

# Romeo & Juliet

2022-23 Guidebook



# ROMEO & JULIET



EXPERIENCE OPERA  
WITH US!

# A LETTER TO TEACHERS

**Dear Teachers,**

Opera Colorado is pleased to provide engaging educational programs and performances for students across Colorado. What follows is a guide we hope you and your students find useful as we explore Charles-François Gounod's *Romeo & Juliet*. In the spirit of exploration, we have included various lessons connecting the production with different subjects. The lessons reference the new Colorado Department of Education's Academic Standards, focusing specifically on high school expectations. This does not mean the lessons should be limited to this age group. While we would be very pleased if you used these lessons in the format provided, we encourage you to expand, alter, and adapt these lessons so they best fit your students' abilities and development. After all, teachers know their students' needs best. We would appreciate your feedback on our teacher evaluation survey (a link to this survey will be emailed to you following the event), and we hope you enjoy all Opera Colorado has to offer!

*Thank you!*

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# MEET THE ARTISTS

Each season, Opera Colorado auditions over 400 emerging artists from across the country for its Artist in Residence Program. During their eight-month residency, the selected six singers and one pianist bring opera to over 45,000 students from schools across the Rocky Mountain region.

*Romeo & Juliet* is translated, adapted, and directed by Cherity Koepke

**JULIET**

**FRANCESCA MEHROTRA**



**CAPULET/TYBALT**

**TURNER STATON**



**ROMEO**

**DAVID SOTO ZAMBRANA**



**FRIAR LAURENCE**

**MICHAEL LEYTE-VIDAL**



**MERCUTIO/  
PRINCE**

**DANTE MIRELES**



**STEPHANO/  
GERTRUDE**

**JOANNE EVANS**



**COLLABORATIVE  
PIANIST**

**OLEG BELLINI**



# Quick Facts

**Composer:** Charles-François Gounod

**Librettists:** Jules Barbier and Michel Carré

**Premiere:** April 27, 1867 Théâtre-Lyrique,  
Paris, France

**Setting:** Fourteenth Century, Verona, Italy

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Nine opera companies will produce Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* in the 2022-23 Season.

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Gounod wrote twelve operas. His most famous opera is *Faust* (1859).

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By 1934, Gounod's *Faust* had been translated into twenty-four languages.

## What's in a Name?

To make the characters from Shakespeare's English tragedy sound familiar to French audiences, Gounod slightly altered some of the character names. Opera Colorado's production combines the opera and play, so our title keeps Shakespeare's spelling, while Gounod's opera is titled *Roméo et Juliette*. See more changes below:

### Play Character

- Paris
- Friar Laurence
- Nurse

### Opera Character

- Pâris
- Frère Laurence
- Gertrude (the nurse)
- Stéphanos\*

\*Gounod and the librettists created this character as a pants role, a woman playing a boy. Pants roles expanded the range of voices a composer could work with in otherwise all-male scenes.

*I'm Charles  
Gounod!*







See UNESCO's  
video on the city  
of Romeo and  
Juliet!

## Location: Fair Verona

Shakespeare's play begins with a prologue, or introduction, by a character called "Chorus." The prologue's famous first lines give the setting and context of the play:

"Two households both alike in dignity,  
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,  
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,  
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean."



Verona was founded in the first century B.C.E. The town flourished as a city state under the rule of the Scaliger family in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and as part of the Republic of Venice from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries.

The warring city states in Italy and clashes for power between Emperor and Pope offered an ideal setting for the story of two young lovers torn apart by rival families. The tale was first set down by Luigi Da Porto, a soldier in the Venetian cavalry, and published around 1530. Shakespeare's version of the tale adopted the setting of Verona, irrevocably linking the city with the characters Romeo and Juliet.

The city of Verona initially rejected this association, but, in the 1990s, a movement grew to embrace the image of Verona as a city of love and highlight locations associated with the fictional characters. Today, over three million tourists flock to Verona annually to see "Juliet's balcony" (built in the 1930s), and the Juliet Club answers over 50,000 letters from lovers seeking advice.

In 2000, UNESCO designated Verona as a World Heritage Site, due to the city's vast number of well-preserved Roman and Renaissance buildings.





## VOCABULARY

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* was written in the late sixteenth century, and the play uses some words less familiar to us today. Use the list below to learn some of the language from the story and then identify these words as you enjoy the performance. (Definitions from merriam-webster.com)

**Appertaining** - to belong or be connected as a rightful part or attribute.

When Tybalt calls Romeo a villain, Romeo responds, "Tybalt, the reason I have to love you doth much excuse the **appertaining** rage to such a greeting," meaning, his secret marriage to Juliet and his new status as Tybalt's relative calms the rightful rage he would normally feel in response to such a greeting.

**Chide** - to speak out in angry or displeased rebuke.

Friar Laurence agrees to wed Romeo to Juliet, saying, "So smile the heavens upon this holy act that after-hours with sorrow **chide** us not!" He is convinced the gods will be so pleased with the marriage that sorrow will not be able to rebuke him for performing the wedding.

**Prodigious** - causing amazement or wonder; extraordinary in quantity or degree.

After falling for Romeo, Juliet learns he is a Montague and exclaims, "**Prodigious** birth of love it is to me, that I should love a loathèd enemy."

**Rancor** - bitter, deep-seated ill will.

After Romeo asks Friar Laurence to marry him to Juliet, the Friar exclaims, "For this alliance may so happy prove to turn your households' **rancor** to pure love."



# ROMEO & JULIET

## Main Characters

### Capulet Household

**Lord Capulet** - Head of the Capulet household

**Juliet** - Lord and Lady Capulet's daughter

**Gertrude** - Juliet's nursemaid

**Tybalt** - Juliet's cousin

### Montague Household

**Romeo** - Only child and heir of the Montagues

**Mercutio** - Romeo's friend

**Stephano** - young servant to Romeo

### Misc.

**Chorus** - The company of players acts as a chorus to deliver the prologue

**Friar Laurence** - Friar for congregation in Verona

## Brief Summary

Opera Colorado's *Romeo & Juliet* interweaves passages from William Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* (c. 1595) with Charles Gounod's French opera *Roméo et Juliette* (1867). The production tells the story of a community wrecked by two feuding households, the Montagues and the Capulets. When Romeo, a Montague, falls in love with Juliet, the daughter of Lord Capulet, the young couple decide to wed in secret, hoping their union will serve to reconcile their families. Tragically, the lovers fall victim to the violence engendered by their relatives' dispute, but their love and sacrifice ultimately inspire their families to stop warring and seek forgiveness.





## PLOT SUMMARY

*Setting: the city of Verona*

Acting as one chorus, the company of singers offers a prologue, explaining the opera is about two warring families, the Montagues and the Capulets, whose long-standing feud has turned the city into a battleground between the two factions.

As the action begins, Lord Capulet welcomes guests to his home for Juliet's debut party, and Juliet sings about how happy she is, as joyful as a bird floating towards heaven.

Romeo and Mercutio enter on their way to crash the Capulet's party. Romeo says it would be better if they did not go to the party because he had a nightmare. He believes it is an omen warning them not to attend. Mercutio tells him the dream is from a fairy named Queen Mab, who torments humans with weird dreams while they sleep.

The scene changes to Juliet talking with Gertrude, the nurse who has raised her, about someday becoming a bride. Gertrude expects this day to come soon, but Juliet wants to remain free and enjoy her youth ("Je veux vivre"). Gertrude leaves Juliet to her daydreams just as Romeo enters.

Spying the beautiful Juliet lost in thought, Romeo is enraptured. He flirts with Juliet, saying his palm is too lowly to touch her hand, but she insists he is welcome to hold her hand. They eventually kiss, and their love is sealed.

Gertrude interrupts their embrace, telling Juliet her mother wishes to speak with her. Romeo learns that Juliet is a Capulet and runs off. Gertrude then tells Juliet that Romeo is the only son of her family's enemy, the Montagues.



Adelina Patti as Juliet, 1867 - National Portrait Gallery



## ROMEO & JULIET

# PLOT SUMMARY (continued)

Later that evening, Romeo returns to the Capulet's house and finds his way to Juliet's garden, hoping to catch a glimpse of her. As he waits, he sings of his love for Juliet. Juliet enters, not seeing Romeo, and ponders what life would be like if they could change their identities so they would not be in opposing families. Romeo answers her musings and swears his love for Juliet before she must rush inside to her mother.

The following morning, Stephano comes to the town square looking for Romeo. Stephano sees Lord Capulet and teases and taunts him by singing a song about a dove captured by vultures. Juliet enters with Romeo. Seeing her father, they quickly part, but Romeo finds a creative way to propose. Juliet joyfully accepts, and they make plans to meet the next day to be married.

The next morning, Friar Laurence prepares for services. Romeo enters and convinces the Friar to marry him and Juliet secretly. The Friar agrees just as Juliet arrives to wed her love.

Back at the town square, Mercutio and Stephano continue to look for Romeo. They see him coming at the same time they see Tybalt, Juliet's cousin and an enemy Capulet. Tybalt challenges Romeo to fight, but Romeo, who is now married to Juliet and, thus, an in-law of the Capulets, tries to walk away. Mercutio thinks this cowardly and fights Tybalt himself. Romeo tries to stop them, and, in doing so, gives Tybalt the opportunity to stab Mercutio, who dies.

Angered by Mercutio's death, Stephano attacks Tybalt. Enraged, Romeo joins Stephano and deals the fatal blow, killing Tybalt. The Prince banishes Romeo for this crime.

Juliet's father, unaware his daughter has married Romeo, decides it is time for Juliet to marry and announces she will wed Count Paris. Hearing this, Friar Laurence goes to Juliet to offer his help. He gives her a sleeping potion that will make it appear as if she is dead. He will send Romeo a message detailing their plan, and he will return as Juliet awakes from the potion inside the family crypt.



Tenor Jean de Reszke as Romeo c. 1888 - New York Public Library



## ROMEO & JULIET

# PLOT SUMMARY (continued)

Juliet agrees to the plan, but, when the time comes to take the sleeping potion, she hesitates, fearful it will not work and she will have to marry Count Paris. Thinking of her love for Romeo, she finds the courage to take the potion.

The next morning, Gertrude comes to wake Juliet for her wedding to the Count Paris. She chides Juliet for sleeping in on her wedding day before she realizes Juliet is dead.

Romeo never receives the message from Friar

Laurence. Instead, he receives news that Juliet has died. Romeo then rushes back to Verona. Mourning his beloved wife, Romeo decides to join Juliet in death by drinking poison.

Juliet wakes from the sleeping potion as Romeo is dying. She tries to drink what is left of his poison, but none remains. Determined to join him in death, she stabs herself, and the two die in each other's arms.

The Prince discovers them and declares: "For never was a story of more woe/ Than this of Juliet and her Romeo."



Designers for Opera Colorado's production used images of Verona as inspiration for the set.







Drawing of Gounod 1841 - New York Public Library

## Composer Biography:

**Charles-François Gounod**

**June 17, 1818-October 18, 1893**

During his lifetime, Charles Gounod composed twelve operas, as well as numerous choral and sacred pieces. His love for music started when he was a child. When Charles was four years old, his father died, and his mother, Victoire, supported herself, Charles, and his older brother, Louis, by teaching piano. She also passed this skill on to Charles, who learned quickly.

Charles attended school at an early age so his mother could work during the day. As a reward for doing well in school, Victoire took Charles to see Rossini's opera *Otello*. Unable to purchase reserved seats, mother and son waited in the cold for two hours to secure a spot at the performance. Gounod was so excited by Rossini's opera, he spent the rest of the night imagining an opera he might compose someday. He began composing the next day and, afterwards, often got into trouble for writing music rather than completing his schoolwork.

When Gounod turned fourteen, he declared his

intention to become a composer. Victoire tried to dissuade him from the hard life of an artist, but, eventually, sent him to study with the renowned composer Anton Reicha. Gounod studied hard, hoping to win the prestigious Prix de Rome competition, which would exempt him from military service. On his third attempt, Gounod succeeded in winning the prize, which included three years of studying music in Rome and in Germany.

While in Germany, Gounod became friends with Fanny Mendelssohn, sister of composer Felix Mendelssohn, and a talented composer herself. Fanny introduced Gounod to several German pieces, including many works by Bach. After completing his studies, Gounod returned to Paris, where he worked as the organist and music director at Les Missions Etrangères (Chapel for Foreign Missions) for over four years.

*(Continued on next page)*



## Charles-François Gounod

“The [operatic] stage is the one place where a musician can find constant opportunity and means of communicating with the public. It is a sort of daily and permanent exhibition where his works can be perpetually on view.” - Gounod

Charles Gounod - New York Public Library

At the chapel, Gounod played music he had found during his travels, including compositions by Bach. Parishioners complained the music was neither cheerful nor entertaining, but, eventually, they came to appreciate Gounod's selections.

Gounod had a deep interest in religion, and, in 1847, he entered a monastery, planning to dedicate his life to religious study, but he found life without music "was quite impossible" and returned to composing. Gounod believed operas were the best opportunity to make a name as a composer, and he turned to writing for the stage to advance his career.

His first opera, *Sapho*, premiered in 1851. While it was not a success, the production helped build his reputation. His opera *Ulysse* premiered the following year, the same year he married Anna Zimmerman, daughter of the famous piano teacher Pierre Zimmerman.

In 1856, Gounod met librettists and collaborators Jules Barbier and Michel Carré and asked them to work with him on an opera. The team began writing an opera based on the tale of

*Faust* but abandoned the project when they learned another theatre already had an adaptation planned. They returned to the project later, but, sadly, Gounod's mother passed away before he achieved his greatest success. As historians Grout and Williams explain, *Faust* became “the most popular French opera ever written, attaining its two-thousandth Paris performance in 1934.”

Gounod continued to compose operas, including *Roméo et Juliette* (1867), for which Barbier and Carré supplied the libretto. For their version of Shakespeare's tale, the librettists altered the ending, delaying Romeo's death until after Juliet revives, which allowed the fated couple a final duet before their demise.

In 1870 the Franco-Prussian War interrupted Gounod's career, driving the composer and his family to seek refuge in England. Gounod returned to France in 1875 and spent the later years of his life largely focused on composing sacred music. Today, he is primarily remembered for his operas *Faust* and *Roméo et Juliette*.





Jules Barbier - Bru Zane Media Base

Michel Carré - Bru Zane Media Base

## Librettists' Biographies:

### Jules Barbier & Michel Carré

Jules Barbier (March 8, 1825-January 16, 1901) and Michel Carré (October 20, 1821-June 27, 1872) worked in Paris as a prolific writing team, collaborating on over thirty opera librettos during the nineteenth century. Their most famous operas include Ambroise Thomas's *Hamlet* (1868), Giacomo Meyerbeer's *le Pardon de Ploërmel*, and Gounod's *Faust* (1859) and *Roméo et Juliette* (1867).

The writers often adapted their librettos from literary sources in what historian David Charlton describes as a “new generation of ‘literary’ opera:

sophisticated, addressing a public that was probably much better-read than that of the late twentieth century, and willing to develop the implications of a dramatic theme.” The pair collaborated on seven operas with Gounod, including *Polyeucte* (1878). They also worked individually and with other collaborators. Carré wrote the libretto for Gounod's *Mireille* (1864) and collaborated with Eugène Cormon on Bizet's *Les pêcheurs de perles*, while Barbier worked with Jacques Offenbach on *Les contes d'Hoffmann* (1881).



Scenes from Gounod's *Polyeucte*, 1878 - Victoria and Albert Museum

# DRAMA AND THEATRE ARTS

**Grade Level:** High School (adaptable for other grades)

**Time:** Variable

**Overview:** Use visuals from *Romeo & Juliet* to explore the design process

**Materials:**

- Scissors
- Set Images (page 10 and page 15)
- Images students can access physically and/or digitally for their designs

Design your own set!

## COLORADO ACADEMIC STANDARD

**Professional Pathway, Standard**  
2. Perform

**GLE**  
2. Develop and refine artistic techniques, choices, and work for presentation.

**Students Can:** Explain and justify the selection of technical elements used to build a design that communicates the concept of a drama/theatre production. (Evidence Outcome b)

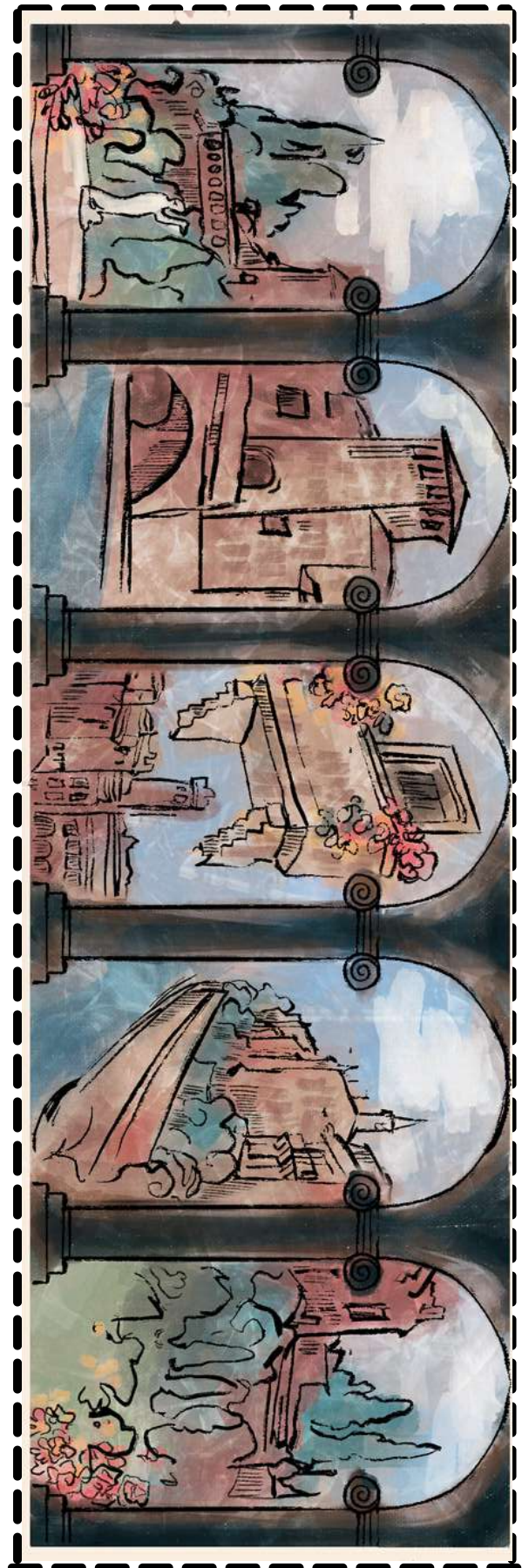
### Design a Set

**Description:** Students use images of the set from *Romeo & Juliet* as a prompt for their own set design.

#### Detailed Steps:

1. Discuss how designers use locations to inspire set designs, particularly for historical plays.
2. Have students view the *Romeo & Juliet* inspirations and identify the influence of these images in the set design for Opera Colorado's production (page 10).
3. Consider how Opera Colorado's production of *Romeo & Juliet* uses the architectural elements of Verona to evoke the fourteenth-century city while also incorporating cell phones and other modern elements. Ask students to evaluate this choice. How did it affect their experience of the story?
4. Ask students to imagine the play in a different time and place.
5. Have students select images that evoke their new setting for *Romeo & Juliet*. Then, ask students to use these images to inspire a concept for a set. Draw the backdrop for this set on the next page.
6. Have students write a brief paragraph describing how their setting works with the plot of the story. Compare and contrast this function with Opera Colorado's design.

# Design a Set

# MUSIC - LESSON

## Theory of Music

Hear songs from  
the show!

Grade Level: High School (adaptable for other grades)

Time: 45 minutes

Overview: Students use Juliet's aria to explore musical elements and expressive qualities.

Materials:

- Devices with internet connection and speaker to play links embedded in lesson
- Optional - ability to display videos along with audio

### COLORADO ACADEMIC STANDARD

**Proficient, Standard**

3. Theory of Music

**GLE**

2. Analyze structure, use of musical elements, and expressive choices within musical creations.

### **Theory of Music (45 minutes)**

**Description:** Students use Juliet's aria "Je veux vivre" to consider the use of musical elements and expressive choices.

#### **Detailed Steps:**

1. Review the context of this song in the story: When Gertrude says Juliet may soon be a bride, Juliet uses this song to declare she wants to remain free and enjoy her youth.
2. Introduce the video/audio by asking students to listen for elements that express joy and youth.
3. Play video of South African soprano Pretty Yende singing "Je veux vivre" (4 minutes).
4. Divide students into groups and have each group decide on a process for recording their ideas.
  - Assign half of the groups to listen to the section of the song from the beginning to 1:12 and consider how the repeated melody interacts with the orchestra's rhythms. How do they think the voice and orchestration are working together to convey Juliet's mood?
  - Assign the other half of the groups to listen to the section of the aria from 2:42 to the end. How do they think the voice and orchestration are working together to convey Juliet's mood?
5. Once groups have finished, pair groups from each topic and have them share their findings.



Soprano Pretty Yende





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