IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA

OPERA IN TWO ACTS

Based on *Le Barbier de Séville*
A play by Pierre Beaumarchais

Libretto by Cesare Sterbini

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A Study Guide prepared by Virginia Opera


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IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA (THE BARBER OF SEVILLE)

Premiere

First performance on February 20, 1816 at the Teatro Argentina in Rome, Italy.

Cast of Characters

Count Almaviva, a nobleman	Tenor
Bartolo, Rosina's guardian	Bass
Rosina, Bartolo's ward	Contralto
Figaro, a barber	Baritone
Basilio, Rosina's music teacher	Bass
Berta, a governess	Soprano
Fiorello, Almaviva's servant	Bass
Officer, a police sergeant	Bass
Chorus	

2023-2024 Season

Brief Summary

The young and beautiful **Rosina** is the ward of the elderly **Dr. Bartolo**. **Count Almaviva**, disguised as a commoner, becomes enamored with Rosina, but is frustrated by Bartolo, who keeps her secluded: Bartolo plans to marry Rosina so he can secure her dowry.

The Count encounters **Figaro**, Seville's famous factotum: a barber and jack-of-all-trades. Figaro plans an intrigue that will enable the Count to enter Dr. Bartolo's house and meet Rosina.

The Count, disguised as a soldier, demands to be billeted in Bartolo's house. When that fails, the Count disguises himself as Don Alonso, a music teacher substituting for the supposedly ill **Don Basilio**. Basilio suddenly appears, but is dismissed after he is bribed to feign illness. Bartolo discovers the charade and the intrigue fails.

Basilio, now Dr. Bartolo's notary, arrives to perform the wedding between Bartolo and Rosina. At the point of a gun, Basilio is forced to substitute the Count's name on the marriage contract: Rosina and the Count are married. Although seething at his loss, Dr. Bartolo is content when the Count gives him Rosina's dowry.

Detailed Synopsis

Time/place: 17th Century Seville, Spain

ACT I
Scene 1: A square in Seville

Old **Dr. Bartolo** guards his beautiful ward, **Rosina**, a young lady bearing a considerable dowry if he should marry her. The handsome young noble, **Count Almaviva**, is secretly in love with Rosina and arrives before dawn with a group of musicians to offer a serenade to Rosina.

The Count pays his musicians generously, and in their enthusiasm he has difficulty dismissing them. Nevertheless, the Count becomes crestfallen and frustrated because Rosina has not come out on her balcony to thank him for his charming serenade.

While the Count lingers dejectedly near Dr. Bartolo's house, pandemonium heralds the noisy approach of **Figaro**, the barber of Seville. Almaviva conceals himself to listen to Figaro's merry song in which the factotum – the jack-of-all-trades – describes his various activities: "Figaro here, Figaro there, Figaro wanted everywhere."

The Count recognizes Figaro, having met him at an earlier time, and immediately enlists his services, promising him money to arrange a meeting for him with Rosina, the woman he loves from afar.

Figaro is certain he can succeed for the Count, because as Seville's greatest factotum, his multiple professions provide him with entry into the homes of people of all stations: in particular, Figaro is Rosina's hairdresser and Dr. Bartolo's barber.

As they speak, Rosina appears on the balcony, drops a note to her anonymous serenader, but is quickly ordered back into the house by her suspicious guardian, Dr. Bartolo: Rosina's note requests the name of the anonymous serenader.

Figaro insists that the Count sing a second serenade: *Se il mio nome*, "If my name you would know…," in which the Count announces to Rosina that he loves her. However, the Count hesitates to reveal his name and station in fear that Rosina would be influenced by the glamour of his aristocratic status: he reveals that he is Lindoro, a man of poverty, but rich in the emotions of love. Figaro contrives an intrigue to get Count Almaviva inside Dr. Bartolo's house: "I have it! A regiment arrives today. You can dress up as a dragoon and insist that your men must be billeted in Bartolo's house."

Figaro and the Count vent their joy at this scheme in a rollicking duet: the Count delights in the prospect of finally meeting Rosina, and Figaro exults at being paid handsomely for his services.

Scene 2: A room in the house of Dr. Bartolo.

Rosina reads a note from her secret lover, Lindoro, and expresses her romantic feelings and excitement.

Dr. Bartolo, protecting his prize, and appreciating Rosina's beauty as well as her dowry, has given strict orders to the servant, **Berta**, that no one is to be admitted into his house except the music teacher and lawyer, **Don Basilio**, and, of course, the barber, Figaro. Dr. Bartolo hopes that with the aid of the cunning Don Basilio, he can arrange a marriage to Rosina this very day.

Don Basilio and Dr. Bartolo plan their own intrigue. Basilio suspects that the man who has been haunting the neighborhood and serenading Rosina is none other than the Count Almaviva. To rid themselves of Almaviva, Basilio suggests that they invent a rumor and scandal to destroy his reputation: by defaming the Count, they are confident and certain that Rosina would reject him.

Certain of success, the conspirators go off to prepare a marriage contract for Dr. Bartolo and Rosina. However, Figaro has been listening through a keyhole, has heard their nefarious plans, and warns Rosina that her guardian is determined to marry her against her wishes.

Rosina has become preoccupied with the anonymous serenader and asks Figaro if he can identify the young man. Figaro tells Rosina that he is none other than his cousin, a man very much in love at this moment. Rosina becomes impatient to meet Figaro's cousin, and is assured by Figaro that if she sends him a note of encouragement, he will come to her immediately. The wily Rosina had already written the note and hands it to Figaro.

Dr. Bartolo suspects that Figaro may be carrying messages between his ward and the mysterious serenader. He surveys Rosina's desk and inquires why Rosina's hand is stained with ink, why a sheet of paper is missing, and why the pen is fresh with ink.

Rosina blushes and feigns innocence, but the ink marks on her fingers betray her. She tells Bartolo that she used the ink as a salve after she had burned herself; that she needed the paper for wrapping some sweets for a girlfriend, and used the pen to design a pattern for her embroidery. Dr. Bartolo erupts in rage, cautioning his ward to forgo matching wits with a doctor of his rank.

A knock is heard on the outside door and a visitor is admitted: it is the Count Almaviva in a soldier's disguise. He staggers into the room, pretends to be drunk, and insists that he billet his men in Bartolo's house, but Bartolo indignantly protests, claiming that he has an official waiver granting him exemption from quartering soldiers. As Bartolo goes off to find his waiver, the Count manages to slip a love note to Rosina.

Officers and soldiers arrive. When Dr. Bartolo complains about the infringement of his privacy, the officer arrests the "soldier," but after the Count surreptitiously reveals his aristocratic identity to the sergeant, to the consternation of the entire company, he is released.

ACT 2
Scene 1: A room in Bartolo's house

His "soldier" scheme a failure, Figaro has invented another intrigue to enable the Count to enter Bartolo's house: this time, he will appear as Don Alonso, a music teacher.

Just as Dr. Bartolo congratulates himself on having rid himself of the soldier, a knock on the door introduces Don Alonso (the Count), who explains that he is replacing the ailing Don Basilio, and has arrived to give Rosina her music lessons. Polite sarcasm follows the interchange between Don Alonso and Dr. Bartolo.

Don Alonso pretends to be an ally of Dr. Bartolo by explaining that he lodges at the same inn as the Count Almaviva, and this very morning he found a letter which Rosina had written to the Count. Don Alonso offers to help Bartolo, who immediately takes him into his confidence, and becomes excited that he now has another ally to help him ruin the Count's reputation.

Dr. Bartolo summons Rosina for her music lesson with Don Alonso. To allow the lovers a discreet moment of privacy, Figaro decides to distract Dr. Bartolo by announcing that since his calendar is full, he must shave the doctor at this very moment.

Bartolo reluctantly accedes and gives Figaro the keys to his closet so he can fetch linen. A loud crash is heard and Bartolo presumes that Figaro has broken all of his china. Frantically, he goes out to investigate the damage, leaving Rosina alone with her music teacher, an opportunity for the young lovers to exchange hurried words of love.

Figaro returns and excitedly advises the Count that he has stolen Dr. Bartolo's balcony key: that key will serve them well for the next phase of their intrigue.

While Figaro performs his "barber" business and covers Bartolo's face with lather, to everyone's amazement, Don Basilio arrives. In order to protect their charade, Figaro and the Count immediately try to dispose of Don Basilio.

Dr. Bartolo, told earlier by Don Alonso that Basilio was ill, inquires of the bewildered Don Basilio why he has come out with a fever. The Count passes Basilio a purse with money, sufficient explanation that he is to feign illness and diplomatically make a hasty departure; prolonged farewells to Basilio compound the humorous situation.

The lovers plan their elopement while Figaro shaves Dr. Bartolo and distracts his attention by splashing soap generously into his eyes. Count Almaviva whispers to Rosina that she should not fear, because they now have the balcony key and they will come to fetch her precisely at midnight. The suspicious Bartolo approaches the preoccupied lovers, discovers the masquerade, and realizes that he has again been duped. In a fury, he orders everyone out of his house.

Bartolo proceeds with his own intrigue and shows Rosina a note that indicates that her supposedly devoted lover, Lindoro, is conspiring to surrender her to the infamous Count Almaviva. Rosina feels betrayed and explodes in a fury: in revenge, she offers to marry Bartolo at once. Although she admits to Bartolo that she had planned to elope with Lindoro, she now insists that Bartolo arrest Lindoro and Figaro when they arrive.

As night falls, a thunderstorm arises. Figaro and Count Almaviva enter Dr. Bartolo's house through the balcony with their stolen key. Rosina greets them with a storm of reproaches, accusing Lindoro of pretending love so he can sacrifice her to the insidious Count Almaviva. The Count is delighted that Rosina is unaware of his real identity, and that she truly loves the poor Lindoro rather than a wealthy nobleman. He reveals his true identity to Rosina, the lovers embrace, and are reconciled. Don Basilio interrupts them, now returning in his role of notary and preparing to wed Rosina to Dr. Bartolo. However, with the aid of a pistol, Don Basilio is persuaded to marry Rosina and the Count instead.

Dr. Bartolo arrives with the police and orders the intruders arrested, but he is too late: the marriage contract has been signed, and his former ward, Rosina, is now the wife of the distinguished Count Almaviva.

After the Count graciously gives Bartolo Rosina's dowry, the old intriguer decides to accept his hard luck philosophically, while the irrepressible Figaro bestows garrulous good wishes on the newlyweds.

About the composer

Gioacchino Antonio Rossini (1792 –1868) was one of the most important Italian opera composers during the first half of the nineteenth century.

A whole generation of music lovers, from 1820 to 1840, acclaimed Rossini the undisputed king of opera composers, living or dead. In the eyes of the opera world, he was idolized and adored. Though Rossini is best known for his *opera buffas*, his comic and satiric operas, he also composed *opera serias*, operas with serious themes. Whatever the particular genre, all of his music contains a unique melodic inventiveness and rhythmic vitality: those special features became the inspiration for his illustrious *bel canto* ("beautiful singing") contemporaries, Bellini and Donizetti, as well as the young Verdi.

Rossini was born in Pesaro, Italy. As a child, he displayed exceptional musical talent, which earned him entry into the Bologna Conservatory at the age of twelve. In 1810, at the age of eighteen, he wrote his first opera, *La Cambiale di Matrimonio* (*The Marriage Contract*), but his first substantial success occurred two years later with his opera, *La Pietra del Paragone* (*The Touchstone*), which premiered at La Scala in Milan, Italy. There were fifty performances in its first season. *Tancredi* and *L'Italiana in Algeri* (*The Italian Girl in Algiers*) followed, and were even greater triumphs. By the age of twenty-one, with these early successes, Rossini had already become established as the idol of the Italian opera public.

In 1815, he was engaged to write new works as well as direct two opera companies in Naples. His first opera under that arrangement was *Elisabetta*, written expressly for the popular Spanish prima donna, Isabella Colbran. Colbran became Rossini's muse and they married in 1822.

In 1816, Rossini wrote his celebrated *opera buffa* masterpiece, *The Barber of Seville*, for production in Rome. Even though a combination of circumstances spelled disaster for the opera at its premiere, on its second evening the opera was acclaimed, and with each successive performance, it gained new admirers. Today, it is generally considered the greatest comic masterpiece in the entire operatic canon.

In 1822, after marrying Isabella Colbran, Rossini left Italy for Vienna where he and his operas became the rage. Two years later, he went to Paris to direct the Théâtre des Italiens, an opera theater that specialized in Italian operas. Rossini's popularity in Paris was so great that Charles X gave him a contract to write five new operas a year. At the expiration of the contract, he was to receive a generous pension for life.

During his Paris years, between 1824 and 1829, Rossini wrote the comic opera *Le Comte Ory* (*Count* Ory) and *Guillaume Tell* (*William Tell*). The latter was a political epic adapted from Schiller's play (1804) about the thirteenth-century Swiss patriot who rallied his country against the Austrians. The stylistic innovations Rossini introduced in both these works would eventually influence composers such as Adam, Meyerbeer, Offenbach, and Wagner.

Though Rossini was only thirty-eight years old when he completed *William Tell,* he had already composed thirty-eight operas. Though he was at the height of his career, he never wrote another opera. He spent his later years indulging in fine wine and food. He wrote some sacred music, a few songs, and some instrumental and piano pieces.

Rossini's sudden withdrawal from the world of opera has inspired much conjecture. Some scholars have concluded that Rossini's indolence and laziness had gotten the better of him after he had achieved such immense wealth. Others claim that the initial failure of *William Tell* to achieve success had embittered him. He was disappointed that his fame had become overshadowed by the popularity of grand opera spectacles of Meyerbeer and Halévy which replaced his *opera buffas*. Others still suggest that Rossini's neurasthenia, a mental disorder characterized by fatigue and anxiety, as well as his debilitating bout with gonorrhea, had become too serious after 1830 and prohibited him from work.

Nevertheless, while in his retirement, Rossini became the major figure in the social and cultural life of Paris. He had become esteemed as Europe's leading composer, and his overtures were even compared to those of Beethoven. He relished the title, "the music emperor of Europe," and he certainly lived like one, maintaining homes in Italy, Paris, and a summer villa in rural France. Rossini had become rich, famous, and gourmand-stomached.

After finally marrying Olympe Pélissier, a woman whom he had loved for years but could not marry until his first wife, Isabella, died, he reigned like a nineteenth-century prince in his luxurious Paris apartment, where he entertained friends in the grand manner, granted audiences, held court, and offered commentaries. Legend reports that the great classical composer, Camille Saint-Saëns, would be anxiously sitting in one corner of Rossini's home waiting his turn at the piano. In another, a famous singer would likewise be preparing to entertain the bejeweled ladies.

Rossini died in 1868 due to complications following a heart attack. He was buried in Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris. At the request of the Italian government, his body was later removed to Florence to his current resting place – the cemetery of the Santa Croce Church.

Thirty-eight years was a long retirement, and a long time to be devoted to Rossini's legacy of gourmand eating, attractive women, and sharp witticisms. Nevertheless, the most famous opera composer of his generation preferred to remain silent musically, and in spite of his personal problems and illnesses, one could easily conjecture that perhaps he was satisfied that he had said all he ever wanted to say in the last dramatic scene of *William Tell:* it was a passionate cry for liberty during an historical time of severe conflict and tension between reform and revolution.

About the playwright

Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732-1799), son of a clockmaker, initially followed in his father's footsteps and was a clockmaker and watchmaker to the court of Louis XV. Beaumarchais was also a self-taught musician. He played and composed music for guitar, flute, and harp, and eventually became the harp teacher to the King's daughters.

In 1763, France was still seeking revenge against England for its loss of Canada, and was observing the development of American resistance with great interest. The French government offered covert aid to the American rebels, but at the same time, was determined to remain out of the conflict until an opportune moment. In 1776, they established a fictitious company under the direction of the author, Beaumarchais, which funneled military supplies and sold arms to the insurgent American colonists.

However, the picaresque Beaumarchais's ultimate fame rests on his literary achievements: the comedic theatrical trilogy *Le Barbier de Séville, ou La Précaution Inutile* (*The Barber of Seville, or The Useless Precaution*, 1775), *Le Mariage de Figaro, ou La folle Journée* (*The Marriage of Figaro, or the Day of Craziness*, 1784), and the final installment, *La Mère Coupable* (*The Guilt Mother*, 1784).

Beaumarchais's trilogy represented a caustic satire of contemporary French social and political conditions that ultimately reflected the growing dissatisfaction with the ruling class and nobility in the years preceding the French Revolution. In retrospect, his writings did much to influence, and even precipitate the Revolution. About the trilogy, Napoleon later commented that they were indeed the "revolution already in action."

Beaumarchais's plays center around the colorful character, Figaro, a factotum or jack-of-all-trades, whose ingenuity serves as the symbol of class revolt against the aristocracy. In effect, the characterizations flatter the lower classes while at the same time, castigate the nobility. Mozart's opera, *The Marriage of Figaro,* and Rossini's opera, *The Barber of Seville,* both adapted from Beaumarchais's original plays, would eventually assure immortality for these literary masterpieces.

Louis XVI forbade performances of *Le Mariage de Figaro*, but the masses, not in a mood to be trifled with in the 1770s, demanded the plays. The King would briefly imprison Beaumarchais, but under pressure, later placated him and agreed to a performance of *Le Barbier de Séville* at Versailles. This performance featured his wife, Marie-Antoinette, as Rosina, and the future Charles X as Figaro.

In the Mozart's *Figaro,* Beaumarchais's depiction of contemporary class conflict is profoundly portrayed. But in Rossini's opera adaptation of *Barber of Seville,* which premiered in 1816, an entire generation after France's political and social upheavals, the heat of the revolutionary fires

had diminished, and nothing of any political or social consequence was emphasized in the text. In fact, the libretto had the obliging approval of the Roman censor, and neither the government nor the aristocratic powers posed any pretext whatsoever to suppress it.

Beaumarchais's plays portray class conflicts evolving against a background of a highly sophisticated battle of the sexes. In Beaumarchais, a subtle use of wiles, wit, determination, decency, love, and a little luck, can tip the scales against aristocratic arrogance and power. The realities of class separation are presented as they are, but there is an underlying implication that social hierarchies are accidents of fortune rather than reflections of inherent worth.

In these stories, Figaro is the real hero, the master of sabotage and intrigue, and an inventive "man for all seasons"; his enterprising cleverness elevates him above the rest of society. Figaro was Beaumarchais himself. The villains and tormentors are in continuous conflict with one another. In *The Marriage of Figaro,* Figaro maintains a witty and high-handed attitude toward his aristocratic master, Count Almaviva. In Beaumarchais's original, Figaro speaks about the Count: "What have you done to earn so many honors? You have taken the trouble to be born, that's all." This comment reveals the essence of eighteenth century political and social conflict that bred the French and American Revolutions.

Although Rossini's opera may lack some of the deep and tender sentiment which underlies so much of Mozart's music, his *Barber* contains much more humor, and is quite more frolicsome and scintillatingly vivacious, serving to endow it with an elemental freshness and energy. And certainly, by its very subject matter, Rossini's *Barber* suggests an inherently livelier and lovelier charm in its recounting of Count Almaviva's adventures while outwitting Dr. Bartolo and carrying off the mischievous Rosina.

Historical Background

In many respects, Rossini's *Barber* owes some of its provenance to Giovanni Paisello's *Barbiere di Siviglia* (1782), an earlier adaptation of Beaumarchais. At its premiere, Rossini's opera suffered disaster. Out of veneration and respect for Paisello, Rossini gave his opera a different title: *Almaviva, or the Useless Precaution,* but that failed to placate Paisello's followers. There was a cabal of noisy opposition from Pasiello's friends, proving that the old dictatorial composer was still very popular and had a devoted following in Rome.

The premiere audience erupted in laughter, not at the humor in the opera libretto, but because of the unfolding of a monumental series of disasters. The tenor forgot to tune his guitar, and a string broke as he attempted the opening Serenade. The singer who portrayed Don Basilio fell and bruised himself badly during his entrance. He then became distracted as he attempted to stop blood from flowing from his nose during his "La Calunnia" aria. Finally, a cat entered the stage during the second act and jumped into Dr. Bartolo's arms. All in all, the *Barber's* premiere received a big tide of disapproval.

Nevertheless, in the hindsight of opera history, Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* has become one of the greatest masterpieces of comedy in music. Sterbini's shrewdly contrived libretto for *Barber* is a first class adaptation that dutifully captures all of the humor, wit, and gaiety of the original Beaumarchais. Rossini's melodies and music contain a perfection of form, an utter spontaneity, sparkle, and charm, that are always enormously faithful to character and situation.

Opera buffa

Opera buffa, the comic or satiric genre, must be distinguished from its more serious predecessor, *opera seria*. *Operas seria* generally dealt with historical, legendary, or mythological themes, and usually contained a happy ending with due reward for rectitude and good deed. Quintessential examples of *opera seria* are Handel's *Julius Caesar* (1724), Gluck's *Orfeo et Euridice* (1762), and Mozart's *Idomeneo* (1781).

During the pre-French Revolution and pre-Romantic eras, aristocrats identified with the extremely popular *opera seria* genre: these operas portrayed lofty personalities whom they perceived as flattering portraits of themselves. *Operas seria* were massive scenes of pageantry that were married to highly complex, ornamented arias that would exploit the virtuosity of individual singers.

As the end of the eighteenth century approached, the *opera buffa* developed: it was a more realistic genre that portrayed more human characters in everyday situations. The lower classes preferred the satire of the *opera buffa* genre which was usually concerned with romantic plots involving cuckolds, deceiving wives, and scheming servants. In certain respects, the themes of *opera buffa* provided a democratization in the performing arts which enabled the lower classes to satirize their masters and vent their frustrations with social injustices.

In contrast to *opera seria*, *opera buffa* preferred simplicity in design. Generally, a few characters would be portrayed against an uncomplicated setting with commensurate simplicity of underlying melodies and tunes. Yet musically, there would be much stylistic contrast. For example, the use of rhythmic, staccato passages emphasized coquettish moods. *Opera buffa* featured extended act finales with sophisticated ensembles (taboo in *opera seria*) that involved the participation of many characters in duets and trios.

Patter songs are a feature of *opera buffa*. These songs are tongue twisters delivered at a quick tempo that requires an acute sense of comic timing in order for the singer to make the words intelligible. In its practical sense, patter is nothing more or less than rapid fire articulation, similar to those popular tongue-twisters: "She sells seashells at the seashore," or "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers." In most classic *operas buffa*, the patter usually portrayed old busybodies.

Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786) is considered one of the greatest *operas buffa*. It is a satiric portrayal of the political and social conflicts existing within his contemporary society. To achieve his objectives, Mozart created incomparable musical characterizations. His heroes became the lower classes, such as Figaro and Susanna, and his antiheroes became those contemptible aristocrats, such as the Count Almaviva and Dr. Bartolo. Mozart brilliantly exploited the *opera buffa* genre, injected his ingenious musical inventions, and breathed life into his characters.

The essence of good comedy is not that it has necessarily happened, but that it could happen. Therefore, comedy must have a link with reality so that it does not degenerate into farce. In order to be convincing and believable, real or imagined situations must convey a sense of credibility. The essence of *opera buffa* is to provide farce, burlesque, satire, and irony, together with moments of seriousness and real human emotions: a magnificent blend of heartfelt comedy and humor together with sentiment and tenderness so that the comic action achieves credibility. Rossini once wrote: "I was born for the *opera buffa.*"

Commedia dell'arte

The *commedia dell'arte* genre originated and is defined as satirical entertainment. The tradition existed for centuries, most prominently performed by troupes of players strolling throughout Italy during the Renaissance. At that time, its underlying satire and irony were important and popular theatrical forces, and ultimately, they would shape the development of comedy on the dramatic as well as lyric stages.

The art form originated in market places and streets where performers traditionally wore masks in order to conceal their identities: their protection was necessitated by the fact that they were satirizing and ridiculing their contemporary world. Performers clowned, insulted, and ridiculed every aspect of society and its institutions by characterizing humorous or hypocritical situations involving cunning servants, scheming doctors, and duped masters.

In order to draw attention to themselves, they generally wore exaggerated and comical costumes. Plots would contain very few lines of set dialogue, and much of their performance contained improvisation. Some of the standard characters were the Harlequin, Columbine, and Pulcinella. In Italy, the characters became affectionately known as *zanni*, no doubt the root of our English word "zany," meaning funny in a crazy or silly way. The *commedia dell'arte* and *opera buffa* comic traditions and satires became the prototype for vaudeville and slapstick, exemplified by Chaplin, the Marx Brothers, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, and today, Mel Brooks and Gene Wilder.

During the eighteenth century, the *intermezzo* developed in the Italian theater: it was a short play with music that was presented between the acts of a serious drama. The *commedia dell'arte* and the *intermezzo* genres were the theatrical predecessors that would develop into the *opera buffa*. Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona* (1733) became one of the earliest *intermezzi,* and almost a century later, Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* would serve as the model for all future *operas buffa.*

Discussion questions

1. *The Barber of Seville* is a comic opera (or *opera buffa*). Satire is one of the comedic tools that Rossini used. What is satire? What makes something a satire?

2. Music from the Romantic period (ca. 1830-1900) is typically characterized as having the following characteristics: long, flowery phrases; experimentation with harmony and texture; emotionally expressive melodies; and large orchestras. Idealistically, music from the Romantic period typically had a moral value and often expressed nationalism. Which aspects of the Romantic idiom are expressed in *Barber of Seville*? In which ways does *Barber of Seville* differ from the Romantic idiom?

3. Commedia dell'arte is a style of performance meaning "artistic play" and each type of character had certain traits. What were some of these characters? What are some of the traits for each character? Are there any similar characters in *Barber of Seville*?

4. At the time when *Barber of Seville* premiered, Italy was not one country but a collection of nation-states ruled by different monarchs. Many Italians were in favor of unification – the process that would lead to a single country ruled by a single government. This period (1820s) in which Italians protested in favor of unification was called the *risorgimento* (resurgence). Italians wanted Italy to re-emerge as a leader of art, language, and music just as it had been in the Roman antiquity and during the Renaissance. To do so, many opera composers and other artists criticized the monarchy and the wealthy elite with their works. In which ways does *Barber of Seville* criticize or make fun of the noble class?

5. Singers called *divas* were very common in nineteenth-century European opera. These singers were most often sopranos and tenors. They would improvise based off of the music that the composer wrote for them. This means that they would make up new music to sing on the spot during performances without the composer's approval. Sometimes they would even sing songs that weren't even part of the opera! Adelina Patti, a nineteenth-century soprano who sang Rosina, improvised one of the songs from *Barber of Seville* on stage. Rossini asked her: "who wrote the piece you have just performed?" Do you think singers should always listen to the composer or should they be able to sing what they want? Explain your answer.