

We are excited for you and your students to attend the Houston Symphony at Jones Hall in February! This concert highlights the core of the Italian music scene during the 19th century—opera. “This weekend, Music Director Juraj VALČUHA gives...an intriguing program that reveals the great sophistication of several Italian composers. The first part of the program as a magical, supernatural bent, with works inspired by witches, demons, and fairytales, while the second half features the big emotions and heart-rending melodies for which Puccini is so well known. Rossini’s famous *William Tell* Overture provides a grand finale to this program of high drama and great music.” –Calvin Dotsey

The resources below were compiled for you to use as you see fit, to complement your current classroom objectives or pass along information to individual students attending who you think would benefit from certain ideas.

[Full Program](#)

[Houston Symphony Video Program Notes](#)

LEITMOTIFS

Opera music uses thematic material to bring characters to life, giving each a distinct musical identity. Composers often assign leitmotifs or recurring melodies to represent characters' emotions, personalities, or transformations throughout the story. These themes help audiences connect with the drama, as they evolve and intertwine to reflect the unfolding narrative. Consider the leitmotifs from the program below.

You might try:

1. Play these motifs on your instrument. Consider what kind of characters each motif might represent. What emotions might they be feeling?
2. Play the motifs with a group of friends. Can you agree on one articulation, dynamic, and phrasing for each motif?
3. Listen to the piece that contains these motifs. How many times do you hear it repeated throughout the work? Do you notice any variations on these motifs?

Motif from Overture to *Belfagor*

The image shows a musical score for the Overture to *Belfagor*, marked **Allegro** with a tempo of $\text{♩} = 88$. The score is for woodwind instruments and includes the following parts: Ottavino, Flauti, Oboi, Corno inglese, Clarinetto Piccolo in $M\flat$, and Clarinetti in $S\flat$. The music is in 2/4 time and features a prominent melodic motif in the woodwinds, characterized by a sequence of eighth and sixteenth notes with various articulations and dynamics.

Motif from Intermezzo from *Suor Angelica* (top stanza)

ANDANTE MOLTO SOSTENUTO
1° SOLO SENZA SORDINA

molto p dolcemente
 cielo.

GLI ALTRI
pp CON SORDINA

calando *pp*

1° SOLO
p

GLI ALTRI LEVANO LA SORDINA

cres. **67** *cres. f* *poco rit. a tempo* **TUTTI** *pp espressivo*

Motif from Intermezzo from *Madama Butterfly*

VIOLINO 1°

ATTO 3°

G. PUCCINI

AND^{te} SOSTENUTO

ff *p*

rall. **2** *a tempo* *rall.* **2** *4^a CORDA..... rit.* **1** *a tempo*

mf *dim.*

Motif from *William Tell* Overture

ARCO

p *FF*

RESPIGHI'S OVERTURE FROM BELFAGOR

Belfagor premiered at La Scala in 1923 and “tells the tale of the demon Belfagor, who ascends to the terrestrial plane so that he might take a wife. Disguised as a rich merchant, Belfagor wins the hand of Candida by bribing her father; the unfortunate young woman is in fact besotted with the sailor Baldo. She refuses to consummate the marriage, and when Baldo returns from the sea, her faithfulness to him is confirmed by the miraculous ringing of church bells.” –Calvin Dotsey

Listen
Here!

This overture was published a year after the opera premier as a separate work. It does not open the opera when it is performed in the theater but serves as a stand-alone orchestral suite that allows highlights of the opera to be performed in the concert hall.

Some things to think about:

1. What is the benefit of publishing an overture for stand-alone performances separate from the full opera?
2. What musical elements in this overture remind you of the story or characteristics of the demon Belfagor?

SUITE NO. 2 FROM LA DONNA SERPENTE

La Donna Serpente (“The Serpent Woman”) was premiered in 1932 and tells the story of a fairy Miranda who is in love with a mortal King Altidor. Miranda’s father requires her to put Altidor through a series of tests. As a result, Altidor curses Miranda and she becomes a serpent for 200 years. In the final act, Altidor battles three monsters to break the spell and restore Miranda to her true form.

Listen
Here!

PUCCINI INTERMEZZOS FROM MANON LESCAUT, SUOR ANGELICA, AND MADAMA BUTTERFLY

An intermezzo is a musical or theatrical act performed in between the acts or scenes of an opera. Many of Puccini’s operas had purely orchestral intermezzi, giving the orchestra a major role in his stage works.

[Listen to the Intermezzo from *Manon Lescaut*](#)

[Listen to the Intermezzo from *Suor Angelica*](#)

[Listen to the Intermezzo from *Madama Butterfly*](#)

Things to Listen for and Consider:

- What do these Intermezzi tell you about the plot of the full opera? If you had to infer what the opera was about based solely on listening to the Intermezzo, what would you say?

- What emotions do you feel while listening to these Intermezzi? What techniques does Puccini utilize to evoke these emotions?

Videos to Learn More:

[Short Overview of Puccini's Life](#)

[Madama Butterfly: What makes it such a powerful opera? \(The Royal Opera\)](#)

[Overview of Puccini's Operas](#)

We are looking forward to seeing you all at Jones Hall soon!