ACCESS OPERA
EDUCATOR GUIDE

ROSSINI

IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA

The Metropolitan Opera

THE WORK

An opera in two acts, sung in Italian

Music by Gioachino Rossini

Libretto by Cesare Sterbini

Based on the play *Le Barbier de Séville* by Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais

First performed February 20, 1816, at the Teatro Argentina, Rome, Italy

PRODUCTION

Bartlett Sher
Production

Michael Yeargan
Set Designer

Catherine Zuber
Costume Designer

Christopher Akerlind
Lighting Designer

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Intrigue, disguises, and love triumphant: It's all in a day's work for Figaro, the barber of Seville. By the time Gioachino Rossini sat down in 1816 to write his great comic opera *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, both he and his leading character already enjoyed immense popularity and far-reaching fame. At just 24 years of age, Rossini was harvesting the fruits of international acclaim that he would savor for the rest of his life. And in the 41 years since Figaro had first set foot on the Parisian stage, in a play by the French watchmaker-turned-nobleman Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, the quick-witted barber had been feted by emperors, feared by kings, and embraced by two generations of composers and poets.

Wily, witty, and urbane, Figaro cut a dashing figure on the stage. But it was Rossini's music that granted the beloved barber his immortality. Soaring lyricism, subtle musical characterizations, and infinitely hummable melodies bring Beaumarchais's story to life in a way that has captivated operagoers for two centuries. Bartlett Sher's production, a staple at the Metropolitan Opera, whisks the audience back to the sun-drenched streets of 18th-century Seville. With its fast-paced zingers and cornucopia of musical treats, this beguiling tale proves that sometimes one clever barber is all it takes for everyone to live happily ever after.

This guide presents *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* as a piece of musical comedy that reflects profound social changes taking place at the time of its composition. Examining *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* in the context of historical events with which students may be familiar, such as the French and American revolutions, this guide will forge inter-disciplinary classroom connections, foster critical thinking, and invite students to enjoy Rossini's impeccable comedy as well as the play—and historical moment—that inspired it. The information on the following pages is designed to provide context, deepen background knowledge, and enrich the overall experience of attending a final dress rehearsal at the Metropolitan Opera.

The Metropolitan Opera is a vibrant home for the most creative and talented singers, conductors, composers, musicians, stage directors, designers, visual artists, choreographers, and dancers from around the world. Founded in 1883, the Met first opened in a lavish opera house at Broadway and 39th Street that, while beautiful, had significant practical limitations. Almost from the beginning, it was clear that the stage facilities of the original theater could not meet the Met's technical needs. But it was not until the Met joined with other New York institutions in forming Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts that a new home became possible. The new Metropolitan Opera House, which opened at Lincoln Center in September 1966, was a technical marvel of its day, and has remained an architectural landmark ever since.

Each season, the Met stages more than 200 opera performances in New York, welcoming more than 800,000 attendees. In addition to presenting the indispensable masterpieces of history's great composers, performed by the world's finest singers and directed by visionaries from throughout the theatrical world, the Met is committed to ensuring that opera remains a living art form by commissioning and staging vital new works that tell modern stories and engage with the issues of today. The Met is also a leader in new media distribution initiatives, harnessing state-of-the-art technology to bring performances from the Met's iconic stage to millions of people worldwide.

This guide includes a variety of materials on Gioachino Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*.

The Source, The Story, and Who's Who in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*
A Timeline: The historical context of the opera's story and composition
Closer Looks: Brief articles highlighting important aspects of Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*
Guided Listening: A series of musical excerpts with questions and a roadmap to possible student responses
Ten Essential Musical Terms: Musical terminology that will help students analyze and describe Rossini's work
Student Critique: A performance activity highlighting specific aspects of this production and topics for a wrap-up discussion following students' attendance
Further Resources: Recommendations for additional study, both online and in print

This guide is intended to cultivate students' interest in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, whether they have any prior acquaintance with opera or the performing arts. It includes activities for students with a wide range of musical backgrounds and will encourage them to think about opera—and the performing arts as a whole—as a medium of both entertainment and creative expression.

This guide offers in-depth introductions to:

- The relationship between Rossini's opera and the original play by Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais
- The role of contemporary politics in the creation and reception of both Rossini's opera and Beaumarchais's play
- Creative choices made by the artists of the Metropolitan Opera for this production
- The opera as a unified work of art, involving the efforts of composer, librettist, and Met artists

Summary

Count Almaviva, a Spanish nobleman, is in love with Rosina. Hoping to be loved for himself (and not for his money), the Count has disguised himself as a poor student named Lindoro and goes to sing to her outside of her home. Soon after, Figaro, the barber who knows all the secrets of the town, arrives and recognizes "Lindoro" as Count Almaviva. The Count asks Figaro to help him woo Rosina, and Figaro hatches a plan. Rosina, meanwhile, has fallen in love with the singer she heard outside her window. She writes a letter to the unknown student. Suddenly, her guardian, Dr. Bartolo, arrives. He also hopes to marry Rosina not because he loves her, but because he wants her money. Bartolo's friend Don Basilio tells Bartolo that Count Almaviva has been seen in Seville and offers to help Bartolo keep the Count away from Rosina. Suddenly, Count Almaviva, now disguised as a soldier, arrives at Bartolo's house. His behavior angers Bartolo, who demands that this disorderly soldier be arrested. When more soldiers arrive to arrest him, Almaviva quietly reveals to them that he is the Count, and they let him go.

Hoping to get close to Rosina, Count Almaviva returns to Dr. Bartolo's home. This time, he is dressed as "Don Alonso," a music student of Don Basilio, and says that he has come to give Rosina a singing lesson. Bartolo is skeptical. He finally allows the lesson to go ahead but refuses to leave the room. Figaro arrives to shave Bartolo and steals the key to Rosina's balcony door. Rosina and Almaviva agree to meet on her balcony that night so that they can run away together, but Dr. Bartolo overhears them and is furious. He decides to marry Rosina as soon as possible and convinces Rosina that Lindoro does not love her. Rosina is heartbroken. That night, as a thunderstorm rages outside, the Count and Figaro come to Rosina's balcony. Rosina accuses Almaviva, whom she still believes to be Lindoro, of not loving her. Finally, the Count reveals his identity and asks her to marry him. Bartolo arrives with soldiers to stop the wedding, but realizes he is too late. Figaro, Rosina, and the Count all rejoice in this happy ending.

THE SOURCE: THE PLAY *LE BARBIER DE SÉVILLE* BY PIERRE-AUGUSTIN CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS

The three "Figaro" plays by Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais were among the most popular comedies of the late 18th century, and they remain among the very few theatrical works of the era that are still performed today. The first, *The Barber of Seville*, premiered in 1775. Both the play itself and the character Figaro were tremendously popular, and Beaumarchais soon set about writing two more plays featuring the same cast of characters: *The Marriage of Figaro* (first performed in 1784) and *The Guilty Mother* (1792). Within a few years of *The Barber of Seville*'s premiere, composers had already begun to adapt Beaumarchais's comedies for the operatic stage; one of the most famous examples is Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*, 1786). Yet Figaro was, from the very beginning, steeped in music. Beaumarchais first wrote *The Barber of Seville* as a comic opera; when an impresario rejected this version, he set about writing the play. Even in the spoken comedy, opera looms large. Beaumarchais's Rosine is a singer, performing in a fictional opera called *The Useless Precaution*. Rossini and his librettist Cesare Sterbini, aware of this history, referenced it in their own opera: During her singing lesson with Don Alonso, Rosina says that she will sing "an aria from *La Precauzione Inutile*," the Italian name for *The Useless Precaution*.

Synopsis

VOICE TYPES

Since the early 19th century, singing voices have usually been classified into six basic types, three male and three female, according to their range:

SOPRANO the highest voice type, normally possessed only by women and boys

MEZZO-SOPRANO the voice type lying below the soprano and above the contralto; the term comes from the Italian word "mezzo," meaning "middle"

CONTRALTO the lowest female voice type, also called "alto"

TENOR the highest standard voice type in adult males

BARITONE the voice type lying below the tenor and above the bass

BASS the lowest voice type

ACT I *Seville, Spain*. Count Almaviva, a Spanish nobleman, is in love with Rosina. Hoping to be loved for himself (and not for his money), the Count has disguised himself as a poor student named Lindoro to woo her. As the opera begins, "Lindoro" comes to serenade Rosina outside the home of Dr. Bartolo, where Rosina lives under lock and key. Soon, Figaro, the barber who knows all the secrets of the town, arrives. Recognizing Lindoro as Count Almaviva, he tells the Count that Bartolo is not actually Rosina's father, but her guardian. In fact, Bartolo plans to marry her in order to get her fortune. Figaro hatches a plan. He suggests that the Count disguise himself again, this time as a soldier, and demand lodging in Dr. Bartolo's residence. This way, he will be close to Rosina. Almaviva is overjoyed, and Figaro looks forward to a nice cash reward from the Count for his help.

Rosina, alone in her room, thinks about the voice she heard serenading her a short while before and admits that she has fallen in love with the singer. Knowing that Dr. Bartolo will never allow her to have contact with the unknown man, she decides to send Lindoro a letter by way of Figaro. Figaro arrives, but before Rosina can speak with him, Bartolo appears with Don Basilio, Rosina's music teacher. Basilio tells Bartolo that Count Almaviva has been seen in Seville. Bartolo, who knows that Almaviva is in love with Rosina, is furious, and the cunning Basilio suggests that they get rid of the Count by spreading wicked rumors about him. Bartolo decides to marry Rosina that very day, and he and Basilio leave to prepare the marriage contract. Figaro, who has overheard the plot, warns Rosina. When Rosina asks Figaro about the handsome young man she saw outside her window, Figaro says that it was the student Lindoro and promises to deliver her letter to him.

Bartolo, deeply suspicious, accuses Rosina of writing a letter to a secret lover. Just at that moment, shouting is heard: Count Almaviva, now disguised as a drunken soldier, has arrived at Bartolo's home. Bartolo claims that he has official exemption from providing housing to soldiers, and in the commotion Almaviva manages to reveal to Rosina that he is, in fact, Lindoro, and passes her a letter of his own. Bartolo demands that Rosina hand over the note, but she tricks him by giving him her laundry list instead. The argument grows more heated, and Figaro, Don Basilio, and the servant woman Berta burst in, announcing that the shouting can be heard throughout the city. Soldiers arrive to arrest the drunken soldier. When he quietly reveals to them that he is actually the Count, the soldiers promptly release him. Everyone except Figaro is amazed by this turn of events, and the main characters all reflect on the chaos and confusion of the day.

ACT II Bartolo is still suspicious, and he suggests that perhaps the drunken soldier was a spy for Count Almaviva. The Count returns, this time disguised as Don Alonso, a music teacher and student of Don Basilio, to give Rosina her singing lesson. Basilio, he claims, is ill. Bartolo is skeptical until "Don Alonso" shows him Rosina's letter to Lindoro, claiming to have found it at Count Almaviva's lodgings. He says that he will use it to convince Rosina that Lindoro is merely toying with her on Almaviva's behalf. This convinces Bartolo that "Don Alonso" is indeed a student of the scheming Basilio, and he allows the lesson to go ahead. Bartolo finds the music

boring and soon nods off. As he snores, Almaviva (whom Rosina believes to be Lindoro) and Rosina declare their love.

Figaro arrives to shave Dr. Bartolo. Bartolo is reluctant to leave Rosina alone with the singing teacher, and he sends Figaro to fetch towels. Figaro, always resourceful, uses the opportunity to steal the key to Rosina's balcony door, then causes a diversion, forcing Bartolo to leave the two young lovers alone. Suddenly, Don Basilio, the true singing teacher, arrives. Figaro, Almaviva, and Rosina bribe him to leave. While Bartolo gets his shave, Almaviva plots with Rosina to meet on her balcony that night so they can elope—but Bartolo overhears them and flies into a rage.

Berta comments on the crazy household. Bartolo summons Basilio, telling him to bring a notary so that Bartolo can marry Rosina right away. Bartolo then shows Rosina the letter she wrote to Lindoro, calling it proof that Lindoro is in league with the Count. Heartbroken and convinced that she has been deceived, Rosina agrees to marry Bartolo.

While a thunderstorm rages outside, Figaro and Almaviva climb a ladder to Rosina's balcony. Rosina appears and confronts Lindoro, who finally reveals his true identity. Basilio shows up with the notary, but bribed and threatened, he agrees to be a witness to the marriage of Rosina and Almaviva. Bartolo arrives with soldiers, but it is too late. He accepts that he has been beaten, and Figaro, Rosina, and the Count celebrate this happy ending.

WHO'S WHO IN *IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA*

CHARACTER	PRONUNCIATION	VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
Figaro A barber	FEE-gah-roh	baritone	Clever and resourceful, Figaro helps Count Almaviva and Rosina overcome many obstacles on the path to true love.
Rosina A wealthy young lady from Seville	roh-ZEE-nah	mezzo-soprano	Beautiful and independent, Rosina will not allow Dr. Bartolo to stand between her and Lindoro (actually Count Almaviva in disguise).
Count Almaviva A Spanish count, in love with Rosina	Count Ahl-mah-VEE-vah	tenors	In love with Rosina, Count Almaviva needs Figaro's help to win the woman of his dreams. Over the course of the opera, Almaviva will adopt many different disguises.
Dr. Bartolo Rosina's guardian	BAR-toh-loh	bass	A greedy schemer, Dr. Bartolo hopes to marry his ward, Rosina, in order to get her money.
Don Basilio A music teacher, Dr. Bartolo's accomplice	don bah-ZEE-lee-oh	bass	A friend of Dr. Bartolo, Don Basilio has a trick or two up his sleeve to keep Rosina away from Count Almaviva.

The Creation of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*

1775 *The Barber of Seville*, a comic play by Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, premieres in Paris. The main characters, including Count Almaviva, Rosina, and the titular barber, Figaro, will appear again in two later plays by Beaumarchais: *The Marriage of Figaro* (1784) and *The Guilty Mother* (1792).

1786 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's opera *Le Nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*), based on Beaumarchais's second "Figaro" play, premieres in Vienna. By this time, Figaro is recognized and adored from Paris to St. Petersburg, thanks in no small part to four other operas based on *The Barber of Seville* that have appeared since the premiere of Beaumarchais's work.

1792 Gioachino Rossini is born on February 29 in Pesaro, a town on the Adriatic coast of Italy. Both of his parents are musicians: His father plays horn, and his mother is an opera singer.

1804 The Rossini family moves to Bologna. Young Gioachino, a talented musician who already enjoys an active career as a performer, begins formal studies in composition. Soon, he will begin composing individual arias for operas being performed in the area.

1810 Rossini's first opera, a short farce, premieres in Venice. Although his next opera will not be performed until October 1811, Rossini's career soon gains tremendous momentum, and he writes seven more operas over the next 16 months.

1813 Two operas, premiered in February and May, give Rossini his first taste of international fame. One of these, *L'Italiana in Algeri* (*The Italian Girl in Algeria*), is still regularly performed today.

1816 On February 20, Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*) premieres at the Teatro Argentina in Rome. The opera, with a libretto by Cesare Sterbini, is prepared in a matter of weeks—some sources maintain that Rossini composed the music in a mere nine days—and the opening night performance is a flop. In August, following slight revisions, the opera appears again, this time in Bologna and to thunderous acclaim.

1817 Riding the wave of success of the Bologna performance, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* is performed in eight more cities in Italy, as well as in Barcelona. The opera's popularity continues to expand: The following year, it will be performed no fewer than 22 times in London. A year after that, it graces the stage in Berlin. Soon, it will have been performed in cities as diverse as Vienna, Edinburgh, St. Petersburg, and New York.

1824 By the age of 32, Rossini has written 34 operas and enjoys international acclaim of staggering proportions. In a biography of Rossini published the following year, the French novelist Stendhal writes of him, "Napoleon is dead, but a new conqueror is now spoken of from Moscow to Naples, from London to Vienna, from Paris to Calcutta." Rossini officially relocates to Paris.

1825 *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* becomes the first opera ever performed in Italian in New York City.

1829 Rossini's final opera, *Guillaume Tell* (*William Tell*) premieres in Paris. Following this, Rossini falls silent; for the remaining four decades of his life, he will never write another large-scale opera. Instead, he turns his attention and accumulated wealth to cooking and exchanging recipes with famous chefs.

1868 On February 10, the 500th performance of *Guillaume Tell* takes place with great fanfare at the Paris Opera. A few months later, on November 13, Rossini dies at his villa in the Parisian suburb of Passy. He is buried at Père-Lachaise cemetery in Paris.

1887 Two decades after Rossini's death, his widow, Olympe, transports his remains to Italy. In May, they are reinterred at the church of Santa Croce in Florence, where his final resting place may still be visited today.

Figaro and the Opera Buffa Revolution

Count Almaviva pursues his wife's maid, Susanna, in a print by Daniel Nikolaus Chodowiecki, 1785.
BY PERMISSION RIJKSMUSEUM, NETHERLANDS

"Figaro killed off the nobility," the French politician George Danton once declared. Figaro is "a revolution in action," proclaimed Napoleon Bonaparte. And even though Marie Antoinette herself had played Rosine in Beaumarchais's play *The Barber of Seville*, her husband, King Louis XVI of France, would soon quip that "the Bastille would have to be pulled down" before its sequel could be performed. By the time Rossini was born, in 1792, the Bastille had indeed fallen. The French Revolution was in its third bloody year, and Europe was reeling. Millennia-old social structures, predicated upon highly codified class relationships, were quickly eroding as new ideas about equality and citizenship sent seismic shocks through the political landscape.

But why would the political giants of the age, from Louis XVI to Napoleon, single out Figaro (both the character and the play) as exceptionally revolutionary? In fact, the history of opera itself offers a clue. Since the advent of opera around 1600, this musical genre had been the exclusive entertainment of the wealthy classes. Its characters were gods, mythological heroes, and the august figures of ancient Greece and Rome. Suddenly, in the middle of the 18th century, a new subgenre burst forth. This opera buffa ("comic opera," in contrast to the earlier opera seria or "serious opera") not only depicted low-class characters such as maids, servants, and barbers, but even portrayed these lowly characters outwitting their rich employers. At first, such comedies, which turned the established social order on its head, were enjoyed as benign entertainment. But by the 1780s, a wildly popular play about a quick-witted barber seemed downright dangerous: It was only one year after Figaro's first appearance that a group of rag-tag colonies in North America declared their independence from the British monarchy and founded a country on the "self-evident" principle of equality for all. By the end of the century, Louis had been beheaded, and Napoleon's armies were marching across the globe.

Rossini was no stranger to the revolutionary tendencies of the time. The Napoleonic Wars had swept across Italy during his childhood. His father, Giuseppe Rossini, was briefly jailed in 1800 for incendiary political opinions, and social unrest across the continent would continue, unabated, throughout Rossini's life. Paris would see two more major revolts, in 1830 and 1848, while Rossini lived there. And it was not until 1861, only seven years before Rossini's death, that a series of revolutions on the Italian peninsula would lead to the unified Italy we know today. In 1816, when Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* was first performed in Rome, opera buffa as a genre was nothing new. But as the world continued to grow and change, Rossini's irresistible music gave a new voice to the barber who embodied, reflected, and even advanced the transformations of the age.

Playwright, Watchmaker, Soldier, Spy

Portrait of Beaumarchais, by Augustin de Saint-Aubin, after Charles Nicolas Cochin II, 1773

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

The madcap adventures of Figaro and Count Almaviva may seem larger than life, but they are well matched by the real-life experiences of the playwright known as Beaumarchais. Born in Paris as Pierre-Auguste Caron in 1732, the writer began life as a humble apprentice watchmaker, yet by his death in 1797, he was a celebrated dramatist with a noble title, having won, lost, and regained a fortune and passed through prison, exile, and three marriages in the meantime.

Like Figaro, Caron knew how to take advantage of every opportunity. In the 1760s, he successfully maneuvered himself into the royal court of King Louis XV after an advantageous first marriage to the widow Madame Franquet. Like many members of the aspiring middle class, Caron purchased a noble title, renaming himself "Beaumarchais" after one of his wife's estates. Once in court, Beaumarchais made a surprising pivot from watchmaking to music (teaching the King's daughters to play the harp), and his royal duties would ultimately include supplying water to the city of Paris and acting as an adviser for the King's foreign affairs. In fact, this last title was a cover for his real position as a royalist secret agent: Beaumarchais traveled to London and Germany on dangerous missions to defend the King's honor, and he even ran guns to the American rebels during the Revolutionary War.

Yet Beaumarchais's lifetime was marked by huge social and political changes in France, and he had to think fast to stay on the good side of the ever-changing French authorities. During the French Revolution, Beaumarchais allied himself with the people's (i.e., anti-royal) cause, spending almost all of his fortune on military weapons for revolutionary volunteers. Yet his past royal ties caused the playwright to fall under suspicion, and during the Reign of Terror he spent time in prison, narrowly avoiding the guillotine before fleeing in exile to Britain and Germany. It is still unclear how Beaumarchais escaped beheading—but then again, all spies have their secrets.

What Happens Next

Rosina of Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and the Countess Almaviva of Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* are the same character from Beaumarchais's plays before and after marriage, respectively. Pictured here, Isabel Leonard is Rosina and Emma Bell the Countess.

And they all lived happily ever after … or did they? Figaro, Count Almaviva, and Rosina reappear in Beaumarchais's sequel *The Marriage of Figaro* (1784), a play adapted into an opera by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Lorenzo Da Ponte in 1789. Although *The Marriage of Figaro* is set only a few years after *The Barber of Seville*, this play reveals profound changes in the relationships between the lead characters.

The play takes place on the sumptuous Almaviva estate, where the Count's previously close friendship with Figaro has transformed into an intense rivalry—because the Count has his eye on Figaro's fiancée, Susanna (who is also Rosina's maid). Gone is the remarkable ability to work together that master and servant once displayed, since Figaro is disgusted by the Count's treatment of not only Susanna but also the other women in his household. Rosina, now the Countess, finds herself trapped in this unhappy marriage and needs Figaro's and Susanna's help to teach her husband a lesson—even though the Countess might also have her eye on a younger man.

The lesson at the end of the play appears to be that forgiveness can always triumph over infidelity. Yet the frictions in the Almaviva household also stem from a deeper social struggle. Figaro and Susanna's cunning triumph over the Count, Almaviva's unsympathetic qualities, and the Countess's lack of agency each suggest that the power of the old nobility is finally over. The heroes of the hour arrive at success through their inner worth, not the situation of their birth.

Beaumarchais completed the Almaviva trilogy with *The Guilty Mother* (1792), a darker play adapted into an opera by Darius and Madeleine Milhaud in 1966. Yet many other artists have also imagined how the story ends. For two modern (and sometimes surprising) takes on the fates of each character during the French Revolution, check out John Corigliano and William Hoffman's *The Ghosts of Versailles*, which premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in 1991, or Elena Langer and David Pountney's *Figaro Gets a Divorce*, premiered by Welsh National Opera in 2016.

IN PREPARATION

Teachers can access recordings for these Guided Listening Activities at metopera.org/aobarbieremusic.

The Guided Listening Activities are designed to introduce students to a selection of memorable moments from the opera. They include information on what is happening dramatically, a description of the musical style, and a roadmap of musical features to listen for. Guided Listening Activities can be used by students and teachers of varying levels of musical experience.

"Ecco ridente in cielo"

Shortly before dawn in the city of Seville, Count Almaviva comes to the town square where his beloved Rosina lives. He pays a group of musicians to accompany him as he serenades her. As a guitar plucks out an accompaniment, he sings a sweet, simple song about his beloved, who, unlike the rising sun "smiling in the sky," has yet to appear at her window. In opera of this time, the complexity of an aria was associated with a character's class. Count Almaviva has disguised himself as a poor student, and his music is thus gentle and simple. But he can't hide his noble passion entirely: Occasionally, when his emotions overtake him, virtuosic flourishes break through Almaviva's simple melodies, reminding us of the nobleman hiding under the poor student's cloak.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR:

- The difference between the simple melodies of "Lindoro" and Count Almaviva's fancy flourishes
- How the orchestra approximates the sound of the small group of musicians visible onstage
- The burst of energetic music as the aria nears its end, which gives the scene a sense of dramatic direction

(00:00) After an opening chord, Almaviva begins directing the town musicians. The woodwinds and strings play a simple, gentle melody, with a guitar providing the accompaniment. (Almaviva will soon sing the same melody.) The melody becomes livelier at (00:34), with the woodwinds playing staccato gestures and rising flourishes.

(00:56) Almaviva begins his simple serenade as the strings and guitar continues plucking out the accompaniment.

(01:23) *"E tu non sorgi ancora?"* ("And you are not yet awake?") Almaviva asks, adding a small ornament as he stretches out the final word of the question.

(01:41) The original melody returns. Such repetition, associated with simple folk songs, is also representative of Lindoro's status.

(03:10) Thinking he has seen Rosina, Almaviva cannot contain his excitement. The virtuosic singing of the nobleman overtakes the simple melody of the student, with both the orchestral accompaniment and the melody becoming brighter and more dazzling. Despite the serenade, Almaviva gets no response from Rosina.

"Largo al factotum della città"

As day breaks, Figaro arrives in the town square with his barber cart in tow. When he opens the cart, we see the expected tools of the barber's trade (wigs, combs and scissors, shaving equipment), but his song lets us know that he serves a far greater function in the town than merely cutting hair. This is our introduction to Figaro as a character and as a singer: Listen to what he sings about the trade he plies and the manner of his singing.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR:

- The extraordinarily fast pace of Figaro's singing. This style of singing is a feature of "patter songs," in which the goal is to sing as many words as possible in the shortest amount of time. Patter songs usually have humorous texts and were associated with low-class characters (like Figaro) or exceptionally immoral nobles (like Dr. Bartolo).
- The narrow melodic range. Although patter singing is very fast, it has a narrow melodic range (as opposed to the wider range of nobler characters). Thus, while the impressively quick delivery makes Figaro seem very clever, he does not have the soaring melodies of the nobleman Count Almaviva.
- The relatively light orchestral accompaniment, which stays out of the way of Figaro's tongue-twisting singing

(00:16) Figaro is heard from offstage. It seems that he is already singing a song, and we are catching fragments of this song as he approaches center stage. Throughout this aria, Figaro often sings wordless syllables like "la la leh la."

(00:36) Figaro sings *"Largo al factotum della città"* ("Make way for the factotum of the city!") Suddenly, his voice drops: *"Largo!"* ("Make way!"). The juxtaposition of quick music with these sudden, jolting stops is like the bumping and jolting of the cart on cobblestone streets.

(00:52) For a moment, Figaro sings a smooth melody about the pleasures of life, before returning to his patter song.

(01:42) The lickety-split tempo of Figaro's aria perfectly reflects his line, "*Pronto a far tutto, la notte e il giorno*" ("I'm in motion night and day.")

(02:15) Figaro parodies the singing style of noble ladies and gentlemen, with wild flourishes across a wide melodic range.

(03:00) The music gets faster and faster as Figaro thinks about running hither and thither to satisfy everyone's demands.

(03:21) "Figaro, Figaro, Figaro!" is the cry he hears all day and night. It is also one of the aria's most famous moments.

(03:53) Listen to the nimble melodies in the wind instruments, which add to the general feeling of acceleration.

"Una voce poco fa"

In Dr. Bartolo's residence, Rosina reclines upon a sofa and thinks about the voice she "just heard." Having decided she is in love with Lindoro, she sets about hatching a plan to win him for herself while under the ever-watchful eye of Dr. Bartolo. Although we have briefly seen Rosina before, when she appeared on her balcony, this is the first scene in which we will really get to know her. It turns out that she is clever, independent, and resourceful in her own right.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR:

- The way the music changes during the scene to reflect the development of the drama
- The music's imitation of the characteristics Rosina describes: For instance, it is sweetly lilting when she sings "I'm sweet and loving," and then fiery and virtuosic when she sings "I can be a viper!"

(00:31) Rosina recalls the voice she heard, and decides, *"Sì, Lindoro mio sarà"* ("Lindoro shall be mine"). Listen to how the increasing complexity of her melody relates to her increasing determination. The orchestral accompaniment is used only to punctuate her words, leaving plenty of space for vocal ornaments.

(02:55) A more melodic section begins. Rosina lays out her plan for tricking Dr. Bartolo: She will be *"obbediente"* ("well-behaved") and *"rispettosa"* ("respectful"). Listen for how the flute prefigures and then interacts with Rosina's aria, making it seem calm and expansive.

(03:48) She also has it in her to be *"una vipera"* ("a viper") and *"cento trappole … farò giocar"* ("play a hundred tricks"). The music is suddenly quicker and more ornamented, reflecting this more active side of Rosina. Traditionally, many of her vocal ornaments would have been improvised, a testament to the astonishing abilities of the singer.

(04:35) The music rushes forward, indicating that Rosina is ready to set her plan in motion.

"Fredda ed immobile … Ma, Signor"

Dr. Bartolo has called for the arrest of the disruptive drunken soldier. Quietly, the soldier reveals himself to the Chief of Police as Count Almaviva, and the Chief promptly releases him. The assembled household and townspeople are astonished at this turn of events. Rosina, Count Almaviva (who, of course, knows exactly what is going on), and Dr. Bartolo announce that they have been struck "frozen and motionless" by the surprise.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR:

- How the speed and volume build to give this Act I finale momentum and excitement
- How the characters are grouped musically to reflect their alliances at this point in the plot: Which characters sing the same music? Which characters sing at the same time?

(00:17) Rosina sings that she is *"fredda ed immobile"* ("frozen and motionless"). After the commotion of the previous scene, this slow melody and the quiet orchestral accompaniment make the music, too, seem frozen and still. As Count Almaviva and Dr. Bartolo join her, listen for the imitative counterpoint: Rosina, Count Almaviva, and Dr. Bartolo all sing the same music, but they do not start at the same time. Rather, they sing it like a canon or round, one after the other.

(00:38) Count Almaviva joins the round.

(00:58) Dr. Bartolo joins the round.

(01:19) *"Guarda Don Bartolo"* ("Look at Dr. Bartolo!") exclaims Figaro. In contrast to the relatively melodic *"Fredda ed immobile"* sung by the noble characters, Figaro enters the musical fray with his characteristic singing.

(02:46) Figaro snaps his fingers and the spell is broken. As the confusion returns, the music gets faster and louder, and everyone starts singing together.

(03:16) The final chorus begins with all the characters singing in unison (the same melody at the same time).

(03:56) The short-lived vocal unison breaks up, indicating that the general dramatic confusion has overcome the brief moment of musical unity.

(04:25) As the music picks up steam, the accelerando reminds us of how the noble characters are being "pushed around" by Figaro and Count Almaviva.

(05:05) At the height of the commotion, the main characters all announce, *"E il cervello poverello, già stordito, sbalordito, non ragiona, si confonde, si riduce ad impazzar"* ("My poor head, my battered brain, if this goes on, I'll go insane!"). Suddenly, the music gets quiet again, offering the characters a moment of respite; this will also make the crescendo to the end of the act seem even bigger and more exciting. The six main characters split into groups indicating who is in cahoots with whom: Figaro and Count Almaviva, Rosina and her maid Berta, and Dr. Bartolo and Don Basilio.

(06:01) From here, it's all one big crescendo and accelerando to the end!

Encouraging Student Response in Attending the Final Dress Rehearsal

COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND *IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA*

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9- 12.1
Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1d
Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or

Watching and listening to a performance is a unique experience that takes students beyond the printed page to an immersion in images, sound, interpretation, technology, drama, skill, and craft. This performance activity will help students analyze different aspects of the experience, engage critically with the performance, and express their views in a respectful and supported environment.

The enclosed performance activity is called "Opera Review: *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*." The reproducible handout for this activity, available at the back of this guide, will invite students to think of themselves as opera critics, taking notes on what they see and hear during the performance and critiquing each scene on a five-star scale. Students should bring this activity sheet to the final dress rehearsal and fill it out during intermission and/or after the final curtain. When they return to class, students can use their "Opera Review" sheets as they review and discuss their experience.

DISCUSSION

Students will enjoy starting the class with an open discussion of the final dress rehearsal. What did they like? What didn't they? Did anything surprise them? What would they like to see or hear again? What would they have done differently?

Il Barbiere di Siviglia is a powerhouse of comic characterization. Rossini's music, Sterbini's libretto, Bartlett Sher's production, and the singers' individual interpretations all work together to make the opera's characters and events vivid and memorable. Now that students have seen the opera, ask them about how all elements of the opera—libretto, music, costumes, wigs, makeup, and the stage sets—work together to make the story come to life. Some questions you might want them to consider are the following:

- How did Rossini (the composer) and Sterbini (the librettist) portray the characters in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*? Which characters seem realistic, and which are exaggerated caricatures? Why do you think this might be? And what role does music play in these characterizations?
- What is the role of singing in the plot? Consider Count Almaviva's song in the first scene, or the "singing lesson" at the beginning of Act II. Why might Rossini have chosen to portray singing and music in this way?
- Figaro is a barber, but he doesn't just cut hair. What else does he do?
- Over the course of the opera, Count Almaviva adopts several disguises. Why? Whom is he trying to trick? When he finally reveals his true identity at the end of the opera, were you surprised by how Rosina responded? How would you react?

- What do you think of Dr. Bartolo and Don Basilio? Are they funny? Frightening? Smart? Sympathetic? How else might you describe them, and why?

When the character of Figaro was first conceived, it was considered shocking that a barber (a servant) could outsmart noble characters. Based on your students' reactions to the individual characters and their portrayals, you may wish to engage this "revolutionary" aspect of the Figaro story. Are there any other plays, musicals, or other pieces of art they can think of that use musical or other forms of characterization to make a political or historical statement?

Finally, remember that opera is a multimedia art form: Any and all aspects of the performance your students have just seen, including the act of seeing it live, are important factors contributing to the overall experience. Ask them for any final thoughts and impressions. What did they find most memorable?

IN PRINT

Beaumarchais, Pierre-Augustin Caron de. *The Figaro Trilogy: The Barber of Seville, the Marriage of Figaro, the Guilty Mother*. Translated by David Coward. Oxford World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

A translation of all three of Beaumarchais's "Figaro" plays, with an in-depth introduction that includes biographical information about Beaumarchais and extensive historical contextualization of his works.

Osborne, Richard. *Rossini: His Life and Works*. Second ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

A scholarly biography of Rossini that considers the man, the myth, and the music in an accessible and engaging way.

ONLINE

The Metropolitan Opera. "*The Barber of Seville*: Special Donkey-cam Video." December 15, 2015.

youtube.com/watch?v=iVRj6FlybGE.

The Met's own Sir Gabriel, the donkey appearing in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, wore a camera during a dress rehearsal and recorded his work as an artist for the Metropolitan Opera.

The Metropolitan Opera. "*Il Barbiere di Siviglia* in Rehearsal." November 5, 2014.

youtube.com/watch?v=evPteqxIL2I.

The Metropolitan Opera gives you an insider's view into a rehearsal of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* in its 2014–15 season, featuring mezzo-soprano Isabel Leonard and baritone Christopher Maltman.

The Metropolitan Opera. *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* Illustrated Synopsis.

metopera.org/barbiere-illustrated

Available in English and Spanish, this short, graphic novel-style synopsis provides an overview of the opera's plot.

Aria

A song for solo voice accompanied by orchestra. In opera, arias mostly appear during a pause in dramatic action when a character is reflecting musically on his or her emotions. Most arias are lyrical, with a tune that can be hummed, and many arias include musical repetition.

Bel canto

Referring to the Italian vocal style of the late 18th and 19th centuries, bel canto singing emphasizes lyricism and ornamentation in order to showcase the beauty of the singer's voice. Its focus on lyrical embellishment directly contrasts with a contemporary Germanic focus on a weighty, dramatic style. Bel canto singing is most closely associated with the music of Gioachino Rossini, Vincenzo Bellini, and Gaetano Donizetti.

Chorus

A section of an opera in which a large group of singers performs together, typically with orchestral accompaniment. Most choruses include at least four different vocal lines, in registers from low to high, with multiple singers per part. The singers are typically from a particular group of people who play a certain role on stage—soldiers, peasants, prisoners, and so on. Choruses may offer a moral, comment on the plot, or participate in the dramatic action.

Ensemble

A musical piece for two or more soloists, accompanied by orchestra. Types of ensembles include duets (for two soloists), trios (for three soloists), and quartets (for four soloists). Sometimes singers will respond directly to one another during an ensemble. At other times, singers will each sing to themselves as if the other singers were not on stage. In ensembles, multiple characters may simultaneously express very different emotions from one another.

Intermission

A break between the acts of an opera. At the beginning of an intermission, the curtain will fall, and the lights in the auditorium will become brighter. Intermissions provide audiences with a chance to walk around, talk with one another, and reflect on what they have seen and what could happen next. The break in the performance may also correspond with a change of time or scene in the story of the opera—the next act may take place hours or months later, or be set in a different location. Usually, lights will dim and a bell may sound to indicate that the intermission is drawing to a close and the opera is about to resume.

Libretto

The text of an opera, including all the words that are said or sung by performers. Until the early 18th century, a composer would frequently set music to a preexisting libretto, and any given libretto could thus be set to music multiple times by different composers. During the 18th and 19th centuries, collaboration between the author of the libretto, known as the librettist, and the composer became more frequent. Some opera composers, most notably Richard Wagner, are known for writing their own text.

Melody

A succession of pitches that form an understandable unit. The melody of a piece consists of the tune that a listener can hum or sing. During arias, the singer will usually sing the main melody, though other instruments may play parts of the melody. Sometimes, such as during ensembles, multiple melodies can occur simultaneously.

Score

The complete musical notation for a piece, the score includes notated lines for all the different instrumental and vocal parts that together constitute a musical composition. In an opera orchestra, the conductor follows the score during rehearsals and performances while each performer follows his or her individual part.

Solo

A piece, musical passage, or line for a lone singer or other performer, with or without instrumental accompaniment. The most common type of solo in opera is the aria, which is composed for a single voice with orchestral accompaniment.

Theme and motive

Themes are the melodic ideas that are musical building blocks for a piece. A theme is often recognizable as a distinct tune and may reappear in its original form or in altered form throughout the piece. A motive (or motif) is a brief musical idea that recurs throughout a musical work. Motives can be based on a melodic, rhythmic, or harmonic component, and their repetition makes them recognizable to the listener. In opera, musical motives are often symbolically associated with specific characters or dramatic ideas.

Il Barbiere di Siviglia

Performance date:

Reviewed by:

Have you ever wanted to be a music and theater critic? Now's your chance!

As you watch *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, use the space below to keep track of your thoughts and opinions. What did you like about the performance? What didn't you like? If you were in charge, what might you have done differently? Think carefully about the action, music, and stage design. Then, after the opera, share your opinions with your friends, classmates, and anyone else who wants to learn more about Rossini's masterpiece and this performance at the Met!

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN / STAGING
Count Almaviva serenades Rosina. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Figaro arrives singing. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Rosina drops a note. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Count Almaviva sings that he is "Lindoro." MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Figaro hatches a plan. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Rosina writes a letter. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN / STAGING
Don Basilio suggests slander. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Bartolo is suspicious of Rosina. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The drunken soldier arrives. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The police arrive and there is great confusion. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
"Don Alonso" arrives. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Rosina's singing lesson MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Figaro comes to shave Dr. Bartolo. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Don Basilio arrives and is bribed to leave. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Figaro shaves Dr. Bartolo and Don Alonso's disguise is revealed. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN / STAGING
The old housekeeper comments on the madness. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
A storm erupts. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Count Almaviva reveals his identity to Rosina. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Don Basilio arrives with the notary. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Count Almaviva's big song MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The grand finale arrives. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆