



Proudly
Presents

OPERA SOUP

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With music by: Mozart, Rossini,
Humperdinck, and Bizet

STARRING

A DASH OF SOPRANO
A TEASPOON OF MEZZO-SOPRANO
A SLICE OF TENOR
AND A PINCH OF BARITONE

OPERA SOUP

Opera Soup is about all the ingredients that go into creating an opera. This study guide is designed to introduce students and teachers to the world of creating opera using examples both demonstrated in Opera Soup and using other examples from operatic repertoire and literature.

In this first section, we will examine each piece used in Opera Soup looking at the stories, composers, historical information and why each piece was chosen to represent each ingredient. In later sections, we will look at how to go about creating and producing your own original opera.

The first area examined in Opera Soup is **Music**. To demonstrate music, we chose Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's piece *Ah! Je vous dirai maman*, K. 265 - better known as the Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star variations. It was written in 1781 as a piano variation. We have chosen to use the soprano and piano version not only to demonstrate music but also the vocal style of the soprano voice. You will notice that Mozart pieces always have a "K." and a number listed after them. This represents a specific cataloging of Mozart's works by Ludwig Alois Friedrich von Köchel. In 1850, Köchel (a botanist and amateur musician) decided to catalogue Mozart's work by arranging them in chronological order. After Köchel's death in 1877, the catalogue has gone through many changes, but the K numbers remain.

From music, we go to **Characters and Costumes**. For elementary school students, we will be performing Mozart's Papageno/Papagena duet from *The Magic Flute* and Rossini's *Cat Duet*. Not all characters in opera are human so using the "bird" characters from Mozart's *The Magic Flute* when they finally fall in love and then having them chased off of the stage by the two cats from the Rossini *Cat Duet* made sense.

Mozart wrote *Die Zauberflöte* K. 620 (*The Magic Flute*) during the last year of his life (1791) while he was working on another opera (*La Clemenza di Tito*) and his famous *Requiem*. Over the years, many scholars and opera lovers have debated the subtext of *The Magic Flute*—it's ties to the Freemasons, the commentary on the French Revolution, its politics and philosophy. Whatever your opinions, *The Magic Flute* remains one of the most performed operas in the repertoire.

There isn't much information regarding Rossini's *Cat Duet* (*Duetto buffo di due gatti*). It has been speculated that this work may be from his later years, after composing operas such as *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*), *La Cenerentola* (*Cinderella*) and *Guillaume Tell* (*William Tell*). Rossini left Italy for France in 1855 where he returned to his composition style of his earlier years.

And whether or not the Cat Duet can be attributed to Rossini at all, he would have appreciated the humor of two cats competing for attention. Rossini died in 1868.

The next area is **Language** which is a very important part of opera. Operas have been written in many languages but the most commonly performed operas are in Italian, French, German, Russian, and English. Other languages used in opera can include Spanish, and Czechoslovakian! To demonstrate language, the *Largo al factotum* from Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* (1816) was chosen. This piece will be performed in the original language of Italian. We will also use this opportunity to demonstrate how surtitles work. Our Baritone becomes the character of Figaro, a local barber and man about town who sings about how wonderful he is and how everyone wants to tell him what's going on.

From language, we move on to **Props** and stay within Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. To demonstrate the use of Props, the trio *Zitti, zitti, piano, piano* (translated it means hurry, hurry, quiet, quiet) in which Figaro (the barber) is trying to help Rosina (the heroine) and Count Almaviva (her suitor) escape from Rosina's guardian, Dr. Bartolo, who wants to marry her. But their efforts to escape are hampered, because Rosina wants to take her stuff with her out the window and down the escape ladder.

A good **Story** is needed in creating opera, and many composers have turned to mythology and fairy tales for inspiration. The next piece comes from Rossini's *La Cenerentola* (Cinderella) (1817) and is a quartet similarly titled *Zitto, zitto, piano, piano*.

In this quartet, Prince Ramiro and his valet, Dandini, compare notes on the women they've met so far in their search for the Prince's bride to be. As part of the search, Ramiro and Dandini have switched clothes so everyone thinks that Dandini is really the prince. They are baffled as to why Ramiro's teacher, Alidoro, thinks there is a suitable wife at the home of Don Magnifico (also the home of Cinderella and her two stepsisters). Clorinda and Tisbe (the two stepsisters) find Dandini and Ramiro and try to wile their way into Dandini's heart, thinking he is the prince. In his generosity, Dandini offers his "servant" Ramiro to the girls as a possible husband but the girls are outraged at the suggestion.

Mood plays an important role in creating opera. Mood can determine how a piece is performed as well as the key (major or minor), tempo, instrumentation and dynamics. For Mood, we chose the Evening Prayer from Engelbert Humperdinck's *HANSEL AND GRETEL* (1893).

The **Duet** can often be the highlight of any opera. For elementary school audiences, we've chosen *Sull'aria* (To Romeo) from Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* K. 492 (*The Marriage of Figaro*) (1786). *The Marriage of Figaro* is part of a trilogy of plays written by Pierre Beaumarchais including *The Barber of Seville* and *The Good Mother*. The play of *Marriage* was banned in Vienna, which may have made it even more appealing to Mozart and the Paisiello opera based on *The Barber of Seville* was enjoying some success (although its success would later be eclipsed by Rossini's version in 1816). In the *Sull'aria*, the Countess (Rosina) is dictating a love letter to her maidservant, Susanna.

And what's an opera without a **Finale** to tie everything together? The finale combines all the ingredients demonstrated throughout Opera Soup; music, characters/costumes, language, props, story, mood and an ensemble piece. For elementary school audiences, our finale is the *Toreador Song* from Georges Bizet's *Carmen* (1875). *Carmen* is one of the most performed and adapted pieces in the repertoire. Movies like *Carmen Jones* (featuring Harry Belafonte and Dorothy Dandridge) and even MTV's hip-hop version of *Carmen* featuring Beyonce have taken inspiration from Bizet's opera. In the *Toreador Song*, Escamillo (the Toreador) is telling the tavern audience, including Carmen and her friends, about his life as a Toreador and his reward for his hard work in the bull ring is love.

At the end of every performance of Opera Soup, there is a 5-10 minute Question and Answer period. Please feel free to ask our performers any questions you have regarding the show and opera. They will be more than happy to answer!

Creating and Producing your own original opera

Now that you've seen Opera Soup, it's time to create and produce your own original opera. The following are suggestions for how to begin the process as well as getting comfortable working as a team (theater games), finding a story, creating a libretto and using other operas and literature for inspiration.

Writing your own opera within a class setting requires that the students and the teacher are comfortable expressing ideas and working together as a team. Below are some theater games that can be used in the classroom to help get everyone comfortable working together as well as moving! Opera singers never stand in one place for hours during a performance so movement is important!

Improvisation exercises for opera/musical theater

Freedom, Concentration and Ensemble

- 1) **Breathing** (freedom): Group stands in a circle, arms down at sides. Slowly lift arms over head and back down; 4 count up and 4 count down.
Purpose: to quiet and center group and become aware of self.
- 2) **Facial flex** (freedom): Move facial muscles in as many different positions as possible including making faces, sighs and neck rolls.
Purpose: to relax and free facial muscles.
- 3) **Extreme masks** (freedom): Body assumes posture and expression of some extreme emotions (i.e. fear, joy, sadness, anxiety, etc.), then quickly switch to another emotion.
Purpose: to be able to shift quickly from one type of emotional expression to another
- 4) **Emotion and Gesture Cards:** Have a series of cards with emotion words or gestures. While a student is singing a prepared song, randomly pick either a word or gesture card. Student must act out the word on the card while singing (even if the emotion/gesture conflicts with the sentiment of the song).
Purpose: awareness of how emotions and gestures play a role in presentation
- 5) **Machines** (ensemble/concentration): Write down different types of machines on pieces of paper and place them in a hat. Divide students into groups of 4-5 and have them pick a machine. They have 3 minutes to break down the functions of the machine into 4-5 different motions. Each student picks a motion and then it is put into an order. It is performed 5 times. After a successful silent machine, the students can also add sound. Further machines can be improvised—a made up machine with movement and sound.
Purpose: to encourage imaginative use of physical and vocalized skills. Timing and concentration required to initiate and continue the patterned response, encourages cooperation.
- 6) **Skits** (ensemble): Group is divided into smaller groups of 3 to 5. Each group is given 2 minutes to set up a scene. To make this easier, write down different scenarios and put into a hat for groups to draw. Scenes can include a subject, an emotional attitude and whether or not vocalized sounds can be used. The scene must develop and should not be fully worked out in advance. Suggestions for skits include animals, inanimate objects, waiting at the bus stop, going to a rock concert, etc.

Purpose: to encourage imaginative use of physical and vocalized skills. Encourages cooperation and exploration of performance possibilities. Stretches character development to include human, non-human, animal and imaginary possibilities.

MOVING ACTIVITIES THAT ENHANCE MUSICAL PERFORMANCE

Exercise One: Walking on a Beat

Students choose a spot in the room. Tell the students you are going to clap 16 counts. Students are to step on every beat. Students can leave their spot but must return by count 16. Clap 16 counts at a walking pace and count out loud so students know how many claps have occurred. Repeat the exercise with 4,8,12 counts. Change tempos. Ask students to vary their steps; walking low, on tiptoes, backwards, sideways, etc. They may not touch each other or talk!

Purpose: Focus, concentration, beginning of rhythmic awareness

Exercise Two: Moving like animals

Have children spread out in the room. Tell them to choose an animal and move around the room like that animal. For the first time, no sound with the movement. Ask questions like: Is the animal big or small? Heavy or light? Quick or slow? Do they fly? Creep? What is unique to each animal? The movements the children do should correspond to movements their animal can do (in other words, a zebra shouldn't be flying). After the group explores their animals, you can have them choose an animal from a hat and individually perform with the group having to guess the animal. You can also add sounds and eventually add imaginary animals.

Purpose: To explore movement qualities

MUSIC/RHYTHM ACTIVITIES

Exercise One: Listening

Students sit on the floor (or at their desks) with closed eyes. Students listen to all the sounds they can hear for 30-60 seconds. Students open eyes and share what they heard.

Purpose: Focus, concentration, attention to environment

Exercise Two: Clapping on a Beat

Students count and clap 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8 all together out loud. Repeat until all are clapping in unison and eventually counting silently. Students continue to count silently while they:

- a. Clap on all the odd beats
- b. Clap on all the even beats
- c. Clap two beats and rest two beats
- d. Rest two beats and clap two beats

Divide the class in half. Half the class claps on odd beats while the other half claps on the even beats (a and b). Then half the class claps two then rests two while the other half rests two then claps two (c and d). You can also use rhythm instruments in addition to clapping. Experiment with combining a, b, c, and d.

Purpose: Focus and concentration

OTHER RHYTHM ACTIVITIES

Exploring sounds around you:

Ask students to move around the classroom or playground to discover objects that can be played. Explore different ways in which the object can be played (beating, scraping, shaking) using hands, pencils, rules, etc.

How does the sound quality of an object change when played or struck with different implements? Or when the object has been altered (full trashcan versus empty, tin can filled with pencils versus filled with erasers).

Purpose: Exploring the aural environment, how quality of sound can change

VOCAL ACTIVITIES

- 1) Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth
- 2) Sing "meow" going up and down a scale (both major and minor)
- 3) Sing "me-may-mah-moe-moo" going from loud to soft, moving up and down the scale
- 4) Spend a day in which all communication within the classroom is sung
- 5) Sing different vowel sounds up and down the scale

Now that you've worked together creating movements, sounds, ideas and exercised your vocal chords, it's time to think about creating your own opera!

In Opera Soup, we started with Music which is certainly a major part of any opera. But for creating your own opera, it's important to start with a good story. Opera composers always start with either an original story (like Aida) or a story adapted from other works (novels, mythology, fairy tales, plays, newspaper articles, etc.).

STEP ONE—The first decision to make is whether or not to create an opera based on an original story or adapt the opera from an already existing piece. There are benefits and challenges to both.

Creating an original story as a team can be extremely rewarding. Start by jotting down everyday occurrences or situations that can make you happy, upset, frustrated, angry, etc. Then decide if you want to tell a dramatic story (perhaps with a sad ending) or a happier story. You can narrow your subjects through this decision.

Possible topics for an original story could include:

In school topics -

- Bullies (or being bullied)
- Peer pressure (not giving in to smoking or drugs, or what happens to someone who gives in to the pressure)
- The Playground (an especially important soccer game or relay race)
- Home work
- Best friends at school

Outside of school topics -

- Families (parents, siblings, going through a divorce, accepting a new family member or step family)
- Athletics (involvement in little league, softball, dance classes)
- Relationships (friends, romantic, enemies)
- The best day ever (getting a new puppy, having a distant relative visit, going to grandma & grandpa's house)
- Summer vacation
- Travel

Narrowing the topic will be the hardest part of this process but once you have your topic, what follows becomes easier.

Adapting an already existing story can be just as challenging as there is a lot of choose from. A word of caution—do not choose material that has been made into a movie or TV show because the images are so ingrained, it's hard to move away from them. For example, *The Wizard of Oz* is a wonderful book by L. Frank Baum. However, the movie version with Judy Garland is so ingrained in our society that it's hard not to think of those songs and that story line when creating a new version solely based on the book.

To find a good existing story there are several places to look for inspiration. Look at what you may already be reading in class.

For elementary school students:

The Giver by Lois Lowry

Any of the *Bunnicula* books by Deborah and James Howe

Any of the *Madeleine L'Engle* books but *A Wrinkle in Time* stands out

Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson

Fever 1793 by Laurie Halse Anderson

The Sign of the Beaver by Elizabeth George Speare

Any book by Beverly Cleary (the Ramona series, the Henry Huggins series)
Any book by Eric Carle (for younger students, The Very Hungry Caterpillar, The Very Quiet Cricket, The Mixed-up Chameleon)
Any Greek mythology stories or Aesop's Fables

Some suggestions for middle and high school students:

Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck (although there are movies and an opera using this story, it lends itself to multiple interpretations)
Mutiny on the Bounty by James Charles/Hall Nordhoff
Any book by Robert Louis Stevenson
Moby-Dick by Herman Melville
To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee
Animal Farm or 1984 by George Orwell
Lord of the Flies by William Golding
Any play by William Shakespeare
Lord Jim by Joseph Conrad
Atlas Shrugged or The Fountainhead by Ayn Rand
Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury
Brave New World by Aldous Huxley

Some of the above have had movies and other adaptations made, but most have not been re-done in the past several years and are not so ingrained in today's culture. You can also look in the daily newspaper for articles that have interest or watch the evening news for inspiration.

STEP TWO—Now that you've picked your story (either original or adapted), it's time to chart out the flow of the plot. It's helpful to have lots of large paper that you can tape up around the classroom because this next step is going to have a lot of details! This is also a good time to choose a setting and time period. You can alter both depending on how you want the story line to flow. For example, the musical West Side Story has its origins from Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Bernstein and Sondheim chose to change the setting and time from Verona during the Renaissance to 1950s New York City.

Once everyone is familiar with the story, write down who the main characters are in the story, what is their gender and approximate age. Write down the secondary characters, their relationship to the main characters as well as gender and approximate age. If you have a story with too many characters, it could be confusing. Take this opportunity to narrow the characters to 2-4 main characters and perhaps 2-3 secondary characters.

From the story, write down all the highlights/plot points of the story. Again, there may be too many so you'll need to adapt and perhaps limit how many plot points you are going to use. Some plot points revolve around the main characters—pick which plot points are MOST IMPORTANT to tell the story. As an example, *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Romeo Montague—teenage son of the House of Montague (main character)
Juliet Capulet—teenage daughter of the House of Capulet (main character)
Tybalt—Juliet's older teenage cousin (male, Capulet) (secondary character)
Mercutio—Romeo's teenage friend (male Montague) (secondary character)
Friar Laurence—religious leader and friend to Romeo and Juliet (secondary character)
Prince Escalus —ruler of Verona (secondary character)
Paris—suitor of Juliet and kinsman to the Prince (Capulet) secondary characters
House of Montague (includes parents and relatives) (secondary characters)
House of Capulet (includes parents and relatives) (secondary characters)

PLOT POINTS

- Houses of Montague and Capulet intensely dislike each other
- Romeo and his friends sneak into a Capulet party where he meets Juliet
- Romeo and Juliet fall in love (Balcony Scene) and pledge their affections
- Juliet's parents want her to marry Paris
- Romeo asks Friar Laurence to marry himself and Juliet (they marry that afternoon)
- Tybalt kills Mercutio
- Romeo kills Tybalt
- Romeo is banished from Verona by the Prince and leaves for Mantua
- Juliet is to marry Paris so she makes plans with Friar Laurence to appear dead
- Friar Laurence sends word to Romeo about Juliet's plans
- Romeo believes that Juliet is dead as he never receives the letter from the Friar
- Juliet is laid to rest in the Capulet family crypt
- Romeo sneaks into the crypt, drinks poison and dies
- Juliet wakes up from her drug induced "sleep" to find Romeo dead
- Juliet stabs herself and dies
- The Duke of Mantua says the moral of the story

This story has been adapted into 2 operas (*I Capuleti e I Montecchi* by Vincenzo Bellini and *Romeo et Juliette* by Charles Gounod) and a musical theater piece (*West Side Story* by Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim) as well as numerous movie versions.

STEP THREE—Now that you have your cast of characters (both main and secondary) as well as the most important plot points in the story, it's time to start creating the story line and/or dialogue. In opera, it's called a libretto. It's essentially a script for the opera and is written like a theatrical script. This is also an opportunity to start thinking about how you'd like the characters to move or behave while they sing their lines. For example:

Juliet: O Romeo, Rome! Wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

Romeo: (aside) Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

You can put in specific instructions for the actors/singers as to their movements while they sing and/or speak their lines. For example, whenever a character has "aside" next to a line, it means that they are saying or singing this line to themselves. In other words, this is an internal or barely spoken thought rather than a conversation with another person.

This may seem a bit overwhelming to write at first. Take one scene at a time. Or focus on one to two scenes from your opera only and write out the libretto of just those scenes. Choose the most dramatic or funny scenes to start with and go from there.

STEP FOUR—Once you have your libretto for your scenes (or if you're really ambitious, your whole opera!), you can start working on the music. Mood will also play a role in writing your music. Is the scene sad? Happy? Angry? A fight? Silly? This will tell you about what key to set the music. Major keys typically represent happiness or silliness while minor keys can be highly dramatic, sad, etc. You can also decide who will be singing in this particular scene. Is it an aria (solo)? Who's singing? What type of voice are you writing for (soprano, mezzo, tenor, baritone, bass)? Is more than one person singing? For the first try at writing music for an opera, you may want to start with an aria. It's a single voice (which is easier than writing for 4 voices at one time!) and you can really use your libretto to help you with the mood and type of music. This is also a good time to include your music teacher or a musical parent/volunteer!

One of the best operatic "conventions" is the aria. The aria can work in several ways. It is always a single character but there are many things the character can be expressing. The following are several examples of arias in operatic and musical theater repertoire where characters use the aria in different ways.

In *The Barber of Seville's Largo al factotum* (also used in Opera Soup), the character of Figaro uses his aria to tell the audience about who he is, what he does and why everyone loves him (it also gives insight into his character in that he's a bit arrogant and a busybody). In Bizet's *Carmen*, the Habanera is performed by Carmen in front of her friends and the town's soldiers, as well as her love interest, and it sets up her character as one who doesn't believe in a singular love. Love is like a free bird or a gypsy and beware if she falls in love with you! This is key to what happens later in the story. In Puccini's *La Bohème*, the two main characters each have an aria they sing to each before joining in the duet *O Soave Fanciulla*. Rodolfo's aria (*Che gelida manina*) gives him the opportunity to tell Mimi about who he is and what he does for a living but also about his hopes. Mimi responds with her aria (*Mi chiamano Mimi*) in which she tells Rodolfo about herself and the flowers she creates through her sewing. She also shares her hopes and dreams. These two arias culminate in the duet *O Soave Fanciulla*, utilizing the theme primarily from *Che gelida manina*. Puccini was a master at creating themes for his characters. Both Rodolfo and Mimi's aria themes come back at various times throughout the opera.

From the world of musical theater, Lerner and Loewe created several wonderful arias for their characters. In *My Fair Lady*, Eliza's aria *Wouldn't it be lovely?* sets up her character's desires for a better life (key to the story where she wants to learn to speak properly and meets up with Henry Higgins, a language professor). In *Camelot*, the opening song *Camelot*, sung by King Arthur, sets up the image of Camelot as a mythical and magical place. The song is also used to convince Guinevere to marry Arthur and stay in Camelot. The themes used in the song *Camelot*, come back throughout the musical and a slightly different version ends the story when it becomes clear that the world of Camelot must end. Some arias just set a mood, like *O What a Beautiful Mornin'* from Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma* or *Bali Ha'i* from *South Pacific*. Other arias can get you inside the mind of the character like *Stars* from Schonberg and Boublil's *Les Misérables*, or *Music of the Night* from Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Phantom of the Opera*.

As you can see, music and mood work together with the libretto to create the scene with the drama or humor that it requires to be effective.

You've got the libretto (story), characters, music, and mood. The Language is fairly straight forward in that you should use whatever language you are comfortable speaking.

STEP FIVE—Now you are ready to put on your opera and/or opera scenes. Here's what some production elements will come in handy as well as your art teacher! You should already have a setting for your opera (a time and location). Is it set in modern day? Or perhaps the Renaissance? Or in Russia? These questions will

play a role in creating a set, props and costumes for your opera. You've already determined the ages of your characters and this will help you in terms of their costuming. For example, if you want to set Romeo and Juliet in modern day and they are both teenagers, then they will be wearing probably jeans and T-shirts. Or if you want to set it in the 1950's, the boys may wear jeans and white T-shirts, but the girls may be wearing poodle skirts and sweater sets.

Be realistic about the materials you will need to make a set, props and costumes. This is a great time to get involved with your art teacher or perhaps artistic parents to help facilitate the set, props and costumes. The key is MAKE IT SIMPLE! If you are telling a good story, the audience doesn't need a lot of distractions with a complicated set or costumes. You may not even need a set, but just some simple props. If your setting is a school, then have a couple of desks and a table. If you need to change scenes, you might want to have some fabric to drape over the desks and/or table to be something else. Cardboard, butcher paper and paint are great (and cheap) ways to create the set you want—but it will take time, planning and some elbow grease!

STEP SIX—This step can take place during the same time as Step Five . . . AUDITIONS! You will need a cast for your opera and this can be a very challenging step. During the casting process, several people are needed to make the decisions. Your stage director (quite likely the teacher), your music director (perhaps the music teacher as well) and the composer (in this case, it may include a majority of the class). You should decide which parts are available for auditions and what kind of person you are looking for.

Make sure you have the auditioners sign up so you know how much time to allow. If the entire class is "voting" on casting, make sure it is a secret ballot so that it doesn't become a popularity contest.

If you already have the music available, have the auditioners prepare something from the opera. Also, have them prepare some of the speaking lines. Remember, you are looking for the best person to play the part!

STEP SEVEN—Putting on the opera. You should have your opera singers, set, props, costumes and music. Now it's time to get ready for a performance. Several dress rehearsals are highly recommended. This gives everyone the opportunity to learn where to move (and how to move if costumes are involved) as well as how to interact with the other actors on stage. You can run rehearsals with and without music (without music is called a blocking rehearsal where actors are learning where to stand and where/how they move) but make sure you have several rehearsals in costume and with props!

STEP EIGHT— Show time! It's all come together and now it's time to share your wonderful opera with an audience! Have someone put together a little program about your opera, the story (synopsis), the cast and directors as well as credits to everyone who helped with the set, props, costumes, music, etc.

We at Kentucky Opera would love to see or read your opera. You can send us your libretto and/or videotape of your performance!

Opera Soup original operas
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TOI! TOI! TOI! (it means good luck or break a leg for opera singers and is pronounced Toy! Toy! Toy!)