



*Booming*  
*Bass and Baritone*



**BEST LOVED OPERA ARIAS**

**Best loved opera arias for  
Bass and Baritone**

<p>1 <b>Gioachino ROSSINI</b> (1792–1868) <b>Il barbiere di Siviglia</b> (<b>The Barber of Seville</b>) (1816) Act I – Cavatina: Largo al factotum della città (Figaro) <i>Lado Ataneli, Baritone</i> <i>Württemberg Philharmonic Orchestra</i> <i>Lodovico Zocche</i> (8.572438) 4:57</p>	<p>6 <b>Jacques OFFENBACH</b> (1819–1880) <b>Les Contes d'Hoffmann</b> (<b>The Tales of Hoffmann</b>) (1881) Act II – Scintille, diamant! (Dappertutto) <i>Samuel Ramey, Bass • Munich Radio Orchestra</i> <i>Julius Rudel</i> (8.555355) 4:09</p>	<p>11 <b>Gioachino ROSSINI</b> <b>Guillaume Tell</b> (<b>William Tell</b>) (1829) 2:41 Act III, Finale – Aria: Sois immobile (Guillaume) <i>Andrew Foster-Williams, Bass-baritone</i> <i>Virtuosi Brunensis • Antonino Fogliani</i> (8.660363-66)</p>	<p>15 <b>George Frideric HANDEL</b> (1685–1759) <b>Acis and Galatea</b> (1718) 3:26 Act II – Aria: O ruddier than the cherry (Polyphemus) <i>Jan Opalach, Bass • Seattle Symphony Orchestra</i> <i>Gerard Schwarz</i> (8.572745-46)</p>
<p>2 <b>Georges BIZET</b> (1838–1875) <b>Carmen</b> (1875) 4:53 Act II – Couplets: Votre toast, je peux vous les rendre (Toreador Song) (Escamillo) <i>Lado Ataneli, Baritone</i> <i>Württemberg Philharmonic Orchestra</i> <i>Lodovico Zocche</i> (8.572438)</p>	<p>7 <b>Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART</b> (1756–1791) <b>Le nozze di Figaro</b> (<b>The Marriage of Figaro</b>) (1786) 4:01 Act I, No. 10 – Aria: Non più andrai (Figaro) <i>Renato Girolami, Baritone</i> <i>Nicolaus Esterházy Sinfonia • Michael Halász</i> (8.660102-04)</p>	<p>12 <b>Giuseppe VERDI</b> (1813–1901) <b>Nabucco</b> (1842) 4:14 Act II, Scene 2 – Recitative: Vieni, o Levital (Zaccaria) <i>Michele Pertusi, Bass-baritone</i> <i>Filarmonica Arturo Toscanini Orchestra Giovanile della Via Emilia</i> <i>Francesco Ivan Ciampa</i> (Dynamic CDS7867)</p>	<p>16 <b>Gioachino ROSSINI</b> <b>Mosè in Egitto</b> 4:55 (<b>Moses in Egypt</b>) (1818, Naples version 1819) Act II – Dal Re de' Regi (Mosè) <i>Lorenzo Regazzo, Bass-baritone</i> <i>Württemberg Philharmonic Orchestra</i> <i>Antonino Fogliani</i> (8.660220-21)</p>
<p>3 <b>Charles GOUNOD</b> (1818–1893) <b>Faust</b> (1859, revised version 1864) 1:56 Act II, Scene 3 – Ronde du Veau d'or: Le Veau d'or est toujours debout! (Méphistophélès)</p>	<p>8 <b>Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART</b> <b>Die Zauberflöte</b> (<b>The Magic Flute</b>) (1791) 2:59 Act II, No. 10 – Aria and Chorus: O Isis und Osiris (Sarastro, Chorus) <i>Kurt Rydl, Bass • Hungarian Festival Chorus</i> <i>Budapest Fialoni Chamber Orchestra</i> <i>Michael Halász</i> (8.660030-31)</p>	<p>13 <b>Giuseppe VERDI</b> <b>Rigoletto</b> (1851) 4:16 Act II – Cortigiani, vil razza dannata (Rigoletto) <i>Eduard Tumuljan, Bass-baritone</i> <i>Czecho-Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra</i> (Bratislava) • <i>Alexander Rahbari</i> (8.660013-14)</p>	<p>17 <b>Giacomo MEYERBEER</b> (1791–1864) <b>Les Huguenots</b> (<b>The Huguenots</b>) (1836) 3:01 Act I – Piff, paff, piff, cernons-les! (Marcel) <i>Soon-Won Kang, Bass • Bratislava Chamber Choir</i> <i>Orchestra Internationale d'Italia</i> <i>Renato Palumbo</i> (Dynamic CDS422)</p>
<p>4 <b>Richard WAGNER</b> (1813–1883) <b>Der fliegende Holländer</b> (<b>The Flying Dutchman</b>) (1843) 4:59 Act I, No. 2 – Aria: Die Frist ist um (Daland) <i>Erich Knodt, Bass</i> <i>ORF Vienna Symphony Orchestra</i> <i>Pinchas Steinberg</i> (8.660025-26)</p>	<p>9 <b>Richard WAGNER</b> (1813–1883) <b>Der fliegende Holländer</b> (<b>The Flying Dutchman</b>) (1843) 4:59 Act I, No. 2 – Aria: Die Frist ist um (Daland) <i>Erich Knodt, Bass</i> <i>ORF Vienna Symphony Orchestra</i> <i>Pinchas Steinberg</i> (8.660025-26)</p>	<p>14 <b>Giacomo PUCCINI</b> (1858–1924) <b>La Bohème</b> (1896) 1:40 Act IV – Vecchia zimarra, senti (Colline) <i>Ivan Urbas, Bass</i> <i>Czecho-Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra</i> (Bratislava) • <i>Will Humburg</i> (8.660003-04)</p>	<p>18 <b>Giacomo PUCCINI</b> <b>Tosca</b> (1900) 4:18 Act I – Tre sbirri, una carrozza (Te Deum) (Scarpia, Chorus) <i>Silvano Carroli, Baritone</i> <i>Slovak Philharmonic Chorus</i> <i>Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra</i> <i>Alexander Rahbari</i> (8.660001-02)</p>
<p>5 <b>Arrigo BOITO</b> (1842–1918) <b>Mefistofele</b> (1868, revised version 1875) 2:51 Act II, Scene 2 – Ecco il mondo (Mefistofele) <i>Samuel Ramey, Bass</i> <i>Munich Radio Orchestra</i> <i>Julius Rudel</i> (8.555355)</p>	<p>10 <b>Richard WAGNER</b> <b>Die Walküre</b> (<b>The Valkyrie</b>) (1870) 3:19 Act III, Scene 3 – Leb' wohl, du kühnes, herrliches Kind! (Wotan's Farewell) (Wotan) <i>Matthias Goerne, Baritone</i> <i>Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra</i> <i>Jaap van Zweden</i> (8.660394-97)</p>		

**Total Timing: 65:12**

## Best loved opera arias for Bass and Baritone

### Introduction

In 1755, the great English lexicographer Dr Johnson defined opera as *exotic* and *irrational*.

He wasn't wrong. It's full of people who say things like 'Farewell, my child, farewell', but who don't leave the stage, or who sing marvellous tunes while slowly dying of stab-wounds, and all usually in a language audiences don't understand. But here's the thing. Although opera is not *realistic*, it is *real*. Opera takes the great moments of life – death, love, vengeance, sex, parting – and stretches them out for us so that we may feel them more fully.

Opera offers truths which are otherwise inexpressible.

### A History of Opera

For an art form which has had such a profound impact on global culture, opera has a surprisingly short history. It was invented in about 1600 in Italy. A group of academics, hoping to recreate the chanted speech of ancient Greek theatre, developed a method of giving sung notes to the words of dramatic characters. Hey presto! – they'd stumbled upon opera: *drama told through music*.

It quickly took off. The wrenching pathos, the opportunities for comedy, the grandeur of

great music combined with powerful stories... From its birth, opera has been about real emotions, and real situations, but heightened to a point of sublimity.

As with all art forms, conventions soon arose. Songs for individual characters became known as *arias*. Quick-paced dialogue, in a less melodic style, was called *recitative*. An opera might have some *duets*, or *trios*, or a *chorus*. The accompanying orchestra began to grow too.

Certain musical forms began to dominate the art form. In the Baroque period (early 18th century) operas mostly fell into the category of *opera seria*. The distinguishing feature of an *opera seria* is a type of aria which always repeats its opening section after a contrasting interlude. Although Handel's *Acis and Galatea* is defined as a *pastoral* rather than an opera (it's a moot point), the aria 'O ruddier than the cherry' is a good example of a *da capo* aria.

At this stage, it was the singers – not composers, not librettists, not producers – who were the most important people of the opera world, and sometimes they demanded ridiculous changes in storytelling merely to suit their egos. In 1762 Gluck tried to reform opera back to purer principles in *Orfeo ed Euridice*,

and this opened the way for more experimental works, such as Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, with its innovative use of ensembles and emotional variety.

In the early 19th century, this in turn developed into a new style called *bel canto* (literally 'beautiful singing') which emphasised singers' virtuosity in long-held phrases and brilliantly sparkling fast passages. Verdi then pushed this style to encompass ever-greater emotional intensity, and sometimes also employed the bigger crowd-scenes and epic backdrops of *grand opera*. Opera had another flowering in the late 19th-century *verismo* style, which exploited sexually heightened conflicts, before it headed into several different *modern* pathways, some more successful than others, in the 20th and 21st centuries.

If you're wondering why this history has only covered Italian opera – partly it's because the Italians were first on the scene and so controlled the field. But it is also because the Italian language, with its open vowels and easy consonants, is a wonderfully straightforward language to sing. All other national schools of opera – including French, German, Russian, and English – have thus defined themselves in a *pro* or *contra* relationship with the globally dominant Italian product.

### The Baritone and Bass Voice

The highest operatic male voice produced without falsetto is the *tenor*. One step lower is the *baritone* and the lowest is the *bass*. Somewhere between the two latter lies the *bass-baritone*. As with so many other musical categories, these terms are often very loosely applied and – as if to add to the confusion – there are further sub-categories as well.

The terms *bass* and *baritone* first came into use in the 17th century, but it was not until the 19th century that they were widely applied: in the Baroque period, any lower-sounding male voice was usually simply called *bass*. In the *bel canto* era, composers like Rossini began to exploit the upper-reaches of the low male voice, with florid passages and longer-breathed melodies, and it was to this type of sound that the term *baritone* (as we now understand it) came to be attached. Later in the century Wagner began to demand more stamina and power in the lower register from his baritones, and the term *bass-baritone* arose.

There are several common features in the repertoire for these voices. In a typical *bel canto* opera, the central conflict revolves around a love-triangle of heroine-lover-villain, in which the baritone almost always takes the latter adversarial role, with soprano and tenor taking the other two. In comic works, basses are often seen as pompous pratfall figures (giving rise

to the 'buffo-bass' or 'comic-bass' category), but in more serious works they also frequently appear as wise priests and noble kings [8] [12] [14]. Lastly, whenever a whiff of sulphur is desired – perhaps with a hint of comedy too – a composer often turns to basses and bass-baritones for operatic devils and demons (see [3] [4] [5] [6] [7]).

- [1] **Largo al factotum della città ('Make way for the odd-job man')**  
from *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1816)  
Figaro is the titular barber of Seville, but is also many other things – a romantic go-between, a wily fixer, an odd-job man, and lots besides. In this energetic entrance aria, he announces all of which he is capable.  
As if to show how clever and flexible the baritone playing Figaro must be, Rossini pushes his voice to an extreme test of dexterity and agility. Figaro's patter-song, with its famously fast repetitions ('Figaro, here! Figaro, there!'), has become one of the best-loved comic numbers in the operatic repertoire.
- [2] **Votre toast ('I'll raise a glass')**  
from *Carmen* (1875)  
Escamillo, a handsome and self-confident toreador, enters a tavern to shouts of acclaim. In this aria, he makes a comparison

between the thrills of bull-fighting and the excitements of love.

Escamillo's aria has one of the catchiest tunes ever written (it also appears in the orchestral prelude to the opera) which has been used in countless films and adverts. But Bizet's use of it is actually more subtle than at first appears: Escamillo is not only singing generally about love, but is also directly trying to capture the heart of the beautiful Carmen who is ignoring him.

The French word 'toast' (taken from English), meaning 'to drink to someone's health', refers to the 17th-century custom of flavouring drinks with spiced toast, apparently.

- [3] **Le Veau d'or ('The Golden Calf')**  
from *Faust* (1859, revised 1864)  
Méphistophélès appears in the middle of a crowd, and then sings a rousing and irreverent song about mankind's susceptibility to greed.  
The story of the golden calf in the Bible refers to the worship of false idols. Here Méphistophélès suggests that a general love of money has become a case of false worship, so, while he is amusing the crowd with his catchy number, he is also mocking them to their faces. Perhaps Gounod, likewise, was holding a mirror up to the

excesses of the Second French Empire in this aria.

- [4] **Il était temps! ('It was time!')**  
from *Faust* (1859, revised 1864)  
Méphistophélès watches as Faust climbs into Marguerite's window in order to seduce her, and takes pleasure in the tragic events which must surely follow.  
The downward sliding melody which opens this passage cleverly suggests a musical descent to hell: and yet the melody which follows is seductively beautiful, as if Méphistophélès can't help but admire the love from which he is forever barred.

- [5] **Ecco il mondo ('Here is the world')**  
from *Mefistofele* (1868, revised 1875)  
During a celebration of the black sabbath, a group of witches give Mefistofele a globe. He sees a world contained within, and describes his hatred of it.

They say the devil has the best tunes, and certainly Mefistofele's wickedly cheerful and waltz-like number is one of the highlights of the opera which bears his name. Interestingly, Boito originally composed the role of Faust for a baritone against the bass of Mefistofele, possibly to avoid comparisons with Gounod's 1859 opera; later he changed the role to a tenor.

- [6] **Scintille, diamant! ('Sparkle, diamond!')**  
from *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (1881)  
Hoffmann has fallen in love with the fascinating Venetian courtesan, Giulietta. The malevolent Captain Dappertutto promises Giulietta a diamond if she is able to steal her lover's reflection from a mirror and give it to him.

Hoffmann faces several different enemies during the course of the opera, but all of them are usually performed by the same bass. It is one of the extraordinary qualities of the piece that although their motivations are never made clear, their mysterious cumulative effect has the psychological power of a frightening dream.

This aria was not included in performances of *Hoffmann* until 1905, long after Offenbach's death, and is based on a tune from the 1875 operetta *Le Voyage dans la lune* ('The Voyage to the Moon').

- [7] **Non più andrai ('You shall go no more')**  
from *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786)  
Count Almaviva, hoping to get rid of the amorous pageboy Cherubino from his palace, sends the young man into the army. Figaro mocks poor Cherubino, and imagines his future life as a soldier without any more female company.

With a melody this comical and jaunty,

it is hard to believe that Cherubino's fate will be as hard as Figaro pretends – and indeed, things turn out quite comfortably for Cherubino in the end. The tune became something of a hit, and Mozart used it again in *Don Giovanni* during a scene in which a band serenades Giovanni while he is eating supper. ('Oh yes, I know that tune!' says his insolent servant Leporello.)

8 **O Isis und Osiris** from *Die Zauberflöte* (1791)

The young hero and heroine of the opera must undergo several trials of initiation before they can reach true enlightenment and join wise Sarastro in his priestly brotherhood. He invokes the gods Isis and Osiris to protect the couple on their journey.

Mozart enjoyed exploiting the extremes of the human voice in *Die Zauberflöte*. Sarastro has one of the lowest roles in the operatic repertoire, and his villainous counterpart The Queen of the Night has one of the highest. The resounding low notes here suggest calm authority and solidity.

9 **Die Frist ist um ('The time is up')** from *Der fliegende Holländer* (1843)  
A mysterious pale sailor steps ashore from a ghostly vessel, lamenting his fate. He

once called upon Satan, and is now cursed to wander the seas forever. He longs for death, but once in every seven years he may come ashore, and if he can find a wife who will be true to him, the curse will be broken.

The Dutchman is the earliest of Wagner's monumental bass-baritone roles. The part demands a voice of enormous power and stamina, and an ability to communicate inner torment and the pain of a divided self.

For an opera which has such a powerfully gloomy atmosphere, it's curious to learn that Wagner's principal source for the story was a little comic episode from Heine's *The Memoirs of Mister von Schnabelwopski*, in which the Dutchman legend is sent up and parodied.

10 **Leb' wohl ('Farewell')** from *Die Walküre* (1870)

Wotan, the king of the gods, must punish his daughter Brünnhilde for disobeying him. He bids her farewell, then surrounds her with a magical wall of fire. The spell may only be broken by a true hero.

Wagner's use of *Leitmotifs*, snatches of melody which represent people, places or objects within the story of the *Ring Cycle* (Wagner's cycle of four music dramas, of

which *Die Walküre* is the second), reaches a peak in this scene. At the mention of the 'future hero', the *Leitmotif* representing Siegfried is heard, even though he has not yet been born. In the next works in the cycle, the hero Siegfried will go on to rescue his aunt Brünnhilde, fall in love with her, and then betray her.

11 **Sois immobile ('Be still')** from *Guillaume Tell* (1829)

The villainous Gesler seizes Guillaume Tell's son, and orders him to shoot an arrow at an apple placed on top of the boy's head. If he refuses, both will die. Guillaume tells his son to remain calm and be still.

Wilhelm Tell was a legendary folk hero of Switzerland, who first appeared in print in the early 14th century. In the 19th, he became a general symbol of nationalistic rebellion against dominating foreign powers.

Although Rossini lived for forty more years, he never wrote another opera after this. The reasons for his retirement remain unclear.

12 **Vieni, o Levita! ('Come, oh Levite!')** from *Nabucco* (1842)

Zaccaria, the high priest of the Jews, prays that the heathen Assyrians will renounce

their idolatry and turn their worship to the true God of the Israelites.

*Nabucco* is one of a minority of operas which have a baritone in the title role. It also has a plum role for a bass, who is given this stirring aria.

13 **Cortigiani ('Vile courtiers')** from *Rigoletto* (1851)

Rigoletto is a hunchbacked jester who has spent his life mocking courtiers. When he learns that his daughter has been abducted by the Duke of Mantua, he pleads with the same courtiers to help him find her. They refuse, and he unleashes his fury.

Earlier in this scene Rigoletto tries to appear nonchalant and unconcerned, and he sings a carefree, mocking melody to the words 'la la la'. It means that when he releases his real emotions – his helpless rage, his powerless fury – the effect is all the more brutal.

14 **Vecchia zimarra ('Old coat')** from *La Bohème* (1896)

When Mimì is discovered near to death from tuberculosis, her cash-strapped friends resolve to buy some medicine for her. All that the philosopher Colline has to pawn is his old overcoat. He sings a fond farewell to it.

Although lugubrious, the mood of this aria is gently satirical: even the word Colline uses for his shabby coat, 'zimarra', is humorously literary and overblown. It provides a moment of semi-light relief before the opera draws to its inexorable tragic ending.

The low bass voice is most often associated with power, age, and authority. It is one of Puccini's witty strokes to cast the voice type as one of the impecunious young students of *La Bohème*.

**15** **O ruddier than the cherry** from *Acis and Galatea* (1718)  
The monster Polyphemus describes the beautiful Galatea in lavish terms.

The high, piping soprano recorder which accompanies the low bass sound of Polyphemus, suggests that his love for Galatea is more comical than heartfelt. It is one of Handel's masterstrokes that he can inject humour into a story which actually has a tragic outcome – Polyphemus kills his rival Acis, whose body is then transformed by Galatea into a fountain.

**16** **Dal Re de' Regi ('From the King of Kings')** from *Mosè in Egitto* (1818)  
The Egyptian Pharaoh has gone back on his promise to let the Jews leave their captivity.

Mosè (Moses) warns that God will punish him with the death of all firstborn sons and then, in this aria, he calls on the Almighty to pour his anger out on the Egyptians.

After the terrifying promise of the death of the firstborn sons, Mosè's plea to God is couched in music of lyrical and plaintive beauty, suggesting his close relationship with his Creator.

**17** **Piff, paff, piff** from *Les Huguenots* (1836)  
Marcel is the servant of Lord Raoul; both are Huguenot Protestants. When Marcel meets a group of Catholics, they ask him to have a drink to bury any grudges. Then they ask him to sing. He obliges with this mocking song, a Huguenot battle cry, which calls for the extermination of Catholics.

The genre of 'grand opera', of which *Les Huguenots* is a prime example, pits personal tragedies and romantic conflicts against a background of great historical upheavals. It is sometimes hard for a composer to find ways of varying the tone through such works, but with 'Piff, paff' Meyerbeer injects a note of jollity into an otherwise sombre tale.

**18** **Te Deum** from *Tosca* (1900)  
Scarpia, the villainous chief of police in

Rome, is in church. He has just set a plot in motion to catch both the revolutionary young painter Cavaradossi and also snare his lover Tosca. Just as he exults that his plan is working, a crowd in the church begin to celebrate a *Te Deum*. 'Tosca, you make me forget even God!' cries Scarpia, before joining in the prayer.

The play upon which *Tosca* is based is a wordy thriller, with plenty of exposition and lots of characters. At first Puccini could not see room for any arias, choruses and

ensembles, and almost gave up the idea of turning it into an opera. But his clever librettists provided him with spectacular moments such as this, which both forward the plot and offer moments of thrilling musical grandeur.

**Warwick Thompson**  
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## Warwick Thompson

Warwick Thompson is a freelance journalist, presenter, and accompanist, specialising in vocal music and opera. His work has appeared in *Metro*, *The Times*, *Bloomberg.com*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Opera*, *Opera Now*, *Pianist Magazine*, and in many other outlets. He has also frequently hosted educational events for Glyndebourne Festival Opera.



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Opera can be defined as drama told through music, and at the height of its popularity conventions arose in which certain voice types came to share common character features. With love triangles it is the baritone who takes the role of the villain; basses are either comically pompous or wise and noble priests or kings; and both voices can be cast as operatic devils and demons. From the jack-of-all-trades, Figaro, to the impotent jester Rigoletto, and from the heroic William Tell to the mischievous Méphistophélès, these larger-than-life characters all represent the grandeur of great music combined with powerful stories.

BEST LOVED opera arias for  
*Bass and Baritone*

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<p>4 Il était temps! 1:48</p>	<p>14 <b>Giacomo PUCCINI</b> (1858–1924)  <b>La Bohème</b>            Vecchia zimarra, senti 1:40</p>
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A detailed track list  
 can be found  
 inside the booklet

Includes  
 comprehensive  
 booklet notes  
 in English

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