

# VICTORIAN OPERA

## THE BARBER OF SEVILLE

Education Resource





# The Barber of Seville

## Education Resource

### CONTENTS

About this resource	3
Glossary	4
<i>THE BARBER OF SEVILLE</i> – ABOUT THE WORK	
Creative team, characters and cast	8
Synopsis	9
About the composer	10
About the librettist	10
About the playwright	11
About the play	11
THE ARTS – MUSIC	
What is opera?	12
Where did opera come from?	12
Voice types and singing styles	13
Opera buffa	14
Italian opera	15
What is bel canto?	15
The score unpacked – An interview with Music Director, Richard Mills	16
MUSIC – ACTIVITIES	19
DRAMA – ACTIVITIES	21
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	22
REFERENCES	22

### ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource is designed for school students in Years 7-10. All the activities can be used in the classroom alongside or separate to Victorian Opera's production of *The Barber of Seville*.

The activities in this resource have been aligned with the following Australian Curriculum Learning Areas:

- The Arts – Music
- The Arts – Drama

The table below outlines how the activities designed around each Learning Area align with Australian Curriculum General Capabilities.

CAPABILITIES	Literacy	Numeracy	ICT	Critical and Creative Thinking	Personal and Social	Ethical Understanding	Intercultural Understanding
<b>THE ARTS – MUSIC</b>							
Activity 1	✓			✓	✓	✓	
Activity 2	✓			✓	✓		
Activity 3	✓			✓	✓		
Activity 4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
<b>THE ARTS – DRAMA</b>							
Activity 1	✓		✓	✓			
Activity 2	✓			✓	✓		✓

### GLOSSARY

**Act** – A component of the total work, consisting of its own partial dramatic arc.

**Appoggiatura** – A grace note which delays the next note of the melody, taking half or more of its written time value.

**Arabesque** – A posture in ballet, where one leg is extended backwards at a right angle, the torso is bent forward, and the arms are outstretched, one forwards and one backwards.

**Aria** – An elaborate composition for solo voice with instrumental accompaniment.

**Arioso** – An aria of a lyrical and expressive quality.

**Arrangement** – In music, a reconceptualization of a previously composed work.

**Banda** – An onstage instrumental ensemble in an opera.

**Bar** – Also called a measure. The section between two bar lines containing the number of beats as indicated by the time signature.

**Baritone** – The male voice between the tenor and bass.

**Baroque period** – Spanning from 17th to mid-18th century in Europe, baroque opera is characterised by a large string section and figured bass.

**Bass** – The lowest male voice.

**Baton** – A white stick used by conductors to conduct with, allowing the conductor greater visibility.

**Beat** – The regular pulse of the music.

**Bel canto** – A singing technique in Italian meaning “beautiful singing”.

**Cantata** – A narrative piece of music for voices with instrumental accompaniment, typically with solos, chorus, and orchestra.

**Caricature** – A ludicrous take on something, usually with a satirical tone.

**Castrato** – Historically, a singer who was castrated as a boy to retain the boyish quality of the voice. The pitch of castrato singers was similar to a soprano.

**Choreographer** – The person who designs and creates the movement of the performance, usually in dance form.

**Chorus** – In opera or music theatre this refers to a large body of singers.

**Chorus master** – The person responsible for the rehearsal and preparation of the chorus prior to production.

**Classical period** – Spanning from mid-18th to mid-19th century, opera in the classical period is characterised by a lighter, clearer texture than baroque music.

**Coloratura** – A rapid passage, run, trill or other virtuoso-like feature used particularly in music of the 18th and 19th centuries.

**Composer** – The person who writes the music.

**Concertmaster** – The lead violinist of the orchestra.

**Concerto** – A musical composition that features one solo instrument accompanied by an orchestra.

**Concerto Grosso** – A musical composition for a group of solo instruments accompanied by an orchestra.

**Conductor** – The person who interprets and directs the orchestra or musical performance, coordinating the performers and keeping the time through the technique of hand movements.

**Contralto** – The lowest female voice.

**Countertenor** – The highest male voice.

# The Barber of Seville

## Education Resource

**Crescendo** – A gradual increase in loudness.

**Designer** – The person who designs the overall look of the production, including the sets, costumes, props and lighting.

**Director** – The person who controls the artistic and dramatic aspects of the production, realising the conceptual and interpretation of the work.

**Discords** – A lack of harmony between notes, sometimes unresolved causing a work to sound unresolved and at times unpleasant.

**Dress rehearsal** – Often the final rehearsal of all the component parts of the production in full costume.

**Duet** – A composition for two performers of equal importance.

**Ensemble** – A group of people that perform together.

**Excerpt** – A short extract from a piece of music.

**Finale** – The last movement in a work of several movements.

**Grand Opera** – A large-scale serious opera without spoken dialogue.

**Harmony** – The chordal structure of a musical composition in contrast to the linear structure, which supports the melody line.

**Hero / Heroine** – In its modern form, the hero/heroine is a protagonist character who fulfils a task and restores balance to the community. He/she is a born leader, whether they know it or not, as well as a real survivor who has faith in good. Others are willing to believe in this person and will follow them.

**Interlude** – A section of music between acts.

**Intermezzo** – An Italian term meaning “in the middle”. It refers to a comic operatic interlude played between the acts of an opera seria performance.

**Intermission** – A break in the performance that allows the audience to leave the auditorium.

**Key** – The tonal centre around which a composition is based, usually indicated by a key signature.

**Libretto** – The text of an opera or music theatre work.

**Madrigal** – A song of several voices arranged in elaborate counterpoint from the Renaissance period.

**Mezzo-soprano** – The second highest female voice.

**Ode** – An ode is a poem that praised or glorified an event or individual.

**Opera** – A staged drama set to music, comprised of vocal pieces with instrumental accompaniment and usually with orchestral overtures and interludes.

**Opera buffa** – Also known as ‘comic opera’, an opera with a large mixture of music, on a light subject with a happy ending, including comic elements.

**Opera seria** – Also known as ‘serious opera’, an opera with dramatic, serious content often with a tragic ending.

**Operetta** – A style of opera that is light hearted, shorter, and may include spoken dialogue.

**Oratorio** – A large musical composition that uses an orchestra, choir and soloists, each of which play a character in the overall work.

**Orchestra** – A large ensemble of instruments divided into four main sections: strings, woodwind, brass and percussion.

**Orchestration** – Utilisation of the instrumentation of an orchestra in the writing of a composition.

**Overture** – An instrumental composition intended as an introduction to an opera or other music theatre work.

# The Barber of Seville

## Education Resource

- Pantalone** – A comic character in Italian theatre, usually a foolish old man who was the butt of all jokes.
- Pirouette** – In ballet, the act of spinning on one foot, typically with the raised foot touching the knee of the supporting leg.
- Ponticello** – A technique that requires string musicians to play over or near the bridge of the instrument with the bow to produce a glassy sound and emphasizes the higher harmonics.
- Principal** – One of the main characters.
- Protagonist** – The main character.
- Pulse** – The underlying beat of a piece of music.
- Range** – The range from the lowest to highest notes that are played or sung.
- Recitative** – A vocal (singing) style designed to imitate the natural inflections of speech, used in opera where dialogue might be used in other forms of music theatre.
- Rehearsal** – Where the performers and the creatives develop the production, shaping lines, songs, movements etc.
- Rhythm** – The regular and irregular pattern of notes of different length in the music.
- Repetiteur** – A pianist who works as an accompanist and vocal coach for opera.
- Romantic Period** – A period in Western music that began in the early 19th century. Romantic composers sought to create music that was individualistic, emotional, dramatic and often programmatic, reflecting broader trends within the movements of Romantic literature, poetry, art and philosophy.
- Score** – The notation showing all the parts of a work, both instrumental and vocal.
- Season** – The time in which a number of performances take place for a single production.
- Solo** – A piece of music performed by a single performer either alone or with accompaniment.
- Soprano** – The highest female voice.
- Soubrette** – A light operatic soprano.
- Sound Designer** – The person who designs the additional sound used in a production.
- Stage Manager** – The person who manages the running of rehearsals and performances, managing all the components of the production during performance.
- Surtitles** – A translation of the words being sung on stage projected onto a screen above the stage.
- Synopsis** – A summary of the story.
- Tempo** – The speed of a composition.
- Tenor** – A high male voice.
- Tessitura** – The general range of vocal parts.
- Time signature** – A notation used to specify how many beats in a bar and the note value equivalent to the beat.
- Tone** – The interval of a major second or a sound of definite pitch and duration.
- Transcription** – In music, a notation of a piece of music that has not been written out.
- Tutti** – A marking in a score that indicates the use of the whole orchestra and/or all the vocal parts.
- Tremolo** – A trembling effect that involves either a rapid reiteration on a single note or between two notes, or a variation in amplitude.
- Vibrato** – A very slight fluctuation of pitch in rapid succession to create warmth in the sound.
- Villain** – Often the antagonist. In literature, this is the evil character in the story, the character who

# The Barber of Seville

## Education Resource

has a negative effect on the other characters.

**Vocal range** – The human voice falls into a range from the lowest to highest notes they can reach. The normal range is around two octaves and is traditionally broken into seven voice types, (from highest to lowest) soprano, mezzo-soprano, contralto, tenor, baritone and bass.

**Western music** – A musical tradition derived from European cultures spanning the flourishing musical culture of ancient times to the present day.

**Workshop** – An exploration of a new work (production, text, music, design).

# The Barber of Seville

## Education Resource

### THE BARBER OF SEVILLE – ABOUT THE WORK

Composer – Gioachino Rossini

Librettist – Cesare Sterbini

#### Creative Team



Conductor  
**Richard Mills**



Director  
**Elizabeth Hill-Cooper**

#### Characters and Cast



Count Almaviva  
**Brenton Spiteri**



Doctor Bartolo,  
Rosina's guardian  
**Warwick Fyfe**



Rosina, a rich pupil in  
Bartolo's house  
**Chiara Amarù**



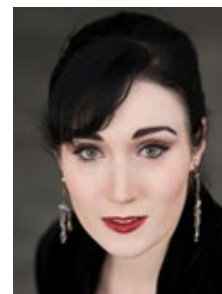
Figaro,  
Dr. Bartolo's barber  
**José Carbó**



Don Basilio,  
Rosina's music teacher  
**Paolo Pecchioli**



Fiorello,  
Count Almaviva's servant  
**Stephen Marsh**



Berta, the governess in  
Bartolo's house  
**Kathryn Radcliffe**



### SYNOPSIS

#### ACT I

Rosina is serenaded by the Count Almaviva who is disguised as Lindoro, a poor student. He keeps his true identity secret as he wants Rosina to love him, unaware of his rank and wealth. Doctor Bartolo, Rosina's guardian, plans to marry her himself.

Figaro, former servant of the Count and a regular employee in Bartolo's residence, is enlisted to help the Count get into the house to make contact with Rosina.

In the meantime, Bartolo has heard that Count Almaviva is in town and, worried that he will steal Rosina away from him, moves his wedding to her to the next day. Figaro learns of the Doctor's plan and suggests that the Count disguise himself as a soldier and request lodgings in Bartolo's house.

The Count arrives pretending to be a drunken soldier billeted at Bartolo's residence, but Bartolo sees through his ploy and refuses the Count entry. The situation heats up and the local military arrive to restore the peace, arresting the Count. Amidst the commotion, the Count manages to slip Rosina a note before whispering his identity to the officers, who immediately release him.

#### ACT II

Assuming another disguise, the Count enters the house dressed as Don Alonso, a substitute music teacher for Rosina as Don Basilio is 'unwell'. During the music lesson, Don Alonso reveals that he is Lindoro. He and Rosina express their love for each other and make plans to escape.

Bartolo decides to hasten his own wedding to Rosina, and orders Don Basilio to organise a notary so that he can marry Rosina at midnight. Bartolo then tells Rosina that Lindoro has been deceiving her and he is acting on behalf of the Count. Rosina is heartbroken and agrees to marry Bartolo.

Later that evening during a violent storm the Count and Figaro break into Bartolo's house through the balcony window. Rosina, angry that she has been deceived, confronts Lindoro. The Count reveals his true identity, and she falls lovingly into his arms. Figaro urges the lovers to escape before Bartolo catches them. To their horror, they discover that Bartolo has moved the ladder from the balcony, blocking their escape.

Don Basilio returns to the house with the notary who is to marry Rosina and Bartolo. After some threats and bribes, Basilio is convinced to witness the marriage of Rosina and the Count. Bartolo and the magistrate arrive too late, and he must admit that he has lost Rosina to the Count Almaviva.

# The Barber of Seville

## Education Resource

### ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868) is considered one of the most popular, successful and influential opera composers of the first half of the nineteenth century. During his career, he composed 40 operas and was central to the development of opera as an art form.

Rossini was born to a horn player and singer and by the age of 14, could play the violin, cello, harpsichord and horn. He had also composed a number of short songs by this age and was commissioned to compose his first opera when he was 15.



Photo by Étienne Carjat, 1865. Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gioachino\\_Rossini](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gioachino_Rossini)

He first achieved fame at the age of 20 while in Venice with his operas *L'inganno felice* (*The Happy Deception*, 1812) and *La pietra del paragone* (*The Touchstone*, 1812), written in the *opera buffa* (comic opera) style. The graceful melodies, amusing characters and ingenious plots of these works appealed to the opera-going audiences of the day. Shortly after, his fame spread to Naples, where the impresario Domenico Barbaia, offered him a six-year contract as the music director of both the Teatro San Carlo and the Teatro del Fondo. During this time, he was to compose some of his most well-regarded operas, including *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra* (1815; *Elizabeth, Queen of England*), *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1816; *The Barber of Seville*), *Otello* (1816), *La cenerentola* (1817; *Cinderella*) and *La donna del lago* (1819; *The Lady of the Lake*).

When he was 31, he took up a post as the director of the *Théâtre Italien* in Paris. During his time there, he started work on modifying his compositional style by replacing the use of coloratura with a more declamatory style of singing. He also reformed the role of the orchestra and gave the chorus a more important position within the context of the opera. He wrote a number of significant operas while in this role, some of which include *Le Comte Ory* (1828; *Count Ory*), and *Guillaume Tell* (1830; *William Tell*). *William Tell* was received with a standing ovation by its premiering audience and also received praise from all critics at the time. It was the last opera that Rossini would compose.

Rossini decided to retire early, at the age of 37. During his retirement he composed little, and that which he did compose consisted of more religious pieces, as well as a few songs and pieces for piano, which were mostly unpublished. He remained in Paris for the remainder of his life, where he passed time hosting extravagant gourmet dinners for the greats of the musical and literary world of the nineteenth century.

### ABOUT THE LIBRETTIST

Cesare Sterbini (1784-1831) was an Italian librettist and writer who also demonstrated an interest in academia and philosophy. His love for linguistics was evident in his ability to speak Greek, Latin, Italian, French and German fluently.

Sterbini is best known for writing the librettos for *Torvald e Dorliska* (1815) and *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1816; *The Barber of Seville*), two of Rossini's operas. His collaboration with Rossini on the latter became his greatest and most memorable achievement.

Sterbini was also an official in the Pontifical Administration in Rome, where he discovered a love for setting poetry to music.

# The Barber of Seville

## Education Resource

### ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

The original play of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*) was written by French author Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732-1799).



Portrait of Beaumarchais by Jean-Marc Nattier, 1755. Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre\\_Beaumarchais](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Beaumarchais)

Born as the son of a watchmaker, Beaumarchais soon advanced in French society to become a music teacher in the court of King Louis XV. Beaumarchais led a very interesting life full of adventure and scandal. As well as being an author, Beaumarchais was also a watchmaker, businessman, spy, arms dealer, diplomat, musician, playwright and revolutionary. While living at the royal court, Beaumarchais was involved in a variety of legal scandals. He also supported the American civil war, covertly supplied arms and financial aid to Spanish rebels in the 1770s and was a French revolutionary.

In 1756, Beaumarchais married his first wife Madeleine-Catherine Aubertin, who helped him secure a job in the royal office. After his appointment, he changed his name from “le Bois Marchais”, which he inherited from his wife, as he thought “Beaumarchais” sounded more aristocratic. Upon his wife’s death the following year, Beaumarchais fell into financial problems. His debts were solved when he became a royal harp tutor for Louis XV’s four daughters, and from there, Beaumarchais ascended the social hierarchy to become a French noble in 1761.

In 1770, Beaumarchais plunged into more financial trouble. After losing two court cases and nominally deprived of his civil rights, he pledged his service to Louis XV and his successor Louis XVI in order to regain them. During his service, Beaumarchais is most known for his support of the American Revolution. Through lies and bribery, he convinced Louis XVI to pay for supplies for American revolutionaries. His service to the King pleased the French Parliament and they reinstated his civil rights.

### ABOUT THE PLAY

Beaumarchais’ interest in writing plays began by composing farces for small, private audiences. His ambitions grew, as he wanted to write for the theatre. Inspired by his journey to Spain, *Le Barbier de Seville* (*The Barber of Seville*) started as a short interlude play Beaumarchais wrote in 1765, with a few prototype characters that later evolved into Count Almaviva, Rosine and Dr Bartolo. The second version of the work was supposed to be a comic opera, with music written by Antoine-Laurent Baudron, but it was rejected in 1772 by the *Théâtre Italien* in Paris. The play as we know it today was written in 1773 and premiered in 1775 at the Tuileries Palace, but it was poorly received on opening night. Within three days, Beaumarchais rewrote the text, turning it into a successful play. Beaumarchais went on to compose two more comedic plays, *Le Mariage de Figaro* (1781; *The Marriage of Figaro*) and *La Mère coupable* (1791; *The Guilty Mother*). These three plays became known as the “Figaro plays”, as Figaro is the protagonist and hero in all three.

Beaumarchais’ plays are very class-conscious and his characters all occupy a certain place in the social hierarchy of eighteenth-century French society. The “Figaro plays” provide comedic criticism of the government and French society and all three plays, at one point or another, have been banned from being performed by either the censors or King Louis XVI.

## THE ARTS – MUSIC

### What is opera?

Opera is a European art form that has been in existence since the 1600s and became especially popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Today there are many styles of opera performance, but they all have one thing in common – an opera is a play that is sung.

The four main languages of opera are Italian, French, German and English.

The main difference between opera and music theatre is amplification. Music theatre is usually amplified while opera is not. In addition, music theatre usually includes spoken dialogue as well as music and dance. Opera, on the other hand, generally uses recitative, a singing style designed to imitate natural speech; however, there are exceptions.

### Where did opera come from?

The roots of opera can be traced back to the Ancient Greeks who lived over 2,000 years ago. The advances in society that this sophisticated civilisation developed included the invention of a city-state (polis) and a golden age in culture, music, art, poetry and drama, including beautiful sculpture, remarkable architecture and the creation of classical poetry, such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer. This ancient civilisation had a profound influence on the discovery and advancement of science, physics, maths, astronomy and geometry, and produced the influential philosophers Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Cicero, who approached the big questions of life often in a genuine scientific way, daring to question and challenge traditional conventions and prejudices of their age. The Ancient Greeks also loved the theatre, with the works of playwrights including Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides informing the future dramatic structures of playwriting.

In the following thousand years, after the height of the Greek civilisation, much of the knowledge and skills they had established were lost, particularly in the sciences and arts. While the art from what we refer to as the Middle Ages was very beautiful, it had lost some of the scientific application that made it so lifelike. In Italy, from about the 1300s, scholars set out to rediscover many of the Ancient Greeks' innovations. This period was called the Renaissance, which translates literally as "rebirth". Founded in Florence, it marked a period of enlightenment and the rediscovery and study of culture, philosophy, art, architecture and science. Highly influential artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Botticelli, Raphael and Donatello, philosophers, writers and mathematicians including Galileo, Shakespeare, Erasmus and Copernicus contributed a wealth of knowledge during this era.

One art form the Renaissance scholars were particularly interested in was Greek theatre. The texts had survived time, but the performance practice indications were lost. Scholars knew from writings by philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato that the plays were accompanied by music and this helped raise the emotional moral tone of the works. But how? What did the music do? How were the lines sung?

A group of thinkers and musicians from Florence called the Florentine Camerata met regularly to determine how the musical accompaniment might have sounded and supported the text. They invented a new art form in which the dialogue in a play would be sung. They decided to call the new art form "Opera", which simply means "a work". The first truly successful opera was called *L'Orfeo*. It was composed by Claudio Monteverdi and is still performed regularly today.

Following the great success of this work, opera became popular all over Europe and then the world. The style of opera and the way it was performed developed over the centuries to reflect the culture of the time. At its height in the 1800s, opera was performed regularly in theatres in every major city.



### Voice types and singing styles

There are seven voice types in opera, each of which is defined by the range of notes they can sing and their vocal quality.

There are three female operatic voice types, although most operas only have soprano and mezzo-soprano roles.

- Soprano – the highest sounding female voice with a vocal range from middle C up to the C two octaves above.
- Mezzo-Soprano – slightly lower than the soprano with a vocal range from the G below middle C to the A two octaves above.
- Contralto – the lowest sounding female voice and rarely used in opera today. The vocal range for this voice type is from the F below middle C to a high F one octave above.

There are four male voice types, although the countertenor voice is most often used in operas from the Baroque period (1600-1750).

- Countertenor – the highest sounding male voice with almost the same vocal range as a mezzo-soprano; the G below middle C to a high F one octave above.
- Tenor – a high sounding male voice that usually takes the leading male role. The vocal range for this type is roughly from the C below middle C to the C above.
- Baritone – the middle sounding male voice with a vocal range from the second G below middle C up to the G above.
- Bass – the lowest sounding male voice which has a vocal range from the E above middle C to the E two octaves below, however some bass singers can go even lower.

There are further categories of voice defining the kind of voice quality and the type of music they can sing. The composer will consider voice types to highlight the different characters – for example, to differentiate between a King and a Servant or a Princess and a Witch.

A few of these are:

- Coloratura – a very high range with the ability to sing complicated parts with agility.
- Dramatic – a heavy sounding, powerful voice.
- Lyric – an average sized voice with the ability to sing long, beautiful phrases.
- Heldentenor – The ‘heroic tenor’, a very big role that requires a powerful sound.

Follow the links below to hear examples of what these voices sound like:

Classical Female Voices – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIPFAww8X-U>

Classical Male Voices – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRL7shs23Wc>

### Opera Buffa

*Opera buffa*, also known as comic opera, is a form of opera that was popular in Europe in the early 1700s. There were many types of comic opera, some of which include French *opéra comique*, German singspiel, the English ballad opera and Italian *opera buffa*. Whereas *opera seria*, or serious opera, was often set in the past, centring around mythological or ancient Greek or Roman plots, *opera buffa* was set in contemporary times. The characters in an *opera buffa* are often drawn from real life, so that audiences can recognise, relate to and laugh at these characters. *Opera buffa* gave composers and lower-class audiences the freedom to mock and laugh at the rich and powerful; something they could not easily do in real life without consequence.

The genre of *opera buffa* started out as short, one or two act performances which would occur during the interval between the acts of serious opera performances in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These performances were known as intermezzo operas and were very popular. The most famous intermezzo *opera buffa* was Giovanni Battista Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona* (1733; *The Servant Turned Mistress*). It was so famous that it transcended its intermezzo status and was performed as a stand-alone opera. *La Serva Padrona* is an important opera in this genre, as it was not only part of bridging the gap between baroque and classical period opera, it also helped advance *opera buffa* as a full-length operatic style.

Rossini also played a central role in developing the *opera buffa* style. He started writing *opera buffa* as it was fashionable to do so, and he enjoyed the style. He was so good at it that the style grew in popularity, and Rossini was obligated to continue writing comic opera. Taking the existing structure of *opera buffa*, Rossini reformed it by embellishing the melodies with *bel canto* style, using unusual rhythms and increasing the role of the orchestra.

### Italian opera

When Rossini began his compositional career, opera in Italy was being composed in the *bel canto* style that had been slowly developing through the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. While there was an increase of romantic subjects being dealt with by Italian composers with plots that featured star-crossed lovers and tragic endings, the form of Italian opera remained the same. The confrontation between the hero and villain in the presence of the heroine and the chorus would signify the beginning of the climax, which would then be followed by a sad sweet song and an action filled piece to bring down the curtain.

Italian opera during this period had achieved an expressiveness and musical fluidity yet to be obtained by the French and German traditions. In addition, Italy's singers were far more accomplished than anywhere else in the world, and the librettists who wrote the operas' texts were skilled in making use of those situations that would lend themselves well to operatic treatment.

### What is *bel canto*?

*Bel canto* literally translates as "beautiful singing" in Italian. Originating as a type of solo singing in the sixteenth century, *bel canto* later developed as a form of operatic singing in Italian opera in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. While *bel canto* is mainly defined as a singing technique, it is also a type of opera, where *bel canto* is expressed through beautiful arias to convey the drama of the story.

As a singing technique, *bel canto* requires the singer to have a certain level of vocal mastery and skill. In order to sustain the often long and florid vocal passages of *bel canto*, the singer is required to have extreme flexibility and agility of the voice. As the style is all about beauty, arias were often written to show off the voice of the performer, particularly through long legato phrases and coloratura. Breath control is very important here, as the singer needs to feel free to sing the coloratura in the long vocal passages. The singer would then ornament their vocal lines with trills, turns and runs which add to the beauty of the melody, while also showing off their technique and vocal skills. Often the arias are also set within a large dynamic range. Although the vocal line and skill of the singer are key elements to *bel canto*, language and articulation are still very important and must be clear.

As the vocal line is filled with so much action which is intended to capture the attention of the audience, the orchestra is usually given simple but beautiful accompaniment to support the singer.

The most recognised composers of *bel canto* style are Gaetano Donizetti, Vincenzo Bellini and Gioachino Rossini.

### **The score unpacked – An interview with Music Director, Richard Mills**

#### **What are the technical challenges for singers when preparing for and performing this work?**

It's the Rossini vocal language which is a constant throughout all his work. It is a very elaborate musical text. It needs very developed technique and great vocal flexibility. That is the way singers were taught in those days. They were taught to sing instrumentally so that they were able to use the voice for whatever exigencies of expression might occur. I draw the analogy of classical ballet which has a whole repertoire of gestures that are used in storytelling, and they are the same gestures that are used in this instance. That's very much what the Rossinian setting is.

#### **There is so much florid writing and embellishment in the vocal parts in this work.**

Yes, but it always has an expressive purpose.

#### **Is that built on the *bel canto* technique?**

Absolutely. It's central to the *bel canto* technique. I wrote an [essay on \*bel canto\*](#), which traces the whole tradition right back to the Italian madrigal, where this began. It's absolutely part of the central *bel canto* tradition. It uses the voices instrumentally, but the decoration is used for expressive purposes and is still there as an object of wonder in its own right. In the same way, as when you go to see a classical ballet, and you see a pirouette and an arabesque that ordinary people can't do. That's part of the magic of theatre.

#### **Can you give any examples of where the music might reflect the text in both the vocal and orchestral part, and what compositional techniques Rossini uses to achieve them?**

A very good example of that is the Act 1 Finale when there's chaos. There's an anvil going in my brain and the music becomes frenetic and busy and chaotic. Of course, it is very difficult to sing that ensemble, it's a masterpiece of construction. The music always reflects the text but it reflects the text with its own repertoire of gestures, which remain consistent. The scales, the arpeggios, the turns, the appoggiaturas, which remain, as I say, part of the analogy of classical ballet, which is very interesting.

#### **So, in this case, the arpeggios and the scale passages are the gestures that you are referring to?**

Yes, and they are made to serve the expression at any particular moment, but they are the same things that keep recurring. It is a language that is a constant throughout his work but its individual, local use is dictated by the text and the dramatic context of each situation. It's an interesting concept. The essence of the style is that flexibility.

#### **Is that something that occurs throughout all of Rossini's operas?**

Yes, a very good example is the first phrase of 'La calunnia', Don Basilio's aria. 'La calunnia' is like a little wind, it's hilarious. Here, the Rossini crescendo is used and starts as a very soft *ponticello* and gradually, as the calumny overtakes the whole world, it grows. It's an example of the stock and trade gesture of crescendo being used. It's used in the overture, it's used in the last ensemble and in the Act 1 Finale, for example. But it also serves other purposes and it expresses other things. The overture is just pure energy. This expressive compositional device is reapplied to mean different things in different contexts. So, for example, in 'La calunnia' it is the idea of calumny taking over the whole world. In the Finale, it's the idea of this complete madness and confusion taking over the whole Act.

#### **So, it's very much dependent on the text of the libretto?**

Yes. Rossini was not only a great composer but a great dramatist.



### **What are some of the specific Rossinian characteristics that distinguish his work from other composers of the time?**

Well, there's a national difference. Rossini was part of the early nineteenth century opera industry, so he was using the received techniques of *bel canto*, and he was part of all the exigencies of that industry. Rossini's harmony is very simple, it's not complex harmony. Not in comparison to say, Franz Schubert or Ludwig van Beethoven. Interestingly, Rossini is considered a greater composer than Beethoven in his day.

### **On what grounds?**

Just popularity. The things that makes Rossini interesting are the vocal decoration, the orchestral manner of the crescendo appropriated for his use, the vocal figurations that also transferred to the orchestra, the motor rhythms which he used to generate the crescendos, and, the vocalicity of the content that contrasts with the instrumental flow. Now when you look at composers like Schubert, Beethoven or Louis Spohr, the content is different because they are German. It's much more harmonic and the harmony is much more complicated. It still has the same kind of vocalicity, but none of the kind of elaborate theatricality of Rossini. So, I think what marks him out is his strong personality framed by a very simple and direct harmonic language, and his mannerisms conceived in the tradition of the commercial Italian opera of the day.

### **Does this opera use a full orchestra?**

A full orchestra of the day, yes.

### **Would there have been limitations in terms of the orchestration that was available in developing certain areas?**

Well, Rossini expanded the orchestra as opera expanded throughout the nineteenth century. The Italian orchestras were generally less developed than the French and German orchestras. If you read Hector Berlioz's journals of his travels to Italy he talks about the generally poor level of playing in the Italian orchestras. And of course when Rossini went to live in Paris, he started to write French operas. Well, in his great French opera, *Guillaume Tell* (1829: *William Tell*), he scored for the kind of forces used in the Paris opera of the day because they represented the ongoing development of the orchestral forces. For example, Rossini expanded the horn section from two to four horns in *Semiramide* (1823), his last Italian opera and in many ways the last opera seria.

The interesting thing about Rossini is the use of the offstage banda that you'll find as early as *Rocciardo e Zoraide* (1818). These were related to opera as an expression of Italian community and the town banda goes through Giuseppe Verdi's compositions as it does Vincenzo Bellini's. It's a very interesting effect in the theatre to hear the juxtaposition of the pit orchestra and the offstage band. The onstage band is also used in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (1787), as an elaborate *tour de force* of composition where orchestra and the onstage band are playing in different time signatures to each other. So, that's an important element of orchestration. But usually, the orchestras for the Naples operas are fairly straightforward: double wind, two horns, two trumpets and sometimes trombones, but not as a matter of course. And the recitatives were played on a forte piano, not on a harpsichord, and often featured the composer conducting from the forte piano as well.

### **When preparing a score like this, what's involved in your preparation?**

It's a very specific style, a style which has been lost. It's better now because there is much more generic knowledge of eighteenth century performance practices, and there's a lot of residual knowledge about eighteenth century performance practice of *bel canto*. It still lives on. I edit in great

detail so that there's no talking. Every fortepiano in the score is analysed and I have to determine whether it should be attacked directly or if it is spread over a crotchet. This then has to be notated in the score and across the orchestral parts.

### **Do you think Rossini's importance as a composer resonates today?**

Yes and no. I mean, Rossini's caricature as a composer today, as everyone knows "Figaro, Figaro, Figaro". What I think you have to remember is that somebody actually thought that up! It didn't exist once and it's now common place.

But the interesting thing of course is the use of the Rossini gestures in the language of the early Hanna Barbera cartoons. I think it's *Steamboat Willie* that uses the *William Tell* overture. Interestingly enough, that kind of theatre of simple gesture and of course the romantic plots of Rossini – and this is a paradoxical point – they are contemporary, but in a sense, they are stock comedic characters. Basilio and Bartolo are buffone characters and related to the pantalone figure. Rosina and the Count outwit the others, which is something also used in standard comedy. There's also the addition of the older woman – the Berta character – and Basilio as the common villain. So, there's a lot of old stuff there as well. But again, I come back to this importance of the appropriation of tradition for a theatrical exigency. In a sense, he also appropriated the comedic traditions. The people in *The Barber of Seville* are your stock types.

### **Why do you think this opera has remained as popular as it has?**

Well, it's simply one of the best nights in the theatre you could possibly have. The thing about Rossini is that there is the greatness of his heart and his understanding of the human condition and that immense compassion and love. Every bar is full of love! That's why it lasts. It's fabulous music!

It is Rossini's love of humanity which shines through every bar, and that's why it speaks to everyone's hearts in every new generation. It's a fantastic thing!

### MUSIC – ACTIVITIES

Years 7-8

#### Activity one: Analysis

Follow the score while you listen to Figaro’s cavatina “Largo al factotum” from Act 1 of *The Barber of Seville*.

As a class, discuss what you think makes this piece so popular and memorable.

Analyse Rossini’s use of repetition focusing on the bass part and vocal line. Identify at least two examples of repetition. What effect does this have on the listener?

Finally, go around the room and highlight what you most liked or disliked about the cavatina.

For a recording of the cavatina, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iy13epXqXTc>.

For a copy of the score (pp. 54-73), visit [http://conquest.imsip.info/files/imglnks/usimg/c/c8/IMSLP517981-PMLP7237-Rossini\\_-\\_Il\\_barbiere\\_di\\_Siviglia\\_-\\_Act\\_I\\_\(orch.\\_score\)\\_\(etc\).pdf](http://conquest.imsip.info/files/imglnks/usimg/c/c8/IMSLP517981-PMLP7237-Rossini_-_Il_barbiere_di_Siviglia_-_Act_I_(orch._score)_(etc).pdf).

#### Activity two: Transcription

Identify the key of the following excerpt, then transcribe the melody down a perfect 4th and then up a minor 3rd.



Ah bra-vo, Fì-ga-ro, bra-vo, bra - vis - si - mo! ah bra-vo Fì-ga-ro, bra-vo, bra



vis-si-mo! a te for - tu - na, a te for - tu - na, a te for - tu - na non man-che



rà. La la ran, la la ran, la la ran, la la ran, la la ran, la la ran, la la ran,



la la ran, a te for - tu - na, a te for - tu - na, a te for - tu - na non man-che - rà.

# The Barber of Seville

## Education Resource

When you have finished your transcription, play the melody on a keyboard or piano and try to sing along with the Italian words.

To make the activity more challenging, transcribe the entire excerpt, melody and accompaniment, down a perfect 4th.

### Years 9-10

#### Activity three: Analysis

Follow the score while you listen to an excerpt from the Act 1 Finale of *The Barber of Seville*.

Write down three musical changes that occur with the appearance of the police officers on page 154. These can be rhythmic, melodic, textural etc.

How does their appearance affect the vocal lines? Analyse one character and map their response from the entrance of the officers on page 154 to 163. You could analyse these in terms of dynamics, rhythm, melody, text etc.

For a recording of the excerpt, visit <https://open.spotify.com/album/2Bti3XM36AyxSYUwCFanak>

For a copy of the score, visit [http://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/1/18/IMSLP575759-PMLP7237-II\\_barbiere\\_di\\_Siviglia\\_COVER\\_Jacopo\\_Tore\\_\(etc\).pdf](http://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/1/18/IMSLP575759-PMLP7237-II_barbiere_di_Siviglia_COVER_Jacopo_Tore_(etc).pdf)

This excerpt starts at the 'Allegro' on page 150 and finishes at the end of the first system on page 163.

#### Activity four: Listening

Listen to the different recordings (found below) of 'Una voce poco fa', sung by Rosina in Act 1 of *The Barber of Seville*. Read the corresponding part in the libretto (link below) in order to understand the context surrounding this aria.

After you listen to the different recordings, write a 300-400 word essay that analyses the stylistic differences that occur, focusing on the choice of each performers' embellishments.

Version 1:

Rosina – Maria Callas

Orchestra – Philharmonia Orchestra

Conductor – Tullio Serafin

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPl1xuzkU\\_E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPl1xuzkU_E)

Version 2:

Rosina – Cecilia Bartoli

Orchestra – Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra

Conductor – Gabriele Ferro

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDyXqf0at\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDyXqf0at_w)

Version 3:

Rosina – Kathleen Battle

Orchestra – Viennese Philharmonic Orchestra

Conductor – Carlos Kleiber

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FwZKjFJ-qo>

A copy of the score in both Italian and English can be found here: [http://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/1/18/IMSLP575759-PMLP7237-II\\_barbiere\\_di\\_Siviglia\\_COVER\\_Jacopo\\_Tore\\_\(etc\).pdf](http://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/1/18/IMSLP575759-PMLP7237-II_barbiere_di_Siviglia_COVER_Jacopo_Tore_(etc).pdf)

You will find the aria on page 79.



### DRAMA – ACTIVITIES

#### Years 7-8

##### Activity one: Scene writing

Read the interview with Richard Mills on page 16 of this resource. Note what he says about Rossini understanding and depicting the human condition and stock comedic characters.

Read the English libretto (link below).

In groups of four, create your own 5-minute script. It must depict a scene or correspondence that is not seen in the actual opera. It can contain any combination of the characters in the opera: Rosina, Count Almaviva, Figaro, Fiorello, Dr. Bartolo, Don Basilio or Berta.

Your scene can either be comedic or serious or have elements of both. Keep in mind that your character choices need to stay true to the story.

Finally, act your scene out, creating movements and physicalities that match your character.

For a copy of the English libretto, visit <https://www.opera-arias.com/rossini/il-barbiere-di-siviglia/libretto/english/>

#### Year 9-10

##### Activity two: Character Transformation

Read *The Barber of Seville* libretto and familiarise yourself with the character of Count Almaviva and his different personas: Lindoro, the soldier, and Don Alonso.

How would you physicalise the Count as his various personas? Act out your interpretation of the physicalisation of each of these characters, including the Count as himself.

Once you have established the physicality for each of the characters, complete the tasks below in relation to the following pairs.

- The Soldier and Lindoro
  - Don Alonso and the Count
  - Lindoro and the Count
  - Don Alonso and Lindoro
  - The Count and the Soldier
1. Morph (transition) from persona to the other.
  2. Meld (blend) a gesture at the moment of transition from one persona to another, to signify the transition of character.
  3. Practice fast-paced transitions of the characters: snap from one persona to another and back again.
  4. Choose one pair and find the corresponding part in the libretto that matches the transition. Using the lines from the libretto, act out a scene and transition between the characters as you feel is appropriate.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This resource was collated and written by Sofia Laursen Habel, intern at Victorian Opera and Ioanna Salmanidis, Education Officer at Victorian Opera. Thank you to Richard Mills for his contribution to the Music section. Furthermore, thank you to Beata Bowes and Rhylla Mitchell for their help in editing and proof reading the final resource.

### RESOURCES

Cassou, J.L. (2018). *Gioachino Rossini – Italian Composer*. Retrieved from

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gioachino-Rossini>.

Gillis, T. (2016) *What is bel canto?* Retrieved from <https://www.operasense.com/what-is-bel-canto/>.

New World Encyclopaedia (2008). *Pierre Beaumarchais*. Retrieved from

[https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Pierre\\_Beaumarchais](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Pierre_Beaumarchais).

Greenwald, H. M. (Ed.). (2014) *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, Oxford University Press.

Royal Opera House (2018). *Gioachino Rossini – Composer*. Retrieved from

<http://www.roh.org.uk/people/gioachino-rossini>.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2016). *Bel canto: Vocal Music*. Retrieved from

<https://www.britannica.com/art/bel-canto>.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2019). *Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais: French author*.

Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pierre-Augustin-Caron-de-Beaumarchais>.

Thompson, W. (2018). *Gioachino Rossini Biography*. Retrieved from

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/music/artists/846be3c9-5f94-46ab-97b9-531335dd3658>.

Troy, C. E. (1979) *The comic intermezzo: a study in the history of eighteenth-century Italian opera*. UMI Research Press.