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CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY

Study Guides
20142015
SEASON

The Barber of Seville

GIOACHINO ROSSINI
(1792 – 1868)

coc.ca/Explore

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All production photographs are from the Canadian Opera Company/Houston Grand Opera/ Opéra National de Bordeaux co-production of *The Barber of Seville*.

Cover: Patrick Carfizzi as Dr. Bartolo and Nathan Gunn as Figaro (Houston Grand Opera, 2011). Photo: Felix Sanchez.
Above: A scene from *The Barber of Seville* (Opéra national de Bordeaux, 2012). Photo: Guillaume Bonnaud

Welcome!

Despite a rocky premiere in Rome in 1816, *The Barber of Seville* quickly grew to become one of the most popular and well-loved operas in the world. Rossini's comedic masterpiece, with the witty barber Figaro at its centre, has captured the admiration of audiences for its light-hearted tone, unforgettable overture, catchy tunes and infectious humour.

Adapted from a French play by the same name, *The Barber of Seville* boasts a memorable cast of characters based on *commedia dell'arte* archetypes. The characters and melodies of *The Barber of Seville* may already be familiar to first-time audiences as the opera has inspired numerous television shows and cartoons, including the hilarious Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd cartoon, "The Rabbit of Seville." Its continued celebration in popular culture attests to the success and wide appeal of *The Barber of Seville*.

This particular production of *The Barber of Seville*, designed by Spanish theatre collective Els Comediants, is a quirky carnival of bright colours, pantomime and acrobatics. This rich production provides a multitude of curriculum topics to explore with students including Drama (historical conventions, *commedia dell'arte*, characters), Visual Art (colour, Cubism, scale), Classical Languages and International Languages (Italian), and World History (changing role of barbers in society).

The Barber of Seville is sung in Italian with English SURTITLES™.

Opera 101

WHAT IS OPERA?

The term "opera" comes from the Italian word for "work" or "piece," and is usually applied to the European tradition of grand opera. Opera is a form of storytelling which incorporates music, drama and design.

Though its origins date back to ancient Greece, the form of opera we are familiar with today started in the late 16th century in Florence, Italy. Count Giovanni de' Bardi was a patron and host to a group of intellectuals, poets, artists, scientists and humanists including Giulio Caccini (composer) and Vincenzo Galilei (father to the astronomer and scientist, Galileo Galilei, who was most famous for his improvements to the telescope). These individuals explored trends in the arts, focusing on music and drama in particular. They were unified in their belief that the arts had become over-embellished and that returning to the transparency of the music of the ancient Greeks, which incorporated both speech and song, and a chorus to further the plot and provide commentary on the action, would present a more pure, natural and powerful way to tell stories and express emotions.

The first opera, *Dafne*, about a nymph who fled from Apollo and was subsequently transformed by the gods into a laurel tree, was composed by Jacopo Peri in 1597. From then on, the early operas recreated Greek tragedies with mythological themes. During the 17th and 18th centuries, topics expanded to include stories about royalty, and everyday or common people. Some operas were of a serious nature (called *opera seria*) and some light-hearted (called *opera buffa*). Since then operas have been written on a wide variety of topics such as cultural clashes (*Madama Butterfly*), comedic farce (*The Barber of Seville*), politicians on foreign visits (*Nixon in China*), the celebration of Canadian heroes (*Louis Riel*), and children's stories (*The Little Prince*), to name a few.

The COC presents works in the western European tradition but musical equivalents to European opera can be found in Japan, at the Peking Opera in China, and in Africa where it is called Epic Storytelling.

What are the differences between operas, musicals and plays?

Traditionally operas are through-sung, meaning they are sung from beginning to end with no dialogue in between. Singers must have powerful voices in order to be heard over the orchestra (the ensemble of instrumental musicians that accompanies the dramatic action on stage during an opera). Remember: opera singers don't use microphones!

Musicals are a combination of dialogue and sung pieces and often include choreographed numbers. The singers often use microphones and are accompanied by a pit band which includes more modern instruments like a drum kit, guitar and electronic instruments.

Plays are primarily spoken works of theatre with minimal singing or music.

There are always exceptions to the rule: though *Les Misérables* is through-sung it is still classified as a piece of musical theatre because of its style of music. By the same token, some operas, like Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, have spoken dialogue in addition to singing.

What does opera feel like?

Take five minutes out of the school day and instead of using regular voices to converse, ask the class to commit to singing everything. Make an agreement with the students that it's not about judging people's voices but about freeing our natural sounds. Make up the melodies on the spot and don't worry about singing "correctly." Did the musical lines help express or emphasize certain emotions? If so, how?

Attending the Opera:
Make the most of your experience

WELCOME TO THE FOUR SEASONS CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

Photo: Sam Javanrouh

So you're headed to the opera, and there are a few questions on your mind. Here are some tips on how to get the most out of your opera experience.

First, there's the question of **what to wear**. People wear all sorts of things to the opera—jeans, dress pants, cocktail dresses, suits, etc. The important thing is to be comfortable. Wear something that makes you feel good, whether it be jeans or your nicest tie. But skip that spritz of perfume or cologne before you go out; the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts is scent-free. Many fellow patrons and performers are allergic to strong scents.

Once you're dressed, it's important to **arrive on time** for the show. Late patrons cannot be admitted to the theatre, and you may have to watch the first act on a television screen in the lobby rather than from your seat. If you don't have your ticket yet, arrive as early as possible—the line-up for the box office can often be quite long prior to a performance! The main doors open one hour before the performance. Line up there and have your ticket ready to present to the usher. If you have any questions about tonight's performance, drop by the Welcome Desk (just inside the main doors) to ask a member of the COC staff, who are full of useful information not only about tonight's opera, but also about COC programs in general. A **pre-performance chat** takes place in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre (Ring 3) about 45 minutes before the show. These chats, given by members of our **COC Volunteer Speakers Bureau**, offer valuable insight into the opera and the specific production that you'll be seeing.

Before the opera starts, take the opportunity to **explore the lobby**, known as the Isadore and Rosalie Sharp City Room. Stop by concessions and **pre-order a beverage for intermission or purchase a snack**. Walk up the stairs, passing a sculpture as you go, and note the floating glass staircase—the longest free-span glass staircase in the world! On the third floor, you'll see the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre, home to our Free Concert Series. You'll also see a mobile by artist Alexander Calder, adding some colour and whimsy to the space.

Chimes will ring throughout the lobby **ten minutes** before the performance, reminding everyone to find their

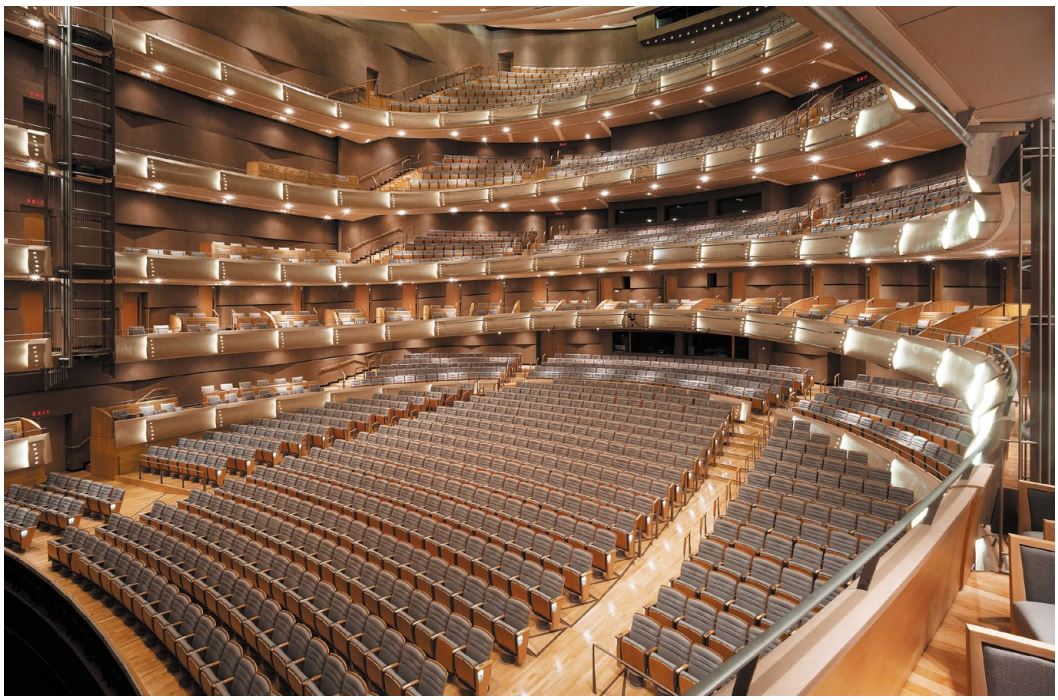
seats. Head towards the door noted on your ticket, get a program from the usher, and find your designated seat in R. Fraser Elliott Hall. It's best to use this time to open any candies you might have and turn off your cell phone—the hall is built to carry sound, so small sounds travel further than you may think! Photography is not permitted once the show starts. The design and direction of the show is under intellectual property and only the official COC photographer and/or members of the media can take pictures and even then, only under special circumstances that require prior arrangements.

As the lights go down and the audience quiets, **listen carefully**. Remember all of that traffic you heard in the lobby? And now... not a peep! The auditorium is physically separated from the outside and the ground below, making for the best acoustic experience possible.

Now it's time to sit back and **enjoy the opera**! **SURTITLES™** will be projected on a horizontal screen above the stage. SURTITLES™ originate from the idea of "subtitles", which are most commonly used in foreign films to make them more accessible outside of their country of origin. The COC was the first opera company to adapt this concept for the operatic stage. Slides containing the English translation of the *libretto* (text for the opera) are projected in a more visible place for the audience: above the stage. SURTITLES™ were first used by the COC at the premiere of the opera *Elektra* in 1983. Only the name could be trademarked, as the technology for the projections was already in existence. Opera companies from around the world have adopted this audience initiative under different names, and it has revolutionized opera stages everywhere.

Feel free to show your **appreciation to the performers** by laughing at humorous bits or applauding after a well-performed aria. If a performer has pulled off some particularly impressive vocal fireworks, it's absolutely acceptable to yell out your appreciation in addition to applause. You may hear your fellow audience members shouting "bravo!" for a man, "brava!" for a woman, or "bravi!" for a group of performers. Feel free to join in!

The Barber of Seville lasts approximately two hours and 55 minutes, including one intermission. The opera is sung in Italian with English SURTITLES™.



R. Fraser Elliott Hall.
Photo: Tim Griffith

Characters and Synopsis

MAIN CHARACTERS (in order of vocal appearance)

Name	Description	Voice Type	Pronunciation
Figaro	A barber	Baritone	FEE-gah-roh
Rosina	Bartolo's young ward	Mezzo-soprano	roh-ZEE-nah
Almaviva	A count	Tenor	al-mah-VEE-vah
Bartolo	A doctor, Rosina's guardian	Bass	BAR-toh-loh
Don Basilio	A music teacher	Bass	bah-ZEE-lee-oh
Berta	Servant to Bartolo	Soprano	BER-tah
Fiorello	Servant to Almaviva	Bass	fee-oh-REL-loh
Ambrogio	Servant to Bartolo	Silent	ahm-BROH-joh
The Officer		Silent	

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

Count Almaviva serenades Rosina, who lives in a house with her elderly guardian, Dr. Bartolo. Figaro the barber enters, boasting of his many talents, and recognizes the Count. Almaviva offers Figaro a reward if he can arrange a meeting between him and Rosina. Almaviva—pretending to be a poor student named Lindoro—sings another melody, telling Rosina he has no wealth and can offer only love. Figaro suggests to Almaviva that he should disguise himself as a soldier to gain entry into Bartolo's home.

Inside Bartolo's home, Rosina, determined to be united with her suitor, has written a love letter to "Lindoro." Figaro enters and conceals himself when Bartolo enters with his accomplice, the singing teacher Don Basilio. Basilio warns him of Almaviva's intentions towards Rosina and Bartolo replies the he himself wants to marry his ward and gain her dowry. Figaro approaches to tell Rosina that Lindoro is in love with her, and that he will arrange a meeting between them. When Figaro departs, Bartolo accuses Rosina of trying to deceive him. Almaviva enters, disguised as a drunken soldier, and gives Rosina a note. Bartolo demands to see it, and Rosina hands him last week's laundry list instead. Bartolo angrily protests at the presence of a drunken soldier and a platoon of troops arrives to arrest Almaviva. However, when Almaviva secretly reveals his true name and title to the officer in charge, he is immediately released.

ACT II

Inside Bartolo's home, Almaviva appears in the disguise of a music teacher, substituting for the supposedly ill Basilio. The suspicious Bartolo refuses to leave the room during the singing lesson, but Almaviva and Rosina succeed in exchanging words of endearment. When Basilio arrives in fine health, he is bribed by Almaviva to leave. While Figaro is shaving Bartolo, the lovers plan their elopement. They are, however, overheard by Bartolo, who is furious at their deception. He throws Figaro and Almaviva out of his home, and sends for a notary so he can marry Rosina without delay.

In the evening, Almaviva and Figaro return to Bartolo's home. Almaviva sneaks inside and reveals his true identity to the astonished Rosina. The notary arrives with a marriage contract and, at Figaro's instruction, enters Almaviva's name on the contract in place of Bartolo's. Bartolo enters to find Rosina and Almaviva married, but is consoled when Almaviva allows him to keep her dowry.

Genesis of the Opera

THE SWAN OF PESARO

Born in Pesaro, Italy on a leap day in 1792 to an opera-singing mother and a horn-playing father, Rossini was a musical child. In 1806, at age 14, he moved to Bologna to attend the Accademica Filarmonica where his classmates nicknamed him "the Little German" because of his enthusiasm for German composers Joseph Haydn and W. A. Mozart. Later in life, he described these two composers as "the admiration of my youth, the desperation of my mature years, and the consolation of my old age."

Rossini left school before graduation to work as an apprentice composer in Venice. Following his apprenticeship he composed several successful operas. With *L'italiana in Algeri* (*The Italian Girl in Algiers*) in 1813, when he was only 21, Rossini broke new ground, integrating serious elements into a comic opera. Soon he was offered a very prestigious position at the wealthiest opera house in Europe, the Teatro San Carlo in Naples. Between his arrival in 1815 and his departure in 1822, he wrote nine operas for Teatro San Carlo (including *Maometto II*, which will be presented at the COC in 2016) and nine for other companies, one of those being *The Barber of Seville*.

In 1824, having married Neapolitan soprano Isabella Colbran and achieved successes in Vienna and London, Rossini moved to Paris to work at the Théâtre des Italiens and, later, the Paris Opéra. Once he had a handle on the French language and theatrical tradition, Rossini was ready to compose for a Parisian audience. His great comic opera *Le comte Ory* (1828), which recycled sections from an earlier work, was a huge success. The political epic *Guillaume Tell* (*William Tell*) (1829), which was the culmination of Rossini's development as an artist, was likewise successful, but it also turned out to be his last opera. He went home to visit his widowed father in 1829 intending to return to France. The Second French Revolution of 1830 prevented him from doing so until 1855. After a prolific 19 years, during which he had composed 39 operas, Rossini retired. During his remaining years, he composed only a few short pieces and two full-length religious works. He died in 1868.

Rossini had been a hero for much of his working life, but by the time he retired his music was no longer as fashionable as it had once been. His work began to come back into prominence in the 1920s, with its popularity becoming more widespread in the 1950s and 60s. Today Rossini's importance to the development of opera is much better understood than it once was. He transformed opera in both Italy and France and made use of numerous compositional innovations, such as the "Rossini crescendo." Learn more about Rossini's contributions to the operatic and symphonic genres in the **Listening Guide** on page 12.

Above: Gioachino Rossini by an unknown painter, 1820. Original painting held by the International Museum and Library of Music, Bologna

Rossini has also been known as the "Swan of Pesaro" and "Signor Crescendo," the latter due to his pioneering use of crescendos (a gradual swell in volume) in the overtures to his operas.

An annual festival devoted to Rossini's operas was **established in Pesaro**, Italy in 1980.

OPENING NIGHT

Rossini is rumoured to have spent a mere 13 days composing *The Barber of Seville*. His speediness was likely helped along by another opera of the same name, which had been written a little over 30 years earlier by a composer named Giovanni Paisiello. Paisiello's *Il barbiere di Siviglia, ovvero La precauzione inutile* (*The Barber of Seville, or The Useless Precaution*) was, like Rossini's, based on the play *Le Barbier de Séville ou la Précaution inutile* (also *The Barber of Seville, or The Useless Precaution*) by Pierre-Augustin Beaumarchais. Rossini worked carefully to set his opera apart from Paisiello's by including carefully worded disclaimers that insisted Rossini's treatment was a brand new work and acknowledged the value of Paisiello's. By the same token, Rossini initially titled his opera *Almaviva, o sia L'inutile precauzione* (*Almaviva, or the Useless Precaution*). However, despite these measures, the initial performance at the Teatro Argentina in Rome on February 20, 1816 was a disaster. Rossini's opera angered Paisiello fans who organized numerous disruptions throughout the performance, including booing and shouting. This in combination with accidents and mishaps, such as an out-of-tune guitar and a random cat roaming the stage, made the opening night a failure.

Rossini made a few changes, such as adding an overture he had composed for a different opera. Despite the catastrophe of its premiere, the second performance of *The Barber of Seville* was a success and catapulted Rossini into a position of fame throughout Europe. Rossini's quick wit, brilliant and joyful musical innovations, and memorable overture have made *The Barber of Seville* one of the world's most frequently performed operas.

Patter songs, like the aria sung by Figaro, require singers to articulate multiple syllables one after the other at remarkable, tongue-twisting speeds. The effect is both impressive and comic. Listen to an example of this section of "Largo al factotum" **here**.

Patrick Carfizzi as Dr. Bartolo and Lawrence Brownlee as Almaviva (Houston Grand Opera, 2011). Photo: Felix Sanchez.

OPERA BUFFA

Opera buffa is a term used to describe the genre of comic opera that appeared in Italy in the 18th century. Before *opera buffa* came into prominence, *opera seria*, or "serious opera," was a more popular operatic genre. But between the standard three acts of an *opera seria*, it was customary to present short, comic interludes. These interludes eventually grew into full-length *opera buffa* productions. Where *opera seria* took on heroic subjects in a serious way, *opera buffa* had a more comic, light-hearted tone. The latter also dealt with everyday people instead of historical or mythical figures found in *opera seria*. Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* is one of the classic and most famous examples of the genre.

COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE AND OPERA

Rossini's most popular opera owes a great debt to the Italian comic street theatre called *commedia dell'arte* (comedy of art). Performers playing stock characters would improvise dialogue based on one of a few sets of familiar scenarios. *Commedia dell'arte* enjoyed immense popularity in Italy in the 1600s. The companies that mounted these shows saw potential for international success and some of them left for German and French-speaking lands. France was the largest such market, and the Italian *commedia* troupes reached great fame in Paris, influencing French theatre. Beaumarchais, the French playwright of the late 18th century who wrote the play *The Barber of Seville*, had clearly absorbed much of the structure of *commedia dell'arte*: most of the characters in his play are modeled after *commedia* character archetypes.

In *commedia dell'arte* there is typically a pair of lovers (*innamorati*) who strive to unite in marriage, but are foiled for a time by one or more elders (*vecchi*), possibly a guardian or an older spouse. Helping the young lovers is one or more servants (*zanni*), who are in turn modeled on the *facchini* or "handymen" who populated the piazzas of Italian towns. Figaro the barber is obviously a representative of the *zanni* character type. He is wily, acrobatic, inventive, and above all, capable of outsmarting everyone else.

Within these three *commedia* types (*innamorati*, *vecchi*, and *zanni*) are specific characters. An example of the *vecchi* is Il Dottore, a gluttonous silly old doctor. Another is Pantalone, a sinister miserly father or guardian of one of the *innamorati*. He opposes their union and tries to keep the young lovers away from each other. Doctor Bartolo in *The Barber of Seville* is a combination of Il Dottore and Pantalone. The music teacher in *Barber*, Don Basilio, is a variation on the deceitful and cantankerous *zanni* character, Pulcinella. Figaro is a variation on Brighella, another *zanni* character. Count Almaviva and Rosina are the *innamorati*. When in disguise at the beginning of the story, Almaviva refers to himself as Lindoro. Lindoro is one of the names commonly given to male *innomorati*, while Rosina is a name often given to female *innamorati*. Fiorello, Almaviva's faithful servant, is a counterpart to Pedrolino, or Pierrot, another example of a *zanni* character.

For the most part, *commedia dell'arte* ceased to exist in Italy by the beginning of the 19th century, although not before making its mark on French plays that, in turn, provided the plots for a large number of Italian operas. *Commedia dell'arte* dealt with stories about love, lust, abduction and trickery, performed to great acclaim for the poorest members of northern Italian society. Opera, on the other hand, despite its attempts, never gained significant popularity among working class audiences. The relationship between Italian opera, French theatre, and Italian *commedia dell'arte* is an interesting example of how different cultures influence one another. *Commedia dell'arte* began as a low-class entertainment, and became the basis for many works of theatre, opera, and literature of Western Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Four *commedia dell'arte* characters illustrated by Maurice Sand. From left to right: Harlequin, 1671; Pantalone, 1550; Lelio (male lover), 1860; Isabella (female lover), 1860

A SHAVE, A HAIRCUT AND MORE

In his famous aria "Largo al factotum*" (Make way for the city's factotum"), Figaro lists some of his barber's tools including combs, razors, scissors, and a lancet (a surgical tool that might be used for bloodletting). He also mentions bloodletting as one of his activities along with giving shaves and working with wigs. Why would Figaro, a barber, sing about the once common surgical procedure in which blood is drained from the body to cure illness and disease? The reason is that historically a barber's practice was not limited to shaving and cutting hair; at one time barbers were associated with surgeons and performed bloodletting and dentistry in addition to hairdressing.

The practice of bloodletting as a treatment against illness originated in ancient times when a correlation was believed to exist between health and what were called "the four humours:" blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. The humours had to be kept in balance in order to maintain good health, thereby necessitating regular bloodletting. In the dark ages, bloodletting was done by clergymen with barbers acting as their assistants. A rule that forbade monks and priests from bloodletting came into being, and the practice became dominated by barber-surgeons. The modern barber pole, with its red and white diagonal stripes, is based on two pieces of equipment used during bloodletting: a pole and a bandage. They were kept together when not in use, with the bloodstained red bandage wrapped around the pole. As science progressed, the association between barbers and medicine was severed. The focus of the profession changed from hairdressing and surgery to hairdressing and fashion.

Like medical doctors today, barber-surgeons were highly respected and were called upon by patients suffering from all manner of maladies. Thus, Figaro's description of his life as noble and his proclamation of his importance and popularity about town is based on the high regard in which barbers were held.

*A *factotum* is a term that describes an individual who has many diverse responsibilities.

Top: Barber's Pole, Edinburgh. Photo: Kim Traynor (CC)

Below: Patrick Carfizzi as Dr. Bartolo gets lathered up by Nathan Gunn as Figaro (Houston Grand Opera, 2011). Photo: Felix Sanchez

Listening Guide

INTRODUCTION
Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868) was not only the most important Italian composer of the first half of the 19th century, but a key transitional figure simultaneously looking back to the Classical era and forward to the Romantic period, always maintaining a foot in both camps. While most famous for *opera buffa* (opera comedies) like *The Barber of Seville* (1816), in fact he composed an even greater number of *opera serie* (based on serious subjects from classical literature and mythology). However, largely due to the vagaries of taste, most of these serious operas had been completely forgotten by the end of the 19th century. What we were left with was a rather skewed view of Rossini as a "one hit wonder" with *Barber* as his singular masterpiece and the public uninquisitive about anything else he had written except the overture to *William Tell*.

This highly selective view of Rossini's legacy de-contextualizes the relationship between his comic and serious operas, leading to misunderstandings about the connections between his *seria* and *buffa* pieces. It is often remarked that Rossini's witty, rhythmically effervescent, florid tunes, while appropriate to comedy, sound out of place when used in a more serious context, as if he was unable to match sound and mood. A more period-sensitive view would perhaps recognize that for Rossini's contemporaries, there *was* something eerie, awe-inspiring or frightening about that jaunty tune he might have used to accompany a visit to a spooky, dark tomb (as happens in 1823's *Semiramide*). It was not until later, when Verdi arrived on the scene that Italian operatic music began to take on meanings we automatically recognize as "dramatic" today.

A scene from *The Barber of Seville* (Houston Grand Opera, 2011).
Photo: Felix Sanchez

Related to these commonly held misunderstandings about the relationship between Rossini's serious and comic works is the suspicious eye cast over the incredible speed with which he supposedly composed *Barber*. In less than 15 days' time, he produced 600 pages of music in full score, leaving the writing of the *recitativo secco* (sung dialogue) to a collaborator, as was common practice. This kind of timetable was nothing out of the ordinary in the operatic world Rossini inhabited—most composers of the day were prolific—for example Leo Hasse and Niccolò Jommelli wrote between 50 and 90 operas each. It was only as a result of the trend both North and South of the Alps towards larger orchestras and more elaborate instrumentation that composers began to feel the need for four, five or more weeks from start to finish. These short turn-around times necessitated that composers of the period write a vast amount of all-purpose music that could be slotted in to suit any situation—tragic, sentimental or farcical. As Italian conductor Alberto Zedda, editor of the critical edition of the *Barber* score, has pointed out: "It was rare that a lyric opera of the period was conceived to pass to posterity as a definitive document to respect in totality as a work of art—vast changes from conception to realization, from premiere to subsequent performances and from these to later revivals were the rule. Large variations persisted." The process of producing an opera in early 19th-century Italy was much more fluid than we think of today. Concepts of "originality" were not saddled with present day negative connotations; indeed, the self-borrowing practiced by Rossini and his contemporaries was not only a practical necessity, but an aesthetic choice.

The tracks listed below are excerpted from *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Decca 478 2497. Academy of St. Martin in the Fields and Ambrosian Opera Chorus, Neville Marriner, conductor. Thomas Allen, Agnes Baltsa, Francisco Araiza. You can also experience the Listening Guide online at **coc.ca/LookAndListen**.

1

MUSICAL EXCERPT
Sinfonia (Overture)

CONNECTION TO THE STORY
The overture is an introductory musical passage played by the orchestra that often introduces themes that will be heard throughout the opera.

MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE
Rossini's overture to *Barber*, which he called a *sinfonia*, is a prime example of his penchant to self-borrow compositions originally written for earlier works. Here, he recycles an overture he originally composed for *Aureliano in Palmira* (Milan, 1813) an *opera seria* about Romans and Persians and the exotic Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra—a decidedly different dramatic context from *Barber*'s world of farce and social satire. This same *sinfonia* was then appropriated for his historical drama, *Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra* (*Elizabeth, Queen of England*; Naples, 1815). It might be difficult for a 21st-century audience to reconcile this frothy, bubbly, cheerful orchestral piece with a serious Tudor melodrama but as noted above in the introduction, it is likely that contemporary listeners were not burdened with the same sets of preconceptions that we face today.

Rossini cemented the structural plans for his longer comic operas early on in his career with his short *farse* (farces) all written for the San Moisè Theatre in Venice between 1812 and 1813. At the forefront of these schema was the archetypal overture featuring his famous *crescendo* (gradually getting louder), not itself a Rossini invention but a musical element he made his own (the first begins at 4:03; the second at 6:00). In his hands, extreme control of dynamic levels was achieved by gradually increasing volume and rhythmic activity and, by expanding orchestral colour through a progressive addition of wind instruments and percussion, all leading to an explosion of sound (listen for two of them at 4:35 and 6:31).

This *sinfonia* is constructed according to a classic Rossini model beginning with a slow twenty-five bar introduction (ending at 0:25), followed by two sets of typical ascending and descending figures each separated by a short interpolation from oboe (at 0:30). Next comes a delicate six bar theme that unwinds on flute and violins (beginning at 0:54) while at 1:54, a *fortissimo* chord prepares the attack on the *allegro con brio* ("with great energy") section beginning at 2:02.

2

MUSICAL EXCERPT
Act 1: *Cavatina*: "Largo al factotum della città" ("I'm the factotum of the city")

CONNECTION TO THE STORY
Figaro, the barber of Seville, introduces himself, listing the skills which open every door in the city to him.

MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE
Figaro enters singing his famous *cavatina*—a type of aria, generally of brilliant character that is sung in one or two sections without any repeats. As a bravura showpiece for the high baritone voice, this excerpt is unequalled either in difficulty or in popularity throughout the entire operatic repertory. Figaro's entrance is carefully prepared to make its biggest effect by having his first calls sound from offstage (listen at 0:18). Rossini presents the aria's principal theme (heard from 0:38-0:41) over and over again in various permutations throughout the long, almost five minute piece to create an unstoppable, forward musical momentum.

The *cavatina* offers the singer plenty of opportunity to show off his vocal prowess, all perfectly suited to the somewhat pompous, self-aggrandizing nature of the character himself. Rossini has written most of the vocal fireworks into the piece itself, but tradition, and an individual singer's abilities, often results in a further upping of the ante. For example, in this recording listen how the singer adds extra vocal flourishes at 2:35 on his "la, la, la" including a sustained top G (very high in the baritone range) at 2:44 that doesn't appear in the score.

As catchy as this tune is, the success of Figaro's aria relies just as heavily on Rossini's text setting. Listen for example to the hilarious, frenetic patter at the climax (at 4:15) as Figaro restates over and over his general indispensability as Seville's go-to man for hire. Here, it is enlightening to note Giuseppe Verdi's comments about *Barber* which in his eyes constituted "neither melody nor harmony; **it is the declaimed word**, just true and essentially music." As such, Figaro's "Largo" is the perfect example of what the poet Lord Byron recognized in Rossini's compositional style as "*musica favellata*" ("spoken music"): text which is sung exactly the way an Italian would speak, think and feel.

3

MUSICAL EXCERPT
Act 1: Cavatina: "Una voce poco fa qui nel cor mi risuonò" ("A voice has just echoed here in my heart")

CONNECTION TO THE STORY
Inside her guardian Bartolo's house, Rosina has just finished a letter to her mysterious love, Lindoro. She expresses her undying love and that no one will stand in her way even if it means she might have to get nasty!

MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE
Rossini's decision to delay the entrance of his heroine, Rosina, until the half-way mark of the first act is a calculated move to stimulate our curiosity about the girl. According to Geltrude Righetti-Giorgi who originated the role, this was one of the reasons the audience disliked much of what they heard on opening night. Tradition dictated their heroines to launch into a showy entrance aria early in the opera but Rossini played with audience expectations, initially giving her only one short phrase from offstage: "Segui, o caro, deh segui così" ("Carry on dear, carry on like that") before she is abruptly silenced by the maid, Berta.

Rosina more than makes up for this first, abbreviated appearance when she finally launches into the aria "Una voce poco fa qui nel cor mi risuonò" ("A voice has just echoed here in my heart"), a vocal showcase written within the standard *cavatina-cabaletta* (slow-fast movement) framework. The instrumental introduction—marked *andante* (a slower, walking pace)—has a rather sharp flavour that dispels any notion of Rosina's naivety. The opening *cavatina* theme (beginning at 0:33) is then sounded by the voice and subsequently developed with an increasing display of *coloratura* (quicker, decorated passagework heard first at 1:00, then more elaborately at 1:16 and so on).

In the faster *cabaletta* (beginning at 2:38), the vocal line gains speed and animation as Rosina becomes more vicious about her guardian, Bartolo. The aria ends with some of the most characterful, bravura passagework Rossini ever wrote (listen from 4:18 on) as Rosina expresses that she is only "docile" ("sweet") until crossed! By this point in his career, Rossini had taken to writing out the quick, decorative sections of his vocal lines, feeling that singers were taking too many liberties and over-improvising his melodies. He complained that "the sense of time, that essential part of the music, without which neither melody nor harmony can be understood...is violated and ignored by singers." Rossini's prescriptive writing out of his florid figurations also reflected a shift in musical style. During the preceding Baroque period, these decorative passages were mainly conceived as ornament but by Rossini's time, they had evolved into an intrinsic part of the melodic line without which many of his tunes would have failed to cohere.

4

MUSICAL EXCERPT
Act 2: Terzetto (Trio): "Zitti, zitti, piano, piano" ("Not a sound, quiet")

CONNECTION TO THE STORY
Lindoro reveals his true identity as the Count to Rosina. The lovers express their joy while Figaro urges them to escape.

MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE
As mentioned in the musical significance of the first musical excerpt, many of Rossini's musical structures were established early in his career. As musicologists Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker have noted, Rossini may not have invented all of these forms but in his hands, a defined set of recurring patterns—what they call the "Rossinian code"—emerged that would be influential through the next several decades in Italy.

One of these standard structures is the vocal ensemble, in this case a trio for Figaro, Susanna and Count Almaviva. Here, you're listening to the *allegro* (fast) section of a larger ensemble in which the three desperately try to escape by ladder through a window and yet, can't help but sing about their eminent departure, thus delaying their exit. Rossini seems to be poking fun at a melodramatic convention—the "big finale"—utilizing its built-in repetitions and variations in an ironic fashion. The trio's ongoing entreaties to each other to creep away in a "piano" ("quiet") manner are comically undermined by loud blasts of sound at 0:22 and 0:45.

Rossini's ironic use of fixed forms like the *allegro* finale to this ensemble depended upon a certain level of audience expectation to aid theatrical communication. Listeners accustomed to a fast-paced finale in its more usual, dramatic framework could then be relied on to "get" the joke when the conventions were used almost against themselves in a new, comical context.

What to Look for

This production of *The Barber of Seville* is shared by the COC, Houston Grand Opera, Opéra National de Bordeaux, and Opera Australia. It premiered in Houston in 2011 and was designed by the same group that worked on the COC's *La Cenerentola*, presented in 2011 in Toronto. The production team are all members of a Spanish theatre collective called Els Comediants, who create innovative performance experiences through a mix of elements of carnival, circus, and street theatre traditions; puppetry; audio and visual elements and more. Since its beginnings in the 1970s, Els Comediants has aimed to create deeply meaningful experiences that nurture a sense of community between people and the natural world, and that rouse the "festive spirit of human existence" in its audiences.

Here, director Joan Font, set and costume designer Joan Guillen and lighting designer Albert Faura have created an exuberant and playful production featuring acrobatics and pantomime enacted behind scrims with the main action going on in the foreground. The designers use hot pinks, bold oranges, and vibrant greens to highlight the comedy that takes place all over the stage. Some of the performers wear colourful wigs and garish makeup, or are topped by shiny helmets adorned with ridiculously fluffy, giant dyed plumes. The brightly coloured costumes and oversized, Cubist set pieces draw attention to the designers' sense of fun and whimsy.

Look for the strong symbolism in this staging, particularly around the ideas of enclosure and entrapment. There are various hints that Rosina is being held prisoner in Bartolo's home. For example, note the bars on the windows. This is also emphasised by a use of darkness and light. There is a back-and-forth between Bartolo and Rosina throughout the opera, notably seen as she attempts to let the light into their home by opening the curtains several

Be sure to keep an eye on the tree that stands outside Bartolo's window. The lighting on the tree changes colour as the story unfolds, and prompted several reviewers of the Houston Grand Opera production (seen in this photograph) to commend Albert Faura for his mastery of lighting design. Photo: Felix Sanchez

times. Bartolo quickly closes them. What other examples of this theme can you see?

The staging in this production is very theatrical. Spotlights are used on the principal characters during their arias, while actors and dancers in the background enact the same story. This emphasises the universality of the story, or how it could happen to anyone.

Look for the mammoth guitar (below) with which Els Comediants pays homage to famous Spanish artist Pablo Picasso. Picasso worked alongside French painter Georges Braque to invent a significant art movement of the early 20th century called Cubism. Among Picasso's works from this period is a sculpture of a guitar made from paper, string, and wire, which he reproduced two years later using sheet metal.

Picasso and Braque were interested in breaking forms down into simple shapes—known as Analytical Cubism—and in experimenting with the synthesis of multiple perspectives of an object at once—Synthetic Cubism. While the guitar in this production of *The Barber of Seville* closely resembles Picasso's guitar, Els Comediants' choice to represent several of the same characters (played by different performers) on stage at the same time could also be interpreted as Cubistic. This unique element of the production appears as a kind of performing arts version of Synthetic Cubism.

COC Spotlight

Not everyone at the COC is an opera singer... take a peek behind the scenes and learn about the many diverse careers available in the arts!

Name: Ian Cowie

Role in the Company: COC Orchestra Personnel Manager and Second Trombone player

Hometown: Toronto

Education: Western University, The Banff Centre, and Pierre Monteux School in Maine.

First became interested in opera: Western University

What made you decide to pursue this career path? My love of orchestral trombone performance.

What is a typical day/shift like for you? What things are you responsible for? Managing all orchestral activity for the COC and performing Second Trombone in all of the operas. On performance days, I usually practice trombone in the morning, go to the office for administrative duties in the afternoon and then go over to the theatre for the performance in the evening.

If someone was interested in becoming the personnel manager of an orchestra, what would you recommend they have in terms of skills or experience? Orchestra Personnel Managers are usually, but not always, members of the orchestra who have administrative experience, especially experience dealing with people in a wide and often complex range of issues. First you must find a job in an orchestra, then at the same time gain experience in organizing large groups of people.

What do you love most about this career? The music and the people I work with.

What do you enjoy the least about this career? Not enough time to practice the trombone.

What surprises you most about this career? When two people or two groups of people look at a situation and come up with completely different understandings.

Ian Cowie
(COC Orchestra Personnel Mangager and Second Trombone Player)

Ian Cowie (second from left) joshes around backstage with his fellow trombone players and COC Music Director Johannes Debus (foreground). Photo: COC

Favourite part about this production: I made an arrangement of "Largo al Factotum" for four Euphoniums which we performed on Tom Allen's CBC Radio show some years ago so that aria is my favourite.

What do you enjoy outside of opera? Spending time with my wife and three daughters, biking, canoe tripping with percussionist Trevor Tureski, renovating old buildings and going out after performances with fellow COC brass players.

Active Learning

One of the best parts of taking your students to the opera is the discussion and further exploration that live theatre can inspire. Take a deeper look into the themes and story of *The Barber of Seville* with these discussion questions and ideas for further exploration.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *The Barber of Seville* is full of familiar melodies. Where have you heard this music before? Do you feel the music was effective in this different context? Why or why not?

- As mentioned on page 11, barbers used to do much more than administer a shave and a haircut. Research the role of the barber from Egyptian culture to the modern day. How many different jobs is the barber's role now split into?

- Research *commedia dell'arte*, starting with the information on page 10. This study guide explains how *The Barber of Seville* fits this form as an opera; this time think about this particular production. How do the colourful elements and staging techniques employed by Els Comediants emphasize the *commedia* form?

- Don Basilio sings an aria about rumours and the speed at which they spread. Play a game of "Telephone" in your class to explore this idea. Sit in a circle and whisper a simple sentence into the ear of the person next to you. Make sure no one else hears it! The next person whispers what they heard to the person seated next to them. This continues around the circle (or down the line, if you prefer), until the last player says what they heard out loud. How did the sentence change? What does this say about how rumours spread and change? Optional: Discuss how this applies to how rumours can be distorted and spread online, especially on social media. Bring up some recent celebrity examples, if appropriate.

- Brainstorm various disguises Count Almaviva could have used to get into Bartolo's home. Have volunteers roleplay as Bartolo and a disguised Almaviva. Have a class vote on who would make it inside!

- Research Cubism and examine how Picasso applied its principles to his sculpture, ***Still life with Guitar***. Make your own sculpture of another object using the very same principles! Share and present your creation to your class.

Did viewing the opera spark some scintillating debates or discussions? Would your students like to share examples of their work with the COC? E-mail us at **education@coc.ca**. We'd love to hear from you!

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Above: Workshop at Howard Park Jr. P.S. Photo: COC