

Opera

What is opera:

An opera is a theatre piece, like a play. But instead of speaking their lines the characters sing them. Even Broadway musicals such as *Les Miserables*, *Evita*, and *Cats* are actually operas.

Operas were invented to combine the best of all possible worlds - awesome singing, great-sounding orchestras, riveting drama, stunning dance, spectacular sets, lavish costumes, fancy lighting and special effects.

Some people avoid opera because they think it's an old, musty highbrow artform reserved for people who wear tuxedos and long dresses. Most people would rather go to a movie. The funny thing is, until very recently going to an opera was like going to a movie. People went to an opera as you might go to a rock concert: to have FUN! They went to see their favourite stars and hear their favourite tunes. They wore casual clothes; they brought along food and drinks; they even cheered during the show. Classical music was their pop music.

Where does opera come from?

Opera originated from the Ancient Greeks (800-100BC). They developed dramatic versions of religious tales (myths), which included singing and chanting. People would sit outside in an amphitheatre watching a live performance of their favourite religious story.

It was not until the 10th century that opera was developed. Imagine you are a monk. Your job is to spread the message of Christianity, the hot new religion sweeping the land. You have a brainstorm: "Hey, didn't the ancient Greeks use some kind of musical plays in their religious service? Why, we could do that too!" This is exactly what happened. To break the boredom of long services, the Europeans started to write little Bible opera-ettes, complete with costumes and singing.

Musicals became a part of **Italian** entertainment. To try to re-create the glories of the lost Greek art, a particular group of composers, in 1590, started meeting. They called themselves the **Florentine Camareta**. They developed the opera by introducing the **recitative** and the **aria**.

We now know that opera was born in ancient Greece and raised in Italy. But one in one, other countries adopted opera as their own, taking it in new and different directions. These other countries include France, Germany and England.

In full sentences answer the following questions:

- Q1. Where did opera originate?
- Q2. In the past was opera popular? Why?
- Q3. What happened in the 10th century?
- Q4. Does opera still exist today? If so give some examples.