

The First World War was one of the greatest tragedies of modern history. Opposing armies hoping for a swift conclusion to the conflict became mired in years of gruesome violence. Young men eager to fight for their countries were quickly awakened to the realities of trench warfare, where disease ran rampant and troops on both sides were hammered with machine gun fire, hand grenades, chemical weapons, and aerial attacks. Civilian casualties reached the millions, nearly equaling the number of military deaths. The grand scale of the war and its legacies—both then and now—are fitting for the operatic stage, in many ways an ideal venue for big events, big emotions, big decisions, and big consequences.

In creating their Pulitzer Prize-winning opera *Silent Night*, however, composer Kevin Puts and librettist Mark Campbell capture not the enactment of violence that characterized the Great War but rather a brief, improvised moment of peace amid the onslaught. “There’s so much division in the world right now, and we’re at the mercy of our leaders sometimes,” Puts remarks. “The fact is, we’re not all that different, we all want pretty much the same things. And as soon as you come face-to-face with one another, you find that there’s not that much separating us.” In the Met-premiere production of *Silent Night*, directed by James Robinson, dramas of family, religion, and nation play out in the trenches of the Western Front.

This guide approaches *Silent Night* as a vehicle for understanding the complex history of World War I, as well as the longstanding tradition of representing armed conflict in the operatic repertoire. Students will also have the opportunity to investigate questions of plot and character while connecting the music of Puts’s opera to their own personal experience. In so doing, they will come to understand how the opera builds on important historical precedents while developing original techniques for conveying the unthinkable calamity of the Great War.



VAN DEN HEEVER



BLISS



VILLAZÓN



REISINGER



OLIVIERI



AUSTIN



McKINNY



KETELSEN

THE WORK

An opera in two acts, sung in English, French, German, Italian, and Latin

Music by Kevin Puts

Libretto by Mark Campbell

Based on the screenplay for *Joyeux Noël* by Christian Carion for the motion picture produced by Nord-Ouest Productions

First performed November 12, 2011, at Minnesota Opera

PRODUCTION

James Robinson Production

Mimi Lien Set Designer

Catherine Zuber Costume Designer

Lap Chi Chu Lighting Designer

Rick Jacobsohn Sound Designer

Seán Curran Choreographer

Tilman Michael

C. Graham Berwind, III Chorus Director

PERFORMANCE

The Met: Live in HD

March 16, 2027

Encore March 20, 2027

Elza van den Heever Anna Sørensen

Ben Bliss Nikolaus Sprink

Rolando Villazón Ponchel

Ben Reisinger Jonathan Dale

Mattia Olivieri Lt. Audebert

Justin Austin Lt. Gordon

Ryan McKinny Lt. Horstmayer

Kyle Ketelsen Father Palmer

Dalia Stasevska Conductor

Silent Night Educator Guide

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CONTENTS



3 **Who's Who in *Silent Night***

An introduction to the opera's main characters

4 **The Story**

A synopsis for young readers

6 **The Source**

Information about the opera's literary forebears

8 **Timelines**

Chronologies highlighting key moments in the creation of the opera

CLOSER LOOKS



12 In the Trenches

14 An Interview with Composer Kevin Puts

MUSICAL SNAPSHOT



16 Diegetic Aesthetic

ACTIVE EXPLORATION



19 Philosophical Chairs

21 Plot Decoder

24 No Quiet on the Western Front

31 **Handouts**

Classroom-ready worksheets that support the activities in this guide

ONLINE ACCESS To access this guide online, including any audio selections and handouts, visit metopera.org/silentnightguide.



CHARACTER	PRONUNCIATION	THE LOWDOWN
Nikolaus Sprink TENOR	<i>NEE-koh-louse</i> <i>SHPRINK</i>	A German opera singer turned soldier. Worn down by the violence of battle, Nikolaus's seemingly reckless behavior initiates the truce between fighting armies.
Anna Sørensen SOPRANO	<i>AH-nah</i> <i>SUR-ren-sen</i>	A Norwegian opera singer and Nikolaus's lover. Anna goes to extreme ends to bring Nikolaus back from the front lines—and ultimately joins him on the battlefield.
Jonathan Dale TENOR		A Scottish soldier. When he sees his brother killed in battle, Jonathan's desire for vengeance overwhelms his misgivings about warfare.
Lieutenant Gordon BARITONE		Leader of the Scottish platoon. Gordon is the soldier responsible for proposing the Christmas truce and suggesting that both sides extend the peace to bury the dead.
Lieutenant Audebert BARITONE	<i>oh-deh-BEHR</i>	Audebert, leader of the French platoon, remains occupied by thoughts of his wife at home and turns down a promotion so he can stay with his troops.
Lieutenant Horstmayer BASS-BARITONE	<i>HORST-my-er</i>	The leader of the German platoon, he is deeply ambivalent about fighting for the German cause; he is Jewish, and his wife is French.
Ponchel TENOR	<i>pon-SHELL</i>	A lighthearted and often goofy French soldier, Ponchel is beset by nostalgia for morning coffee with his mother.

GLOSSARY

Initiate (*v.*): to begin, start, or introduce

Misgiving (*n.*): a feeling of mistrust or fear

Ambivalent (*adj.*): having contrary or mixed feelings about something

Beset (*v.*): to trouble or burden continually



THE STORY

Synopsis

ACT I. In Berlin, German tenor Nikolaus Sprink and his lover, Norwegian soprano Anna Sørensen, are performing together in an opera when a military official interrupts their duet. The **Kaiser** has declared war, and Sprink has been enlisted. In a Scottish village, Jonathan and his brother William rush off to enlist. And in France, Lieutenant Audebert's pregnant wife, Madeleine, begs him not to leave her for combat.

Five months later, in December 1914, a bloody battle breaks out on the Western Front—the Germans against the Scottish and their French allies. During the **skirmish**, William is fatally shot. Despite the prayers of his parish priest, Father Palmer, Jonathan vows revenge on the enemies who killed his brother. In the French bunker, Audebert logs the names of the men he lost while he pictures his wife and their future child safe at home. Exhausted by the day's fighting, troops from all three sides find some brief **respite** in sleep.

On the morning of Christmas Eve, a shipment of decorated trees arrives for the German **platoon**. Their lieutenant, Horstmayer, informs Sprink that Crown Prince Wilhelm has requested the tenor sing that night at a party, where he'll be joined by Anna. In the French trenches, Audebert receives a haircut from his **aide-de-camp**, Ponchel, who remarks that his mother lives only an hour away. After Anna and Sprink perform at the Crown Prince's **soirée**, Anna reveals she has arranged for the couple to spend the night together. When Sprink tells her he has an obligation to return to his comrades, she convinces him to take her with him.

Back at the front line, Sprink sings for the German troops. Suddenly, he climbs out of the bunker to perform a carol for the Scots on the other side, who answer back on bagpipe. Horstmayer, Audebert, and the Scottish lieutenant, Gordon, confer in **no man's land** and agree to a ceasefire—just for that night. Troops from the three platoons **fraternize**, sharing chocolate and exchanging photos of wives and

GLOSSARY

Kaiser (*n.*): the ruler of the German Empire from 1871–1918

Skirmish (*n.*): a small, irregular, or disorganized fight

Respite (*n.*): temporary rest or relief from an unpleasant situation

Platoon (*n.*): a small group of foot soldiers

Aide-de-camp (*n.*): an officer acting as an assistant to a senior officer

Soirée (*n.*): an evening party or gathering

No man's land (*n.*): the terrain between two opposing armies

Fraternize (*v.*): to cultivate friendly relations with troops of an opposing army



girlfriends. Father Palmer holds a Christmas Eve mass, during which Anna sings the “*Dona nobis pacem*”—“Grant us peace.”

ACT II. The next morning, the three lieutenants agree to extend the truce through Christmas Day so the platoons can bury their dead. Watching from the side, Anna imagines what it must be like for women who receive news that their loved ones have been killed. Meanwhile, word of the truce has reached the British, German, and French commanders, who find this disgraceful conduct **treasonous**. As Christmas comes to a close, Anna and Sprink—refusing to participate in the war any longer—surrender themselves over to the French as prisoners.

The troops write home about the extraordinary truce—all except Jonathan, who lies to his mother in a letter that William is still alive. The British Major arrives the day after Christmas to notify the Scots that they are being relocated. Just then, a soldier can be seen in no man’s land. The Major orders the men to fire, but only Jonathan obeys, shooting what appears to be a German. In reality, it is Ponchel, who borrowed a German uniform to sneak behind enemy lines and visit his mother. Before he dies, Ponchel shares some news he learned: Audebert’s son has been born.

Audebert is lectured by his father, the French General, who informs him that the platoon is being transferred to Verdun. Likewise, the Crown Prince tells the Germans that they are being deployed to the Eastern Front as punishment. While they wait to be shipped off by train, the German troops hum a ballad they learned from the Scots. Men from all three sides reflect on the miraculous Christmas they witnessed.

Synopsis reprinted courtesy of Houston Grand Opera

FUN FACT

In the film *Joyeux Noël*, the basis for Puts’s opera, the singing voices of Nikolaus Sprink and Anna Sørensen are provided by superstars of the Met stage, tenor Rolando Villazón and soprano Natalie Dessay, respectively.

GLOSSARY

Treasonous (*adj.*): characterized by betrayal or breach of faith



The Screenplay for *Joyeux Noël* by Christian Carion for the Motion Picture Produced by Nord-Ouest Productions

In adapting Christian Carion's screenplay, librettist Mark Campbell hewed closely to the film's structure and storyline. After studying the film and doing his own research on the Christmas truce of 1914, Campbell made several decisions that made *Silent Night* more appropriate for the operatic stage. One such **alteration** was to set simultaneous dialogue in the German, Scottish, and French bunkers, respectively—an **affordance** of **polyphonic** music not easily achieved in film. Another slight modification was to frame Nikolaus Sprink's **defection** at the beginning of Act II rather than placing it toward the end of the narrative.

Campbell also sought to complicate further some of the film's characters, particularly Sprink and his lover, the soprano Anna Sørensen (who is Danish in the film and Norwegian in the opera). Whereas they are portrayed as **unimpeachably** noble characters in the movie, Campbell sought to make them more **fallible**. Sørensen, for example, essentially traps Sprink into spending the night with her on Christmas Eve when he insists on returning to his platoon. And Sprink later questions whether Lieutenant Horstmayer, who is Jewish, is truly loyal to the German cause. In addition, the librettist greatly expanded the role of Jonathan Dale, the vengeful Scottish soldier whose brother is killed in the first scene, from a **peripheral** to

GLOSSARY

Alteration (*n.*): a change or modification

Affordance (*n.*): an aspect or property of an object that relates to its use

Polyphonic (*adj.*): composed or arranged for several voices or parts

Defection (*n.*): the act of deserting a person, cause, or country

Unimpeachable (*adj.*): not able to be doubted, questioned, or criticized

Fallible (*adj.*): capable of making mistakes or being wrong

Peripheral (*adj.*): marginal or not of direct concern





a central character—downgrading the stage time for Father Palmer in the process.

Other small changes were made for the sake of **concision**. In the film, for instance, each army's higher-ups learn of the truce by reading the **correspondence** of their soldiers; in the opera, it is implied that a member of the platoons leaked the information. *Joyeux Noël* also contains a scene not included in the opera when, after the extension of the truce, Horstmayer provides shelter for the French and Scottish platoons during a German air raid. In return, the French and Scottish lieutenants let the Germans seek cover in their trenches during the ensuing counterattack. A final creative choice by Campbell was to have Nikolaus and Horstmayer, who speak French, translate Lieutenant Gordon's words for Lieutenant Audebert, who doesn't understand English. In the film, all three lieutenants converse without the need for translators. In this way, *Silent Night* puts extra emphasis on the need for collaboration—and communication across difference—in times of conflict.

GLOSSARY

Concision (*n.*): brevity or terseness

Correspondence (*n.*): communication by letters





TIMELINE

The Creation of *Silent Night*

1963 Christian Carion is born to a family of farmers in the north of France, where many World War I battles took place.

1972 Kevin Puts is born in St. Louis, Missouri. He studies at Yale University and the Eastman School of Music, where he receives his Doctor of Musical Arts degree.

2001 Carion directs his first **feature film**, *Une Hirondelle a fait le Printemps* (*The Girl from Paris*).

2005 The film *Joyeux Noël*, written and directed by Christian Carion, is screened at the Cannes Film Festival. It goes on to be nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film the following year.

2011 Kevin Puts's first opera, *Silent Night*, premieres at Minnesota Opera, as part of its New Works Initiative, in a co-production with Opera Philadelphia.

2012 *Silent Night* wins the Pulitzer Prize for Music.

2013 *Silent Night* has its East Coast premiere with Opera Philadelphia.

2014 *Silent Night* has its European premiere at Wexford Festival Opera in Ireland and is staged by Fort Worth Opera, Calgary Opera, and Cincinnati Opera.

2015 *Silent Night* is staged at Montreal Opera, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, and Florida Grand Opera.

Puts and Campbell collaborate on the opera *The Manchurian Candidate*, based on Richard Condon's novel and two subsequent film adaptations, which premieres at Minnesota Opera.

GLOSSARY

Feature film (*n.*): a movie that typically runs longer than 80–90 minutes



2016 The Wexford production of *Silent Night* is staged by the Atlanta Opera.

Campbell contributes the libretto for composer Paul Moravec's *The Shining*, adapted from Stephen King's novel, which premieres at Minnesota Opera as part of its New Works Initiative.

2017 Puts and Campbell collaborate on a **chamber opera**, *Elizabeth Cree*, which premieres at Opera Philadelphia. *Silent Night* receives its West Coast premiere at Opera San Jose.

Campbell contributes the libretto for composer Mason Bates's first opera, *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*, which premieres at the Santa Fe Opera.

2018 *Silent Night* is staged at the Glimmerglass Festival and University of Kentucky Opera Theatre.

The Metropolitan Opera **commissions** Puts to write a new work based on Michael Cunningham's novel *The Hours* and its film adaptation.

2019 *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs* wins a Grammy Award for Best Opera Recording.

2020 *Silent Night* is staged by Utah Opera.

2022 Puts's third opera, *The Hours*, premieres at the Met.

2026 *Silent Night* is staged at Houston Grand Opera in a co-production with the Met directed by James Robinson. The opera also receives its first revival at the Atlanta Opera.

2027 *Silent Night* receives its Met premiere.

Think about it!

In Act I, Scene 4 of *Silent Night*, Nikolaus Sprink expresses despair at the state of the war. "*Alles ist nutzlos*" ("Everything is useless"), he sings. "*Alles: Die Opera. Der Gesang. Nutzlos.*" ("Everything: Opera. Singing. Useless.") This statement is especially noteworthy when sung in the middle of an opera!

- How do you think about the relationship between violence and art?
- Is art necessary in time of political turmoil, or is art powerless to effect political change?
- Should we care about art in the middle of war, or should art only be enjoyed during peacetime?

GLOSSARY

Chamber opera (*n.*): an opera written for and performed by a small number of singers and musicians

Commission (*v.*): to provide funding for an artist to produce a particular work



TIMELINE

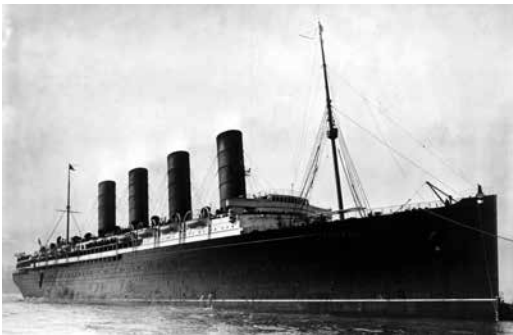
The First World War

1914 On June 28, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of the Austro-Hungarian Empire is assassinated in Sarajevo. In response, Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia, believing it responsible for the murder.

In August, Germany, led by Kaiser Wilhelm II, invades Luxembourg and Belgium. France responds by invading Alsace, a region they had ceded to Germany following the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71. British forces arrive to support France, and Austria-Hungary invades Russia.

Around Christmas, groups of soldiers along the Western Front partake in unofficial ceasefires to mingle and exchange gifts—an event that becomes known as the Christmas truce. The ceasefires are widespread, with approximately 100,000 troops participating.

RMS Lusitania coming into port, possibly in New York, 1907
NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY



1915 In February, the Turkish army **disarms** its Armenian troops, suspecting that they are helping the Russian army.

In April, the Ottoman Empire begins the Armenian Genocide. Beginning with arrests and deportations in Constantinople (present-day Istanbul), approximately one million Armenians are sent on death marches over the next two years.

On May 7, off the coast of Ireland, a German submarine sinks the *RMS Lusitania*, a British ocean liner crossing the Atlantic from New York City to Liverpool, England. Nearly 1,200 passengers are killed, including 128 Americans.

Italy declares war on Austria-Hungary.

1916 From February till December, French and German forces engage in the Battle of Verdun, leading to one million casualties.

1917 In April, the United States declares war on Germany, abandoning its policy of **neutrality**—largely because Germany had resumed unrestricted submarine warfare.

In December, Russia signs an **armistice** with Germany.

GLOSSARY

Disarm (*v.*): to take weapons away from

Neutrality (*n.*): the act of abstaining from taking part in a war between other states

Armistice (*n.*): a formal agreement by warring governments to end hostilities



1918 On January 8, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson presents his “Fourteen Points” in a speech to Congress, outlining the principles that would guide peace negotiations to end the war.

On November 11, Germany signs the armistice on a train in the forest near Compiègne, thereby bringing the war to an end. It is estimated that the war resulted in 15 to 22 million military and civilian deaths, as well as another 20 million wounded, making it one of the deadliest conflicts in human history.

Austria-Hungary dissolves following its military defeat, leading to the creation of several independent states, including Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and what would later be known as Yugoslavia.

1919 The first meeting of the Paris Peace Conference takes place. Over the next year, these convenings determine the terms of peace for the defeated Central Powers. The Peace Conference creates the League of Nations, an important **precursor** to the United Nations.

Five treaties also emerge from the conference. In June, the Treaty of Versailles, the most notable of the five, is signed, officially ending the war between Germany and most of the Allied Powers. (The United States never **ratified** the treaty, as it failed to pass two separate votes in the Senate.) The terms of the treaty place all responsibility for the war on Germany; require Germany to pay significant **reparations** to Russia, France, and England; mandate that Kaiser Wilhelm II be put on trial; grant independence to German-controlled territories in Europe (Czechoslovakia and Poland); give Alsace-Lorraine back to France; and force Germany to give up control of its overseas colonies in Africa, Asia, and Oceania.

1921 The United States signs a peace treaty with Germany, as well as with Austria and Hungary.



Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany
WIKICOMMONS

GLOSSARY

Precursor (*n.*): a person or thing that precedes another

Ratify (*v.*): to formally confirm or validate

Reparations (*n.*): monetary compensation to make amends for war damage



In the Trenches



German cavalry of the 11th Reserve Hussar Regiment in a trench on the Western Front, 1916

BUNDESARCHIV, GERMANY

GLOSSARY

Sobering (*adj.*): creating a more serious or solemn mood

Trench (*n.*): a long, narrow ditch dug by troops to provide a place of shelter

Devise (*v.*): to plan, create, or invent

Artillery (*n.*): large-caliber military weapons, including cannons and mortars

Parapet (*n.*): a low protective wall at the top of the bunker which provided protection against attack

When the First World War began in the summer of 1914, armies on both sides insisted the conflict would be “over by Christmas.” The **sobering** reality soon emerged that the war would be a long one, and ultimately somewhere between 15 and 22 million soldiers and civilians were killed. One major reason that the war dragged on for several years and claimed so many lives was the nature of the fighting itself. The Great War represented the apex of trench warfare, a style of battle in which opposing forces attack and defend from a complex, semi-permanent system of **trenches** dug into the ground.

World War I was not, however, the first instance of trench warfare. During the American Civil War, both Union and Confederate armies used trench systems. The man widely credited with developing the first modern system of trench warfare was French military engineer Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban (1633–1707), who **devised** a strategy for attacking fortresses using three parallel trenches described in his work *Mémoire pour Servir à l’Instruction dans la Conduite des Sièges* (1672).

During the First World War, both the Allied and Central Powers used extensive systems of trenches—many of them stretching a mile, some on the German side covering as many as 14 miles, and on both sides encompassing more than 475 miles from the Swiss Alps to the English Channel. Trenches were created by excavating soil from the ground, then using that soil to increase the height of the protective walls on either side of the trench. The inside of the trench was often fortified with sandbags, wooden planks, sticks, barbed wire, and mud. The front-facing wall of the trench had a “fire step” for soldiers to stand on when aiming **artillery** at the opposing army. Just below the top of the trench, an ammunition shelf enabled troops to reload their weapons quickly. The trench was often excavated further to create a “dugout” for resting between battles. An “elbow rest” at the top of the **parapet** helped soldiers steady and aim their rifles.



Trenches were typically dug in a zigzag configuration so that enemy combatants entering or overtaking the trench could not fire down the entire length of the tunnel. Most trench systems had three or four long trenches running roughly parallel to one another; the first was the front-line trench, the second was the support trench, and the third was the reserve trench. Running roughly perpendicular were communication trenches used to carry information and artillery. Between trench systems of opposing armies was “no man’s land,” often covered with layers of barbed wire to defend against potential **incursions**.

Trench warfare was used in the First World War largely as a defense against machine guns and other rapid-fire weapons. These tunnel systems provided a space to take cover from attack, including aerial **bombardment**. With the development of increasingly sophisticated and lethal chemical weapons, moreover, trenches were thought to offer protection from exposure from poison gas and other chemical weapons. Beyond the threat of armed conflict, the confined space of the trench was also a breeding ground for lice and rat infestations, as well as disease. One of these was trench foot, caused by prolonged immersion in or contact with water and mud—despite the use of wooden “duckboards” running along the bottom of each trench to keep soldiers’ feet dry. Trench foot often led to decay and **gangrene**, ultimately requiring amputation.

Since trench warfare was largely defensive rather than offensive, it led to both sides being stuck in an ongoing **stalemate** where neither army could make significant advances. This deadlock was finally brought to an end by the Allied Powers’ use of the tank, which could easily overtake trenches defended with machine guns and rifles. But that was already four years into the conflict, and the misery of life in the trenches had already taken its toll.

GLOSSARY

Incursion (*n.*): a hostile invasion or sudden attack

Bombardment (*n.*): a sustained military attack made on a target

Gangrene (*n.*): death of body tissue caused by loss of blood or bacterial infection

Stalemate (*n.*): a situation in which neither side can make progress





Interview with Composer Kevin Puts

How did you decide to write an opera in the first place, and why did you pick this subject?

As my orchestral and concert music became more lyrical, some people said, “You should really think about opera.” I just had no idea how to start. I think it was probably around 2010 when I got a call from Dale Johnson, who was the artistic director of Minnesota Opera. He had heard my orchestral music and thought that I had the skills that opera would require. And he had a very specific project in mind, to adapt this wonderful film *Joyeux Noël*, which was set during the first Christmas of World War I. So that’s how it started; he just asked me to do it. And he had this plan to make it a huge opera with a big orchestra and chorus, a big cast, and possibly do it in three languages. So for my first opera, that was kind of a **daunting** assignment, but I agreed to do it.

specific things to work with and to bring to life with music. I found it incredibly exciting. It just felt very natural.

Can you describe the sound-world of *Silent Night*?

I think the sound-world has a lot of variety, and it’s interesting that I was quickly labeled a “polystylist” after this opera. But it’s what was called for in the opera—that beginning classical pastiche, several Christmas carols that we wrote on our own, a duet which is supposed to evoke German lieder, a Scottish ballad. All these little moments that brought in music within the music, I think, suggested a “polystylistic” approach. So I don’t know if there’s a real overarching musical style to the opera. I think that the war music—the theme based on fifths that you hear at the very opening—ties the whole thing together. It functions as a way of zooming out and looking at the whole picture. And there are many such moments, sweeping orchestral **interludes** looking at the whole situation: all three armies, the situation they’re in, the context of the war.

How do you think about the relationship between the orchestra and the voice?

For me, the orchestra was the point of familiarity—I felt I knew how to allow the orchestra to operate. And certainly, I think the storytelling happens in the orchestra. You can do things with voices and how they sing the text to evoke

GLOSSARY

Daunting (*adj.*): something that seems difficult or intimidating

Interlude (*n.*): a short instrumental or vocal passage between primary sections of a work

Climax (*n.*): point of highest tension, emotional intensity, or volume

Orchestration (*n.*): the assignment of musical elements to specific instruments in an ensemble

Before *Silent Night*, you were writing mostly orchestral music. How does one become an opera composer?

I knew a few operas quite well. So I had a sense of the feel of it, the pace of it, the atmosphere of it. But it wasn’t until I got the first act of Mark Campbell’s libretto in the mail that I really knew what it felt like to write an opera. And I probably knew film more than I knew opera at that time. I was very happy to discover that his libretto was quite cinematic in the way that it moved from scene to scene—it was giving me such



whatever situation is at play, but really the orchestra is where the storytelling takes place. There's a scene in Act II where the men decide to extend the truce so they can bury the dead, who are strewn about in no man's land. Originally, that was just an orchestral interlude. It began with a flute solo and gradually built up the entire orchestra until the bagpipes took over. We actually added the chorus to that scene for this new production. It was, interestingly, very easy to just overlay this orchestral interlude with the three choruses gradually entering and building up into a big choral **climax**.

Have you revisited the score since its premiere?

I've gone back through the entire opera and revised it. I really think I've come a long way in terms of understanding what an opera singer needs to let a line really bloom. I decided to revise the opera when the Met told me they were going to do it. I thought, "Maybe I'll just take a look, just go through it and see." I think every single line in the opera has been altered in little ways. It's almost like when you clean an old painting; they do these meticulous things and suddenly the work is more vibrant. I think the opera just comes off the stage better now. The singers are happier. And then I did the same thing with the **orchestration**. I just looked at every bar and thought, "What is the best solution for the orchestra to really be able to play?" The



short answer is that I've learned a few things about writing operas since 2010.

***Silent Night* has been staged by many opera companies in the United States and even around the world. Why do you think it has resonated so deeply with audiences?**

I have to give Mark Campbell a lot of credit. I think it's such a smart libretto. I think the way he tells the story is just brilliant, the fact that, for these soldiers, it didn't take a lot for them to realize these are men just like us that we're bombing every day. To see that and

say, "Now what do we do? Now that we know each other, now that we've shared Champagne, we've played soccer together? This is insanity." I hope there are some musical moments that people look forward to. When I think of opera, I think of moments that I love—moments in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, in *Der Rosenkavalier*, in Britten's operas and John Adams's operas that I just want to hear over and over. When I composed *Silent Night*, I tried to create moments that are satisfying musically just on their own. Whether I was successful, I don't know, but I certainly aimed for that.



FUN FACT

When *Silent Night* had its European premiere at Wexford Opera Festival in Ireland, the creative team was asked to remove a stage direction where Father Palmer, a priest fighting for the Scottish army, removes the cross from his neck and throws it across the battlefield.

GLOSSARY

Diegetic (*adj.*): relating to what occurs within the world of the story

Conventional (*adj.*): typical or traditional

Extant (*adj.*): already existing or accessible

Liturgy (*n.*): a form of public worship, especially in the Christian Church

Sacrament (*n.*): certain ceremonies or religious acts practiced in the Christian church

Engraver (*n.*): someone who carves pictures on metal or wood from which prints are to be taken

Diegetic Aesthetic

It's fitting that *Silent Night* is both the title of Kevin Puts and librettist Mark Campbell's Pulitzer Prize-winning opera and the name of perhaps the most famous Christmas carol beside "Jingle Bells." Indeed, *Silent Night* is a thoroughly musical opera, and not just because the words are sung and there is a full orchestra playing throughout the work. Puts's opera makes frequent use of **diegetic** music, a term that describes when the characters in the story hear or perform music that they are meant to perceive as music itself—rather than **conventional** dialogue or arias, which the audience hears as music and the characters in the story perceive as regular speech.

In *Silent Night*, there are in fact two types of diegetic music found throughout the opera. The first involves Puts incorporating **extant** musical works into the score. There are two primary examples of this technique. The first is "*Dona nobis pacem*" ("Grant us peace"), a section of the Latin Mass sung by Anna Sørensen at the conclusion of Act I. The Latin Mass is the **liturgy** of the Catholic Church, and "*Dona nobis pacem*" specifically comes from a longer part of the Mass called *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God), which is typically sung during the **sacrament** of Holy Communion. "*Dona nobis pacem*" is also typically sung as a round with three parts, where each singer or group of singers performs the same melody but starting at different times so the melody harmonizes with itself. Puts chooses, however, to set the Latin text to an original melody, sung freely without any orchestral accompaniment or harmony.

Another example of this type of setting is "*Dormi, Jesu*" ("Sleep, baby Jesus"), which Nikolaus Sprink sings while emerging from the German bunker and walking into no man's land. When the Scottish troops accompany him on the bagpipe, the idea of a truce between the armies is enacted musically before any such agreement is made. "*Dormi, Jesu*" is traditionally the text of a lullaby that originated with Flemish **engraver** Hieronymus Wierix (1553–1619), who included it in his book *Jesu Christi Dei Domini Salvatoris Nostra Infantia*



(*The Infancy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*). English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge encountered the work on his travels through Germany and published an English translation in his volume *Sibylline Leaves* (1817).

The second type of diegetic music found in *Silent Night* involves Puts composing original music in imitation of

historical styles, both popular and operatic. The opening scene, for example, features Sprink and Sørensen singing an Italian opera duet modeled after Mozart. They later **reprise** this piece when performing for the Crown Prince on Christmas. During that recital, the couple also performs a German piece, “*Komm, Frühling!*,” modeled after the **lieder** written by German composers of the 19th century like Schubert and Schumann.

In addition to these more formal musical imitations, Puts and Campbell created original patriotic songs representing each army in the opera. First, the German soldiers sing, “*Der Sieg wird unser sein*”



Hieronymus Wierix, *The Virgin Sewing While Angels Rock Her Son to Sleep*, before 1619, engraving
COURTESY THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

GLOSSARY

Reprise (v.): to repeat a song

Lied (n.): a musical setting of poetry, especially during the German Romantic period



FUN FACT

Kevin Puts and librettist Mark Campbell's *Silent Night* isn't the only theatrical work about this historical event. *All Is Calm: The Christmas Truce of 1914* (2007) is an a cappella piece with dialogue and songs in English, written by Peter Rothstein and developed by the Cantus Vocal Ensemble and Theater Latté Da in Minneapolis. *Silent Night* would premiere four years later in neighboring St. Paul.

("Victory will be ours"); then the Scottish soldiers sing, "*Never turn your back on Union Jack*;" and finally the French soldiers join in with, "*Nous nous battons*." By the end of the scene, all three groups—each represented by an offstage chorus—are singing at the same time, though they could hardly be said to be singing together. Puts and Campbell also wrote an original sentimental **ballad**, "*Many the miles I have travel'd*," to be sung by the Scottish soldiers, accompanied freely by bagpipe. This music first appears in Act I, performed by the Scottish troops, and reappears at the very conclusion of Act II, when the German troops hum the ballad's tune while being relocated to the Eastern **front**. In this way, the opera ends with a poignant image of musical sharing that outlives the violence inflicted upon its performers.

GLOSSARY

Ballad (*n.*): a simple song with two or more verses sung to the same melody with light accompaniment

Front (*n.*): the area where opposing armies meet and fight



Philosophical Chairs

Philosophical Chairs is an activity designed to foster critical thinking, active inquiry, and respectful dialogue among students. To play, participants agree or disagree with a series of statements, but the game doesn't end there. The most crucial element is what happens next: Participants discuss their point of view and can switch sides if their opinions change during the discussions.

Each topic statement is deliberately open ended yet ties into several of the themes present in *Silent Night*—including war and peace, duty to family and country, and shared humanity in the face of violent conflict. Offer students a brief overview of the opera's plot, setting, and context, and remind them how to build a safe space for productive conversation. Some of the topics might be confusing or challenging—that's okay! As you and your students explore and learn about *Silent Night*, you can return to these statements: What do they have to do with the opera's story? How might these questions help us explore the opera's story, history, and themes?

A NOTE TO FACILITATORS: Between statements, provide some clarity as to why that statement was chosen. Explain to students where and how each theme shows up in the opera or invite students to offer their own explanations.

STEP 1. INQUIRE

Distribute the included handout with guidelines and statements, making sure to review the rules of engagement as a group. Next, invite students to read one of the statements—out loud as a class, to themselves, or in small groups. As they read, they should ask themselves:

- Do I understand the statement?
 - If not, what questions might clarify it for me?
- What immediately comes to mind when I read the statement?
 - What is my initial reaction: Do I agree or disagree?
- What led me to that decision?
 - What opinions do I hold about this statement?
 - What life experiences may have led me to think this way?

MATERIALS

- Handouts

OBJECTIVES

Learners will be able to:

- Express and defend their point of view on a given topic.
- Listen to thinking different from their own and respond with examples and evidence.

CONNECTIONS

- Delineate and evaluate arguments and claims.
- Evaluate a speaker's reasoning.
- Express ideas persuasively.



STEP 2. RESPOND

Read the statements again out loud and ask students to commit to one side. They can agree or disagree, but there is no middle ground. (Many will not be completely comfortable committing to one side over the other—that's part of the game. It will help foster conversation and debate.)

STEP 3. DISCUSS

Start a conversation! Use the following questions to guide discussion:

- Does anyone feel very strongly either way? Why or why not?
- Does anyone feel conflicted? Why or why not?
- Give voice to what you thought about in the first step:
 - What led me to make my decision?
 - What opinions do I hold about this statement?
 - What life experiences may have led me to think this way?
- What might you not have considered that others are now bringing up in the discussion?
- Did any new questions arise during the discussion?

As the conversation continues, students are free to change their minds or develop more nuanced perspectives.

Repeat steps 1 through 3 for each statement.

SILENT OVERTURE If you have timid students and/or a class with several emerging language learners, consider allowing time for students to silently reflect prior to diving into the activity. Post the statements around the room, provide each student with a small stack of sticky notes of two different colors, and have them complete a gallery walk silently reading the statements. As they read the statements, students should write down questions (one color sticky note) and thoughts that came to mind (other color sticky note) and place them around the posted statement.

Set a ten-minute timer for students to complete this activity. Then, set a five-minute timer for students to read their peers' thoughts and questions prior to completing the active class discussion part of Philosophical Chairs.



Plot Decoder



The creators of *Silent Night*, composer Kevin Puts and librettist Mark Campbell, had a difficult task to accomplish. In adapting the 2005 film *Joyeux Noël* for the operatic stage, they had to decide which plot points to include, which to consolidate, and which to remove altogether from their work. And, just like the filmmakers before them, they were prompted to consider how one of the most important events in modern history—the First World War—could be condensed into a coherent narrative.

In this activity, students become detectives, translators, and oracles as they uncover the story of *Silent Night* through a collaborative game of plot sequencing and deduction. Rather than beginning with a full synopsis, students will use clues, reasoning, teamwork, and revision to identify the opera's key events and place them in order. In so doing, they will build curiosity about the characters, the history of World War I, and the extraordinary events at the center of the opera.

STEP 1. DISCOVER

Begin the lesson by sharing this one-sentence summary of *Silent Night*:

On a dark night in 1914, soldiers from three nations embroiled in World War I put aside their weapons to celebrate Christmas together in no man's land.

MATERIALS

- Handouts
- Scissors
- Green, yellow, and gray colored pencils or markers

OBJECTIVES

Learners will be able to:

- Identify and sequence the key plot points of *Silent Night*.
- Collaborate with their team and carry out their assigned roles.

CONNECTIONS

- Sequence events.
- Develop questions for deeper understanding and further exploration.
- Engage in collaborative discussion to express ideas and persuade.



Instead of reading the synopsis or watching performance clips, students will explore the plot through a game. This game should be played before digging deeper into the other materials included with this guide. Students can use their prior knowledge of World War I, armed conflicts, and plots of operas they have studied to play the game, but they should not consult the synopsis included with this guide or any other informational materials about *Silent Night*.

STEP 2. LEARN

Once students have heard the one-sentence summary of the opera, they are ready to learn how the game works. You can distribute or project the “Rules of Play” handout included with this guide or simply describe the mechanics of the game.

When students are familiar with the rules, divide them into teams. Within each team, assign specific players to be either detectives or translators. Teams can also nominate a member of their group to serve as their translator. There should be only one translator per team.

Finally, assign either one oracle for each team or one person to be the oracle for the entire class. Teachers can also serve in this role! The oracle(s) will need a copy of the answer key below:

2	6	8	3	13	11	4	14
---	---	---	---	----	----	---	----

Each group of detectives will need the “Detective Team” handout included with this guide; they should cut the list of plot points into individual sentence strips. Each translator will need the “Translator Key” and “Code Sheet” handouts included with this guide. Each oracle will need a green, yellow, and gray coloring implement and the answer key (keep it secret!).

STEP 3. PLAY

Now that students have a one-sentence opera summary and know the rules of the game, it’s time to play! The first team to decode the plot points correctly wins.



STEP 4. REVIEW

After the game has finished, share the full synopsis of the opera with students. Explore the eight correct plot points, as well as the other 12, which are all based on elements of either the opera or the history of World War I. Debrief by asking:

- Were the eight plot points chosen in the game representative of the opera's plot? Would you have chosen something different? Why?
- What type of set design do you expect to see on stage?
- Which musical elements do you expect to be present in the score?
- What do you expect to be the main message of the opera?

Chart student responses to revisit after the second lesson (see “No Quiet on the Western Front” included with this guide) or after students have seen the opera.



ACTIVE EXPLORATION

No Quiet on the Western Front

MATERIALS

- Handouts
- Audio tracks
- Mood Meter (optional)
- Musical Toolbox (optional)
- Opera Orchestra (optional)

OBJECTIVES

Learners will be able to:

- Compare and contrast songs from different operas with similar themes.
- Draw personal connections with songs from different genres.

CONNECTIONS

- Draw logical inferences from musical examples.
- Describe and compare musical examples based on mood.
- Draw connections with U.S. History core learning standards.

Silent Night is a story told in music, and it's also a story that itself features plenty of music-making. The opera even begins with an opera, and key scenes throughout the work include several kinds of singing—patriotic anthems, Christmas carols, excerpts from the Latin Mass, and more. In this way, *Silent Night* joins a long tradition of representing war through song on the operatic stage.

In this activity, students will explore four types of songs used in operatic depictions of warfare, analyze examples from the repertoire, and make inferences about the songs included in *Silent Night*. Then, they will have the chance to create their own playlists, using their own experience as the basis for their choices and demonstrating their understanding of mood and emotion, musical elements, and text.

STEP 1. EXPLORE

Begin by introducing the four types of war music that students will encounter in *Silent Night* and explore throughout the lesson.

- Battle songs and drumlines
- Patriotic songs and anthems
- Songs of mourning
- Songs of peace and resistance

Take a moment to help students understand each of the four song types, engaging in the inquiry-based process of your choosing. You might choose to make a Know–Want to Know–Learn (KWL) chart or four-way Venn diagram, or brainstorm list of expected characteristics for each song type. Use the following questions as a guide:

- How would you expect each song type to sound?
- What words or phrases would you anticipate hearing in the lyrics of each song type?
- What emotions would you associate with each song type?
- Do you know any examples of any of the four song types (e.g., a school fight song, a national anthem, or something else you've heard or sung)?



A scene from *Silent Night*
KAREN ALMOND/HOUSTON GRAND OPERA

STEP 2. LISTEN

Once students have identified their musical expectations of each song type, they will engage in a listening activity. Play the example excerpt for each category:

Battle Songs

Wagner, *Die Walküre*, Act III Prelude

TRACK 1 or **MOoD CLIP 35 (2019)**

Patriotic Songs

Donizetti, *La Fille du Régiment*, “*Salut à la France*”

TRACK 2 or **MOoD CLIP 31 (2019)**

Songs of Mourning

Verdi, *Nabucco*, “*Va, pensiero*”

TRACK 3 or **MOoD CLIP 29 (2024)**

Songs of Peace and Resistance

Saint-Saëns, *Samson et Dalila*, “*Hymne de joie, hymne de délivrance*”

TRACK 4 or **MOoD CLIP 9 (2018)**



Students should note their observations for each excerpt using the “Songs of War” handout provided with this guide. You can also opt to create a class chart with their observations. They might describe the way the piece feels (e.g., aggressive, sad, hopeful) or sounds (e.g., loud, rhythmic, gentle), or analyze the text of the excerpt (e.g., word choice, tone, metaphor) where applicable. A “Text and Translations” handout is also provided with this guide, if you choose to use it. If you are in a music classroom, challenge students to use specific vocabulary to describe what they hear. Feel free to use the Mood Meter, Musical Toolbox, and Opera Orchestra tools available in the “Additional Resources” section of the *HD Live in Schools* Educator Hub (metopera.org/educator-hub).

Once students have listened to each example at least once, prompt them to compare the selections:

- What musical elements are similar across categories?
- What elements differ across categories?
- How do these excerpts compare to students’ expectations from Step 1?

STEP 3. EXPAND

Now that students have noted their initial expectations and analyzed examples of each song type, they will work individually or in small groups to sort a second set of pieces into corresponding song categories. As with Step 2, students should pay attention to emotion and mood, dynamics and phrasing, and literary language, providing musical and/or textual evidence for their reasoning. Below is an answer key:

Songs of Mourning

Verdi, *Macbeth*, “*Patria oppressa!*” **TRACK 5** or **MOoD CLIP 29 (2014)**

Battle Songs

Bellini, *Norma*, “*Guerra, guerra!*” **TRACK 6** or **MOoD CLIP 30 (2017)**

Songs of Peace and Resistance

Giordano, *Andrea Chénier*, “*Sì, fui soldato*” **TRACK 7** or **MOoD CLIP 31 (2025)**

Patriotic Songs

Verdi, *Aida*, “*Gloria all’Egitto*” **TRACK 8** or **MOoD CLIP 18 (2025)**

 **A NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS:** This is a great place to pause the lesson. Steps 4 and 5 can be completed during a different session, as long as students (or you!) hold onto their handouts.



STEP 4. PREDICT

In the second half of this lesson, students can turn to *Silent Night*. This work, like those explored in steps 2 and 3, includes examples of each of the four song types found in operatic depictions of war.

Battle Song

Act I, Prologue: “*One more week here in Glasgow*”

Soldiers from Scotland, France, and Germany prepare to leave for war.

Patriotic Song

Act I, Scene 9: “*Many the miles I have travel’d*”

Father Palmer leads the Scottish regiment in a song, accompanied on bagpipe.

Song of Mourning

Act I, Scene 9: “*Dona nobis pacem*”

Anna Sørensen sings from the Latin Mass in no man’s land.

Song of Peace and Resistance

Act I, Scene 9: “*Hab Freude im Herzen, O Christenheit! / Dormi, Jesu*”

Nikolaus Sprink sings a Christmas carol, leading the armies to call a temporary ceasefire.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

How Do I Connect with Someone I Disagree With?

Finding common humanity means recognizing the basic needs, values, and emotions you share with someone, even when—or especially when—you don’t see eye-to-eye. And once you’re able to find one thing you have in common, you can easily find more!

Grab a partner and read through the character descriptions below, paying specific attention to what the characters do not have in common. Then, work with your partner to create a “Common Humanity List” of at least ten things the two characters might share. Discuss how those items or ideas might help the characters connect, rise above their disagreements, and find their common humanity.

Character #1. Nikolaus Sprink: German; man; opera singer; unmarried; enlisted soldier (not an officer); in his 20s; has killed someone in battle; lives in the German bunker; misses his girlfriend, Anna; raised in a Christian tradition.

Character #2. Lieutenant Audebert: French; male; married with a child on the way; an officer; in his late 20s; father is a French general; lives in the French bunker; misses his wife, Madeleine; raised in a Christian tradition.



Guide students in making predictions about these four key musical moments in the opera. Students can use the synopsis and other materials included in this guide, their prior knowledge of World War I, and the descriptions of each piece above to inform their thinking. Ask:

- In what order might these songs appear in the opera?
- What do you think they will sound like?
 - Students can look for clues in the descriptions above, such as instrumentation, number of people singing, and language.
- Who do you think these characters are, and how might they fit into the story?
- How do you think the opera will end?

STEP 5. CREATE

In the final step, students will build their own playlist connecting the four song types to their own experience, adding one song of their choosing to each category. These choices can be from any genre of music, but they must align with the emotion and mood, musical elements, and/or lyrical content of each category. The songs do not need to be specifically about war; a piece about heartbreak or loss, for example, could fit in the “songs of mourning” category.



SCAFFOLD

- Expand the lesson to include a visual art element. Have students create a gallery walk in the classroom or in a larger space (such as a hallway installation) to accompany their playlists, creating artwork of any medium inspired by listening to any or all the songs they've compiled.
- Expand the lesson to include musical theater! Check out the following examples of the four song types from the musical theater repertoire:

Les Misérables: "Do You Hear the People Sing?"

Hamilton: "The Story of Tonight"

1776: "Mama Look Sharp"

Hair: "The Flesh Failures (Let the Sunshine In)"

The Pirates of Penzance: "O Men of Dark and Dismal Fate"

- Consider having students narrow in their focus to popular music from one particular wartime era, tying into classroom learning about U.S. history. Possible suggestions include:

Civil War: "Battle Hymn of the Republic," "Follow the Drinking Gourd"

World War I: "Over There," "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier"

World War II: "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy," "I'll Be Home for Christmas"

Vietnam War: "War (What Is It Good For)," "Fortunate Son"

Philosophical Chairs

Active listening, critical thinking, and respectful dialogue (even when we disagree about something) are learned skills. Everyone can learn them, and no one can perfect them without practice. Philosophical Chairs is designed to help us develop these skills while also learning about the opera.

Directions

1. Read the Rules of Engagement
2. Read the Statements
3. Discuss

The Rules of Engagement

Be sure you understand the statement. If something is unclear, ask!

Face each other. Body language helps show that you're listening carefully and respectfully.

Only one speaker at a time. Everyone will get their turn to speak.

Think before you speak. Be sure that what you're going to say is what you really mean.

Summarize the previous person's comments before adding your own.

Address ideas, not the person. Challenging ideas or statements is good only if we respect the individuality and inherent value of the person who expressed them.

Three before me. To make sure everyone's voice is heard, you may not make another comment until three others have shared their thoughts.

Philosophical Chairs (CONTINUED)

The Statements

You might find these statements challenging—and you might find it challenging to talk with someone who has a different answer from your own. That’s okay! Remember, changing your mind when you learn new information is a sign of strength, not weakness.

1. Conflict is unavoidable.
2. War is inevitable.
3. War is necessary to achieve peace.
4. Peace is temporary.
5. Compassion is more powerful than violence.
6. Peace has more value than victory.
7. Peace is a universal desire.
8. Every citizen has a duty to fight for their country.
9. Memories are essential for survival.
10. Memories deepen suffering in hardship.
11. We are all more alike than different.
12. Enemies can be friends.
13. Empathy weakens a soldier’s effectiveness.
14. All people are connected by a universal human bond.
15. Shared humanity is powerful enough to bridge division.

Plot Decoder | Rules of Play

How to Win

Select the eight plot points included in the opera and place them in the correct order.

PLAYER TYPES

Oracle: There can be one oracle for the whole class (either the teacher or a student) or one oracle on each team. Oracles have the answer key and share information with the translators.

Translator: There should be one translator on each team. Translators are the connection between the detectives and the oracle(s). They convert the plot points chosen by the detective into a numerical code to be checked by the oracle.

Detective: Each team should have two to five detectives tasked with sorting the plot points. They can only communicate with the translator, not with the oracle.

How to play:

Each team will receive 20 plot points. Only eight of them are actually in the opera. As a team, the detectives must deduce not only which plot points are in *Silent Night* but also the order in which they occur.

The detectives begin by reading their 20 plot points, choosing the eight they think are portrayed in the opera, and putting them in chronological order (**Attempt #1**).

The translator must then convert **Attempt #1** into a numerical code (e.g., 13, 20, 6, 2, 18, 12, 9, 10), where each number corresponds to a given plot point. Once **Attempt #1** is made into a code, the translator brings it to the oracle.

The oracle compares the eight-number code to the answer key and colors each of the eight slots either green, yellow, or gray.

GREEN = Correct plot point in the correct spot

YELLOW = Correct plot point but in the incorrect spot

GRAY = Incorrect plot point

The oracle then gives **Attempt #1** back to the translator, who brings it back to the detectives, sharing which plot points should stay, change places, or be removed.

The detectives then create **Attempt #2**, removing the gray plot points, shifting the yellow plot points, and keeping the green plot points. Once the detectives have agreed on **Attempt #2**, the process repeats until either the team correctly decodes the plot or fails after five attempts. The first team to decode the plot correctly wins!

Plot Decoder | Detective Team

Directions

Read the 20 plot points below. Determine which eight are included in the opera and in what order. Give your chosen plot points to the translator. Repeat until you have the correct plot points in the correct order.



Nikolaus Sprink ventures unprotected into no man's land to sing a carol.	Embarrassed by the truce, troops write home with lies about the war.
Lieutenant Audebert's pregnant wife sends him courageously off to war.	Elephants from the Hamburg Zoo deliver munitions to the trenches in France.
The Kaiser sends Lieutenant Horstmayer a Christmas tree instead of reinforcements.	Back home at Christmas Mass, Anna sings the " <i>Dona nobis pacem</i> " ("Grant us peace").
Father Palmer helps Jonathan plot revenge for the death of William.	Jonathan kills a French soldier.
Brothers Jonathan and William enlist in the Scottish Army.	William receives a blood transfusion from Jonathan in the trenches.
German, Scottish, and French troops strike a truce, sharing chocolate and Champagne.	British, French, and German commanders catch news of the truce and are pleased.
Nikolaus Sprink and Anna Sørensen perform for the Crown Prince of Germany.	Ponchel leaves the trenches to visit his mother.
Lieutenant Audebert's wife sends a cake to the trenches to celebrate the birth of their child.	Nikolaus Sprink is accidentally shot in no man's land.
The German, Scottish, and French armies battle on the Western Front.	Anna Sørensen and Nikolaus Sprink spend the night together after their performance.
While digging a trench, Ponchel discovers a coffee cup with real gold trim.	French, German, and Scottish platoons are relocated as punishment for their Christmas truce.



Plot Decoder | Translator Key

Directions

Use the numbered list below to convert the detectives' chosen plot points into a numerical code. Then, bring the code to the oracle to be colored. Repeat until all boxes are colored green or your team fails after five attempts.

1. Elephants from the Hamburg Zoo deliver munitions to the trenches in France.
2. Brothers Jonathan and William enlist in the Scottish Army.
3. Nikolaus Sprink and Anna Sørensen perform for the Crown Prince of Germany.
4. Jonathan kills a French soldier.
5. Lieutenant Audebert's pregnant wife sends him courageously off to war.
6. The German, Scottish, and French armies battle on the Western Front.
7. Back home at Christmas Mass, Anna sings the "Dona nobis pacem" ("Grant us peace").
8. Ponchel leaves the trenches to visit his mother.
9. The Kaiser sends Lieutenant Horstmayer a Christmas tree instead of reinforcements.
10. Anna Sørensen and Nikolaus Sprink spend the night together after their performance.
11. German, Scottish, and French troops strike a truce, sharing chocolate and Champagne.
12. William receives a blood transfusion from Jonathan in the trenches.
13. Nikolaus Sprink ventures unprotected into no man's land to sing a carol.
14. French, German, and Scottish platoons are relocated as punishment for their Christmas truce.
15. While digging a trench, Ponchel discovers a coffee cup with real gold trim.
16. Father Palmer helps Jonathan plot revenge for the death of William.
17. British, French, and German commanders catch news of the truce and are pleased.
18. Lieutenant Audebert's wife sends a cake to the trenches to celebrate the birth of their child.
19. Nikolaus Sprink is accidentally shot in no man's land.
20. Embarrassed by the truce, troops write home with lies about the war.

Plot Decoder | Code Sheet

Team Name: _____

Translator: _____

Attempt #1

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Attempt #2

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Attempt #3

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Attempt #4

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Attempt #5

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

No Quiet on the Western Front | Songs of War

Directions

As you listen to each example from the four types of war songs, write down your observations, paying close attention to mood and emotion, musical elements, and literary devices. Later in the activity, you will add one piece of music of your choosing to each of the categories below.

BATTLE SONGS	PATRIOTIC SONGS	SONGS OF MOURNING	SONGS OF PEACE AND RESISTANCE
Wagner <i>Die Walküre</i> Act III Prelude (Track 1)	Donizetti <i>La Fille du Régiment</i> “ <i>Salut à la France</i> ” (Track 2)	Verdi <i>Nabucco</i> “ <i>Va, pensiero</i> ” (Track 3)	Saint-Saëns <i>Samson et Dalila</i> “ <i>Hymne de joie, hymne de délivrance</i> ” (Track 4)
NOTES: _____ _____ _____ _____	NOTES: _____ _____ _____ _____	NOTES: _____ _____ _____ _____	NOTES: _____ _____ _____ _____
Add a song of your choice:	Add a song of your choice:	Add a song of your choice:	Add a song of your choice:

No Quiet on the Western Front | Songs of War (CONTINUED)

As you listen to each of the following examples, write down your observations, paying close attention to mood and emotion, musical elements, and literary devices. Then, select which category you think each example belongs to.

Verdi <i>Macbeth</i> “<i>Patria oppressa!</i>” (Track 5) NOTES: _____ _____ _____ _____	Bellini <i>Norma</i> “<i>Guerra, guerra!</i>” (Track 6) NOTES: _____ _____ _____ _____	Giordano <i>Andrea Chénier</i> “<i>Si, fui soldato</i>” (Track 7) NOTES: _____ _____ _____ _____	Verdi <i>Aida</i> “<i>Gloria all’Egitto</i>” (Track 8) NOTES: _____ _____ _____ _____
Which category does this music belong to? Check one: ☐ Battle song ☐ Patriotic song ☐ Song of mourning ☐ Song of peace and resistance	Which category does this music belong to? Check one: ☐ Battle song ☐ Patriotic song ☐ Song of mourning ☐ Song of peace and resistance	Which category does this music belong to? Check one: ☐ Battle song ☐ Patriotic song ☐ Song of mourning ☐ Song of peace and resistance	Which category does this music belong to? Check one: ☐ Battle song ☐ Patriotic song ☐ Song of mourning ☐ Song of peace and resistance

No Quiet on the Western Front | Songs of War (CONTINUED)

Based on the title and description of each piece, infer which category it belongs to. Use the lines provided to explain your reasoning.

Act I, Prologue: "One more week here in Glasgow" Soldiers from Scotland, France, and Germany prepare to leave for war. NOTES: _____ _____ _____ _____	Act I, Scene 9: "Many the miles I have travel'd" Father Palmer leads the Scottish regiment in a song, accompanied on bagpipe. NOTES: _____ _____ _____ _____	Act I, Scene 9: "Dona nobis pacem" Anna Sørensen sings from the Latin Mass in no man's land. NOTES: _____ _____ _____ _____	Act I, Scene 9: "Hab Freude im Herzen, O Christenheit! / Dormi, Jesu" Nikolaus Sprink sings a Christmas carol, leading the armies to call a temporary ceasefire. NOTES: _____ _____ _____ _____
Which category does this music belong to? Check one: ☐ Battle song ☐ Patriotic song ☐ Song of mourning ☐ Song of peace and resistance	Which category does this music belong to? Check one: ☐ Battle song ☐ Patriotic song ☐ Song of mourning ☐ Song of peace and resistance	Which category does this music belong to? Check one: ☐ Battle song ☐ Patriotic song ☐ Song of mourning ☐ Song of peace and resistance	Which category does this music belong to? Check one: ☐ Battle song ☐ Patriotic song ☐ Song of mourning ☐ Song of peace and resistance

No Quiet on the Western Front | Text and Translations

TRACK 2 or MOoD CLIP 31 (2019)

Donizetti's *La Fille du Régiment*, "*Salut à la France*"

Salut à la France,	To France,
À ses beaux jours!	Now and always!
À l'espérance,	To hope and happiness,
À nos amours!	Friendship and love!
Salut à la gloire!	To honor and glory!
Voilà pour mon cœur!	So much for my heart!
Avec la victoire,	When crowned by victory,
L'instant du bonheur!	My joy is complete!
Salut à la France!	Salute to France!
Salut à la gloire!	Salute to glory!
Salut à la France!	Salute to France!

TRACK 3 or MOoD CLIP 29 (2024)

Verdi's *Nabucco*, "*Va, pensiero*"

Va, pensiero, sull'ali dorate.	Fly, our thoughts, on wings of gold.
Va, ti posa sui clivi, sui colli.	Fly to our native valleys and hills.
Ove olezzano tepide e molli ...	On soft, caressing breezes ...
L'aure dolci del suolo natal.	Fly to the sweet soil of our homeland.
Del Giordano le rive saluta,	Greet the shores of the Jordan River,
Di Sionne le torri atterrate.	And the toppled towers of Zion.
Oh, mia patria sì bella e perduta!	Oh, our lovely lost country!
Oh, membra sì cara e fatale!	Oh, memories ... so precious and full of despair!

Not Quiet on the Western Front | Text and Translations (CONTINUED)

TRACK 4 or MOoD CLIP 9, 2018

Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila*, "*Hymne de joie, hymne de délivrance*"

Que l'univers tressaille d'allégresse.	Let the universe reverberate with joy.
Il a rompu nos fers.	He has broken our chains.
Hymne de joie, hymne de délivrance ...	Hymn of joy, hymn of deliverance ...
Montez vers l'Éternel.	Rise to the Eternal One.
Il a daigné dans Sa toute-puissance	He has deigned in His omnipotence
Secourir Israël!	To save Israel!

TRACK 5 or MOoD CLIP 29 (2014)

Verdi's *Macbeth*, "*Patria oppressa!*"

D'orfanelli e di piangenti,	From orphans, from those who mourn,
Chi lo sposo e chi la prole ...	Some for husbands, some for children ...
Al venir del nuovo sole	At each new dawn a cry goes up
S'alza un grido e fere il ciel.	To outrage heaven.
A quel grido il ciel risponde	To that cry heaven replies
Quasi voglia impietosito ...	As if moved to pity ...
Propagar per l'infinito,	Oppressed land, it would
Patria oppressa, il tuo dolor.	Proclaim your grief forever.

Not Quiet on the Western Front | Text and Translations (CONTINUED)

TRACK 6 or MOoD CLIP 30 (2017)

Bellini's *Norma*, "*Guerra, guerra!*"

Guerra, guerra! Le galliche selve
Quante han quercie producon guerrier.
Qual sul gregge fameliche belve
Sui romani van essi a cader.
Sangue, sangue! Le galliche scuri
Fino al tronco bagnate ne son.
Sovra i flutti del Ligeri impuri
Ei gorgoglia con funebre suon.
Strage, strage, sterminio, vendetta!
Già comincia, si compie, s'affretta.
Come biade da falci mietute
Son di Roma le schiere cadute.
Tronchi i vanni, recisi gli artigli,
Abbattuta ecco l'aquila al suol.
A mirar il trionfo dei figli
Ecco il Dio sopra un raggio di sol.

To battle! May our warriors
Outnumber the trees.
We will fall upon the Romans' throats
As hungry wolves upon the flock.
Our weapons are
Bathed in blood.
Forest streams become
Crimson torrents.
Slaughter, extermination, vengeance!
Let our destiny be fulfilled.
Let Rome's legions
Be mown down like grain.
Wings clipped, talons torn out,
Rome's eagle lies dying.
Irmisul comes to us on the rays
Of the sun to behold our triumph.

Not Quiet on the Western Front | Text and Translations (CONTINUED)

TRACK 7 or MOoD CLIP 31 (1996)

Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*, "*Si, fui soldato*"

Si, fui soldato	Yes, I was a soldier.
E glorioso affrontato ho la morte ...	I was never afraid of dying ...
Che, vile, qui mi vien data!	But with honor, not as you'd have it!
Fui letterato,	I made my pen a weapon,
Ho fatto di mia penna arma feroce	Sharpened to battle hypocrites.
Contro gli ipocriti!	And with my verses,
Con la mia voce ho cantato la patria.	I exalted this land of ours.

TRACK 8 or MOoD CLIP 18 (2025)

Verdi's *Aida*, "*Gloria all'Egitto*"

Gloria all'Egitto, ad Iside	Glory to Egypt, and to Isis
Che il sacro suol protegge!	Who protects its sacred soil!
Al re che il Delta regge	To the King who rules the Delta,
Inni festosi alziam!	Festive hymns let us raise!
Gloria! Gloria! Gloria!	Glory! Glory! Glory!
Gloria al re!	Glory to the king!

Post-Opera Review | *Silent Night*

Directions

For each character, think about the following: **Main Goal:** What does the character want? **Key Moment:** What was their most impactful moment or scene on stage? **Performance Choice:** How did the singer(s) show the character through voice, movement, and expression?

Use specific evidence from the opera—such as a scene, vocal choice, movement, or interaction with another character—to explain your thinking.

Nikolaus Sprink

MAIN GOAL:

KEY MOMENT:

PERFORMANCE CHOICE:

Anna Sørensen

MAIN GOAL:

KEY MOMENT:

PERFORMANCE CHOICE:

Jonathan Dale

MAIN GOAL:

KEY MOMENT:

PERFORMANCE CHOICE:

Ponchel

MAIN GOAL:

KEY MOMENT:

PERFORMANCE CHOICE:

Post-Opera Review | *Silent Night*

Lieutenant Gordon

MAIN GOAL:

KEY MOMENT:

PERFORMANCE CHOICE:

Lieutenant Audebert

MAIN GOAL:

KEY MOMENT:

PERFORMANCE CHOICE:

Lieutenant Horstmayer

MAIN GOAL:

KEY MOMENT:

PERFORMANCE CHOICE:

Post-Opera Review | *Silent Night*

Rate the following elements of the opera on their effectiveness in communicating the plot and core theme of the opera, five being extremely effective, one being not effective at all. Justify your rating with at least one example from the opera.

CHOREOGRAPHY AND ACTION DIRECTION RATING: ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

JUSTIFICATION: _____

SET AND LIGHTING DESIGN RATING: ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

JUSTIFICATION: _____

COSTUME, HAIR, AND MAKEUP DESIGN RATING: ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

JUSTIFICATION: _____

OVERALL IMPRESSION What is your overall impression of the opera *Silent Night*? How effectively did it communicate the main themes and emotions?

STANDOUT SCENE Which scene was most impactful? How did the music, performance, and staging work together to make it effective?

PERSONAL CONNECTION Choose a theme (violence, art, protest, communication). How does it connect to your own life or the world around you?

