

Cinderella

An Opera in Two Acts

Music by Gioachino Rossini

Libretto by Jacopo Ferretti

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Cinderella *(La Cenerentola)*

Premiere

First performance on January 25, 1817 at the Teatro Valle in Rome, Italy

Cast of characters

Angelina (La Cenerentola, or Cinderella)

Don Ramiro, Prince of Salerno

Dandini, Ramiro's valet

Don Magnifico, Baron of Montefiascone; Cinderella's step-father

Alidoro, Philosopher' Ramiro's former tutor

Clorinda, Magnifico's elder daughter

Tisbe, Magnifico's younger daughter

Courtiers of the Prince's palace

Contralto

Tenor

Baritone

Bass

Bass

Soprano

Mezzo soprano



Brief summary

The opera takes place in Salerno in the late 18th century.

Don Magnifico, a nobleman who has fallen on hard times, lives with his two daughters and Angelina (called Cinderella), his step-daughter. Prince Ramiro's tutor Alidoro, disguised as a beggar, visits the family's castle where only Cinderella treats him kindly. The prince's courtiers announce that Ramiro is on his way to drop in as he searches for the most beautiful maiden in Salerno; Magnifico is excited; a royal marriage to either Clorinda or Tisbe could replenish his fortune.

When the Prince arrives, he is disguised as his valet Dandini. He quickly spots Cinderella, the girl Alidoro has told him about, but her shyness prevents her from speaking to him. When "the Prince" arrives (actually Ramiro's valet Dandini in disguise), Magnifico and his two daughters receive him enthusiastically. The false prince invites them to a ball that evening, at which he will announce his choice of a bride. Cinderella asks to join them at the ball, but Magnifico forbids her to come. Alidoro returns, saying he has heard of a third daughter; Magnifico quickly replies that she is dead. When the others exit, Alidoro tells Cinderella that he will take her to the ball himself, promising that everything will end well for her.

At Ramiro's country home, he and Dandini, still in disguise, share their distaste for Clorinda and Tisbe; they express confusion about Alidoro's claim of a third daughter. Angelina's step-sisters arrive: the "prince", as a test, offers his "valet" in marriage to whomever is not chosen for the royal wedding. Both sisters recoil at the suggestion of marrying a commoner. Alidoro enters with Cinderella, now almost unrecognizable dressed in finery; her presence causes general bewilderment.

Cinderella confides to Dandini (who is still posing as Ramiro) that she is in love with his valet. The real prince overhears her confession of love and happily approaches; Cinderella, however, announces that she is returning to her home. Giving him one of her bracelets, she tells the "valet" that if he truly loves her, he will find her. Ramiro vows to discover the woman with the matching bracelet.

Magnifico, anxious to secure his good fortune, presses the "prince" to choose one of his daughters. Dandini reveals his true identity, provoking Magnifico to anger. Back at his own castle, Magnifico and his daughters, all thoroughly frustrated, order Cinderella (in rags once again) to cook their supper. A thunderstorm breaks; Ramiro's carriage crashes in front of Magnifico's home, forcing the prince inside. Ramiro, no longer in disguise, quickly recognizes Cinderella as the woman he loves, causing an uproar from Magnifico, Clorinda and Tisbe. Ramiro, irritated at their carrying-on, warns them of dire consequences, Angelina generously asks him to forgive them.

Ramiro and Cinderella are married at the royal palace. When the chastened Magnifico attempts to curry favor with the new princess, Cinderella says she simply wants to be acknowledged as his daughter. Celebrating her good fortune, she exults that her days as a

servant-girl are over. Generously, she invites her step-father and step-sisters to join her in her happy new life.

Detailed Synopsis with Musical Examples

Overture

The overture is in a truncated sonata-allegro form in which there is no development section. Following an extensive slow introduction marked *Maestoso*, the “A” theme is introduced in the tonic key of E flat major (Ex. 1):



Ex. 1

The “B” theme modulates to the dominant key of B flat; the character remains light and playful (Ex. 2):



Ex. 2

The exposition ends with a closing theme in B flat (Ex. 3). Following the formula Rossini employed time after time, this theme provides the material for one of his characteristic long crescendos, gradually building to a boisterous climax. This theme will return to provide the closing moments of the septet that ends the Act 1 finale.



Ex. 3

In lieu of a development section, a simple transition back to E flat triggers the recapitulation; all three themes are presented again, with the latter two remaining in the tonic key.

Act 1: Salerno, Italy; late 18th century

We are in the home of Don Magnifico, Baron of Montefiascone. Once proud and wealthy, Magnifico’s fortunes, as well as his mansion, are in a sad state of decline. His daughters

Clorinda and Tisbe busy themselves with practicing ballet and working with flowers, respectively. Kneeling in front of the fireplace is their stepsister Angelina (Cinderella) who is stoking the fire to boil water for the coffee the other two have demanded. In a brief, lively duet, they boast of their mutual beauty and artfulness.

Meanwhile, Cinderella softly sings a simple folk-like song as she works. The song tells of a king who, finding three potential brides, chose the one with innocent goodness rather than beauty or nobility (Ex. 4 – “Una volta c’era un re”):

Andantino



U - na vol - ta c'e'e-ra'un re, che'a star so-lo, che'a star so-lo s'ann-oi - ò;

Ex. 4

The tempo and minor modality of her song recall that of “Se il mio nome saper voi bramate”, a similarly folk-like song sung by Count Almaviva to Rosina early in Act 1 of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. Both numbers depart from Rossini’s typical florid vocal writing, signaling that they are examples of “diagetic music”; that is, music the characters perceive as performed music in their fictional lives.

A man in shabby clothing comes to the house, asking for alms. (In reality he is Alidoro, a philosopher and the tutor of Ramiro, Prince of Salerno.) Clorinda and Tisbe order him away, but Cinderella offers him some coffee and a bit of bread.

The stepsisters begin to berate Cinderella for her charity but are interrupted by the arrival of Prince Ramiro’s courtiers, they inform the household that Ramiro himself will soon drop by to invite them to a royal ball at which the prince will select the most beautiful maiden to be his bride.

Clorinda and Tisbe, greatly excited, begin ordering Cinderella to fetch their jewelry, bonnets and other finery in preparation for the ball. She responds with a line that appears to be a sly paraphrase of Figaro’s “Largo al factotum” from *Il barbiere*. Where Figaro complained “Figaro qua, Figaro là, Figaro su, Figaro giù” (“Figaro here, Figaro there, Figaro up, Figaro down”), Cinderella echoes him: “Cenerentola vien qua, va là, va su, vien giù.” But whereas Figaro is happy in his profession, Cinderella, treated as a servant, is miserable. Alidoro watches the hubbub in amusement; he is engineering Ramiro’s search for a bride and already regards Cinderella with favor.

The stepsisters order Alidoro to leave; he whispers to Cinderella that by tomorrow she may find happiness. An argument erupts as to who will have the privilege of telling their father the exciting news of the prince’s visit when Don Magnifico himself appears. Still in bedclothes, Magnifico is unhappy to have been awakened by all the noisy tumult, especially since he was in the middle of a very entertaining dream. In a comic aria (Ex. 5 – “Miei rampoli femminini”), he proceeds to narrate the dream, in which a donkey grew feathers and flew to sit on top of a steeple while the church bells rang below:

company of a retinue of courtiers. The stepsisters and their father enter; Dandini, in his princely persona, describes the difficulty of finding a suitable woman to wed (Ex. 7 - Aria, “Come un ape ne’giorni d’aprile”):



Ex. 7

A new theme is introduced in the orchestra at the point in the aria when Magnifico and the stepsisters begin to respond to Dandini’s remarks:



Ex. 8

An interesting comparison can be made between this theme and the refrain of the “Hunter’s Chorus” from Carl Maria von Weber’s opera *Der Freischütz* (Ex. 9), which is merely a quicker and simpler version of the same musical thought:



Ex. 9

Der Freischütz premiered in 1821, four years after *La Cenerentola*.

During his solo, Dandini alternates between offering flowery compliments to Clorinda, Tisbe and their father (all of whom are certain the “prince” is under their spell) and sotto voce asides to Ramiro about his real opinion of them. The prince privately wonders why the shy young maiden he spoke to is not present.

Dandini invites the two daughters and Magnifico to his coach to travel to the ball, exiting just as Cinderella returns. Magnifico, highly impatient to be off, demands his hat and cane, becoming furious when Cinderella is slow to deliver them.

A quintet ensues, a major climactic point in this act, comprised of several sections, resembling a multi-movement instrumental work such as a sonata. The initial “movement” is a vigorous Allegro in ABA form: the outer sections are in C Major while the “B” section is in the dominant key of G.

This movement features Cinderella, Magnifico, Dandini and Ramiro. Cinderella begs Magnifico to take her to the ball with the other girls. Dandini returns, wondering why the invitees haven’t left yet. Magnifico, calling Cinderella a vulgar, lazy girl, threatens her with his cane. Ramiro privately fumes as the “prince” urges Magnifico not to mistreat her. Cinderella’s desperation to be included is expressed with highly florid vocal writing (Ex. 10):



Ex. 10

The second “movement” of the Quintet is in E flat major and marked “Moderato.” The change in character from lively virtuosity to a calmer effect signals the entrance of Alidoro, who bears a registry of all the eligible maidens in the city, according to which Don Magnifico should have three daughters. Thinking quickly, Magnifico claims the other daughter died. Cinderella starts to protest, but her stepfather snarls threats under his breath. This section has a march-like rhythmic character, ending softly as Magnifico feigns grief.

The third section, in binary form, modulates to the new key of A flat major. The action freezes for a few moments as each character sizes up how the others are reacting to the announcement of the third daughter’s “death.” Magnifico and Cinderella each sing a theme in the new key, after which the others join in, with all five voices singing together for the first time.

The fourth and final movement returns to the original key of C in a frenzied finale marked “Allegro vivace.” The virtuosity here features rapid patter rather than the elaborate melismas of Cinderella’s previous coloratura (Ex. 11):



Ex. 11

Magnifico redoubles his threats of violence to Cinderella should she try to reveal her identity while the other four react accordingly. During the frenetic orchestral postlude, Dandini leads Magnifico away with Ramiro in tow.

Alone with Cinderella, Alidoro promises that her situation will improve very shortly. She, taking in the rags he is wearing, is highly skeptical. In a virtuoso aria “Là del ciel nell’arcano

profondo” Alidoro calls on Cinderella to have faith that God will not permit someone with her goodness to die in distress (Ex. 12):



Ex. 12

The lengthy opening section, due to the religious tone of Alidoro’s advice, is highly dramatic, by far the most serious in tone of the entire score to this point. In its powerful rhetoric and gravitas, it foreshadows the dramatic style heard in dramas by Donizetti and even Verdi. On the other hand, the elaborate coloratura flourishes mark it as *echt* Rossini.

The concluding section of the aria (which is in through-composed three-part form), while not overtly comic, does allow the composer to adopt a more characteristically lively affect as Alidoro urges Cinderella to await her inevitable triumph with excitement and happiness. A reference to a “growing noise” allows Rossini an opportunity for one of his patented *crescendi*. Alidoro and Cinderella exit the house together.

The scene changes to a room in Prince Ramiro’s country home. Dandini, still disguised as the prince, enters with Clorinda and Tisbe on either arm; Ramiro, still in servant’s clothing, follows them in, accompanied by Magnifico.

Dandini, praising Magnifico’s evident expertise in wine, orders his courtiers to escort him to the royal wine cellar, promising to name him vintner if he can remain sober. Magnifico departs, instructing his step-daughters to keep His Highness happy. Dandini, privately marveling at Magnifico’s stupidity, imperiously dismisses his “valet,” leaving him alone with Clorinda and Tisbe. In an attempt to gain favor with the “prince,” each sister bad-mouths the other, pointing out each other’s flaws. Dandini takes each one aside in turn, confiding that she alone is his favorite.

Magnifico and the royal courtiers, having concluded a lengthy wine-tasting, have retired to a drawing room containing a table and writing materials. The prince’s men exude enthusiasm for the Baron’s ability to hold his wine as he has sampled thirty barrels with no ill effects. To Magnifico’s delight, they anoint him with several important-sounding titles: Vintner; Superintendent of goblets; President of grape harvests; and Director of bacchanalias.

Immensely proud, Magnifico begins dictating an official proclamation to be posted all over the city. Berating the courtiers if their penmanship displeases him, he proclaims that anyone who mixes a drop of water into a bottle of wine shall be subject to capital punishment. The courtiers leave to prepare a festive dinner at which copious amounts of wine will be consumed. This scene, labeled an aria for Magnifico, is actually a comic number for chorus with soloist as the courtiers sing continually. Magnifico’s vocal line has little melodic content, with repeated notes simulating the droning of his dictation while the orchestra plays the theme (Ex. 13):



Musical score for Ex. 13, featuring a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics: "Noi, Don Mag - fi - fi - co".

Ex. 13

The finale of Act 1 follows the model of Mozartian finales such as that to Act 2 of *Le Nozze di Figaro* in that it begins as a duet, gradually growing into a quartet, a sextet, and finally a septet with all principals on stage.

The duet involves Ramiro and Dandini, alone together for the first time, thus able to comment on the results of their scheme to this point (Ex. 14 - "Zitto, zitto, piano piano"). Dandini reports that Clorinda and Tisbe are equally capricious and vain. When Ramiro recalls Alidoro's mention of a suitable daughter, Dandini scoffs.



Musical score for Ex. 14, featuring a vocal line with the lyrics: "Zit-to, zit-to, pia-no, pia-no: sen-za stre - pi - to'e - ru - mo-re;".

Ex. 14

The duet's brevity, breakneck pace and sotto voce dynamic recall another aspect of the finale of *Figaro's* second act: the frantic whispered duet between Susanna and Cherubino as the latter escapes from the Countess's boudoir.

Duet expands into trio as the two sisters enter, searching for the "prince." Dandini declares that, since he can only marry one bride, the one not chosen he will give to his "valet," pointing to Ramiro. Clorinda and Tisbe recoil in horror, despite Ramiro's promise to be a good husband.

The voices of the courtiers are heard as they welcome an unknown visitor. Alidoro enters, announcing that a veiled woman has arrived incognito; this inspires intense curiosity from everyone. Alidoro ushers in Cinderella, dressed in elegant fashion with a veil covering her face.

The quartet has become a sextet, introduced by the chorus of courtiers hailing the stranger's mysterious beauty. There follow solo statements from:

- Cinderella, now speaking with new boldness and confidence, expressing disdain for physical beauty and her desire for a respectful and kind bridegroom;
- Ramiro, who privately muses that he recognizes that voice; and
- Dandini, who bids the stranger to lift her veil and reveal herself.

The main body of the sextet begins in the form of a G major theme with variations in moderate tempo as each character, expressing confusion and trepidation, sings a version of the theme, first stated by Clorinda (Ex. 15):



Ex. 15

Ramiro, Cinderella and Dandini follow with their own versions of the theme (half of which is shown above), each version embellished with unique figurations. During Dandini's statement, the other six characters sing along in homophonic harmony.

The moment of contemplation is broken by Magnifico, turning the ensemble into a septet as he bursts in with a vigorous orchestral Allegro in B flat major. Magnifico begins to announce that dinner is served, but the sight of the beautiful newcomer reduces him to sputtering bewilderment, remarking in confusion that she bears a striking resemblance to Cinderella. Dandini changes the subject by suggesting they all enjoy themselves at dinner. Before exiting, however, the finale ends with a return of the final theme from the overture (see Ex. 3 above); all characters wonder, with varying degrees of hope or dread, what the evening will bring.

The text for this passage is tailor-made for a Rossinian crescendo: at first speaking of babbling brooks and chirping birds, the characters go on to imagine an earthquake with "smashing and roaring", imagery that begs for growing sonority and a fortissimo climax.

Act 2: A room in Ramiro's house, later that same evening.

Magnifico, Clorinda and Tisbe overhear the prince's courtiers chuckling at the presumption of the two girls in assuming Ramiro would wed either of them, especially in the light of the mysterious newcomer. The three of them discuss the stranger's remarkable likeness to Cinderella. Magnifico is stunned to think that his lowly step-daughter not only obtained a fine gown, but had the courage to come to the prince's home; to speak so articulately; and to behave with such poise. He worries what might happen if it were discovered that he has squandered Cinderella's inheritance in order to support his daughters. Clorinda and Tisbe, though fearful that Ramiro will snub them, still hold hope, remembering how Dandini, as the "prince," had previously flattered them. Magnifico replies that he yet has faith in them, confessing that the stakes are high: he is deeply in debt, with no hope of re-marrying unless his fortunes change.

In the aria “Sia qualunque delle figlie,” Magnifico begs whichever of his daughters ascends the throne not to abandon him. Imagining what life would be like once he was father to a princess, Magnifico indulges in a fantasy: everyone in town, wanting him to put in a good word for them, will shower him with chocolate, pastry, candy and, best of all, money. He’ll sleep until noon and be waited on hand and foot. In fact, imagining he’ll get no peace from the constant bribes, he ends by ordering all the imaginary supplicants to leave him alone. Having roused himself into a state of irritation, he exits.

This is Magnifico’s most virtuosic solo yet; the rapid patter exceeds all previous examples in length and speed. The opening section, on the other hand, contains one of Rossini’s jauntiest melodic inspirations (Ex. 16):



Ex. 16

Ramiro enters alone, thinking amorously of the mysterious woman; even Dandini, he remarks, seems taken with her. Cinderella, still incognito, hurries in, followed by Dandini. Ramiro conceals himself to overhear their conversation. Dandini’s attempts to tell the stranger that he loves her are rebuffed as she confesses to the “prince” that she’s in love with his valet. At this, Ramiro shows himself, asking if she’ll be his alone. In reply, Cinderella bids him to take some time to get to discover who she is and get to know her better. Forbidding Ramiro to follow her home, she gives him a bracelet. He’ll know he’s found her when he finds the woman who wears a matching bracelet. She leaves.

Ramiro, bewildered at this turn of events, asks Alidoro (who has been observing their interaction with approval) what he should do; the tutor advises him to follow his heart. At this, Ramiro informs Dandini that he is no longer a prince, ordering him to get Magnifico and his daughters out of the palace and calling for a carriage.

In the aria “Sì, ritrovarlo io guiro.” Ramiro vows to do whatever it takes to find the anonymous woman again. The aria is in through-composed ternary form, remaining in C major throughout, with the chorus of courtiers joining in during the final two sections. The opening Allegro establishes an energetic vocal line in keeping with Ramiro’s determined attitude (Ex. 17):



Ex. 17

The aria calls for no fewer than six high C’s in addition to a great deal of agility.

Upon the departure of Ramiro and his followers, Alidoro enters quietly, satisfied that his wishes for Ramiro are almost fulfilled, then quickly exits.

Dandini enters, unhappy that his short-lived tenure as “prince” has ended unceremoniously. Magnifico, spotting Dandini, rushes in, demanding that the “prince” reveal his choice of bride. In a comic duet (“Un segreto d’importanza”, Ex. 18), Dandini teases the old fool, repeatedly stressing the need to keep the news secret until Magnifico is ready to burst from impatience.



Ex. 18

Highly amused, Dandini asks what Magnifico would expect should he, the “prince”, marry one of the sisters; the latter responds with a lengthy list of luxuries: horses, fine dinners, fancy carriages and the like. At this, Dandini reveals the hoax: that he and Ramiro have switched identities and he is in reality a valet whose duties include making beds and dressing hair.

Dumbfounded, Magnifico demands an explanation from the real prince; Dandini orders him out of the palace at once. An argument ensues in which the opening theme (Ex. 18 above) is restated in rapid 6/8 meter.

Alidoro returns, noting that the impending thunderstorm will aid his plans; he has arranged for Ramiro’s carriage to break down in front of Magnifico’s palace.

The scene returns to the Baron’s home. Cinderella, wearing threadbare clothing again, sings her gentle song of the king who married for love (Ex. 4 above), then reflects on her preference for the humble young “valet” over the simpering “prince”; she also marvels at the reaction of her step-sisters to her appearance at Ramiro’s palace.

Magnifico, Clorinda and Tisbe enter, just returning home. They all comment on Cinderella’s remarkable resemblance to the beautiful stranger. Two sounds are heard from outside: a clap of thunder presaging an impending storm; and the crash of a carriage overturning. Magnifico, still angry about his encounter with Dandini, orders Cinderella to prepare some food.

At this point, an orchestral interlude depicts the storm, with instrumental effects simulating sheets of rain and lightning bolts. A similar storm intermezzo was a successful element of // *Barbieri di Siviglia*; Rossini was happy to insert a similar device into this work as well.

Dandini enters, explaining about the carriage accident, with Ramiro (now in royal garb) following. Magnifico’s mood brightens; he is certain the prince is here to select one of his daughters. He shouts for Cinderella to bring a chair for His Highness.

When Cinderella enters bearing a chair, the sight of the man she loves dressed as a prince flusters her. At the same moment, Ramiro, recognizing her bracelet as the object of his search, cries out joyously that he has found the mysterious beauty.

This pronouncement causes all the others to freeze in disbelief and shock. Ramiro's revelation triggers a lengthy sextet, a highlight of the score. ("Siete voi? Voi prence siete?") As with the Act 1 quintet, this ensemble is a multi-movement piece structured like an instrumental work with contrasting keys, tempi and affects as the characters process their evolving emotional reactions.

The quintet begins with a slow introduction in E flat major marked "Maestoso." Cinderella and her family members, all greatly befuddled, stammer out halting questions as Ramiro commands Magnifico to be silent. The introduction is followed by an imitative passage in quasi-fugal style in which all characters sing in a halting, quasi-mechanical staccato as if they are all so stunned they can barely enunciate their thoughts. The theme is first sung by Dandini (Ex. 19):



Ex. 19

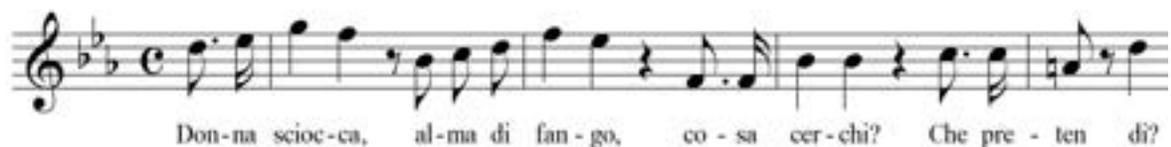
This subject is stated in turn by Ramiro in the tonic, followed by Cinderella and Magnifico in the dominant key of B flat. Though the contrapuntal texture and imitative entrances suggest a fugue, the rest of this section merely proceeds in four-part homophony until Clorinda and Tisbe introduce a counter-theme, still in E flat (Ex. 19a):



Ex.19a

For the duration of this opening section, short bursts of coloratura melismas are tossed about from one character to another while the other five continue their halting staccatos. All six are singing the same text, in which they reflect that the situation has become very complicated. The passage beginning from Ex. 19 to the final cadence of this section is repeated.

Angry outbursts from the step-sisters begin a new movement of the sextet, marked “Allegro”. It begins with three statements of a new theme, sung first by Clorinda (Ex. 20) in which she scolds Cinderella for her presumptuousness:



Ex. 20

Magnifico repeats the theme in the key of E flat, rudely ordering his stepdaughter to the kitchen. Now Ramiro states the theme, this time in A flat, warning the other two to watch their tongues. Dandini, looking on, remarks in an aside that everything is unfolding as he knew it would. This movement closes with an orchestral cadence in G major.

The third movement establishes a calmer mood. Cinderella, introducing a new theme in G, implores the prince to have pity on her foolish family so that “goodness may triumph” (Ex. 21):



Ex. 21

Ramiro and Dandini are impressed by her generous spirit, but Clorinda and Tisbe snidely accuse her of being a hypocrite. Taking command of the situation, Ramiro at last announces his choice of bride: he will marry Cinderella.

A transitional section setting up the sextet’s finale, marked “Allegro,” begins with Cinderella’s family reacting to this news; at first laughing it off as a joke, they quickly turn to confusion and resentment. Dandini marvels that Ramiro has handled everything with great skill in a passage that brings the tonality back to the original key of E flat.

The finale of the sextet, marked “Vivace,” begins with Ramiro gently ordering Cinderella to ascend to her throne. She turns to her family to ask their blessing, but is curtly rebuffed. Unperturbed, Cinderella expresses her happiness while Ramiro comments on the pettiness of her stepsisters (Ex. 22):



CLOR
 Quel - lo - bron-to - la'e bor - bot-ta,

TIS
 Quel - lo - bron-to - la'e bor - bot-ta,

CIN
 Do - ve - son! Che'in-can to è ques-to?

RAM
 Quel-lo - fre - me,-ques-to - fiot - to,

Ex. 22

Tisbe and Clorinda are inclined to continue their disparagement of Cinderella when Alidoro, no longer dressed as a beggar enters with a stern message for them and their father. Chiding them for their indifference when he asked for alms, he confirms that “Angelina”, the one who showed him kindness, is destined for the throne. A further revelation is provided when Alidoro points out that Magnifico stole his stepdaughter’s inheritance, warning that if the family does not change their ways, the debt will be repaid by putting all their belongings up to public auction.

This news hits Clorinda particularly hard, prompting her to vent her disappointment in the aria “Sventurata! Mi credea,” clearly intended as a spoof of one of opera’s most common tropes: a prima donna (or, in this case, a would-be *prima donna*) exuding heartbreak at feeling *abbandono*, or abandoned.

The model for this aria (not written by Rossini, as will be discussed below) appears to be Mozart, particularly Countess Almaviva’s “Dove sono” from *Le Nozze di Figaro*. The orchestration, both in sonority and evocation of the galant style of early Viennese classical composers, combined with Clorinda’s mock-tragic vocal line, certainly bring Mozart to mind (Ex. 23):



Ex. 23

This outpouring of genteel suffering of the soul is followed by an animated Allegro conclusion. Her dreams of life as a princess gone, Clorinda vows to find herself a husband.

The aria is calculated to make the audience understand that, while Clorinda may take her disappointment seriously, we should not. There is satire not only aimed at the character's exaggerated self-pity, but gentle satire of operatic styles of the past as well.

For her part, Tisbe is more resigned to a humble fate. All save Alidoro exit; he exults in the triumph of the plans he made for Ramiro, his beloved pupil.

The final scene takes place at the throne room of Prince Ramiro's palace where the newly-married couple is holding court, with Dandini, the royal courtiers, and Cinderella's family in attendance. Magnifico, in an effect of extreme humility, kneels before the princess, calling her "Your Highness", but Cinderella responds she would prefer that he call her his daughter. Ramiro still harbors misgivings about the family, but his bride begs him to let bygones be bygones, stating that past wrongs should be forgotten.

The opera concludes with a grand solo for Cinderella in the form of the expressive aria "Nacqui all'affano" and the brilliantly virtuosic aria with chorus "Non più mesta." The fact that the title character has no substantive solos until the final moments of the drama is a definite departure from conventional operatic procedures.

"Nacqui nell'affano" is a heartfelt Andante in E major, the first appearance of this key in the opera. Describing how, until this happy day, her heart suffered in silence, Cinderella expresses herself with new-found poise and dignity, befitting a royal bride. Her self-assurance is made manifest in a vocal line of expansive coloratura (Ex.24):



Ex. 24

Clorinda and Tisbe are moved to display genuine remorse, prompting Cinderella to conclude the solo with an animated theme in contrasting meter in which she promises to include her family in her new life (Ex. 25):



Ex. 25

A brief choral transition in which all the onlookers shower her with praise prompts the final number of the opera: “Non più mesta.” An aria with chorus, it takes the form of theme and variations with each variation more brilliant and virtuosic than the last. The theme (Ex. 26) exhibits a light-hearted joyous nature, thus providing the “happily ever after” ending every fairy tale needs - even versions that omit the fairy.



Ex. 25

About the Composer

Composer, gourmand, man-about-town, ladies' man, host of impeccable artistic salons, bon vivant, notable wit – the life of Gioachino Antonio Rossini (1792-1868) encompassed all these personas and more. Easily the dominant figure of the *bel canto* school of Italian opera in the early nineteenth century, his works not only earned him a fortune, but exerted influence on succeeding generations of operatic masters including Donizetti, Bellini, Verdi and even Puccini, whose *Gianni Schicchi* extends Rossinian wit into the next century.

Rossini was born to a hard-working but poor family in Pesaro on the Adriatic coast of Italy. His musical talent, evident from early childhood, was likely inherited from both parents. His father played brass instruments while his mother, though she lacked vocal training, spent a few years singing comic opera with some success.

His youth and education followed the pattern often seen in the lives of prominent composers: that of the gifted child who accomplishes much early in life. Serious composition began at age twelve with a collection of six instrumental sonatas. A local instructor with a good library introduced Rossini to the works of Haydn and Mozart, music that remained a lifelong influence. Admitted to a conservatory in Bologna at fourteen, Rossini excelled despite his notorious lack of discipline. Satisfied he was ready to make his way in the music world at sixteen, he quickly became a respected figure as keyboardist, vocalist and *répétiteur* in local theaters.

These skills led the tenor Domenico Mombelli to invite Rossini to set a libretto written by his wife, Vincenzina Viganò. The novice composer, now aged eighteen, began work in 1810 on the opera, entitled *Demetrio e Polibio*. It was staged in 1812; never again would there be such an interval of time between commission and performance.

His serious pursuit of a career in composition began in Venice, an important center of opera in Northern Italy. Successes with short operas at small theaters quickly led to opportunities at the important houses of La Scala in Milan (where *La pietra del paragone* enjoyed a long and profitable run in 1812) and La Fenice in Venice (where *Tancredi*, the earliest of his operas still performed today), made him an international success in 1813).

Despite a few failures along the way, the composer was able to parlay his growing reputation into an appointment as Director of Royal Theaters in Naples. The stability and resources this position afforded began one of Rossini's most fruitful periods. *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra* was well received; the public was unaware of the extent to which the score consisted of carefully-selected borrowings from his previous operas. Rossini was always happy to re-cycle musical material from one work to another.

A pivotal moment in Rossini's career was brought about as the result of a daring, seemingly foolhardy decision: a new setting of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* in 1816. Based on the first play in the "Figaro trilogy" by Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, Rossini's version was seen in many quarters as disrespectful to Giovanni Paisiello (1740-1816), the revered composer of no fewer than ninety-six operas. His *Il barbiere di Siviglia* had been a beloved favorite for over three decades. Despite a catastrophic opening night in Rome due to stage mishaps and a strong pro-Paisiello faction in attendance, Rossini's combination of musical wit,

melodic facility, sparkling vocal writing and colorful orchestration soon launched *Il barbiere* on a journey of success that continues to this day.

When Rossini sensed that Naples had tired of his style, an opportunity to begin a new professional chapter arose. Political unrest in Naples compelled the Teatro San Carlo to travel to Vienna. In Vienna Rossini quickly ascended to a level of acclaim and rapturous appreciation comparable to that later bestowed on Johann Strauss Jr.. Vienna also broadened his musical horizons: hearing a performance of Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony, Rossini called on the composer for a meeting that has become legendary in music history. Neither the language barrier nor Beethoven's deafness prevented a respectful dialogue; Beethoven professed his admiration for *Il barbiere*, reportedly advising Rossini to remain focused on comedy rather than drama.

While en route to Vienna, Rossini took a big step in his personal life, marrying the soprano Isabella Colbran, the latest and most serious of the composer's many love affairs. He had written several roles for Colbran, an important artist.

A decline in Rossini's mercurial career began as early as 1823. *Semiramide*, a tragedy adapted from Voltaire, premiered at La Fenice, starring Colbran in the title role. Though a great success, the opera marked a turning point for husband and wife. Colbran's voice had degraded to the extent that she was forced into retirement; as for Rossini, he never again wrote for an Italian theater. From this point on, their marriage devolved steadily until the composer came to resent her.

Paris became his new base of operations by the mid-1820's, thanks to a lucrative contract from Louis XVIII calling for the creation of new works as well as administrative duties at the Théâtre-Italien. A number of works composed to mostly French-language libretti culminated in 1832 with the final opera of his career, the epic *Guillaume Tell*, known today mostly for its iconic overture. For all practical purposes, Gioachino Rossini was now in permanent retirement at age thirty-nine.

For a long period of time it was generally believed that this retirement, dubbed "the Great Renunciation" by the critic Francis Toye, was simply a manifestation of Rossini's wealth and reputation for laziness and the pursuit of pleasure. Continuing research, however, has revealed that this period of inactivity resulted from a complex web of circumstances. These include

- Rossini's sense in the mid 1800's that his style was becoming outdated in comparison to that of newer composers like Meyerbeer, Berlioz and Verdi;
- The death of his mother in 1827, a traumatic event in his life;
- The dissolution of his relationship with Colbran, whom he abandoned in 1830; and, perhaps most of all,
- A succession of severe health crises, both physical and mental, that kept him bedridden for a number of years.

During his recovery from various ailments Rossini was nursed by Olympe Pélissier, the new love interest in his life. They married in 1846; by 1855 they moved to Paris to give Rossini access to the superior medical care available there. Paris remained their home for the rest of his life.

It was in Paris that Rossini returned to musical composition, though never again for the stage. Though less well-known than *Il barbiere di Siviglia* or *La Cenerentola*, the body of works he created in his leisure time reveal that his mastery of technique remained as strong as ever. These pieces, many of which he referred to as “sins of my old age,” began appearing in private performances around 1857; they include works for piano, songs for voice and piano, and a number of chamber works both instrumental and vocal – some one hundred fifty in all.

The usual venue for these works were the salons presented on a regular basis by Rossini and Olympe. Over time, these private concerts increased in prestige until everyone who was anyone in the Paris community of arts and letters wanted to be invited. Attendees included such giants as pianists Franz Liszt and Anton Rubinstein, composers such as Gounod and Verdi, and the violinists Pablo de Sarasate and Joseph Joachim. Another notable visitor to call upon Rossini during this period was none other than Richard Wagner; his conversation with Rossini was as mutually respectful as the earlier dialogue with Beethoven – this despite Rossini’s famous barb about the German master, roughly translated as “Wagner’s music has beautiful moments but horrible quarter-hours.” Another example of his celebrated wit occurred following an unlucky soprano’s performance of an aria from a Rossini opera at one of the salons. The performer distorted the vocal line with so many unwritten ornaments that when she had finished, Rossini clapped politely and wryly inquired, with mock curiosity, as to who had composed it.

Another work dating from these final years in Paris is a choral work considered one of Rossini’s finest: the *Petit messe solennele* (1864).

Gioachino Rossini passed away from cancer at the age of seventy-six, the composer of thirty-nine operas, several of which will remain in the standard repertoire indefinitely.

Historical background

La Cenerentola, better known to English-speakers as *Cinderella*, was the twentieth of Gioachino Rossini's thirty-nine operas and may be the only opera in music history in which police action was required to compel its creation.

The year 1816 saw Rossini juggling several assignments in a particularly hectic period of his burgeoning musical career. Projects included a revival of *L'italiana in Algeri* in January; the premiere of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* in February; a new cantata in April; and two more new operas in September and December. All this required frequent commuting between Naples, where he was entrenched as Director of Royal Theaters, and Rome, where impresarios were anxious to reap the rewards of his rising box-office appeal.

The impresario Pietro Cartoni asked Rossini for an opera to open the Carnival season in Rome at the Teatro Valle on December 26 1816. Rossini gladly signed a contract, the terms of which were to pay him a fee of five hundred *scudi*, a sum equaling roughly \$30,000 today.

As time passed, several complications arose. The composer was expected to report to Rome in October to meet with Cartoni and begin work in earnest. But delays resulting from his over-crowded schedule pushed the start-up date to December 3; this caused the new opera to be moved from the first production of the season to the second. Even December 3 proved impossible as it conflicted with the premiere of Rossini's *Otello* on December 4.

A second snag involved a complete rejection of the original subject and librettist chosen. The new opera was originally to be called *Laurina alla corte*, with a libretto by Gaetano Rossi, who had previously supplied the libretto for *Tancredi*. At first, Rossini appeared pleased with the drafts he received from Rossi, expressing praise for its theatricality in a November letter to Cartoni.

From that point on, however, Rossini went incommunicado, doubtless giving Cartoni sleepless nights with Carnival approaching and his star composer possibly having lost interest. This is when the impresario requested that the General Director of the Naples police force Rossini to comply with his contractual obligations. At last, he made his way to Rome, ready to work. By now, however, Rossi was no longer available; a new poet had to be engaged quickly - the window of time for readying the new project had shrunk dramatically. Jacopo Ferretti (1784-1852), a Roman dramatist who would later supply five libretti for Gaetano Donizetti, was quickly brought on board. Ironically, Rossi had originally been hired for the project that became *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, only to have Rossini replace him with Cesare Sterbini. If their history produced any awkwardness between them, there is no record of it; most likely, such doings were commonplace in the helter-skelter world of Italian Opera in the early 1800's.

Yet again, things did not proceed smoothly. The draft of *Laurina alla corte*, now tentatively titled *Ninetta alla corte*, ran afoul of the censors. After fruitless attempts to avoid censorship without drastically altering the story, *Ninetta* was abandoned. Cartoni now had a composer and librettist, but no subject, with the Carnival clock tick-tocking ominously.

The decision to proceed with the familiar story of Cinderella, suggested by Ferretti, was happily endorsed by Rossini. While the librettist may have attempted to credit this idea to his poet's imagination, circumstances make it plain that this was an example of seizing on a subject already proven to be stage-worthy. In fact, there had been three operatic versions of the fairy-tale originally written by Charles Perrault (1628-1703), the most recent being *Agatina, o La Virtù premiata* by Stefano Pavesi (1779-1859), staged at La Scala in 1814 and still in demand. (Pavesi was the composer of sixty-six operas, all long since banished to obscurity.) *Agatina's* libretto is by Marco Mauceri.

To say that Ferretti plagiarized *Agatina* is technically true, but the concept of "intellectual property" as we understand it today was unknown during this period in the history of music and literature. Mauceri himself had based *Agatina* on Etienne's *Cendrillon*, first heard in 1810. Any successful opera was likely to spawn a few imitators. It is also true that Ferretti, while retaining the structure and plot points of the previous version, injected his libretto with more of the comic element.

Now the last remaining problem to be solved was that of meeting deadlines if there were any hope of providing singers enough time to learn and rehearse their roles. Fortunately, Gioachino Rossini's methods in composition were conducive to high-speed productivity; the composition of *La Cenerentola* was thus completed in an astonishing twenty-four days. Several factors were at work to permit such a pace. These include:

- Self-borrowings. Rossini's willingness, mentioned above, to recycle music composed for previous operas into a new project. This was especially true if the material had first appeared in a failed opera; the composer was loath to leave quality musical ideas consigned to works that would not likely be heard again. In *La Cenerentola* his self-borrowings consist of the overture, originally written for *La Gazzetta*, the opera that premiered just months before in September; and Cinderella's cabaletta "Non più mesta." The latter had been discarded as a planned solo for Count Almaviva in *Il barbiere*.
- Outsourcing. Even for compositions not under such extreme time pressure, it was not uncommon for Rossini to ask other composers to provide minor pieces in the score. Indeed, this was a fairly common practice during this period of opera history. In the case of *La Cenerentola* Roman composer Luca Agolini contributed three items: 1) all of the secco recitative, or sung dialogue with continuo accompaniment; 2) an aria for Alidoro entitled "Vasto teatro è il mondo"; and 3) Clorinda's aria "Sventurata! Mi credea." Since both Alidoro and Clorinda are secondary characters, it was considered appropriate not to bother the primary composer with their creation. Both arias fall into the category of *arie di sorbetto*, or "sherbet arias." Italian audiences did not listen to performances with the reverent silence expected in modern opera houses; there was a good deal of conversation, eating and drinking, much as at a modern sporting event. Arias were given to minor characters with the understanding that vendors would stroll through the theater selling snacks - a cup of sherbet being a likely example. Also coming into play:
- Rossini's formulaic approach to composition. Any music lover who has heard several of Rossini's overtures quickly grasps that they are remarkably similar not only in structure but in types of musical materials. This is because Rossini seldom varied his basic technique, whether in choral passages, orchestral passages, vocal writing, chord progressions and orchestral sonorities. As one examines the music closely, it

becomes apparent how nearly abstract it is; that is, unlike Donizetti, Verdi, and even predecessors like Mozart, Rossini did not consider the job of music to characterize human psychology or affect, or to depict dramatic situations. With few exceptions he left the expressive burden to the genius of the singers. When asked what was required to create great opera, Rossini famously replied: “Three things – voice, voice and voice”. This attitude allowed him to manufacture attractive music without belaboring differences in character. This also accounts for the very qualities in his music that allowed them to be easily transferred from one opera to another.

NOTE: regarding the *ariette di sorbetto* phenomenon, Rossini eventually discarded Agolini’s aria for Alidoro, replacing it “Là del ciel nell’arcano profondo” (see Ex. 12 above). This was made necessary when a particularly distinguished singer took on the role in a revival, thus warranting a solo from Rossini himself.

La Cenerentola has in common with *Il barbiere di Siviglia* the fate of an unsuccessful first performance immediately followed by enthusiastic acclaim. The difficult first night was clearly due to the singers, victims of the last-minute creation of the opera, having had little time to properly prepare their roles, leaving them exhausted.

Librettist Ferritti described the unfortunate opening night in his memoirs:

“Except for the *maestro*, ... all those taking part in the performance of the melodrama on that fatal first night had rapid pulses and the sweat of death dripping from their pallid foreheads.

And solemn reasons existed for that fever and that icy rain. What was being presented was an opera difficult of musical execution and a drama not largely understood. But the Carnival was short and the impresario’s interests required it thus. To be feared was a cabal by all the acerb and immature little maestri and all the semi-retired little maestri, who hated the new maestro to death, like pygmies at war with the sun.

On that first, extremely stormy evening, nothing escaped the shipwreck but the largo and stretta of the quintet, the final rondo, and the sublime largo of the sextet; the rest went by unobserved, and here and there even whistled at. But Rossini, not having forgotten the temporary downfall of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and being conscious of the magic with which he had largely infused *La Cenerentola*, bewildered and saddened by that fiasco, said to me: ‘Fools! Before Carnival ends, everyone will be enamored of it... Not a year will pass before it will be sung from the Lilbeo to the Dora, and within two years it will please in France and be considered a marvel in England. It will be fought over by impresarios, and even more by prime donne.’”

He was as good a prophet as composer in this case. *La Cenerentola* had a successful run of twenty performances during that Carnevale season, soon conquering other operatic capitals as well.

La Cenerentola differs from Perrault’s original fairy tale in significant ways, just as with the operas on which it was modeled. Many of these changes were to make the material conform to the conventions of *opera buffa* and the traditions of *commedia del’arte*. The evil stepmother of the original is replaced by Don Magnifico who, though cruel to Cinderella, is more of a bumbling fool. This would have been an automatic casting change in a *bel canto*

comedy, both to provide more balance of male and female characters as well as supplying the expected basso buffo role.

Another contrast is the absence of the magic or supernatural element. There is no fairy godmother, no magic wand, no magic transformation of Cinderella into a gown in front of our eyes, no pumpkin turning into a coach, and so on. This is interesting in showing how Rossini, though living and working in the early Romantic period of music history, nonetheless remained apart from it. Magic was soon to become a standard element in opera in works like Carl Maria von Weber's *Der Freischütz*. Some say that Italian opera houses lacked the technical resources to execute special effects, which is another consideration. The character of the fairy godmother is replaced by the philosopher/tutor Alidoro. This could well have been decided to give the opera a character similar to Don Basilio in *Il barbiere* - a stentorian basso profondo to complement the comic bass of Magnifico.

Finally, the substitution of a bracelet for the original glass slipper was a concession to the censors in Rome. Retaining the slipper would have required a scene in which the female performer would display a bare foot and ankle in public - this would have created a moral scandal in Rome, the seat of Christendom.

A final operatic adaptation of the Cinderella story appeared in 1899 with *Cendrillon* by Jules Massenet (1842-1912) the composer of *Manon*, *Werther*, *Thaïs* and others. This opera restores the elements of the fairy godmother and the glass slipper. While less popular than either *Manon* or *Werther*, it has many admirers and has been revived in recent years.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Preface

Cinderella was written in Italian. The Virginia Opera will perform *Cinderella* in the original language, Italian, but an English translation will be projected on a screen above the stage. With these captions, audiences can experience the beauty of opera in the original language, yet still understand the meaning of all that is being sung.

Objectives

1. To understand how opera, as an art form, reflects and comments on society and the world in which we live.
2. To develop an awareness of how the study of certain art forms such as opera can communicate ideas of the past and present.
3. To develop a basic understanding of what opera is. Students should be able to identify the many elements (musical, visual, and dramatic) of an opera and understand how they work together to produce a unified, exciting, and emotional work.
4. To understand the process of adapting a story for the stage; what changes need to be made and why. Incorporated in this objective is a basic understanding of what makes a good opera.
5. To know the basic plot/story line of *Cinderella*.
6. To understand how music serves as a mode of communication in opera and the effect music has on characteristics and mood.
7. To develop some sense of appreciation for opera as a timeless art form that brings real characters, emotions, and situations to life.
8. To understand the working relationship between words and music in an opera. Students should understand how a composer and librettist work together to create significant, dramatic, and unified meaning.

What is opera anyway?

- An opera is a musical drama or comedy where the actors *sing* rather than speak their lines. Today opera singers are often referred to as “singing actors.”
- The word “opera” is the plural form of the Latin word *opus*, which means “a work of art”. We use the plural form because of the many different art forms that combine to create an operatic performance like singing, dancing, orchestral music, visual arts, acting, and more.
- An opera tells a story. It can come from many sources, including history, current events, religious texts, fairy tales, legends, literature, poetry, and mythology. Opera can be funny, scary, sad, dramatic, mysterious, imaginary, or a combination of all these things. Opera has something for everyone!

Opera is not alone!

Opera is not the only type of classical vocal music. The other genres of classical vocal music, which use an operatic style of singing, are:

- Oratorio
- Cantata
- Art song
- Chamber vocal music
- Orchestral song

An oratorio is a lot like an opera. It tells a story through song and is a large work comprised of solo arias, duets, trios, ensembles, etc., all accompanied by an orchestra. Unlike opera however, the stories for oratorios tend to stem from sacred (religious) sources, and there are no sets, props, or costumes. The choir generally plays an important role, and there is little interaction between the characters.

A cantata is effectively a short oratorio, but it can also be secular. For example, the famous composer Johann Sebastian Bach wrote a comic cantata about being addicted to coffee, appropriately entitled the *Coffee Cantata*.

Art songs are musical settings of poems or other shorter texts for solo voice and piano that are not part of a staged work but performed instead in a concert or recital. Folksongs, spirituals, and other traditional songs are generally not considered art songs since they stem more from the popular music tradition than classical; however, if a composer arranges such a traditional song as a concert piece for voice and piano, it may be considered an art song. A group of art songs intended to be performed together as a set is called a song cycle.

A similar work written for solo voice (or a small group of singers) and an instrument(s) other than piano is referred to as chamber vocal music. Songs that were originally written for voice with orchestral accompaniment are called orchestral songs.

Opera terms

Act - the main sections of a play or opera

Aria - a song sung by only one person

Bass - the lowest male singing voice

Baritone - the middle range male singing voice, between tenor and bass

Blocking - the actors' movements on stage, determined during rehearsals by the stage director

Character - the people in a story, also called a role or part

Chorus - a group of singers who function as a unit onstage, representing townspeople, crowds, etc.

Composer - a person who writes music

Conductor - the person who leads the orchestra and is in charge of the musical interpretation of an opera

Contralto - the lowest female voice

Costume - the clothing a singer wears to portray a character

Crew - group of people who operate behind the scenes, controlling the curtain, changing scenery, managing props, running sound effects, and more

Duet - a song sung by 2 performers

Ensemble - a musical passage sung by multiple characters, usually occurs at pivotal points in the drama or at the end of an act

Libretto - literally means "little book" in Italian, the words to an opera

Librettist - the person who writes the words to an opera (the libretto)

Melody - a musically satisfying sequence of single notes

Mezzo-soprano - the middle range female singing voice, between soprano and contralto

Orchestra - a group of musicians who play together on various musical instruments

Overture - the piece of music played by the orchestra at the beginning of an opera, often introduces music that will be heard later in the opera and sets the emotional tone for the audience

Prop - an object used or brought onstage by the performers

Quartet - a song sung by 4 performers

Recitative - words that are sung in the rhythm of natural speech, similar to rap, and propel the story's action forward

Rehearsal - time when performers practice before a show, either with piano or the full orchestra

Scene - segment of action within an act

Score - written form of a musical composition, containing all instrumental and voice parts as well as any words

Set - the scenery on stage which indicates where the action takes place

Solo - only one voice singing at a time

Soprano - the highest female voice

Stage Director - the person who tells the performers where and how to move on stage and who determines the story's interpretation and overall look or concept

Supertitles - the meaning, in English, of the words in an opera projected on a small screen above the stage

Tempo - the speed at which music is performed

Tenor - the highest male voice

Trio - a song sung by 3 performers

Vibrato - a naturally pulsating tone that wavers from slightly above to slightly below the actual musical pitch and has a rich, emotional quality

Where did opera come from?

Opera as an art form began with the inclusion of incidental music that was performed during the tragedies and comedies popular during ancient Greek times. The tradition of including music as an integral part of theatrical activities expanded in the Roman Empire and continued throughout the Middle Ages. Surviving examples of liturgical dramas and vernacular plays from the Medieval times show the use of music as an insignificant part of the action as do the vast mystery and morality plays of the 15th and 16th centuries.

Traditional view holds that the first completely sung musical drama (now recognized as opera) developed as a result of discussions held in Florence in the 1570s. An informal group of men, known as the Florentine Camerata, routinely got together to talk about music and the arts, and their meetings led to the musical setting of Rinuccini's drama, *Dafne*, by composer Jacopo Peri in 1597. The work of such early Italian masters as Giulio Caccini and Claudio Monteverdi led to the development of a through-composed musical entertainment comprised of recitative sections which revealed the plot of the drama, followed by da capo arias which provided the soloist an opportunity to develop the emotions of the character. The function of the chorus in these early works mirrored the choruses found in Greek drama.

The new musical "form" was greeted favorably by the public and quickly became a popular source of entertainment. Opera has since flourished throughout the world as a vehicle for the expression of the full range of human emotions.

Italians claim the art form as their own, retaining dominance in the field through the death of famed composer Giacomo Puccini in 1924. Other Italian composers Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, and Leoncavallo developed the art form through clearly defined periods that produced opera buffa, opera seria, bel canto, and verismo. The Austrian composer Mozart also wrote operas in Italian and championed the singspiel (sing play), which combined the spoken word with music, a form also used by Beethoven in his only opera, *Fidelio*. Bizet (*Carmen*), Offenbach (*Les Contes d'Hoffmann*), Gounod (*Faust*), and Meyerbeer (*Les Huguenots*) led adaptations by the French which ranged from opera comique to the grand, full-scale tragedie lyrique. German composers von Weber (*Der Freischütz*), Richard Strauss (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), and Wagner (*Der Ring des Nibelungen*) developed diverse forms from singspiel to through-composed spectacles unified through the use of the leitmotif. The English ballad opera, Spanish zarzuela, and Viennese operetta helped further establish opera as a form of entertainment throughout the world.

With the beginning of the 20th century, composers in America diverged from European traditions in order to focus on their own roots while exploring and developing the vast body of the country's folk music and legends. Composers such as Aaron Copland, Douglas Moore, Carlisle Floyd, Howard Hanson, and Robert Ward have all crafted operas that have been presented throughout the world to great success. Today, composers John Adams, Philip Glass, John Corigliano, and Ricky Ian Gordon enjoy success both at home and abroad and

are credited with the infusion of new life into an aging art form, which continues to evolve even as it approaches its fifth century.

Why do opera singers sound like that?

Singing in an opera is completely different from singing popular music, or what you hear on the radio. The style of singing in classical music developed along with the operatic art form, so people have been singing this way for hundreds of years. Some characteristics of a classical, or operatic, voice are:

- A large range (the ability to sing extremely high as well as extremely low)
- Breath control to sustain long musical phrases
- Strong resonance that projects over a full orchestra and into a large space without amplification
- Varying levels of volume (the ability to sing both loudly and softly)

When a singer uses the above techniques most effectively, a natural “vibrato” occurs. This is the slight alteration of pitch that you hear when a singer sustains a note. It is caused by air (breath) passing through our voice box, or larynx, and generating vibration of the vocal folds, or cords, to create pitch. Therefore, even the straightest sound, if produced in a healthy way, still has some vibrato in it.

For opera singers, vibrato serves several purposes, helping the voice stay in tune and carry over the orchestra as well as warming it up to sound more human, emotional, and visceral. String players liked the sound of vibrato so much that, in the 16th century, they adopted the technique as well.

How can I become an opera singer?

Is a singer “born” with natural talent or are their voices “trained”? Most voice professionals agree that, while innate talent must be present, most of what makes an operatic voice is learned through rigorous and on-going training. Each singer’s career path is different, but for many opera singers, it looks like this:

1. Begin learning general musicianship, often at a young age through piano lessons, choir, band, or other musical experience. Some singers might take private voice lessons as well.
2. Study music, vocal performance in particular, at the university level and earn a Bachelor’s of Music degree.
3. Continue studying intensely in graduate school, earning a Master’s of Music degree.
4. Begin working as a Young Artist (sometimes called Emerging Artist), the intern of the opera world, singing in outreach programs, opera choruses, covering lead roles, performing smaller supporting roles, and anything else that offers experience.
 - a. Some singers go back to school at this point to earn their Doctorate of Music degree. With that, they can teach at the university level and/or continue their performing careers.
5. Transition from performing as a Young Artist to the Mainstage, singing leading or mainstage supporting roles.

However, it takes a lot more than just an excellent voice to become an opera singer!

Opera singer must-haves:

ACTING: Opera singers must become highly skilled actors in order to accurately portray their characters, sometimes even studying dance in order to have the best command of a stage.

STAMINA/ENDURANCE: Although few singers ever have to sing throughout an entire opera, many operas require main characters to be on stage for a substantial percentage of the show. Most operas last between 2 and 3 hours, with the longest being over 5 (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* by Wagner), so that's a lot of singing, especially for the leads!

VOCAL AGILITY: Classical voices are often characterized as “lyric” or “coloratura.” Lyric voices possess a warmer tone that sounds best when singing longer, sustained, melodious phrases. Coloratura refers to fast, often high-pitched, elaborate singing involving trills, runs, and leaps, so a coloratura voice performs such vocal pyrotechnics with ease. However, all voices should have a considerable amount of vocal flexibility and agility in order to stay healthy.

PHYSICALITY: Physical appearance is increasingly important for opera singers today. Many opera companies are filming their productions and broadcasting on television and in cinemas, so singers must do even more to physically represent their characters.

HEALTH: Because opera singers' instruments are their bodies, it is imperative for singers to stay healthy. Many opera singers exercise regularly and eat nutritious diets, even when traveling, to keep from becoming ill and having to cancel a performance.

LANGUAGES: Operas are performed across the world in all different languages, from Italian which originated the art form to English, Spanish, Russian, even Tagalog (the language spoken in the Philippines). Many singers are bi- or multi-lingual, and even if they are not fluent in more than their native language, they must learn to at least pronounce a variety of other languages. In formal classical schooling, English-speaking singers must take classes in French, Italian, and German at the minimum.

GOOD MEMORY: Opera singers have to be able to memorize hours of music in foreign languages (and of course know what each word means!), and the hundreds of moves as each opera is staged. Experienced singers memorize not just their parts, but those of others they are on stage with, so they can continue unaffected by someone else's error.

BUSINESS & MARKETING SKILLS: Singers are paid only when they perform, so they have to learn how to plan and budget in a sustainable manner for their lifestyles. When they are not traveling, they may need to do additional work using other skills such as teaching voice lessons, singing in a paid church choir, working temporary office jobs, etc. Before reaching the highest levels of success, opera singers must also develop adequate marketing skills in order to promote their services and create a brand for themselves.

CONFIDENCE & RESILIENCE: Singers travel a great deal and must leave their family and friends for long periods of time. Some opera companies begin rehearsals only two weeks before Opening Night, so singers must be adaptable and confident in their abilities,

regardless of potentially stressful situations. Furthermore, because they are frequently traveling to new and unfamiliar places, singers must become skilled at navigating new cities, countries, and cultures in order to have a positive experience and get along with everyone involved in the production.

How to make an opera

First, take a playwright and mix in a librettist to fashion the dramatic script, or a libretto, containing the words the actors sing. Next, combine text with music by introducing the librettist to the composer who then make sure the music and words work together to express the emotions revealed in the story. Following the completion of their work, the composer and librettist entrust their new opera to a conductor who, with a team of assistants (*repetiteurs*), assumes responsibility for the musical preparation of the work.

The conductor collaborates with a stage director (responsible for the visual component) in order to bring a performance of the new piece to life on the stage. The stage director and conductor form the creative spearhead for the new composition while assembling a design team which will take charge of the actual physical production.

Set designers, lighting designers, costume designers, wig and makeup designers and even choreographers must all be brought on board to participate in the creation of the new production. The set designer combines the skills of both an artist and an architect using blueprint plans to design the set which will reside on the stage, recreating the physical setting required by the storyline. These blueprints are turned over to a team of carpenters who are trained in the art of stage carpentry.

Following the set's construction, painters bring the set to life with paint, following instructions from the set designers' original plans. As the set is assembled on stage, the lighting designer works with a team of electricians to throw light onto both the stage and the set in an atmospheric, as well as practical, way. Using specialized lighting instruments, colored gels, and a state-of-the-art computer program, the designer works with the stage director to create a lighting plot by writing lighting cues which make lighting changes flow seamlessly during the performances.

During this production period, the costume designer, in consultation with the stage director, has designed appropriate clothing for the singing actors to wear. These designs are fashioned into patterns and crafted by a team of highly skilled artisans called cutters, stitchers, and drapers. Each costume is specially made for each singer using individual measurements. The wig and makeup designer, working with the costume designer, design and create wigs and makeup to complement both the costume and the singer's character as well as represent historically accurate fashions.

As opening night approaches, rehearsals are held on the newly crafted set, combined with backstage crew, costumes, lights, and orchestra in order to ensure a cohesive performance that will be both dramatically and musically satisfying to the assembled audience.

Jobs in opera

The composer Richard Wagner coined the term, *gesamtkunstwerk*, or “total work of art,” in reference to opera for good reason. Opera combines all forms of art—music, theatre, dance, and visual art—in one entrancing package. That means it takes people with all kinds of talents and skills to make even one performance possible. Here are just some of the careers you could have in the opera world.

Pre-production Careers

Pre-production begins with the composer and librettist creating the opera, and then the producer oversees and manages its realization.

- Stage Director
- Artistic Director
- Technical Director
- Producer
- Composer
- Librettist
- Set/Scenic Designer
- Charge Artist
- Paint Crew
- Carpenter
- Electrician
- Costume Designer
- Lighting Designer
- Sound Designer
- Projection Designer
- Chorus Master
- Choreographer

Performing Careers

- Opera Singer
- Orchestra Member
- Conductor
- Chorus Member
- Supernumerary
- Dancer

Backstage Careers

- Stage Manager
- Wardrobe Supervisor
- Wig/Hair Artist
- Make-up Artist
- Props Master

Technical Theatre Careers

The areas of technical theatre are scenery, lighting, props, costumes, and sound. They work together in a production to establish the place, time, and overall mood of the show.

- Lighting Engineer
- Spotlight Operator
- Sound Engineer
- Run/Deck Crew
- Fly Rail Operator
- Projection Board Operator
- Stagehand

Front of House Careers

The Front of House is the part of a performing venue that is open to the public—lobby, ticket booth, will-call window, auditorium, foyers, etc.

- House Manager
- Box Office Manager
- Concessions Manager
- Usher
- Ticketing Agent
- Custodian

Staff/Administration Careers

- General Director
- Artistic Administrator
- Production
- Human Resources
- Finance
- Marketing
- Development
- Education and Outreach
- Audience Services
- Facilities

Opera etiquette

(in other words, how to behave at an opera)

What to Wear

Most people like to dress up when they go to the opera because it's part of the fun! Although you can pretty much wear whatever you want, an evening at the opera is usually considered to be a special occasion. If you ever go to the Metropolitan Opera in New York City, you will find audience members in everything from formal evening gowns (especially on opening nights) to jeans and a nice top.

Be a Great Audience

Performers feed off an audience's energy, so being a good audience member is very important, not just at an opera but any live performance! Here are some tips for being a great audience member:

- Watch and listen quietly but actively.
- Keep your cell phones and other devices out of sight and on silent or airplane mode.
- Stay in your seat until the lights come on, indicating an intermission or the end of the show.
- Show your appreciation for the performers by applauding at the best moments, for example:
 - When the conductor takes the podium right before the first music starts,
 - After an aria,
 - At the end of a scene,
 - At the end of each act,
 - During the bows at the end of the show,
 - When everyone else is clapping.



BRAVO!

At most opera houses, it is considered rude to whistle.

Instead, to show appreciation for a singer, it is tradition to clap and shout, "Bravo!" This is a fun, easy-to-remember Italian word which means, "Great job!" or "Well done!" Be sure you say, "Brava!" for a woman performer and "Bravi!" for a group.

If you really enjoyed the performance, you can also say, "Bravissimo!" (bravissima for women, bravissimi for a group), which means "*Really* well done."

Discussion questions

1. It has been pointed out in this study guide that *La Cenerentola* is unusual in that the title character does not get a significant solo aria until the closing moments of the opera. Given this, do you feel that she is still the “star” of the piece? If so, why? If not, which character seems most important to you? Give reasons for your choice.
2. Is your estimation of Rossini as a composer affected by the speed with which he worked, his continual recycling of his own music and the formulaic patterns of his music? In other words, can music of genius result from such habits?
3. In their meeting, Beethoven told Rossini that he thought *Il barbiere di Siviglia* was hilarious; he also advised him to “give the world more Barbers.” If you were Rossini, would you regard this advice as a compliment or a put-down? Why?
4. As the concepts of feminism and women’s rights have advanced in recent generations, many people look with disfavor about a story in which a woman finds happiness only when a man comes along to marry her and give her status. What is your opinion? Has the story outlived its time? Is Cinderella a bad role model? Do any other elements of the story offer more worthwhile messages? Explain your answers.
5. Imagine that Rossini wrote a sequel to the opera with many of the same characters. How might their lives have changed? What would happen to Clorinda and Tisbe? Would Dandini stay with Ramiro? Would Cinderella continue to treat her step-family with generosity and inclusion? Outline a scenario in which “happily ever after” is discarded in favor of “real human nature.”
6. Italian comic opera always casts dialogue in the form of secco recitative, the device in which dialogue is sung rapidly to music that is essentially tuneless and formless, accompanied by harpsichord. This contrasts with French and German operas and operettas in which the dialogue is merely spoken as in a non-musical play. Why did the Italians prefer sung dialogue? Which do you find more suitable for the art form of opera?
7. Rossini, following his “retirement” and withdrawal from opera composition at age thirty-nine, did return to writing music in his old age, but never again wrote an opera. What might have been his reasons for staying away from the opera business? How had the style of operatic music and opera singing changed during the years of his illness and recuperation?
8. When a story is adapted from one art form (play, novel, fairy tale) to another (musical, opera, movie), the details of the original plot are always changed in some way, much to the frustration of those who loved the original and hate any change. What explains this phenomenon? Why, for example, is it not possible to take the text of a play by Shakespeare and make it into an opera simply by setting all of it to music without omitting anything? What would happen if one attempted such a feat?