

SARASOTA **OPERA**

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Exploration in Opera

Teacher Resource Guide - 2014 Winter Festival Season



The Barber of Seville By Gioachino Rossini

Table of Contents

The Opera

The Cast	1
The Story	2-3
The Composer	4
The First Performance	5-6
Listening and Viewing	6

The History

Timeline	7-8
The City of Seville	9-10
The History of Barbering	11-13
Beaumarchais and <i>Barber</i>	14-18
In The News	19-21

All About Opera

What to Expect at the Opera	22
Opera Terms	23
Opera Jobs	24
Behind The Scenes with Figaro	25-26
Sarasota Opera House History	27

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A special thanks to the following organizations for the use of articles and content:

Cleveland Opera
OPERA America

Opera New Jersey
San Francisco Opera Guild

Program Support

Exploration in Opera is made possible through the
Community Foundation of Sarasota County
and the generous support of **Harry Leopold**



The Cast

The Count Almaviva (Tenor)

Who disguises himself as Lindoro, a drunken soldier, and as Don Alonso, a music teacher

Bartolo (Bass-Baritone)

A doctor of medicine and Rosina's guardian

Rosina (Mezzo-soprano)

Bartolo's ward

Figaro (Baritone)

A barber

Basilio (Bass)

A music teacher and hypocrite

Berta (Soprano)

Bartolo's old housekeeper

Fiorello (Baritone)

Count Almaviva's servant

A Sergeant of the Guard (Tenor)

Ambrogio

Dr. Bartolo's servant



The Story

Act I

Scene 1 - *A plaza in the city of Seville*

In the early hours of the morning Count Almaviva, with the aid of his servant Fiorello and a band of musicians, sings a serenade under a balcony. When his song elicits no response, the musicians noisily depart and the Count considers his next move. He hides when he hears the approach of Figaro who enters declaring that everyone in the city depends on him as barber and general factotum. The Count recognizes Figaro and confides his predicament. The Count has fallen in love with the daughter of a doctor and he has followed her to this house, waiting night and day in the hopes of seeing her. Figaro tells the Count to be of good cheer because he is indispensable to the household and can help. He tells him that Rosina is not the doctor's daughter, but only his ward, and that the old man plans to marry Rosina for her inheritance.

The balcony door opens and Rosina comes out with a letter she would like to give to her suitor (whose identity she does not know). She is interrupted by the entrance of Dr. Bartolo, who wants to know the contents of the letter, which Rosina lets drop to the street. As Dr. Bartolo goes down to get the letter, the Count retrieves it. Dr. Bartolo, thinking that Rosina is up to something, insists that she go inside. Figaro reads the letter to the Count, which encourages his advances. Dr. Bartolo leaves the house planning to hurry his marriage to Rosina. The Count sings to Rosina again, telling her that he is a poor student named Lindoro. When she begins to answer him from inside the house, she is interrupted. The Count and Figaro plot how to further the Count's cause, which Figaro is only happy to do, provided that he is well compensated.

Scene 2 - *A room in the house of Dr. Bartolo*

Rosina's heart has been touched by Lindoro (the Count) and she is determined to outwit Dr. Bartolo in order to be with the poor student. Figaro enters but his conversation with Rosina is interrupted by Bartolo and he hides. The doctor tries to find out what she was talking to Figaro about but she won't tell him and leaves. Don Basilio, Rosina's music teacher and Bartolo's confidant enters and informs him that Rosina's secret lover Count Almaviva has arrived in Seville. Basilio suggests that they slander the Count as a way of getting rid of him, but Bartolo thinks it would be better for him to marry Rosina quickly. The two leave to make plans. Figaro has overheard this and tells Rosina who seems unconcerned. She is more interested in learning about her unknown suitor. Figaro tells her that the poor student is his cousin who has fallen hopelessly in love with her. He tries to convince her to write the young man a few words of encouragement; she coyly hesitates, only to produce the letter she has already written. Figaro leaves to deliver it and Dr. Bartolo enters, again trying to interrogate Rosina. When she again proves obstinate, he threatens to keep her locked up in the house.

Rosina leaves and there is a loud knock on the door. It is Count Almaviva, disguised as a drunken soldier. He claims that he has been assigned to billet in Bartolo's house. When Bartolo gets the paper exempting him, the Count runs his sword through it, demanding to stay there. Figaro enters and attempts to quiet things down, but the Count becomes increasingly raucous. The police enter and are about to arrest the Count when he quietly signals his true identity to them and they come to attention. This confuses everyone who does not know what to make of this turn of events.

A room in the house of Dr. Bartolo

Having found no one in the regiment who knows the drunken soldier, Dr. Bartolo's suspicions have been aroused. A knock on the door reveals Count Almaviva, this time disguised as a music teacher named Don Alonso. He claims to have been sent to give Rosina her lesson because Don Basilio is ill. Suspicious, Bartolo suggests that they visit Basilio but is deterred when the Count gives him the letter he had received from Rosina, telling Bartolo he will use it to tell the girl that he'd gotten it from another of the Count's lovers. Bartolo falls for the story and summons Rosina who immediately recognizes the Count (as Lindoro). Bartolo falls asleep as the Count accompanies her in an aria, during which they plot to elope that evening. Awakening, Bartolo complains that he can't stand modern music and proceeds to demonstrate an older aria that he prefers. Figaro slips in and proceeds to mock him. The barber has come to give Bartolo his shave, which the doctor refuses. When Figaro complains that he feels mistreated and will have nothing further to do this crazy household, Bartolo relents and gives Figaro his keys to fetch the shaving basin. Figaro uses this opportunity to steal the key to the balcony for the elopement. They are suddenly interrupted by Don Basilio, who has arrived to give Rosina her lesson. Count Almaviva thinks quickly convincing Bartolo that since Basilio doesn't know anything about Rosina's letter, he might ruin the plan and the best thing to do is to get Basilio back home and to bed. They all convince Basilio that he is deathly ill (aided by a purse full of money from the Count) and Basilio leaves. As Figaro begins to shave Bartolo, the Count tries to warn Rosina about the letter he has given Bartolo, but the doctor overhears him, chases the Count and Figaro out.

The maid Berta complains about the goings on in the house. Bartolo returns with Don Basilio, who suspects that Don Alonso was none other than Count Almaviva himself. Bartolo sends Basilio out to make arrangements for an immediate wedding. He calls in Rosina and shows her the letter, telling the girl that he'd received it from a lover of Count Almaviva and that her beloved planned to turn her over to the Count. Stunned, Rosina agrees to marry Bartolo and tells him of the plan for the elopement. He tells her to hide in her room while he goes to fetch the police. After a storm the Count and Figaro use a ladder to climb up to the balcony and steal into the house. Rosina greets them with reproaches. Heartened that Rosina really loves the poor student Lindoro, the Count reveals his true identity and Rosina realizes that she has been duped by Bartolo. The three plan to flee but discover that the ladder has been removed from the balcony. Basilio enters with the notary and with a purse and a gun, the Count convinces Basilio to facilitate the marriage between the Count and Rosina. Bartolo enters with the police, but it is too late. Bartolo finds some consolation in the fact that the Count will let him keep Rosina's dowry. Everyone celebrates the marriage of the Count and Rosina.



The Composer

1792-1837



Gioacchino Rossini was born on leap day 1792 in Pesaro, a small town on Italy's Adriatic coast. His parents – father Giuseppe, a trumpeter and inspector of slaughterhouses, and mother Anna, a singer and baker's daughter – started his musical training early. Turmoil ensued in the Rossini family life when the newly restored Austrian occupying forces temporarily imprisoned Giuseppe for his actions supporting Napoleon.

While still a young teenager, Rossini began musical studies at the conservatory in Bologna. There he gained the nickname "the little German" for his devotion to Mozart and won a prize for a cantata that he composed. In 1810 at the age of 18, Rossini had his first opera, the one-act comedy *La cambiale di matrimonio* (*The Marriage Contract*),

produced in Venice. Other operas soon followed, and Rossini achieved a substantial hit with *La pietra del paragone* (*The Touchstone*) when it was introduced at La Scala in 1812 and given 50 performances in its first season. The following year brought triumphant premieres of the dramatic *Tancredi* and the comedic *L'italiana in Algeri* (*The Italian Girl in Algiers*) at different theaters in Venice. With these successes, the 21 year-old Rossini became the idol of the Italian opera public.

In 1815, an impresario of opera houses in Naples hired Rossini as music director for the Teatro San Carlo. Rossini's responsibilities included writing operas for this theater and the contract paid well, including a cut from the impresario's popular gaming tables that were operated to help fund theatrical operations. In Naples, older composers such as Giovanni Paisiello were jealous of the young Rossini. However, Rossini scored an enthusiastic public success with his opera, *Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra* (*Elizabeth, Queen of England*). For this composition, Rossini employed two innovations: he wrote out all the vocal ornaments in full and replaced keyboard-accompanied recitatives with ones accompanied by string quartet. The production starred the mistress of the impresario, the popular Spanish singer Isabella Colbran. She would later become Rossini's first wife.

During his time at the Teatro San Carlo Rossini wrote two of his best comedies, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*) and *La Cenerentola* (*Cinderella*), both of which premiered in Rome. *Il barbiere di Siviglia* was written in 1816, and though it was not favorably received at its premiere the opera quickly became one of the composer's most beloved works with admirers as notable as Beethoven and Verdi.

Rossini's most important operas through the 1820's show his maturity as a musical dramatist. Among the masterpieces from this period are *Maometto II* (1820) and *Semiramide* (1823), as well as *Guillaume Tell* (1829), which was composed while Rossini was working in Paris as director of the Théâtre Italien (1824-1826).

At the age of 37 Rossini retired, and in 1837 moved to Italy. A number of years following his early retirement Rossini and his second wife, Olympe, returned to Paris. In 1858 the famous *samedi soirs* (Saturday Night) salons were initiated and quickly became a meeting place for singers, composers, artists and friends. The last occurred September 26, 1868 as the composer's chronic ill health finally overcame him. He died two months later. In 1887 his remains were brought to the city of Florence. A procession of more than 6,000 mourners attended the re-interment in Santa Croce.

The First Performance

1816



The Teatro Argentina in Rome

Rossini's opera *The Barber of Seville* has become such an operatic icon that it seems incredible it was ever called anything but that. What is often overlooked is that when the work premiered in 1816 the title was *Almaviva, ossia l'inutile precauzione* (Almaviva or the Useless Precaution).

There were two reasons for this. The work was originally written as a vehicle for the star tenor Manuel Garcia, making Almaviva and not Figaro the starring role. Secondly (and perhaps more importantly) a version of *The Barber of Seville* by composer Giovanni Paisiello had premiered in 1782 and was still extremely popular.

Beaumarchais' play *The Barber of Seville* had already been set to music several times. An operatic version was written by Nicolas Isouard in 1796 and another version by Francesco Morlacchi (to the same libretto as Paisiello's) would premiere in Dresden in the same year as Rossini's. Yet, Rossini had particular reason to be worried about Paisiello. The older composer was notoriously touchy and unsupportive of his colleagues. He had many partisans in Rome, who would take offense at a new version of the same subject by their favorite composer.

As gossip about Rossini's new opera spread, he decided to take pre-emptive action. The title page of the score read "Almaviva or The Useless Precaution, comedy by Signor Beaumarchais, newly put into verse and adapted for the modern Italian musical theatre."

In a note to the audience the composer and his librettist Cesare Sterbini wrote: "...with the object of fully convincing the public of the feelings of respect and veneration entertained by the composer of the music of the present drama for the famous Paisiello, who had already treated this subject under it's original title." They concluded: "Maestro Gioachino Rossini, in order not to incur the charge of impudent rivalry with the immortal composer who has preceded him, has expressly requested that *The Barber of Seville* should be newly put into verse and that the musical numbers should be differently arranged, in view of the changes in modern dramatic taste that have taken place since the period in which the famous Paisiello wrote his music."

With this Rossini tried to make a concerted effort to distinguish his work from that of Paisiello. He needn't have bothered.

The premiere on February 20, 1816 at the Teatro Argentina in Rome was one of opera's great fiascos. Followers of Paisiello have been blamed for disrupting the proceedings, but in reality a number of events conspired to make the evening a great failure. We have the reminiscences of the first Rosina, Geltrude Righetti-Giorgi (See "In The News", pages 19-21) to fill us in on what happened (with the caveat that such memoirs are notoriously unreliable and biased toward the writer).

Manuel Garcia, the star tenor singing Almoviva, convinced the composer to allow him to substitute a serenade made up of Spanish tunes for the one that Rossini wrote. In a further show of virtuosity, the tenor wanted to accompany himself on the guitar. Unfortunately he had forgotten to tune the instrument before going onstage, so the audience had to wait while it was tuned. There was a further delay when a string broke and a new one requisitioned. Shortly afterward Figaro entered, carrying yet another guitar.

In the next scene the singer playing Don Basilio tripped and landed face-first on the floor ending up with a bloody nose. A cat wandered on stage during the first act finale and Figaro, Basilio, and Bartolo chased it, trying to catch it. The animal ultimately took refuge underneath Rosina's skirts.

By the end of the evening the audience was in stitches, but not from Rossini's comedy. The music was found too heavy and over-orchestrated. When Rossini tried to encourage his artists by standing at the pianoforte and applauding them, he was hissed and booed.

Mme. Righetti-Giorgi claims that when she went to the composer's house after the performance to console him, she found him sound asleep, seemingly unconcerned. Whether this is true or not Rossini decided to skip the next performance, which seemed to have succeeded where the first one failed.

Paisiello's version remained in the repertoire for a number of years, but eventually faded from view as Rossini's opera began to make the round of international stages. Rossini's opera was admired by diverse composers as Beethoven, Verdi, and Wagner. It wasn't long before "Almoviva or the Useless Precaution" was long forgotten and "The Barber of Seville" was recognized a masterpiece.

Like many of his other operas, Rossini created *Il barbiere di Siviglia* quickly. Though there is disagreement to the exact length of time it took, it was definitely composed in less than a month. For the overture, Rossini used one that had already served the function for two of his earlier works, *Elisabetta*, *Regina d'Inghilterra* (*Elizabeth, Queen of England*) and *Aureliano in Palmira*. In spite of the speed at which he wrote, Rossini created an opera filled with grace and wit. Today, it is one of the most performed operas in the world.

Listening & Viewing

Largo al factotum

<http://youtu.be/rmTcmBn56Jk>

Libretto Pages 5-6

Figaro enters declaring that everyone in the city depends on him as barber and general factotum.

Una voce poco fa

http://youtu.be/mDyXqf0at_w

Libretto Page 13

Rosina, enamored by the young student Lindoro (in reality the count) vows to trick her guardian (Dr. Bartolo) so she can be with the young suitor.

Act I Finale

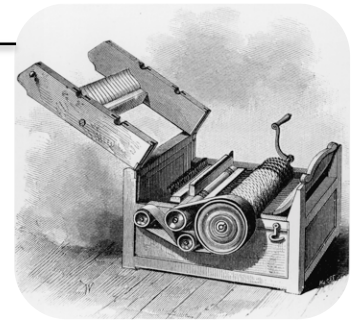
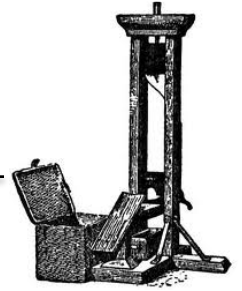
<http://youtu.be/1Usi5bA84bY>

Libretto Pages 26-28

The police enter and are about to arrest the Count when he quietly signals his true identity to them. This confuses everyone who do not know what to make of this turn of events.

Timeline

- 1775** Beaumarchais' *Barber of Seville* receives its debut performance in Paris
- 1789** The French Revolution begins with the storming of the Bastille
- 1791** Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart dies
- 1792** **Gioacchino Rossini is born in Pesaro, Italy**
- 1793** Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin increases the demand for slave labor
- 1799** Beaumarchais dies
- 1803** The United States agrees to pay France \$15 million for the Louisiana Territory, doubling the size of the US
- 1804** Lewis and Clark set out from St. Louis on an expedition to explore the West and find a route to the Pacific Ocean
- 1810** The Mexican War of Independence begins
- 1811** *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen is published
- 1812** The War of 1812 begins over British interference with US maritime shipping and westward expansion
- Napoleon leads the French invasion of Russia, resulting in a catastrophic defeat for the French
- 1816** **Rossini's *Barber of Seville* premieres in Rome**
- 1819** Spain agrees to cede Florida to the United States
- 1820** The Missouri Compromise is brokered to maintain the balance between free and slave states
- 1825** The Erie Canal opens
- 1829** Rossini's 39th and last opera, *Guillaume Tell*, opens in Paris



1836

Texas declares its independence from Mexico and Texan defenders of the Alamo are all killed during a siege by the Mexican Army

1849

Harriet Tubman escapes from slavery

1852

Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is published

1859

On the Origin of Species by Charles Darwin is published

1862

Les Miserables by Victor Hugo published

1865

Confederate general Robert E. Lee surrenders to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, VA.

1867

U.S. acquires Alaska from Russia for the sum of \$7.2 million

1868

Gioacchino Rossini dies in Passy, Paris, France

1869

The Suez Canal opens

1870

The Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution is ratified, giving African Americans the right to vote

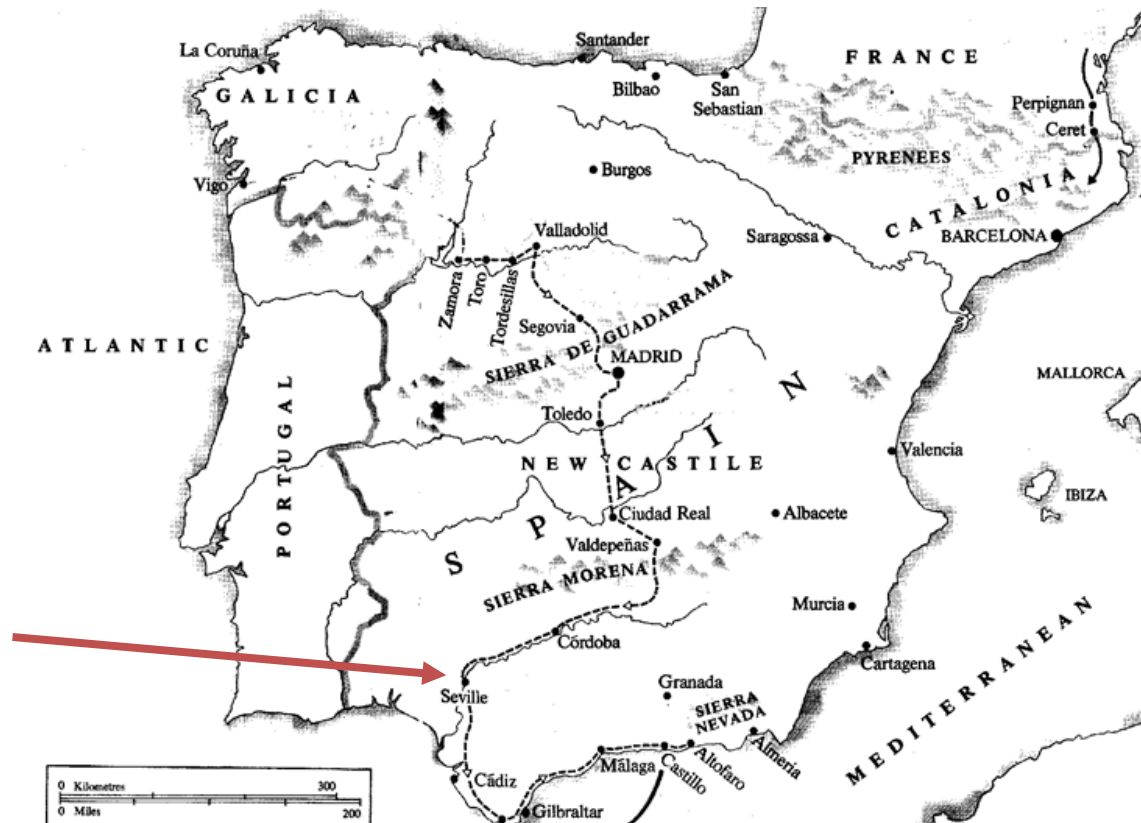
Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea by Jules Verne is published



The City of Seville

Seville is the asylum of the poor, and the refuge of the outcasts. - Cervantes

Seville was guaranteed an important place in history by its location. It forms the apex of a triangle that joins it with Gibraltar, the connection with Africa and the opening to the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic port of Cadiz, gateway to trade with the New World. It has been a multicultural city since it was first visited in ancient times by the Phoenicians, Greeks, and Romans. Since the Middle Ages, it has been home to Spaniards, Jews, Moors (North African Moslems), slaves from other parts of Africa, and by the end of the fourteenth century, the Gypsies.



Seville has been the home of the very rich and the very poor for centuries, and the gypsies formed a part of a larger community of the poor who lived on the outskirts of established society. This larger group also included the "Moriscos" (Moslems who had converted to Catholicism) and African slaves. The Moriscos, like their counterparts in the Jewish community (the "Conversos"), often had to convert to Catholicism to avoid execution or expulsion and because they were not considered to be "legitimate" Christians due to the circumstances of their conversions, they often did Seville's most menial jobs, working as farm laborers, peddlers, and dockworkers.

Even though many worked hard, they lived at a bare subsistence level and many suffered from malnutrition. Both groups suffered much religious prejudice and their religious practice was often called into question, until finally the Conversos were expelled in 1492, with the expulsion of Moriscos following in 1610. Many gypsies took the menial jobs they left behind. For several centuries, the outcasts of Seville included not only these working poor, but also a large criminal element. It was very hard for the institutions of the city to maintain order against these bands of homeless transients, prostitutes, pickpockets and bandits, who operated in government-regulated brothels and taverns surrounding the city.

At the other end of the spectrum, and in a completely different area of the city, lived the elite classes. This group encompassed professionals such as doctors, lawyers and notaries at its lower socio-economic end, all the way to very wealthy merchants and the nobility at the top. These are characters we meet in *The Barber of Seville*. The Moorish era in Spain had been one of great prosperity, but the merchants and nobles of the newly Catholic Spain created a new era of even greater trade and wealth, beginning with the discovery of the New World. Membership in this group of merchants and nobles implied vast riches gained in the trade of gold, jewels and slaves, and its members also participated in the governance of the city of Seville and Spanish colonies abroad.

In order to participate in the nobility, families had to prove that they had been members of the Catholic Church for many generations, which caused a problem for the remaining Conversos, who forged documents proving their falsified genealogies in order to protect their social positions and their lives. During the boom times, the lines between the merchant families and the nobility began to blur. Though traditionally the nobility did not participate in trade, over time they did begin trading, allured by the prospect of such tremendous profits and wealth. As the nobility and merchant classes intermarried, the two classes eventually became one.

Primary text and images used courtesy of San Francisco Opera Guild

The History of Barbering

*All things change except **barbers**, the ways of barbers, and the surroundings of barbers. – Mark Twain*



In modern society, a barber is a person who cuts and styles hair. With this in mind, it may come as a surprise that historic barbers were not only individuals who cut hair; they were also the medicine men and priests of their communities. By 500 BC, barbers from the Eastern Hemisphere (Asia, Africa, and Europe) had become some of the most important and highly respected individuals of their communities.

Men of old were very superstitious and they were convinced that the hairs on the head allowed both good and bad spirits to enter the body. If a person was possessed by bad spirits, it was believed that only the barber had the ability to drive them out by cutting the hair. Barbers flourished anywhere there were great superstitions about hair.

When in Rome, do as the Romans do

Barbers became prominent figures in Greece in the fifth century BC. Rivalries existed among the men of

Athens over the excellence of their beards. Barbers made an art of trimming beards, and the most prominent members of Greek society frequented their shops. Philosophers, poets, and statesmen traveled regularly to barber shops to discuss daily news, quickly making the shops into headquarters for political, social, and sporting news. The art of barbering became such an important aspect of Greek society that a prominent citizen was defeated for office because his opponent's beard was more neatly trimmed.

In the third century BC, Alexander the Great led the Macedonians in a conquest of Asia. Several battles were lost, however, because the Persians forced the Macedonians to the ground by pulling their beards and then stabbing them. To prevent a continuation of this, Alexander ordered all of his soldiers to be clean-shaven. Civilians followed suit, and beards fell out of style.

Barbers were unknown in Rome until 296 BC, when Ticinius Mena traveled from Sicily and introduced the concept of shaving, and it soon became highly fashionable. Romans fell so in love with the art of barbering that frequently they would invest several hours a day in hairdressing, hair cutting, shaving, massaging, and manicuring. Barbers became such important figures that a statue was erected to commemorate the first to come to Rome. Eventually, Hadrian became the emperor. With a face covered with scars, he chose to grow a beard to cover his imperfections. As in contemporary society, the Roman people followed the lead of rulers and significant people and beards became fashionable again. With every change, barbers retained their importance.

Barbers as Bloodletters

During the first ten centuries of the Christian era, very few people were capable of reading or writing. Monks and priests were considered the most knowledgeable people of their time; consequently, they became the physicians of the Middle Ages. Many diseases that are easily cured today were fatal then. "Bloodletting," or draining blood from a person's body, became the popular method for curing illness, and clergymen enlisted barbers to act as assistants. The clergy continued practicing medicine until 1163 when, at the Council of Tours, it was ruled that it was a sacrilege for clergy to draw blood from humans; thus barbers became the only individuals who would perform such an act.



The Barber Pole

The barber pole is a familiar symbol around the world, and it originated in the days when bloodletting was one of the principal duties of the barber. The two spiral ribbons painted around the pole represent the two long bandages, one twisted around the arm before bleeding and the other used to bind it afterward. Originally, when it was not in use, the bandaged pole was hung at the door as a sign. Later, for convenience, instead of hanging out the original pole, another one was painted in imitation of it and given a permanent place on the outside of the shop.

Barber-surgeons began to thrive all across Europe. Both "common" people and royalty traveled to barbers to be shaved, receive a haircut, and to have their illnesses treated. The barbers quickly expanded on their reputations as surgeons and began practicing dentistry -- perhaps to increase their income. Dentists of the time became so infuriated that kings and councils were forced to interfere, but barbers continued practicing dentistry for several more centuries.

By the middle of the thirteenth century, the barbers of Paris, also known as the Brotherhoods of St. Cosmos and St. Domain, founded the first known school for surgical instruction for barbers. Eventually the school expanded and became the model for schools of surgery during the Middle Ages. As the practice of surgery continued to develop, many barber-surgeons did not improve their techniques. Unskilled and uneducated barber- surgeons dominated the field, and postoperative infection became very common.

The mayor and council of London took note in 1416, and an ordinance was passed, "forbidding barbers from taking under their care any sick person in danger of death or maiming, unless within three days after being called in, they presented the patient to one of the masters of the Barber-Surgeon's Guild."

By 1450, parliament incorporated the Guild of Surgeons and the Barbers Company. Barbers were limited to shaving, hair cutting, tooth drawing, and bloodletting. Under this incorporation, a board of governors, consisting of two surgeons and two barbers, was created to oversee the awarding of diplomas to surgeons. Although surgeons resented the required barber signatures on their diplomas, barbers continued to be highly favored by the monarchy and had great power in society.

Splitting Hairs

The science of medicine rapidly advanced, and it became more difficult for barbers to acquire the skills being practiced by dentists and surgeons. The surgeons, who had always resented the relationship they shared with barbers, requested parliament to investigate the matter. The incorporation between surgeons and barbers was severed in England in June 1745, by sanction of the king. Louis XIV took similar action in France and, by the end of the eighteenth century virtually all European barbers had relinquished their right to perform surgery and dentistry except in communities where doctors and dentists could not be obtained.

Rossini's Barber

Figaro, the barber character in Rossini's opera, is very similar to historical barbers. In his introductory aria (*Largo al factotum*), Figaro sings, "Fortune assigned me its favorite star by far. I am respectable, highly acceptable, in any circle I feel at home. I am the king of lather and foam." Later in the aria, he brags about having access to every house in town: "I, as a barber, have access to all houses, with my guitar as well as comb and scissors," indicating that he is held in very high regard.

In Act II, Figaro visits Bartolo to give him a shave, but Dr. Bartolo tells Figaro he is too busy and asks Figaro to return at a different time. Figaro retorts, "I'm busy. I'm shaving all the officers of the regiment in town, even the colonel; the Countess of Andronica has called me to her house to do her hair; the Viscount of Bombe must have a wig with ringlets ... Look here; am I your barber or one of your servants?"

Primary text used Courtesy of San Francisco Opera Guild and Cleveland Opera On Tour. Written by Tanya Lee-Shadle.

Beaumarchais and Barber



The journeyman watchmaker, of the witty-tongued and unbridled pen, the secret agent, the councillor of kings, the millionaire merchant-adventurer whose energy and daring contributed so largely to the success of the (American) colonies in their struggle for independence, the author of two of the most sparkling comedies ever written, the gay, open-handed, cool-headed, hot blooded creature... must be numbered among those whose vanity whet to fill the coffers of the (royal) estate.

John Rivers – “Figaro, the Life of Beaumarchais”

Beaumarchais — The Opera’s Inspiration, By Marc A. Scorca

Pierre-Augustin Caron, known to history as Beaumarchais, was born on January 24, 1732. Son of reputed watchmaker, André Caron, Pierre was raised in a home that prepared him for the role he was to assume as a member of the nobility. Pierre Caron inherited his father's literary and artistic talents, his quick wit and, above all, his aspirations. Young Caron was sent to school when he was nine but made little progress. After four years, André removed his son from school to train him in his own trade, that of a watchmaker. But Pierre's lively nature was unsuited to working as an apprentice. He frequently disregarded parental regulations and caused noisy, nighttime disturbances through the neighborhood. André was forced to evict Pierre from the house and ignored his pleas for permission to return. Pierre was granted amnesty when he finally capitulated to a set of stern behavioral regulations.

Pierre returned home and applied his anger and resentment to the intensive study of his ordained trade. The young watchmaker was particularly interested in redesigning the escapement apparatus, the size of which prevented the construction of a conveniently small timepiece. Pierre succeeded in developing a new escapement, which revolutionized the trade. A legal dispute about the ownership of the invention was settled in Pierre's favor. More important, the controversy brought the young inventor to the attention of Louis XV, who invited him to visit Versailles with his invention.

Pierre Caron was granted the dignitary title of "Purveyor to the King" and circulated freely among the nobles at Versailles, who kept him busy with orders for watches. Although inexperienced in dealing with the nobility, Caron displayed a natural ability at conversing with his social superiors. Indeed, his first experience among the nobility confirmed his desire to join their ranks. His good looks helped.

A certain Madame Madeline Franquet was the first woman to make an overt (and successful!) attempt to attract Caron's attention. She was thirty, only six years older than Caron but much younger than her sickly husband. As Controller of the Military Chest, Monsieur Franquet drew an enormous salary. Caron's second courtly post, that of Controller of the Pantry of the Royal Household, was insignificant. Determined to insure her lover's future, Madame Franquet persuaded her husband to cede his position as Controller of the Pantry to the young watchmaker. Accordingly, Pierre-Augustin Caron was appointed Contrôleur Clerc d'Office de la Maison du Roi by a Royal Patent dated November 9, 1755.

Caron was one of four Controllers, each of whom spent only three months per year at Versailles.

The responsibilities of the office were minimal. It is difficult to understand the importance of a purely ceremonial office (Can we wonder why there was a revolution), but such appointments were coveted by the elite of the middle class as preliminary steps in the process of attaining noble status. Acquisition of the office of Controller of the Royal Pantry was Caron's entrance into the noble environment of the imperial court. He absorbed the ways of the nobility as he had learned the art of watch making.

After only two months in his new position, Madame Franquet was widowed. She married Pierre-Augustin Caron on November 22, 1756, ten months after the death of her husband. It was from a small land holding owned by his wife that the former watchmaker adopted the *nom de guerre* Beaumarchais, which he used exclusively until his death. Although he was not yet noble, the change of name symbolized for Beaumarchais an irreversible break with his middle-class past.

The newlyweds lived well on the combination of Madeleine's substantial dowry and Pierre's income from his court position. Beaumarchais could afford to give up watch making, keep a carriage and valet, and attend theater performances regularly. Due to his position at Versailles, Beaumarchais became friendly with many nobles of the court. He and his wife frequently organized small recitals at their home for invited guests. The tension that soon developed between husband and wife over his financial dependence on her was soon resolved with Madeleine's death from typhoid fever in September, 1757. Beaumarchais' first marriage had lasted only ten months.

Following Madeleine's death, Beaumarchais lived with a childhood friend in a humble section of Paris. It was at this time, during the nine-month period when he was not on duty at Versailles, that Beaumarchais frequented the literary cafes in Paris. There, he became acquainted with journalists, poets and philosophers. The results of Beaumarchais' self instruction in contemporary thought surfaced twenty years later in his support for the American revolution and the composition of *The Marriage of Figaro*.

Beaumarchais was rescued from loneliness by an acquaintance from Versailles, Charles Lenormant d'Étoile, the neglected husband of Madame de Pompadour. Lenormant had constructed a stage in his chateau where he frequently presented comedies. In Beaumarchais, he found both a talented performer and playwright. It was at the Château d'Étoile that Beaumarchais met the influential Duke de la Vallière, one of the privileged few who knew the daughters of Louis XV, Mesdames Louise, Sophie, Victoire and Adelaide.

When the Princesses expressed to La Vallière a desire to learn about the harp, the Duke approached Beaumarchais. Beaumarchais, an accomplished harpist, had recently invented a new pedal arrangement that made the instrument easier to play. Thus, in 1757, the young, widowed Beaumarchais was introduced to the Princesses of France. His charm and talent impressed the women, who requested that he become their musical instructor. He assured them of his service. Beaumarchais not only taught them how to play the harp, but he composed most of the music they played as well. He organized and presided over small recitals attended by the King, his daughters and the dauphin, Louis, who was very fond of Beaumarchais. Although barely twenty-seven years old, and not yet noble, the former watchmaker was on intimate terms with the Royal Family of France.

Such rapid success was not viewed courteously by more established members of the court. Beaumarchais was frequently affronted either directly or indirectly by slanders meant to discredit him at Versailles. Despite the resentment and challenges of the established nobility,

Beaumarchais' ascent was spurred by his acquaintance with the wealthy financier, Paris du Verney. At the suggestion of Madame de Pompadour, du Verney had undertaken the construction of a large military school in Paris. Although the project had been inaugurated in January, 1751, it had not yet been given royal approval by 1761. Correctly perceiving the potential of an association with du Verney, Beaumarchais suggested that the Princesses visit the Academy. The women enthusiastically supported the idea. When they returned to Versailles, they encouraged their father, the King, to do the same. He did so, and gave official recognition to the École Militaire on August 18, 1760.

Paris du Verney was delighted with Beaumarchais. He immediately included Beaumarchais in some business speculations that made the former watchmaker a wealthy man. With his new financial security, Beaumarchais moved to make official the social progress he had achieved in the past five years. In 1762, he applied for a position as Secrétaire du Roi, an office which brought immediate ennoblement. Beaumarchais was granted the office, for a payment of 85,000 francs. He had made it officially into the nobility one month before his thirtieth birthday.

But Beaumarchais was not completely satisfied. He wanted higher status within the nobility. Due to the death of the possessor, the post of Grand Master of Waters was available, for a fee of 500,000 francs. Paris du Verney was willing to advance the money to Beaumarchais. He wrote a letter of recommendation to Louis XV, which received the enthusiastic support of the Princesses. Although he had the support of the King, Beaumarchais was victimized by the snobbery of the established nobility. The other Grand Masters would not consent to Beaumarchais' appointment, claiming his origin was too common (We begin to see the source of the revolutionary fervor that was manifest in the speeches of Figaro).

Paris du Verney persuaded him to take another available position which, although less profitable, was much more prestigious. Beaumarchais's candidacy was subject to the sole review of the Duke de La Vallière, his good friend. Thus, in 1763, Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais was appointed as the Lieutenant General of the Preserves in the Bailiwick and the Captainry of the Warren of the Louvre. He was responsible for the preservation of the game laws within a fifty-mile radius of Paris. His subordinates were the Count de Rochechouart and the Count de Marcouville. Since his superior, the Duke de la Vallière, rarely attended to his responsibilities at the Louvre, Beaumarchais was left to preside over the court and the two Counts. Regardless of the personal aversion for the court system that developed within him, Beaumarchais carried out his judicial duties at the Louvre for twenty-two years.

Beaumarchais had little opportunity, however, to enjoy the domestic tranquility he had worked to establish. He rushed to Spain upon receipt of a distressing letter from his sister, Lisette. She had moved to Madrid with her sister and brother-in-law and had fallen in love with a journalist and author, Clavijo. It became obvious after two years that, despite promises to the contrary, Clavijo had no intention of marrying Lisette. When Beaumarchais learned of his sister's humiliation, he went to Spain to resolve the situation.

Once in Madrid, Beaumarchais pursued Clavijo feverishly and jeopardized his career, but he relented when Lisette decided she no longer wanted to marry him. Despite his preoccupation with familial and social obligations, Beaumarchais found time to conduct extensive business negotiations. He suggested numerous plans for involving French money in Spanish business ventures, such as the formation of a joint-stock company for trade with the Louisiana territory.

Upon returning to Paris, Beaumarchais was invited to contribute to his friend Lenormant's theatrical repertoire. Beaumarchais composed some comic sketches under the title, *Le Barbier de Séville*. He based the scenes on his experiences in Madrid. The hero, Figaro, is embroiled in a plot to insure the marriage between Count Almaviva (Clavijo) and Rosina (Lisette), who is pursued by a lusty old Doctor, Bartolo (André Caron). Interestingly, Figaro is a contraction of "fils Caron" which means "son of Caron." The character, Figaro, is named after the author himself! The comic sketches were well received and encouraged Beaumarchais to create more pieces for the stage.

With the dramatic birth of Figaro, Beaumarchais was launched on yet another career, as a playwright. In correspondence, as well as in his dramatic creativity, he advanced a belief that audiences were much more interested in realistic characters and situations than they were in heroes and mythological or classical themes. In this regard, he was clearly in accord with Mozart, as evidenced by the composer's progress from *Idomeneo* to *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte*.

Between plays, Beaumarchais found time to marry for a second time. His new wife was Geneviève Levèque. They wed on April 11, 1768, seven months before the birth of a baby son, Pierre-Augustin Eugénie. Levèque had a great fortune, which enabled Beaumarchais, in association with Paris du Verney, to buy a large portion of the forest of Chinon. Beaumarchais enjoyed a large income from the sale of lumber from the forest for many years. But his second marriage suffered the same fate as his first. Geneviève died in childbirth in November of 1770.

Paris du Verney also died in 1770, beginning a stormy period in Beaumarchais' life during which he was involved in a variety of lawsuits stemming from the various business affairs the two friends had launched. These lawsuits resulted in various judgments, jail sentences and highly publicized battles among highly visible people. Beaumarchais' cutting commentaries circulated throughout Europe. Goethe derived material for his play *Clavigo* from Beaumarchais' adventures in Spain. Voltaire wrote:

"No comedy was every more amusing, no tragedy more touching. What a man! He unites everything, humor, seriousness, argument, gaiety, power, emotion, and every kind of eloquence, and yet he seeks none. He confounds his enemies, and gives lessons to his judges. His naïveté delights me, and I forgive him his carelessness and petulance."

Still, Beaumarchais needed the intervention of the King himself to help clear his name and set his affairs in order. Beginning with Louis XV and continuing with Louis XVI, Beaumarchais performed a number of private diplomatic services for the Royal Family, most of which involved suppressing slanderous rumors about marital infidelities. These services brought him to Vienna where he met with Empress Maria Theresa, mother of Marie Antoinette, the wife of Louis XVI. When he finally returned to Paris by the beginning of 1775, Beaumarchais' legal rights were restored.

As a relief from the hectic pace of the preceding several years, Beaumarchais completed *Le Barbier de Séville*. He took the opportunity to vent some of the resentment that had grown within him toward those who had taken advantage of him. He introduced the character Bazile (Basilio), who was the personification of corruption. In the play, Beaumarchais dealt frankly with familiar topics such as aristocratic haughtiness and the use of slander as a weapon.

But Beaumarchais' rest was short. When, at the beginning of May 1776, the French government decided to supply the American colonists for their fight against the British, Beaumarchais was placed in charge of the secret operation by Louis XVI. Using the business skills he learned from

du Verney, Beaumarchais proceeded to build a massive commercial fleet, which began shipping supplies to America.

At the same time, Beaumarchais began sketches for the sequel to *Le Barbier de Séville*, *The Marriage of Figaro*. He added characters, including an incompetent judge, which made the play more complicated than its predecessor and more cutting. Following the approval of the censors, Marie Antoinette expressed a desire to have the play performed at Versailles, despite the King's objections. The premiere was set for June 13, 1783, and rehearsals progressed accordingly. The night of the opening, the King prohibited the performance and relented only after Beaumarchais made a few alterations. The play finally opened to the public on April 27, 1784, and was an enormous success. It broke all records at the Comédie Française, with sixty-eight consecutive performances. Thousands of people paid to hear Figaro tell the Count:

"Because you are a great Lord, you fancy yourself a great genius.... Nobility, fortune, rank, place -- all these things make you so proud. But what have you done to deserve them? You have taken the trouble to be born."

In 1786, Beaumarchais retired from business and built himself and his third wife a splendid mansion. He wrote the third play in his *Figaro* trilogy, *La Mère coupable*, and an opera, *Tarare*, with music by Salieri. (Lorenzo da Ponte translated this libretto at the same time he was writing the libretto for *Don Giovanni*!)

Beaumarchais survived the French Revolution. In the last years of his life, he remounted *La Mère coupable* and met Napoléon Bonaparte. Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais died on May 18, 1799, of a cerebral hemorrhage.



In 1823 there appeared in Bologna a pamphlet entitled (we translate) "Notes Concerning Maestro Rossini by a Lady, Formerly a Singer, in Response to What Was Written about Him in the summer of 1822 by the English Journalist in Paris and That Same Year Reported in a Milan Gazette." The author was Geltrude Righetti-Giorgi (1793-1862) who had created the role of Rosina at the famously disastrous first performance of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*; as we shall see, the prior existence of another *Barbiere*, by Paisiello, was only one of the reasons for the failure.

The "English Journalist" in Righetti-Giorgi's title takes a little explaining. The great French novelist Stendhal (pseudonym of Henri Beyle, 1783-1842) was a devotee of Italian opera, having lived in Italy for many years. On his return to France, he undertook to write what was to be the first full-length study of Rossini's life and music; published in 1824, his *Vie de Rossini* was an instant success. The composer was just thirty-two at the time; he had settled in Paris and was about to enter on the final stage of his career, which would culminate with *Guillaume Tell* five years later. Stendhal's biography, then, was timely; it was also highly entertaining.

Unfortunately it is quite inaccurate and thus unsuitable for representation among these documents. Prior to that, however, in January 1822, Stendhal had contributed an anonymous article on Rossini to *The Paris Monthly Review*, an English-language periodical. It was this, translated into Italian and published in the *Gazzetta musicale* of Milan, which provoked Righetti-Giorgi's fiery outburst.

Thus we have Stendhal to thank after all for this rare eyewitness report from Rossini's earlier, Italian career. Righetti-Giorgi transcribed the whole offending article and responded to it segment by segment. Excerpted below are the segments of Stendhal's article dealing with the first performance of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and the singer's rebuttal. (Note: "Whistling," the Continental sign of public disapproval, is here translated "booing.")

Stendhal's Article

When [Rossini] engaged to write for Rome, the impresario suggested he compose new music for *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, several other dramas having been turned down by the censor. The Maestro hesitated at first; then he wrote to Paisiello to obtain his permission; the latter consented, never doubting it would succeed. Rossini showed the letter to all the amateurs and also had a notice about it printed in the libretto. He composed his *Barbiere* in thirteen days and confessed that his heart was pounding at the first performance, when he took his place at the pianoforte.

The beginning of the opera seemed tedious to the Romans, and far beneath Paisiello's. They disliked an aria sung by Rosina, 'Io sono docile,' the peevish cries of a woman getting on in years rather than the tender lament of a young woman in love. The duet between Rosina and Figaro won the first applause. The 'Calunnia' aria was judged very good; but it is very much like the 'Vendetta' aria in Mozart's *Nozze di Figaro*.

This opera had a singular fate: at the first performance it displeased, while at the second it was received with enthusiasm. Despite this, the Roman critics found that Rossini had remained beneath all the famous composers in expressing the tender passions. The complicated trills and

volate [flights] in which Rosina gets involved, and which are so much applauded in Paris, were almost booed in Rome. It was felt that if Cimarosa had ever composed the *Barbiere*, it would have been more comical and heartfelt; and it was the general conviction that Rossini was not the equal of Paisiello in the 'Buona sera' quintet, where Don Basilio is sent off to bed.

Geltrude Righetti-Giorgi Response

On this subject, Mr. British Journalist, you shall hear me, for whom Rossini wrote the part of Rosina in the *Barbiere di Siviglia*.

The censorship had no dealings whatever with Rossini. The poet [Jacopo] Ferretti was engaged to write a libretto for the Teatro Argentina; the principal part was to go to the tenor [Manuel] Garcia. Ferretti presented a story about an officer who is in love with a hostess and is thwarted by a lawyer. The impresario thought the argument rather common and, abandoning Ferretti, sought out the other poet, Mr. [Cesare] Sterbini. The latter, who had previously been unsuccessful with [the libretto of Rossini's] *Torvaldo e Dorliska*, decided to tempt fate once more. The argument of the new libretto was discussed together with Rossini, and *Il barbiere di Siviglia* chosen by common consent. Rossini did not, as is generally supposed, write to Paisiello, since he believed that the same argument could be treated successfully by different artists....In his Invitation to the public, Rossini declared he had intended no offense to the excellent Paisiello by undertaking an argument that had been treated by Paisiello in so masterly a fashion. This hint may have contributed to the unhappy outcome. Oh, what gossip there was that day in the streets and coffeehouses of Rome! The envious and the ill-disposed claimed Rossini had by then exhausted his earlier poetic vein; accordingly they affected the greatest surprise on hearing that the noble impresario of the Teatro Argentina had engaged him to write an opera. They were all, however, prepared to immolate him; and the better to succeed, they began by censuring him for having undertaken an argument treated by Paisiello. "See", they cried as they stood about in knots, "see how far the pride of a heedless youth can go! He is thinking of rubbing out the immortal name of Paisiello. Just wait and see, fool, wait and see!"

In such a situation one's friends are of small use, and their prudent silence can sometimes animate and excite one's enemies.

Through an unfortunate act of kindness Rossini, who greatly respected the tenor Garcia, had allowed him to compose the airs that were to be sung beneath Rosina's windows after the Introduzione. And indeed Garcia wrote them on themes from that nation's [i.e., Spain's] love songs. But Garcia, after tuning his guitar onstage (which aroused the mirth of the indiscreet), sang his cavatinas with little spirit, and they were received with disdain. I was prepared for anything. I climbed the stair that was to take me to the balcony in order to say just these words: "Segui, o caro, deh segui cosl" ["Continue, my dear, oh continue thus"]. The Romans, accustomed to regaling me with applause in *L'Italiana in Algeri*, were expecting me to earn it again with a pleasant, amorous cavatina. When they heard those few words, they burst into an uproar of disapproval. There followed what was bound to follow. Figaro's cavatina, although sung in masterly fashion by [Luigi] Zamboni, and the beautiful duet between Figaro and Almaviva, sung also by Zamboni and Garcia, were not even listened to. At last I appeared onstage, no longer at the window; and I was supported by the public's constant favor during thirty-nine previous appearances.

I was not getting on in years, Mr. Journalist: I had barely reached the age of 23. My voice was admired in Rome as the loveliest of any that had ever been heard there. Always most willing to do

my duty, I had become the darling of the Romans. They therefore fell silent and prepared to listen to me. My courage returned to me; and as to how I sang the "Vipera" cavatina, let the Romans testify, as will Rossini himself. They honored me with three successive rounds of applause, and Rossini also stood up once to thank them. He, who in those days was a great admirer of my voice, turned to me from the keyboard and, jesting, said to me, "Ah, Nature!" "Thank her," I replied smiling, "for without her favor you would not now have risen from your seat." At that point the opera seemed to have come back to life; but it was not to be. Zamboni and I sang the lovely duet between Rosina and Figaro, and Envy, enraged, showed itself in all its manifestations. Booming from all sides. We reached the finale, a classical composition of which the world's foremost composers might well be proud. Laughter, shouts, and penetrating boos without respite, except for yet more din. We reached the beautiful unison melody, "Quest'avventura"; a raucous voice from the balcony yelled, "That's the funeral of Don C[esarini, the impresario, who had suddenly died four days earlier]." Nothing more was needed. It is impossible to describe the insults that were poured on Rossini, who sat undaunted at the keyboard and appeared to be saying, "Forgive them, Apollo, for they know not what they do." At the conclusion of the first act, Rossini made a show of clapping his hands - not at his opera, as was commonly believed, but at the singers who, to tell the truth, had done their best. Many took offense. This will give a fair picture of the second act's reception.

Rossini left the theater as if he had been an indifferent spectator. My soul filled with these events, I went to his house to comfort him; but he had no need of my comfort, for he was peacefully asleep.

The next day Rossini removed from his score whatever he felt was justly censurable; he then gave out that he was ill, perhaps so he would not have to appear at the keyboard. The Romans meanwhile had second thoughts and supposed that they ought at least to listen attentively to the whole opera, in order to judge it fairly. They therefore came to the theater the second night too and kept perfectly still. Mr. Journalist here begins to speak the truth. The opera was crowned with universal applause. Afterwards we all went to see the feigned sick man, whose bed was surrounded by many distinguished Roman gentlemen who had hastened there to compliment him on the excellence of his work. At the third performance the applause increased: finally Rossini's *Barbiere di Siviglia* entered the rank of those musical compositions that never grow old and are worthy to stand beside the finest opere buffe of Paisiello and Cimarosa.

From Luigi Rognoni, "Gioacchino Rossini", new ed. (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1977), 356-59. Trans. P.W.

What To Expect at the Opera

Opera is not a remote art form that only the initiated appreciate. It reflects human conflicts and passions. It has inspired a level of devotion in some people best compared to that of a die-hard sports fan. Just as you do not need to know every statistic to enjoy watching a football game, you do not need to be a music or opera expert to enjoy a performance.



Supertitles - Real-time English translations are above the stage, providing immediate understanding of what is happening, helping you to experience the excitement of the performance no matter what the language.

Theater - With just under 1,200 seats, there are no 'bad' seats in our theater. Most operagoers love attending opera in our theater because of its intimate size.

What to Wear - Dress comfortably, and be yourself. Opera is not the playground of the rich, and we work hard to make sure that everyone feels at home in our theater. At the Sarasota Opera House, "Opera Dress" can be khakis or jeans or evening gowns and tuxedos.

Applause - At the opera, unlike the symphony or other classical music concert, you can applaud when the performance moves you (similar to a solo at a jazz performance). You can also express your appreciation for the performers by yelling bravo, brava, or bravi when the conductor enters the orchestra pit, at the end of a well-sung aria or ensemble, or during the bows.

Eating and drinking - During regular performances, food and drinks are available prior to the show and during intermissions. During dress rehearsals, our concessions are closed.

Restrooms - There are ample restrooms located in the lobby of the theater. We asked that you encourage your students to use the bathroom before the opera begins or during intermissions.

Late Seating - If you arrive after the performance has begun or leave while an act of the opera is in progress, you will need to wait until an intermission to re-enter.

Electronics - Out of consideration to our performances and patrons, we asked that all cellphones and electronic devices be turned off before the performance begins. Just like at your local movie theatre, the use of any recording devices is strictly prohibited.

Opera Terms

The words you hear around an opera house can often be confusing, especially the ITALIAN ones! The following is a list of words you may hear and their definitions.

- ARIA** A solo song in an opera
- BRAVO** The word the audience yells after a great show!
- COLORATURA** A type of singing where the singer sings a lot of notes very quickly
- CONDUCTOR** The person who leads the singers and orchestra
- COMPOSER** A person who writes music
- DUET** A song sung by two people at the same time
- FINALE** Italian for "final", a musical number at the end of an act
- LIBRETTO** The words of the opera that are then set to music by the composer (literally means "little book")
- MAESTRO** Italian for "master" or "teacher", the conductor is often referred to as maestro to show respect
- OPERA** A play that is sung rather than spoken
- OVERTURE** The musical introduction
- PIT** The place in the theater where the orchestra sits; it is in front of and at a lower level than the stage
- QUARTET** A musical piece involving four singers or instruments
- RECITATIVE** A kind of sung speech; many Mozart opera have this type of sung dialogue
- SINGSPIEL** A German word for an opera that has spoken dialogue; *The Magic Flute* is an example of this.
- TRIO** A musical piece involving three singers or instruments

Opera seems to have fancy words for everything and the singers are no exception. There are a lot of different types of voices. The list below gives the basic voice types for men and women.

- SOPRANO** The highest female voice; they are usually the heroine or female romantic lead in the opera.
- MEZZO-SOPRANO** ... Mezzo is Italian for "middle", so a mezzo-soprano is the middle female voice type; they often play more character- type roles like witches, old ladies, gypsies and even young boys!
- CONTRALTO** The lowest female voice. A real contralto is very rare; the roles written for them are often sung by mezzos who have a strong lower range.
- TENOR** The highest male voice; they are generally the hero or male romantic lead.
- BARITONE** The middle male voice; with a warm vocal quality they often play comic roles such as Papageno (in *The Magic Flute*) or fathers.
- BASS** The lowest male voice; because of the very low sound they are often villains or the father figure.

Opera Jobs

	<p>Opera requires a huge cast of players both on and off the stage to make everything come together.</p>
Administration	<p>Led by the Executive Director, members of the administrative staff work to support the artistic mission of the company through fundraising, donor cultivation, community outreach, patron education, and management of the day-to-day needs of the organization. The Development, Marketing, Finance, and Education departments are but some of the areas covered under administration.</p>
Backstage	<p>Artistic Director - Defines the artistic mission of the company and works with the Executive Director and Artistic Administrator to decide which operas will be performed. In many companies, the artistic director is also a conductor.</p> <p>Artistic Administrator - Works with the artistic director to cast and plan each production.</p> <p>Stage Director - Tells the singers where to go, instructs them on how to portray their roles, and works with others to create a vibrant story with lights, costumes, sets, and props.</p> <p>Stage Manager - Assists the director, singers, and backstage crew during rehearsals and performances with the help of several assistant stage managers.</p> <p>Set Designer - Plans or designs the sets through careful research and study.</p> <p>Lighting Designer - Plans or designs the color, intensity, and frequency of the lights onstage.</p> <p>Costume Designer - Plans or designs the costumes and supervises their construction.</p> <p>Wig & Makeup Designer - Oversees the design of hairstyles, wigs, and makeup.</p> <p>Stage Crew - Assists in the construction, installation, and changing of sets, costumes, lighting, and props during rehearsals and performances.</p>
On Stage	<p>Cast - All singers and actors who appear onstage.</p> <p>Principals - Singers who perform the large roles within the opera.</p> <p>Comprimario - Singers who perform the supporting roles within the opera, from the Italian meaning "next to the first."</p> <p>Supernumeraries - "Supers" are actors who participate in the action but do not sing or speak.</p> <p>Conductor - The person who leads the singers and orchestra.</p> <p>Orchestra - The musicians who play the instrumental parts within the score of the opera.</p>

Behind the Scenes with Figaro



Italian born baritone **Marco Nisticò's** impressive combination of beautiful tone, exquisite artistry, and superior stagecraft has delighted audiences throughout North America, South America, and Europe. In 2013-14 he returns again to the roster of the Metropolitan Opera for the premiere of Nico Muhly's *Two Boys*, sings Dulcamara in *L'elisir d'amore* with Teatro dell' Opera in Rome, and returns to Sarasota Opera as Figaro in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*.

Marco Nisticò's 2012-13 Season included his return to the Metropolitan Opera as Le Dancaire in *Carmen*, the title role of *Rigoletto* with Sarasota Opera, and Montfort in Verdi's *Les vêpres siciliennes* in a return to the Caramoor Festival.

Mr. Nisticò lives in New York City.

Why Opera? What drew you to become a singer?

My father is a singer and a voice teacher. He's my voice teacher in fact. I was born into this.

I heard opera every day, from my father's students at home and attending his performances. When I was growing up, opera was ubiquitous in Italy, everybody would know opera tunes and in elementary school we would learn to play "Va pensiero" from *Nabucco*, on our flutes (I was not very good at it!). However, that trend was already changing. Pop music was growing and things changed dramatically. Now most people know that Italy is the birthplace of opera, but never go to a show.

What singing did you do as a teenager?

As a teen I hated opera and did not want to sing. However, I think I was kind of "destined" to fall into it. One day I asked my dad to help me sing a song I was learning (for a university assignment I was doing for Sorbonne in Paris). After that, I was hooked.

What are you looking forward to most about performing the role of Figaro this season?

Figaro is one of my favorite roles. One of the first roles I ever sang. I have sung Figaro in 5 different productions and many performances. There have been some in Europe (Holland, Bulgaria, and Bologna in Italy), Mexico (Guadalajara and San Luis Potosì) as well as here in the United States (Toledo, OH, Opera Festival of New Jersey, and, of course, Sarasota Opera). I love the free spirit of the character and the music goes perfectly with it.



Marco Nisticò as Figaro (right) with Eric Margiore as Count Almaviva. *The Barber of Seville*, Sarasota Opera 2008

Is there anything unique when preparing a role?

I don't know whether it's unique, but I read the libretto and try to analyze the poetic aspect of the words. I then go to the music and sing it as much as possible, by myself and then with a pianist. Figaro is a role I have done many times.

What should the audience know about Figaro? What is challenging about the role?

Figaro is the smartest guy in the room (and I say "guy" because Rosina is just as smart). He is also a revolutionary, since he's a servant who always prevails against his masters. The challenge is that the role has been sung by all the great baritones of the past and there are some inevitable comparisons. However, I really enjoy portraying this character.

What is the most bizarre experience you have had during a rehearsal or performance?

During a performance of *The Barber of Seville*, the orchestra did not come in and I had to sing a cappella (without accompaniment) a good part of my duet with Rosina. At the moment it was not "fun", but now it's a good story to tell. And I will never forget my Rosina's face, looking at me as if to say "good luck with that, buddy".

Do you have any pre-performance rituals, superstitions, or good luck charms?

I like to relax during the day and then warm up before the performance. I tend to eat only chicken and rice the day of a show as well.

How do you relax in between performances?

I enjoy watching Netflix. I also go to the gym and spend time with friends.

What music do you listen to when you are driving or commuting around New York City?

I don't own a car (traffic in New York is terrible!). The rare times I rent one I listen to NPR (talk). I do not listen to music while walking/taking the subway/etc. so I can be in touch with the people around me.

How do you stay connected to family and friends when you are "on the road"?

I really do not like personal blogs so I use Facebook, emails, Skype and the phone to talk to family and friends. I talk with Marina, my wife, several times a day on the phone.

Sarasota Opera House



Looking for opportunities to promote the real estate market in Sarasota Arthur B(ritton) Edwards, Sarasota's first mayor, prominent entrepreneur, and real estate investor, decided that downtown needed an attraction, signaling to the world that the city was a destination. The Edwards Theatre, opened in April 1926 would serve the community as a place of entertainment, community resource and finally as an opera house over the next nine decades. Approaching its 90th year in 2016 (the final year of Sarasota Opera's Verdi Cycle), it is still the jewel of downtown Sarasota.

The opening night in 1926 was accorded great fanfare in the local press. The performance included a live band, dancers, and an opera singer (Mr. Edwards' daughter). As a mixed-use venue, it also included the silent movie "Skinner's Dress Suit" accompanied by the Robert Morton orchestral organ. Later bill of fare included Will Rogers, the Ziegfeld Follies, the exotic fan dancer Sally Rand, and touring opera companies. A hurricane in 1929 destroyed the organ and required renovations to the lobby, but performances continued.

Mr. Edwards sold the venue to the Sparks movie theater chain, which renamed it the Florida Theater. Movies became more prominent in future years, especially in 1952 when Cecil B. DeMille's *The Greatest Show on Earth*, largely filmed in Sarasota, had its world premiere, with many of the stars including Charlton Heston and Mr. DeMille in attendance. Live performances in those years included a young Elvis Presley in 1956 (with a top ticket price of \$1.50).

The years took its toll on the Florida Theater and in 1972 it stopped showing films. The front part of the building continued to house offices and a radio school, but in 1979, a new future was destined for the building.

The Asolo Opera Guild, founded in 1960 to support opera performances at the Asolo Theatre on the grounds of the Ringling Museum, needed a new home and arranged to purchase the Florida Theater for \$150,000. Over the next few years the Guild undertook to renovate the building as it raised funds and in 1984 it was ready to reopen as the Sarasota Opera House.

After a subsequent renovation in 2008, with much of its original beauty restored and enhanced, the Sarasota Opera House was called "one of the finest venues for Opera in America" by *Musical America*. It seats 1,129 and the orchestra pit accommodates over 75 players. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1984, received the Florida Preservation Award in 2010, and helped spurred the revival of downtown Sarasota.