



OPERA CAROLINA

LEONCAVALLO

PAGLIACCI

RACHMANINOFF

ALEKO

Insights. Highlights.

All that makes for a great night.

Your guide to making the most of this double dose of opera.

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Know How

Get There

Visting Center City doesn't have to be a tough trip.

Blumenthal
Performing Arts
Center

130 N. Tryon St
Charlotte, NC 28202

Ride. Hop on the Lynx
Lightrail. Check out
the options [here](#).

Drive. Directions from
door to door [here](#).

Park. Participating
garages are just \$5.
Find details [here](#).

The Belk Theater.

Make any seat in the house the best one.

Attending an opera in the Belk Theater is an experience not to be forgotten. The performance you are attending is the **final dress rehearsal** in which the cast performs one last full run-through of the opera before opening night. Just like a regular performance, there will be an intermission(s) between acts.

Upon entering the theater, notice the production crew's station in the orchestra level seating (the lowest level of seating). The crew is set up with computers and headsets to allow them to communicate with people backstage to ensure that the performance runs smoothly. During this final rehearsal they will be making sure all cues and technical features of the performance are in place. Also notice the supertitles

(English translations of the lyrics being sung) that are projected onto a screen above the stage.

Please remember that this is a **working performance** and the performers on stage are very aware of their audience, especially a distracting audience. The polite audience member should always refrain from talking and stay seated during a performance. Nothing shows more respect and appreciation for the performers on stage than giving them your full attention.

Shout it Out

Give a shout out to the cast after a beautiful aria or at the end of the evening – literally! Shout **"Bravi!"** for a job well done to the whole cast, **"Brava!"** to the diva who aced it, or **"Bravo!"** to the guy who left it all on the stage.

Opera Carolina

Transfixed and transformed by our community.



Then, now, & years from now

Let's take a journey back to 1948: the Charlotte Music Club is formed by a handful of arts enthusiasts who realize that Charlotte's artistic landscape –but more importantly, cultural community– would be enhanced by opera performances. Fast forward to today: Opera Carolina is a 67 year-old company that's still blossoming, hitting new highs with each season of glorious music, drama, and all that encompasses the operatic art form. Your resident Opera continues to bring high-quality standards of the operatic repertoire to stages near you, but is also continually striving to perform lesser-known gems.

What does our future hold? A rich commitment to our community –which we take seriously– to continue enriching the lives of citizens from all walks of life; a continual quest to produce excellent opera from all eras on our stage; and, most importantly, to connect our community.

The people

In the early days of Opera Carolina, volunteers designed the sets, built costumes, sang in the chorus, filled leading roles and, of course, sold tickets and held fundraisers to support the company.

Now a fully professional company that not only produces Opera performances on a large scale but also travels programs into local schools and community venues, we never forget the legacy of the original volunteers who made this company the what it is today. Opera Carolina is rooted

in the Carolinas; 90% of our company live and work right here in our region, complimenting the international artists who join the resident company to perform on our mainstage. We guess you can say we've got Carolina on our mind.

The House

If the paragraphs before didn't sell you on our commitment to our community, maybe information on the Opera Center will. We may be 67 years old, but we've just moved out on our own. Opera Carolina now resides in the historic Biberstein house, in the Elizabeth neighborhood. The last remaining historic home in the Uptown radius, Opera Carolina's new digs are as much a part of the community as is the company.

Built in 1906, the Biberstein House was designed and lived in by R. C. Biberstein, one of the noted mill architects of the Southeast. Mr. Biberstein is credited with building many of the mills in the Charlotte region, including the Highland Park #3 mill. Mr. Biberstein eventually moved his business into this house, his talents and self-designed home playing a role in the New South Industrial movement. Today, the home is registered as a Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmark.

The house has since been adapted into offices and is now the proud home of Opera Carolina. The Opera Center hosts the company's administrative offices and also serves as space for auditions, recitals, and more. *Our doors are always open.*



Literature

Mark Twain
Lord Byron
Horatio Alger
Walter Scott
Alexander Pushkin

Visual Art

Eugène Delacroix
Edward Hopper
Francisco Goya
George Bellows
Hudson River School

Composers

Frédéric Chopin
Franz Liszt
Pietro Mascagni
Hector Berlioz
Giacomo Puccini

Stylin' Romanticism + Realism

The nitty gritty on what makes the movements.

Not only are you getting a double dose of opera, you're also getting two styles – all in one sitting! Our Russian friend, Rachmaninoff, hails as one of his homeland's last Romantic composers while Italy's native son, Leoncavallo, helped put verismo opera on the map.

Before we get into what makes Romanticism and Realism different -we call it verismo in Italian- let's cover the basics about what they are. Remember, artistic movements or styles we experience in music are also present in the other forms of art (visual, literature, dance, etc.) and in many cases began in an art form other than music.

Romanticism

- Plot events drive the story
- Language is usually literary or poetic
- Settings are usually exotic (think distant or fictional lands)
- Characters' mental states revealed through outbursts, tirades, extreme emotions
- Story is mostly *told*
- Details used for effect (atmosphere, mood, etc.)
- Characters are usually peculiar, unusual people (avengers, bandits, gypsies)

Realism

- Characters drive the plot
- Language is commonplace, ordinary
- Settings are ordinary (villages, estates, small cities)
- Characters' mental states are revealed through dialogue, inner monologue, dreams/thoughts
- Story is mostly *shown*
- Details portray illusion of reality (dirty windows, unkempt appearances, etc.)
- Characters are usually ordinary people in typical, mundane situations

Give a Google to the names in the boxes to discover who belongs to what style or movement.

Transfixed

Same plot, different styles of storytelling.

While the essential plot is the same, the ways in which the story is told are quite different.

Romantic Rachmaninoff finesses us with a fine blade, while our Realist Leoncavallo bludgeons us with betrayal.

Synopses

Cast

Old Gypsy, bass

Zemfira's father + leader of the gypsy clan

Zemfira, soprano

Old Gypsy's daughter + once in love with Aleko

Aleko, baritone

Outsider who left society to live with the gypsies

Young Gypsy, tenor

Zemfira's lover

Old Gypsy Woman

Gypsy Chorus

Aleko

It's evening along the bank of a river, Caucasus mountains. With campfires lit, tents pitched, and songs in the air about the freedoms of nomadic life, our band of gypsies have made camp for the night. An Old Gypsy sings his story of love long ago for Mariula, who deserted him for another leaving him to raise their daughter, Zemfira.

We're brought back to the present as Aleko, who has left civilized life for the gypsy life, reminisces on the once-passionate days he shared with his lover, Zemfira. At the Old Gypsy's story, Aleko is outraged that he didn't take revenge on Mariula. Zemfira speaks up and reveals her true colors, taking her mother's side. Mirroring her mother, she thinks love is free and has secretly taken a young gypsy lover.

That evening Zemfira meets the Young Gypsy before returning to camp. She teases Aleko about her young, wild lover. Left alone, Aleko frets and broods on the state of his relationship, and at dawn he catches Zemfira and the young gypsy together. He flies into a jealous rage, killing them both. Living vicariously through Aleko, the Old Gypsy spares his life but the band of gypsies cast him out forever.

Pagliacci

Before the curtain opens, Tonio joins us on stage. He begs us to think of the actors and how they are real men and women -flesh and blood, not just fictional characters- with real feelings and passions. And he advises that this opera will paint a scene from life...

A traveling troupe of actors rolls into town, and their leader, Canio, invites the villagers to attend the show that evening. While everyone makes nice and heads for a drink, the actor Tonio stays behind for a few moments only to be teased about his feelings for Nedda, Canio's wife, which mirror his role on the stage. At all this teasing, Canio reminds them that real life and the acting on the stage are not the same – the outcomes would be very different if, in fact, Nedda did have a lover. They all leave for their drinks and Nedda is left to herself to consider Canio's words, which were as if he was in her head. While she's left to fret, Tonio suddenly appears and confesses his desire for her. Nedda is not impressed.

While the aspiring lover exits, the real lover, Silvio, enters. He begs Nedda to run away with him since the troupe will soon be gone. She's head over heels and agrees to his plan. Little does she know Tonio brought Canio back to spoil her secret. Blood boils but Beppe cools it down – it's time to begin the show.

The show begins and the four players proceed in acting out an eerily similar scene. Zanni (Tonio) assures Columbine (Nedda) that her husband Pagliaccio (Canio) is away when he pours his heart out to her. Columbine brushes him off and awaits her lover, Harlequin. Harlequin arrives, Zanni is sent off, and the two lovers plot to get rid of Pagliaccio so they can be together. Making an unexpected return, Pagliaccio arrives just in time to discover half-eaten meals and a guilty looking Columbine. He demands she confesses her lover's name and we're not sure whether he's acting still or if this is real life. Nedda denies and each time, Canio gets angrier – so angry he stabs her in cold blood. She cries out for Silvio as she's hurt and Canio takes after him with his knife.

Much like we began, Canio addresses us that the comedy has ended.

Cast

Canio, tenor

the troupe's leader
Pagliaccio in the play

Nedda, soprano

Canio's wife
Columbine in the play

Tonio, baritone

An actor in the troupe
Zanni in the play

Beppe, tenor

An actor in the troupe
Harlequin in the play

Silvio, baritone

Nedda's villager lover

Villager Chorus

Rachmaninoff

The Russian Romantic

Piano powerhouse and master of melody.



Sergei Vasilievich Rachmaninoff

Born to Russian aristocrats who were also amateur pianists, Sergei Rachmaninoff **came by his talent for playing the piano honestly**. His parents fostered his talent through private lessons but mom and dad weren't always smart with their pennies. After his family's finances collapsed, they moved to Saint Petersburg where Sergei's piano chops were good enough to get him into the Saint Petersburg Conservatory on full scholarship— at the age of 10!

While there, he composed many works, including the one-act opera you're joining us for, *Aleko*. The story wasn't an original idea – he **borrowed it from Pushkin's poem *The Gypsies***. Sergei (ever the optimist), thought *Aleko* was sure to fail, but it was so successful that the Bolshoi Theatre (Russia's famous theater), produced it and Sergei won the prestigious Great Gold Medal for the work. It seems *Aleko's* success was a just the starting point for Rachmaninoff's future fame and success.

Following his conservatory days, Sergei continued both writing music and performing as a pianist and conductor all over Russia – not a bad gig! In 1917, the pressures of the Russian Revolution pushed Sergei and his family to leave the U.S.S.R. for the U.S.A., with a few stops in between. In late 1942 it was discovered that Rachmaninoff has advanced-stage melanoma and he died from it in March of the next year.

The Music

Rachmaninoff, one of Russia's last Romantic composers, was highly influenced by his composer idols Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov. From their style of writing he developed his own musical language that is known for its **song-like melodies and expressiveness**, all told through colorful orchestration, which you're sure to hear in *Aleko*.

Transfixing tunes.

Check out these big hits from the opera – you won't want to miss them.

Old Gypsy's Story

Remember the term foreshadowing from English class? Well, here it is in opera. The Old Gypsy tells us a story that will repeat itself.

[Take a listen.](#)

Aleko's Cavatina

Moonlit musings about his love for Zemfira and her wandering heart. This is the opera's number one tune.

[Take a listen.](#)

Young Gypsy's Serenade

More moonlit musings but, this time, from Zemfira's lover and a more agreeable tune to her ear.

[Take a listen.](#)

Leoncavallo

Ruggero the Realist

He really nailed it with this one.



Ruggero Leoncavallo

Although Ruggero Leoncavallo of Naples wasn't technically a one-hit wonder, he is primarily remembered for the big hit on our double bill. Our man of the music had a **dual interest in music and literature** so he studied both, at Naples Conservatory and Bologna University, respectively. These two passions led him to seek the ultimate marriage between music and poetry, much like the great Wagner.

Leoncavallo's first go at opera, *Chatterton*, wasn't a huge success so he whisked himself to Egypt and then Paris, working as an accompanist and café pianist to support himself. He was eventually introduced to the publisher Giulio Ricordi, who was more impressed with his writing of words than music. After a few trials by fire –an opera written and not awe-inspiring to Ricordi, a failed partnership with Puccini– Leoncavallo was desperate. He quickly scribed *Pagliacci*, jumping onto the current Italian opera trend of verismo -gritty tales of life as it really is- and modeled it after Pietro Mascagni's big hit *Cavalleria Rusticana*. **At last, Leoncavallo had written the one.** He was finally launched into fame and wealth.

He continued composing and writing but never again could he repeat the success of *Pagliacci*. He tried to create his own rival version of Puccini's *La Bohème*, but he missed the mark. He reset earlier works and missed the marks (again). Not until the advent of recording technology would he once again be fortunate; his *Pagliacci* was the first Italian opera to be recorded in full-length.

He would spend the rest of his life trying to **outshine his masterpiece**, *Pagliacci*, even leaving behind an unfinished effort at the time of his death. They say art reflects life and Leoncavallo's certainly fits the bill.

Transfixing tunes.

Check out these big hits from the opera – you won't want to miss them.

Bell Chorus

A moment of wary happiness before life takes a turn. The villagers sing a warning to all young lovers.

[Take a listen.](#)

Vesti la giubba

The big hit you hear everywhere and didn't know was *this one*. Canio laments having to clown around while his heart is breaking.

[Take a listen.](#)

No, Pagliaccio non son

The blurred lines between the drama on the stage and in real life become crystal clear. Enough said.

[Take a listen.](#)

Explore

Pushkin's poem *The Gypsies*, which *Aleko* is based on.

The Realist movement in America.

Romanticism in Europe and Russia.

Connect the Curricular Dots

Classroom Connections.

Taking the opera beyond the Belk.

Create

Your own artistic or literary style + rewrite one of the stories.

An alternate ending to the story where one or both lovers survive.

A prequel or sequel to the stories.

Analyze

The distinct differences between the two operas' style and presentation.

The physical/bodily qualities and impacts of such stress as the characters endured.

Now you know it all

See you next season.

Opera Carolina

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Charlotte, North Carolina 28204

www.operacarolina.org