

Opera Voices

There are many categories of voices in opera. The most basic ones are soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone and bass. Even within these voice categories there are several different types. The soprano is the highest female voice, followed by the mezzo soprano. To both of these voice types several prefixes can be added which describe particular qualities of a singer's voice. The "range" of a singer refers to the distance between the singer's highest and lowest notes that they can comfortably sing. *Coloratura* refers to a singer whose voice is very agile and can articulate notes very rapidly. Coloraturas often sing very florid series of scales and runs, often stretching to the very top and bottom of the range. *Lyric* refers to a lighter, tuneful voice, which is not expected to display the same vocal athleticism of a coloratura. A *dramatic* soprano refers to the largest of operatic voices; they are much weightier than lyric voices and often have a dark color or timbre. Dramatic voices can cut through even over the huge orchestras of Richard Wagner. There is a rare female voice below the mezzo soprano, known as a contralto.

The tenor is the highest of the male voices. A tenor with a very high light voice is often described as a lyric tenor. A Heldentenor or "heroic tenor" is a voice type often associated with the music of Wagner. The voice is very full and substantial, with a low range extending almost to the realm of a baritone. The baritone is the middle male voice, between the tenor and bass. The prefixes lyric and dramatic also apply to the baritone voice. A high bass voice is often referred to as a "bass-baritone", this a voice lower than a baritone but not as low as the "basso profundo".

How would you categorize your own singing voice?