

## OPERA UNLIMITED STUDY GUIDE For TEACHERS

Dear Teacher,

We are delighted that you will be bring your class to see three of Aesop’s Fables, a child-size (~40 minutes) opera adapted from the fables: The Ant and the Grasshopper, The Lion and the Mouse, and The Tortoise and the Hare. After the performance, our cast will spend a few more minutes listening to your students’ comments and answering their questions.

As with all OPERA UNLIMITED productions, we have created simple sets and costumes to help students identify with the characters. Sometimes our performers step outside the story to connect with the audience, an unusual happening in an adult opera performance.

Studies show that students who are well-prepared before attending an opera and who engage in follow-up activities have an enhanced experience. To assist you, OPERA UNLIMITED has prepared this Guide, incorporating the New Mexico Common Core State Standards, including “Character Counts” issues, which offer kids a framework for ethical living. Please use the vocabularies, suggested activities, and discussion topics to help prepare your class for their experience and to spark further learning afterwards.

We need to know what kind of impact our performance makes on you and your students, since we incorporate audience comments and suggestions in our future programming. We would appreciate it if you would complete the evaluation form and return it to us at [operaunlimitednm@gmail.com](mailto:operaunlimitednm@gmail.com). Consider having your students draw a picture or write about their favorite part of the opera and send it to us at 3167 San Mateo Blvd. NE ABQ 87110. We’d love to see what they think!

This handout includes the following:

- General information about behavior at a live performance

- General opera terms and terms specific to this opera, to be used to understand music concepts and as vocabulary builders

- Information about today’s opera, including background, composer, names of characters and a synopsis

- Moral lessons that show the importance of “Character Counts” issues

- Suggested follow-up activities, relating the opera to literature, speech, body movement, art, and foreign languages.

- An Evaluation form

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### **Preparing Before the Performance:**

Please review the enclosed materials before preparing your class for its opera experience. IF you have time, review the original fable with your students. Remind your class that being at a live performance differs from watching television at home.

### **How Opera Differs from TV and Movies:**

Many students have never attended a live performance before and must be reminded that the performers are aware of their reactions. The singers work hard to keep their viewers involved and they appreciate an enthusiastic response. However, they are also aware of disturbances, such as people talking to their neighbors or otherwise not paying attention.

### **Suggested Rules of Audience Courtesy:**

- No talking: other people want to hear and see what is going on
- Stay seated until the opera is over
- Laugh if you think something is funny
- Clap if you have enjoyed the performance and think it was done well
- Take your things with you when you leave

### **Voice Types**

Voices range from high to low. Each voice is appropriate to certain types of singing and characters. This opera features three voice types: a baritone, a mezzo-soprano and a soprano.

**Soprano**—the highest female voice; generally the heroine of the story

**Mezzo-Soprano** (Alto)—the lower female voice;

**Baritone**—the middle range for men; often the hero's best friend or a villain.

**Tenor**—the highest male voice; often the hero – not used in this opera.

### **Opera Terms**

Accompanist: pianist who plays music for the singers

Composer: the person who writes the music for the opera

Costumes: clothing worn by singers to evoke a period, place or person

Dialogue: words in an opera, may be spoken or sung

Libretto: the words spoken or sung by each character; the librettist may also be the composer

Make-up: wigs and cosmetics worn to help create the character

Opera: a story set to music including arias (solos), duets, and choruses

Score: written record of notes and words

Set: painted or otherwise created background that identifies the scene in an opera

Synopsis: summary of the story as it unfolds onstage through Acts and Scenes

Theme: underlying message or moral; what the story is really about

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### **Background**

Aesop was a storyteller who lived in ancient Greece thousands of years ago. He wrote many fables, now collectively known as *Aesop's Fables*. This opera presents three of these fables.

A fable is a story that is short and to the point. Fables often use animals to teach a moral or a valuable life lesson.

### **Characters**

*The Ant and the Grasshopper*: 2 Ants, Queen Ant, Grasshopper, Bear, Hawk

*The Lion and the Mouse*: Mouse, Lion, Hunter

*The Tortoise and the Hare*: A tortoise (a kind of turtle), a Hare (like a rabbit), Robin

### **Synopsis**

*The Ant and the Grasshopper*: One day in late autumn a family of Ants were bustling about in the warm sunshine, drying out the grain they had stored up during the summer, when a starving Grasshopper, his fiddle under his arm, came up and humbly begged for a bite to eat. "What!" cried the Ants in surprise, "haven't you stored anything away for the winter? What in the world were you doing all last summer?" "I didn't have time to store up any food," whined the Grasshopper; "I was so busy making music that before I knew it the summer was gone." The Ants shrugged their shoulders in disgust. "Very well" they cried, "now dance!" And they turned their backs on the Grasshopper and went on with their work.

*The Lion and the Mouse*: A Lion lay asleep in the forest, his great head resting on his paws. A timid little Mouse came upon him unexpectedly, and in her fright and haste to get away, woke the Lion. Roused from his nap, the Lion laid his huge paw angrily on the tiny creature to kill her. "Spare me!" begged the poor Mouse. "Please let me go and some day I will surely repay you." The Lion was much amused to think that a Mouse could ever help him. But he was generous and finally let the Mouse go. Some days later, while hunting, the Lion was caught in a hunter's net. Unable to free himself, he filled the forest with his angry roaring. The Mouse knew the voice and quickly found the Lion struggling in the net. Running to one of the great ropes that bound him, she gnawed it until it parted, and soon the Lion was free.

*The Tortoise and the Hare*: There once was a speedy hare who bragged about how fast he could run. Tired of hearing him boast a tortoise challenged him to a race. The Hare ran rapidly down the road for a while and then paused to rest. He looked back at the Tortoise and cried out, "How do you expect to win this race when you are moving at such a slow pace?" The Hare lay down and fell asleep. The Tortoise walked and walked never stopping until he came to the finish line. When the Hare woke up, the Tortoise was almost at the finish line. The Hare ran as fast as he could, but the Tortoise won the race

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### **Morals**

**The Ant and the Grasshopper:** There is a time for work and a time for play. Prepare today for the needs you will have tomorrow.

**The Lion and the Mouse:** No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.

**The Tortoise and the Hare:** You can be more successful by doing things slowly and steadily than by acting quickly and carelessly.

### **Vocabulary Builders (Before or after the performance – select according to grade level).**

amass, toil, industrious, encroach, peckish, perchance, initiative, dissolute, odious, tarry, err, verily, opaline, vermin, delectable, reverie, uproarious, chortling, unabating, magnanimous, conscientious, meritorious, stupendous, noblesse, ruckus, reciprocate, knave, fleet, celerity, verve, audaciously, plight, heady, disparity, persevere, feat, prevail, attest

### **Post-performance Suggested Activities as appropriate for grade level**

Have students compare the opera's story to the fable

Ask students to draw a picture of their favorite part of the opera and send the pictures to Opera Unlimited

Ask students to write a letter to one of the characters and send it to Opera Unlimited

Have students act out a modern-day version of the fable

### **Discussion Topics (in addition to the moral and vocabulary)**

How did the music help you understand the fable? (For example, did the music get loud when the fable got scary?)

In what ways does the music make the fable different from the written fable?

Fables are fictitious stories that relay a moral in the end. Is there anything about each of these fables that seems to apply to the world in which we live?

Was there anything realistic about any of the fables?

#### *The Ant and the Grasshopper*

What are the personality traits of the Ant?

What are the personality traits of the Grasshopper?

What is the moral of the fable of The Ant and The Grasshopper.

#### *The Lion and the Mouse*

What is the relationship between the Lion and the Mouse?

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In the context of this fable, how do we define worth?

Explain how this fable illustrates how small acts of kindness are never wasted.

### *The Tortoise and the Hare*

Why did the Hare stop during the race to sleep?

How did the Tortoise persistence help him win the race?

What is the moral of the fable The Tortoise and the Hare?