not just a song thrown in. It could reveal relationships between characters or tell a little more in depth of what is going on. Remember to keep **the arias (solos) to an absolute minimum**, but to encourage the children to create as many opportunities as possible for **duets, trios and choruses**.

Compose
Composer
Arrange
Arranger
Accompaniment
Score

Specialist: Tell the children that they are going to be *composers* now and compose melodies. Explain to them that you will be the *arranger*. That means that you will write their melodies down using the computer and a special program that lets you do this for them. Tell the children that you will *arrange* accompaniment to their *composition*. Tell the children that you will bring a completed *score* to class in a few weeks when you have finished the process of *arranging* their music.

Major
Minor
Augmented
Diminished

Play major, minor, diminished and augmented chords on the piano. Ask them to tell you whether they sound happy, sad, scary, excited, and angry. Ask them to **describe the feeling** that different chords create. Tell them that they will choose which sound they want to go with the lines of their libretto.



Teacher: Have the libretto either projected on the wall or written on big pieces of paper for the children to look at as they compose. (This can become a wonderful reading exercise.)

Specialist: Help the children to understand the natural rhythm and inflection of speech by saying their lines in a rhythmic pattern with proper emphasis and inflection. Have them clap their hands, and speak each line. Once they are comfortable doing this as a group, ask if anyone would like to try it alone.

Validate
the
children



Here is an important “validating” opportunity. When a child offers a suggestion or makes any attempt to contribute, he must be affirmed and praised for his contribution. You will notice as you proceed that the more validating that is going on for the brave children, the more the others will begin to participate.

Once the group has settled on a rhythm for a line of dialogue, ask a child to sing it to you. You may call on the children; you may ask for raise of hands; the teacher may call on them. There is no rule here. You need to be sensitive to the class. Give every child an opportunity to participate, but never require it.

As each line is sung, record it and/or notate it as you go. You may write the notes above the words and divide the syllables into measures showing the downbeats and rests appropriately. This is especially helpful with older children.



However, experience has shown that the classroom time is precious and the attention span of young children is short, so it is easier to use a small cassette recorder, or karaoke machine.



Sometimes children want to participate in making up the melodies, but are too shy to raise their hands. There are several techniques you may use – and more you will think of on your own.

- ? Move up and down the rows allowing each child have a turn to create a melody. If you do this, be prepared for the child who sincerely does not want to sing. **They must not feel badly about not singing and must not be forced to do so.** When you come to a child who is too timid or afraid and you can see they are just not going to sing, ask them to choose a child who has his or her hand raised. The child they choose then sings the line and t
- ? You may also divide the class into several groups of children. Give each of them a section of the libretto to work on together. They will each go to a different part of the

room and work together until they are happy with the melody they have created. Then they come back to the music specialist and the tape recorder and sing away!

Affirmation
Validation
Trust
Risk
Learning

Teacher: It is very helpful for you to call on the children by name. You know your class. This is a wonderful opportunity for children to receive *affirmation or validation* for something unrelated to core subjects. A child who cannot do well in math or reading may do very well at making up his own tunes; use this time **with** the music specialist to build rapport and *trust* with the children. Remember, when children *trust*, they are more willing to *risk*, and all *learning* takes place at the edges of risk.

Creative
Opera

Specialist: If there are many solo parts, encourage the class to turn them into duets, trios or choruses...sung in unison, of course. For instance, you can easily turn one lion into two or three lions – a mommy, daddy and baby – or three brothers or sisters – or you can have an entire pride of lions. Just because the story says there was one big bad wolf, doesn't mean the children cannot rewrite the story to be several big bad wolves. This is *creative opera*. The more original the better.... Do not be afraid to encourage the children to change something in the script if it is clear that you are going to end up with a lot of little soloists on the stage. Remember: there is strength in numbers!

Strength in Numbers



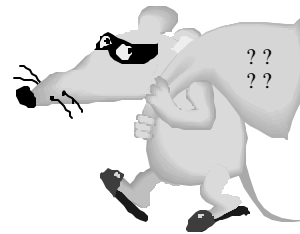
However, the music specialist must not decide for the children and announce what they should and are going to do! This is the children's work, not ours.

Repetition *Repetition* in all music is natural, common and highly desirable. In opera it is traditional and in children's opera it is critical. Teach the students this principle. Feel free to suggest that they repeat certain musical themes or even entire songs throughout the opera. It will give it a sense of cohesiveness that is important and will make the opera easier to learn.

Example: if they are writing a new version of "The Three Little Pigs", it might be possible to have the pigs make up a song that they sing each time they move from house to house, or, as in the Disney version, whenever the wolf knocks on the door.

Ethical
Honest

Do not let the children use songs they know... Remember it is their creation, and just as with the story line, they do not want to "steal" from another composer. That is not *ethical* or *honest*.



Repeat a phrase

Teach the children that they may *repeat phrases*.

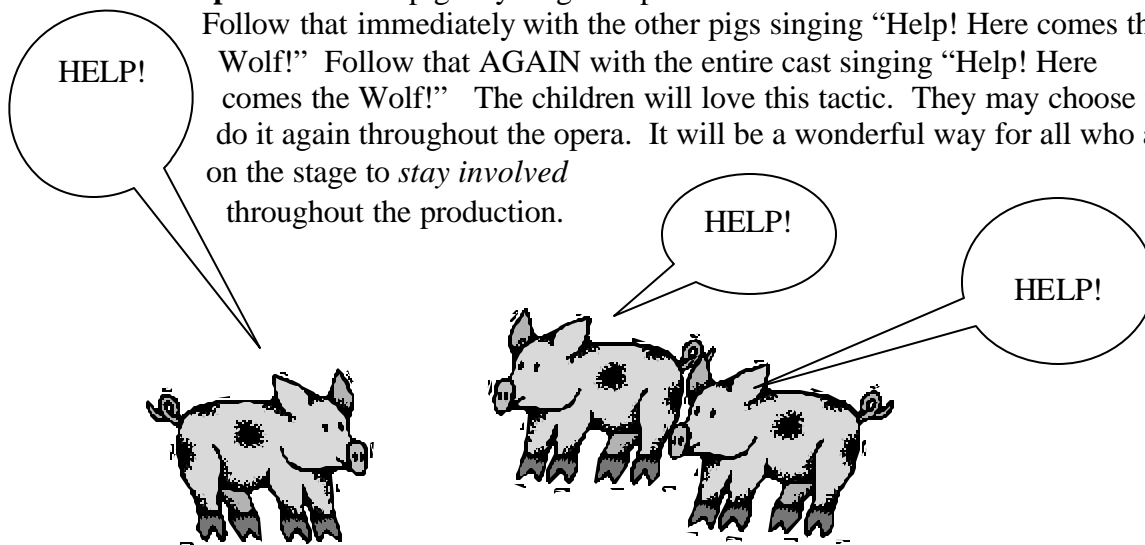
Example: If one child wanted to sing a phrase one way and another child wanted to sing it another way, what would you do? Suggest that they sing it twice – once each way. A nice musical phrase could also be sung low and then higher and again even higher. You may make suggestions or show them ways of taking what they have *composed* and *repeating* it in another part of the opera. After you have done this, they may think of places they want to do it again in other parts of the composition.

Suggest that characters repeat phrases sung by others.

Everyone stays involved

Example: One little pig may sing “Help! Here comes the Wolf!”

Follow that immediately with the other pigs singing “Help! Here comes the Wolf!” Follow that AGAIN with the entire cast singing “Help! Here comes the Wolf!” The children will love this tactic. They may choose to do it again throughout the opera. It will be a wonderful way for all who are on the stage to *stay involved* throughout the production.



Specialist and Teacher: Throughout the process, remind the children that *recitative* means *sing as if spoken*. They need not rhyme everything. Only in arias and in choruses would they possibly want rhyme, and even then, it is not required.

Evaluation: Teacher and Specialist should ask themselves whether every child was invited to participate. Did each child feel comfortable and included? Did each one actually participate in some way? Remember that within Opera for Children by Children, **the process is more important than the product**. This opera will be the children’s creation. The most significant question to ask is, “Who composed the melodies - the children, the music specialist or the teacher?” The answer must be: the children.

USOE Fine Arts Core Objectives - Music

Standard 1

The student will develop the voice and body as instruments of musical expression.

Standard 3

The student will create music through improvising, 1530-03 arranging, and composing.