



Ángela Peralta

HIDDEN HERO OF HISTORY

Listen to the story: <https://jonincharacter.com/angela-peralta/>

Ángela Peralta was an **opera** singer, composer, harpist, and pianist who was called “The Mexican Nightingale” by the audiences who adored her from around the world.

She was born in Mexico City on July 5, 1845. At a very young age, she showed a profound talent for singing and was first heard in public at the age of 8.

She went on to study music at the **Conservatorio Nacional de Música** and, at 15, made her opera debut at the **Teatro Nacional**, or National Theater of Mexico City.

An opera is a story told entirely through music. Unlike a musical which has songs interwoven throughout a script of dialogue, an opera uses a libretto and all of the performers sing the narrative. Some of the singers sing really high notes and some sing in lower registers. Ángela Peralta was what music-makers call a **Soprano**, which meant she could hit the highest of notes.

A year after making her debut, Ms. Peralta went to study singing in Italy. On May 13, 1862, she made her European debut at **La Scala** in Milan, Italy. La Scala is a renowned theater where many of the finest singers from around the globe have performed. Today, it's regarded as one of the leading opera and ballet theaters in the world.

After La Scala, Ms. Peralta's career took off! She performed in opera houses all over the world—in Rome, Florence, Bologna, Madrid, Barcelona, St. Petersburg, Alexandria, Cairo, Havana, and New York City.

One highlight of her tour was singing before King Victor Emmanuel II of Italy, where she received 32 **curtain calls**. She was very beloved!

Ms. Peralta was a very versatile performer, known for singing in the **Bel Canto**—or “beautiful singing”—style popularized in Italy. It is a form of singing that emphasizes the beauty of sound, rather than dramatic performance.

In addition to singing, Ms. Peralta began her own opera company in Mexico in 1871. During its tenure, she performed many of the leading roles. She was an accomplished harpist and pianist who composed numerous romantic pieces in the popular music styles of the 1800's.

Her legacy is preserved in an opera house named in her honor: the **Ángela Peralta Theater**, located in the coastal Mexican city of Mazatlán.



Glossary

Opera – a dramatic work in one or more acts, set to music for singers and instrumentalists.

Conservatorio Nacional de Música – a music conservatory located in the Polanco neighborhood of Mexico City.

Teatro Nacional de México – The National Theatre of Mexico is a theatre in Mexico City that hosts events showcasing the artistic and musical talents of Mexico.

Soprano – refers to the highest-pitched human voice type, though it can also refer to a singer who possesses that voice type.

La Scala – The “Teatro alla Scala” in Milan, Italy is among the world’s most famous opera houses. It opened in August of 1778 and most of the greatest singers of the past 200 years have appeared there.

Curtain call – when an audience applauds after a performance and the performers come out to take a bow. When the audience keeps cheering, the performers keep returning to the stage to acknowledge the audience.

Bel Canto – (Italian for “beautiful singing”) is a vocal style that prevailed throughout Europe during the 18th and early 19th centuries. It is a style associated with beautiful melodies, silvery voices and floods of rapid notes curling their way up and down the scale. (ref: Anne Midgette, *Washington Post*, 2019)

Ángela Peralta Theater – A luxurious opera house in historic Mazatlán that was named after one of Mexico’s most beloved singers, Ángela Peralta. She never performed there herself but it stands as a symbol of her legacy. Today, it is one of Mazatlán’s main tourist attractions.

Give it Some Thought

- How do you think Ángela Peralta felt when she stood on stage at 15 ready to make her debut as an opera singer?
- What are you thinking about the most after you read about Ángela Peralta’s life? How does her story make you feel?
- Ms. Peralta travelled the world for her job as an opera singer—what kinds of things do you think you can learn from visiting and performing in so many different countries around the world?

Use Your Imagination

Imagine that you are an opera singer like Ángela Peralta and you are getting ready for an upcoming opera you've never performed in before. This is an opportunity to put yourself in someone else's shoes, and see things from a new perspective - it is important to understand the character you are portraying in order to tell their story.

For this activity, pick a character you already know or come up with your own original character. Write your responses to these questions in your journal or use the "My Opera Character" worksheet.

- What is your character's name?
- Where does your character live?
- How old is your character?
- What does your character want?
- What challenges does your character face?
- What are your character's likes?
- What are your character's dislikes?
- Draw a picture of your character.