PATHWAYS FOR UNDERSTANDING

Il Barbiere di Siviglia by Gioachino Rossini

The Metropolitan Opera Guild
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An Introduction to
Pathways for Understanding Study Materials

The goal of Pathways for Understanding materials is to provide multiple “pathways” for learning about a specific opera as well as the operatic art form, and to allow teachers to create lessons that work best for their particular teaching style, subject area, and class of students.

Meet the Characters / The Story/ Resources
Fostering familiarity with specific operas as well as the operatic art form, these sections describe characters and story, and provide historical context. Guiding questions are included to suggest connections to other subject areas, encourage higher-order thinking, and promote a broader understanding of the opera and its potential significance to other areas of learning.

Guided Listening
The Guided Listening section highlights key musical moments from the opera and provides areas of focus for listening to each musical excerpt. Main topics and questions are introduced, giving teachers of all musical backgrounds (or none at all) the means to discuss the music of the opera with their students. A complimentary CD of the full opera, as well as the full libretto (with English translation), are provided as part of the Guided Listening resources and are sent via mail.

Guiding Questions / Discussion Points
Guiding Questions or Discussion Points appear within several sections of these materials to spark discussion in your classroom and facilitate student exploration. Note that these questions are not intended to serve as “official” learning outcomes for the opera experience; rather, we hope that they act as a point of departure for prompting meaningful analysis and conversation amongst students. We are aware that teachers incorporate the study of opera into their classrooms in many ways and to address a variety of student outcomes, and we expect that individual teachers will adapt these materials to best serve their specific curriculum and instructional goals.

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### Production Information

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<tr>
<th>Music:</th>
<th>Gioachino Rossini</th>
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<tr>
<td>Original Italian Text:</td>
<td>Cesare Sterbini, after the play <em>Le Barbier de Séville</em> by Beaumarchais</td>
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### Meet the Characters

**Count Almaviva** (tenor): A rich and handsome young nobleman smitten with Rosina.

**Dr. Bartolo** (bass): Rosina’s guardian; an old doctor who hopes to make a fortune by forcing Rosina to marry him. Knowing that Rosina hates him, Bartolo has imprisoned her in his house.

**Rosina** (mezzo-soprano): Young and beautiful, the cunning Rosina is in love with Almaviva, but is not aware of his true identity.

**Figaro** (baritone): The town barber who always manages to be in the middle of everyone’s plans and schemes.

**Basilio** (bass): Rosina’s music teacher and a good friend of Bartolo.

**Fiorello** (baritone): A servant of Count Almaviva.

**Ambrogio** (bass): A servant of Dr. Bartolo.

**Berta** (soprano): A housemaid of Dr. Bartolo.

**An Officer** (tenor): A policeman.
The Story of Il Barbiere di Siviglia: Synopsis

Act I
Seville. Count Almaviva comes in disguise to the house of Doctor Bartolo and serenades Rosina, whom Bartolo keeps confined to the house, beneath her balcony window. Figaro the barber, who knows all the town’s secrets and scandals, arrives. He explains to Almaviva that Rosina is Bartolo’s ward, not his daughter, and that the doctor intends to marry her. Figaro devises a plan: the count will disguise himself as a drunken soldier with orders to be quartered at Bartolo’s house so that he may gain access to the girl. Almaviva is excited and Figaro looks forward to a nice cash pay-off.

Rosina reflects on the voice that has enchanted her and resolves to use her considerable wiles to meet its owner, whom the count leads her to believe is a poor student named Lindoro. Bartolo appears with Rosina’s music master, Don Basilio. Basilio warns Bartolo that Count Almaviva, who has made known his admiration for Rosina, has been seen in Seville. Bartolo decides to marry Rosina immediately. Figaro, who has overheard the plot, warns Rosina and promises to deliver a note from her to Lindoro. Bartolo suspects that Rosina has indeed written a letter, but she outwits him at every turn. Angry at her defiance, Bartolo warns her not to trifle with him.

Almaviva arrives, creating a ruckus in his disguise as a drunken soldier, and secretly passes Rosina his own note. Bartolo is infuriated by the stranger’s behavior and noisily claims that he has an official exemption from billeting soldiers. Figaro announces that a crowd has gathered in the street, curious about the argument they hear coming from inside the house. The civil guard bursts in to arrest Almaviva but when he secretly reveals his true identity to the captain he is instantly released. Everyone except Figaro is amazed by this turn of events.

Act II
Bartolo suspects that the “soldier” was a spy planted by Almaviva. The count returns, this time disguised as Don Alonso, a music teacher and student of Don Basilio. He announces he will give Rosina her music lesson in place of Basilio, who, he says, is ill at
home. “Don Alonso” also tells Bartolo that he is staying at the same inn as Almaviva and has found a letter from Rosina. He offers to tell her that it was given to him by another woman, seemingly to prove that Lindoro is toying with Rosina on Almaviva’s behalf. This convinces Bartolo that “Don Alonso” is indeed a student of the scheming Basilio, and he allows him to give Rosina her music lesson. She sings an aria, and, with Bartolo dozing off, Almaviva and Rosina express their love.

Figaro arrives to give Bartolo his shave and manages to snatch the key that opens the doors to Rosina’s balcony. Suddenly, Basilio shows up looking perfectly healthy. Almaviva, Rosina, and Figaro convince him with a quick bribe that he is sick with scarlet fever and must go home at once. While Bartolo gets his shave, Almaviva plots with Rosina to elope that night. But the doctor overhears them and furiously realizes he has been tricked again. Everyone disperses.

Bartolo summons Basilio, telling him to bring a notary so Bartolo can marry Rosina that very night. Bartolo then shows Rosina her letter to Lindoro, as proof that he is in league with Almaviva. Heartbroken and convinced that she has been deceived, she agrees to marry Bartolo. A thunderstorm rages. Figaro and the count climb a ladder to Rosina’s balcony and let themselves in with the key. Rosina appears and confronts Lindoro, who finally reveals his true identity as Almaviva. Basilio shows up with the notary. Bribed and threatened, he agrees to be a witness to the marriage of Rosina and Almaviva. Bartolo appears with soldiers, but it is too late. Almaviva explains to Bartolo that it is useless to protest and Bartolo accepts that he has been beaten. Figaro, Rosina, and the count celebrate their good fortune.

THE METROPOLITAN OPERA
The Story of Il Barbiere di Siviglia: Guiding Questions

Act I – Master of Disguise
In the first act of Il Barbiere di Siviglia, Count Almaviva dons two disguises.

- Why might Almaviva feel that he must hide his identity?

- What are some other instances – in literature, history or other musical works – where characters have chosen to hide their true selves? How do their reasons for doing so compare with those of Almaviva?

- Describe an instance when you were tempted to pretend to be someone else.

Act II – Personal Motivations
In the second act, we see many characters’ goals and motivations come to light.

- What are each of the characters (Almaviva, Rosina, Bartolo and Figaro) trying to achieve in the story? What strategies or schemes do the characters employ in order to sway things their way?

- Which character is the most scheming of all? Does he or she get what he or she wants in the end?

- Who are some other characters (in literature, history, opera or otherwise) who have acted purely out of self-interest? What was their primary motivation? Did these characters get what they wanted in the end?
The History of Rossini’s *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*

In 1773, Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais wrote the play *Le Barbier de Séville ou La Précaution inutile (Il Barbiere di Siviglia)*. It was shortly followed by *Le Mariage de Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*), and *La Mère coupable* (*The Guilty Mother*). This trilogy showcases the same characters at different points in their lives, allowing Beaumarchais to create exceptionally well-developed personalities. His protagonists – Almaviva, a privileged, daredevil count, Figaro, his ingenious servant, and Rosina, a feisty ward of the bumbling Doctor Bartolo – surpass the conventional stock characters of 18th century comedy. The dialogue is sharp and often political, glorifying the wit of the lower classes at the expense of the aristocracy.

Many modern critics see in the character of Figaro the spirit of the French Revolution. In fact, although Figaro’s skepticism of authority may herald the French Revolution, the writing of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* in 1773 and *The Marriage of Figaro* in 1778 precede the start of the French revolution by more than ten years. Only the third play in the trilogy, *The Guilty Mother*, which has fewer political themes than the others, was written in 1792 – during the French Revolution. Throughout the writing of the full Figaro trilogy, Beaumarchais was incredibly interested in the American Revolution and the colonial fight for liberty. He convinced the French monarchy that England was weak and that the colonists only needed a little help to vanquish their oppressors. After much prodding, the monarchy authorized Beaumarchais to sell arms to the Americans. The playwright therefore assisted in the American victory over the British.

Regardless of the plays’ political undertones, the spirited characters in Beaumarchais’s works were well suited to treatment in operatic form. The plays themselves were sprinkled with short songs sung by the characters and other incidental music. Beaumarchais’s plays have been set by multiple composers. The first play’s most famous rendering is the opera at hand – Rossini’s *Il Barbiere di Siviglia (Il Barbiere di Siviglia)*. The second play was treated in 1784 in Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and John Corigliano’s 1991 *The Ghosts of Versailles* loosely adapts the third play in the trilogy.
The first operatic version of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, with music by Giovanni Paisiello, premiered in Saint Petersburg in 1782, only nine years after the play was written. Paisiello’s opera capitalized on the popularity of the French play, and it was a major success all over Europe. Its libretto, probably written by Giovanni Pertrosellini, minimized the political nature of the source material, saving it from censorship, and allowing commoners and aristocrats to enjoy the opera together.

In December of 1815, Gioachino Rossini was asked to compose an opera for the Carnival season in Rome at the Teatro di Torre Argentina. In his contract, Rossini agreed to compose the opera in five weeks, based on any libretto that the theater’s owner and impresario, Duke Francesco Sforza-Cesarini, suggested. Sforza-Cesarini approached Vatican poet Cesari Sterbini and asked him to write a new libretto using Beaumarchais’s *Barber*. Sterbini completed his version in twelve days, and Rossini was ready to get to work. Despite his willingness to collaborate, Rossini was afraid of offending Paisiello, who was still alive at the time, by composing a new opera based on the same material. Rossini wrote to Paisiello asking permission to embark on the project. The older composer gave Rossini his blessing, apparently assuming that Rossini’s opera would pale in comparison with his own. On his part, Rossini attempted to prevent audience members from pitting Paisiello’s old work against his new one, and premiered his opera under the title of *Almaviva* rather than *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. However, the name change did not prevent friends and fans of Paisiello from interrupting the opera’s first performance.

There were an inordinate number of on-stage mishaps at the opera’s premiere – in the first scene, Count Almaviva’s guitar had not been tuned, and when the singer, Manuel García, began to tune it on stage, all of its strings snapped. The same thing then happened to Figaro’s guitar during his entrance. The laughter and catcalling of Paisiello’s fans drowned out most of the music. The singer playing Don Basilio was so distracted by the noise that he fell on his face when he came on stage – the laughter intensified when he wiped his blood onto his costume. To add to the hilarity, a cat wandered onto the stage and ended up tangled in Rosina’s skirts. When Rossini gestured to his talented but beleaguered cast at the close of the piece, inviting the
audience to applaud, he was met with booing. Rossini left for home and went straight to bed. He feigned an illness for the next performances so that he would not have to conduct and play the piano, a breach of his contract.

Staying in bed, Rossini missed the quick turnaround of public opinion. As soon as the crowd of Paisiello’s supporters dispersed, the audience was able to hear Rossini’s work for what it was – a spectacular piece. The applause grew nightly, and soon the opera was being performed, not only all over Europe, but in America as well. *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* had its American premiere in New York City at the Park Theatre in 1825.
Guided Listening: “Largo al factotum della città”
CD 1, Track 5 | Libretto pg. 3

Figaro, the town barber, introduces himself.

**FIGARO**
(behind the scenes)
La la la le ra, lalalala!
(He enters with a guitar.)
I am Il Barbiere di Siviglia, I am.
I am a man with a way and a will, I am.

I love the life I lead,
Full of surprises,
When a man rises
Right to the top.
Nature has given me higher ability
By far.

Fortune assigned me its favorite star,
By far.

I'm in a hurry, I cannot linger,
I have a finger in ev'ry pie.
Life is exciting, full of adventure,
There's not a barber as happy as I.

I am respectable,
Highly acceptable,
In any circle I feel at home.
I am reliable,
Clever and pliable,
I am the king of lather and foam.

Then there are matters more confidential,
Delicate errands, secret commissions.
I love the life I lead,
Rare occupation,
What a vocation,
What a career!
I'm needed ev'rywhere,
Wanted by ev'ryone,
Elegant ladies, elderly dandies,
"Make an appointment,"
"Give me some ointment,"
"Hurry and shave me,"
"Carry a message."
Figaro Figaro Figaro Figaro! Figaro,
No more, hold on! Have mercy!
I beg you! Do me a favor!
One at a time, not all at once!
Give me a chance!

"Figaro!"
What now?
"Hey, Figaro!"
Quite so!
Figaro, here; Figaro, there;
Figaro, yes; Figaro, no.
Figaro, fast; Figaro, slow;
Figaro come; Figaro go!
Quick as a thunderbolt,
Bursting with energy,
Eager and willing,
I'm on the spot,
No matter what.
Ah bravo, Figaro, bravissimo,
You are a wonder, you are a marvel,
You are in luck, your fortune is made.
I am the king of razor and blade,
King of my trade, king of my trade.

Discussion Points

- What is Figaro’s profession? Are his skills limited to his profession, or does he help people in other ways, too? How so?

continued on next page
Discussion Points (continued from previous page)

• Who is Figaro speaking to in this moment?
  o Do you imagine him in front of a large crowd or on an empty street? If you were staging this scene, what direction would you give the singer playing Figaro?

• Listen to the music.
  o How might you describe it? Is it slow and gentle or fast and showy?
  o Does the feeling or tone of the music stay the same throughout the aria?
    ▪ Does it become more or less intense or exciting?
    ▪ When does the climax of the aria occur?

• How does the music work with or against the lyrics in conveying Figaro’s personality?
  o What does the music tell us about his character?
  o Is he quiet and subdued, jovial and adventurous, or something else?
  o Is he confident or unsure of his abilities?
Guided Listening: “Se il mio nome saper voi bramate – L’amoroso e sincero”
CD 1, Track 7 (0:00 – 3:50) | Libretto pg. 7

Count Almaviva serenades the beautiful Rosina, who is listening from her balcony.

COUNT
If my name your dear heart would discover,
Hear it now from the lips of your lover.
I am Lindoro, who lives to adore you,
Who sees you, admiring,
And calls you, desiring.
Ev’ry whim of your heart I’ll obey,
From the dawn to the end of the day.

FIGARO
You’re lucky, she loves you. Continue.

COUNT
Your devoted and loving Lindoro
Cannot spread many riches before you.
My means are slender,
But I do surrender
A true heart, entreating,
For you ever beating.
I shall love you forever and aye,
From the dawn to the end of the day.

ROSINA
from the balcony
I adore ev’ry word that you say.

FIGARO
(softly to the Count)
You heard it, what did I tell you?

ROSINA
(appears from the balcony)
Your sincere and devoted Rosina
Is well disposed toward Lindo…
(discovers Lodo...)
(disappears from the balcony)

Discussion Points

• Why does Count Almaviva disguise himself in this scene?

• What characterizes a “serenade,” like this one that the Count sings to Rosina?
  o Do you think that the words of the serenade are most important, or the music?
  o What is the Count trying to communicate to Rosina? Does Rosina reciprocate his feelings? How can you tell?

• What do Figaro’s lines tell you about his role in the scene?
  o What is his relationship to the Count and Rosina?
  o How do his singing lines compare to those of the others?

continued on next page
Discussion Points (continued from previous page)

• Can you recall any stories or plays that include a scene similar to the balcony scene from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*? What are the similarities and differences between those scenes and this one?
Rosina has just read a letter from her admirer, Lindoro, and is planning her response.

**Guided Listening:** “Una voce poco fa”  
*CD 1, Track 10 | Libretto pg. 10 - 11*

Rosina has just read a letter from her admirer, Lindoro, and is planning her response.

**ROSINA**
You alone have won my heart  
With your song not long ago.  
As I heard you from afar,  
Love was born, I seemed to know.  
Yes, Lindoro dear, you are,  
You are mine — it shall be so!  
Though my tutor will object,  
That’s no more than I expect.  
I’ll rely on wit and ruse,  
Do exactly as I choose.  
Yes, Lindoro dear, you are,  
You are mine — it shall be so!  
I am so well behaved,  
So easygoing,  
Always obedient,  
Cheerful and knowing.  
To guide and manage me  
Is never hard.

But if you cross my will,  
That is another thing,  
Then I can have a viper’s sting!  
A hundred traps I lay  

---

**Until I have my way.**  
Be on your guard!  
A thousand tricks I play  
Until I have my way.  
Be on your guard!

I know that I will win. But in the  
meantime, I have to send my note  
to him. But how? It’s a bold  
undertaking, I am watched ev’ry  
minute. Never mind; for the  
present; I’ll seal it.

(goes to the writing table and seals the letter)

If Figaro would be willing…this  
very morning I noticed him  
conversing with Lindoro. Figaro is  
my friend, he’s clever and  
resourceful. He might be just the  
right man and I can trust him.

---

**Discussion Points**

- Listen to the music.
  - Are there distinct sections of this piece? Where do they occur?
  - How do the distinct musical sections reinforce what Rosina is singing about?
  - Does the aria gradually escalate throughout, remain the same, or otherwise? What musical elements – such as changes in tempo, dynamics, orchestration etc. – does the composer use to achieve this effect?
Discussion Points (continued from previous page)

• Listen to the music, paying close attention to the singer portraying Rosina.
  o What do you notice about the style of singing in this aria? Is the voice dark and heavy or light and agile?
  o Does the singer alter her singing style, or does it stay the same throughout? If she alters her style, where do changes occur?
  o How does the singing style connect with Rosina’s personality and what is she singing about?

• Rosina begins the aria ruminating on the expressions of love she has received from Lindoro, then moves on to describing herself, devising a plan to prove that Lindoro’s love is real.
  o In “Largo al factotum della città,” Figaro also describes himself – virtually introducing himself to the audience.
  o Compare the two arias. How are the ways that Figaro and Rosina describe themselves similar?
    ▪ How do they differ?
    ▪ Explain using what you hear in the music of each aria, as well as what the characters say.
Figaro has come to tell Rosina about Bartolo’s plans to marry her immediately. Rosina is unconcerned and, feigning ignorance, inquires about the young man (Lindoro) who was with Figaro the night before.

**Rosina**
I’m his love…you really mean it?
I myself am his beloved!
(aside)
I confess I had foreseen it,
I admit I always knew.

**Figaro**
You’re the goal of his affection,
You alone, my dear Rosina.
He adores you, lovely Rosina.
(aside)
You are clever, signorina.
But then I am clever too.

**Rosina**
Let me ask you. Will Lindoro come to see me,
Would you say?

**Figaro**
Do not worry, your Lindoro wants to see you right away.

**Rosina**
How exciting! Let him come here,
But with caution and discreetly.
I’m so happy, yes, so very happy!
But what’s causing his delay?

**Figaro**
He is waiting for permission,
For a sign that you invite him.
Just a tiny written message,
Just a line of your approval,
And he’ll visit you today.
You will see him this very day.
Will you do it?

**Rosina** (pretending)
No, I cannot.

**Figaro**
Don’t be bashful.

**Rosina** (pretending)
I don’t dare to.

**Figaro**
It’s so easy.

**Rosina**
I’m embarrassed.

**Figaro**
Why on earth? Tell me why?
Say why? (going to the writing table)
Waste no time and write the letter

**Rosina**
(takes the letter from her pocket and gives it to him)
It so happens that it is done.

**Figaro**
(taken aback)
So, she’s embarrassed! Am I stupid, what an idiot I have been!

**Rosina**
Now my happy heart beats faster,
I am overcome with joy.

**Figaro**
I admit she is my master,
While she looks so sweet and coy.

**Rosina**
Love shall be my inspiration,
My delight, my shining star.

**Figaro**
Women baffle all creation,
What a puzzle women are!

**Rosina**
Are you certain that Lindoro…

**Figaro**
Yes, I am. I have told you
He’s already on his way.

**Rosina**
Love shall be my inspiration,
My delight, my shining star.

**Figaro**
Women baffle all creation,
What a puzzle women are! Too sly by far!
Discussion Points

• As one sees from the stage directions given in the libretto, this is a complex scene with Figaro and Rosina interacting with one another, as well as making “asides” to the audience.
  o If you were directing this scene, how might you position the singers, knowing that the audience will not be aware of the stage directions given in the libretto?

• Listen to the music.
  o How does the orchestra mimic the “back and forth” nature of the duet?
  o Do you hear differences in the singers’ voices when they are talking to the audience, as opposed to each other? If so, what differences do you hear?

• What purpose does this scene serve in the story? Do you feel that it is comedic (funny) or dramatic (intense)?

• Do you find similarities between Figaro and Rosina’s personalities? If so, what are the similarities between the two characters?

• Is Figaro sincere when he admits that Rosina has tricked him? What do you know about his character that makes you think one way or another?
Guided Listening: “Che cosa accadde” and “Fredda ed immobile”  
CD 2 , Track 3 (2:48 – end) and Track 4 (0:00 – 2:45) | Libretto pp. 23

In the Act I finale, Count Almaviva has disguised himself again (this time as a drunken soldier) and is insisting that he be housed in Bartolo’s residence. Bartolo, already upset by the “soldier’s” disrespect for him, becomes increasingly enraged. The clamor is heard outside, and the police show up to investigate.

BARTOLO  
This barbarian of a soldier  
Nearly killed me with his saber.  
Yes he did, yes he did,  
Nearly killed me with his saber.

FIGARO  
I came here to keep them quiet,  
That is all I tried to do.  
Yes I did, yes I did.  
That is all I tried to do.

BASILIO  
He was acting like a madman,  
Always brandishing his saber.  
Yes he did, yes he did.  
It is absolutely true.

COUNT  
I am quartered with the doctor,  
And he made a big to-do.  
Yes he did, yes he did.  
Yes, he made a big to-do.

ROSINA  
You can see that he’s been drinking  
And is hazy in his thinking.  
Yes he is, yes he is.

BERTHA  
He was acting like a madman,  
Always brandishing his saber.  
Yes he did, yes he did.

OFFICER  
So that’s it.  
(to the Count)  
So it’s you. I must arrest you,  
Off to prison, come at once.

(The soldiers advance to surround the Count.)

COUNT  
You arrest me, really?  
Not a chance!  
(He takes the officer aside and shows him a paper. The officer is astonished, orders the guard to retire to the back, where he places himself at their head. All stand rigid in amazement.)

ROSINA AND BERTHA (as if spellbound)  
Rigid and motionless,  
Like a marble monument,  
I cannot stir a step,  
I can’t draw a breath.

COUNT  
Rigid and motionless,  
Like a marble monument,  
They cannot stir a step,  
They can’t draw a breath.

BARTOLO (as if spellbound)  
Rigid and motionless,  
Like a marble monument,  
I cannot stir a step,  
I can’t draw a breath.

BASILIO (as if spellbound)  
Rigid and motionless,  
I cannot stir a step,  
I can’t draw a breath.

FIGARO  
Look at Don Bartolo,  
Rigid and motionless,  
Just like a monument.  
Ha, ha, I laugh myself  
Almost to death.
Discussion Points

• This excerpt begins immediately following the police guard’s request for an explanation of what is going on.
  o What effect is produced when all the characters are singing different words at the same time? How does this make you, as a listener, feel?
  o Does this method accurately portray the characters’ emotions at the beginning of the scene? If so, how?

• Listen to the music.
  o Do you notice a major change in the music at one point? If so, how does it change?
    ▪ Does it become faster, escalating even more, or does it become slower and more timid?
    ▪ Or does it change in another way?
  o How does the change in the music connect with what is happening in the scene, as well as with the words that are being sung?

• Based on the reaction of the soldiers, what do you think the letter that the Count, in disguise, gives to the guard actually says?
  o Is it the same letter that he shows Bartolo originally, or does it say something else?
  o Why do the other characters react the way they do? Why are they shocked?
  o Figaro very obviously “has the last laugh” in this scene. What does he know that the others don’t?

• This scene is at the very end of Act I. What do you predict will happen next?
Guided Listening: “Ma vedi il mio destino – Pace e gioia sia con voi”
CD 2, Track 5 | Libretto pp. 25-26

Count Almaviva, now disguised as a substitute for Rosina’s music teacher, Don Basilio, who has become mysteriously ill, meets Bartolo at his home to give Rosina her music lesson.

BARTOLO
It’s just as I suspected; all my efforts to learn that soldier’s name proved to be futile. It seems that no one knows him. I’m wondering…oh, I’ve got it! It’s clear as day! I’ll wager that this drunkard of a soldier is no one but a scout of Almaviva’s. One of his spies, trying to see Rosina. Even in one’s own house one is no longer safe. From now on…

(knocking is heard) Who’s knocking? Who can it be? Ambrosius, go and open. Don’t be afraid. If it’s Basilio, admit him.

COUNT
(enters disguised as a music master, in a robe and hat similar to Don Basilio’s)

(with an oily voice)
Heaven bless you, now and ever.

BARTOLO
Thank you, thank you, for your compliment.

COUNT
Heaven bless you ever after.

BARTOLO
I am honored, you’re very kind.

COUNT
Heaven bless you, now and ever.

BARTOLO
Thank you, thank you, for your sentiment. (to himself) I have seen that fellow somewhere.

COUNT (to himself)
I have not achieved my purpose…

BARTOLO (to himself)
He looks awfully familiar.

COUNT
In the morning as a soldier…

BARTOLO (to himself)
Who the devil is this creature?

COUNT (to himself)
But disguised as a music teacher…

BARTOLO (to himself)
Will my trouble never end?

COUNT (to himself)
I am sure to reach my end, Yes, I will reach my end. (aloud) Heaven bless you now and ever.

BARTOLO (becoming impatient)
I have heard you, how repetitious.

COUNT
I have heard you, how repetitious.

BARTOLO
So you told me, my good friend

COUNT
Heaven…

BARTOLO (imitating)
Heaven…

COUNT
Bless you…

BARTOLO (imitating)
Bless you. I have heard you, no more good wishes.

COUNT
Heaven bless you ever after.

[continued on next page]
BARTOLO (imitating)
Ever after –
Stop it, stop it, let me be.
(to himself)
What a terrible disaster!

COUNT (to himself)
As a humble music master…

BARTOLO (to himself)
What a day of toil and trouble.

COUNT (to himself)
I will certainly deceive him.

BARTOLO (to himself)
Ev’rybody is conspiring,
Ev’ryone is after me.

COUNT (to himself)
Ah, my darling, the time is nearing
When at last you will be free.

Discussion Points

• The libretto indicates for the singer portraying Count Almaviva to use an “oily” voice in this duet.
  o What are possible qualities of an “oily” voice? Is it loud and full, or smooth and clear – or otherwise?
  o How does this direction enhance the Count’s disguise in this section?

• Listen to the music without looking at the libretto. Can you pinpoint when Bartolo becomes annoyed at the “music master’s” constant blessings?
  o If so, where is his annoyance most prominent? How can you tell?

• Listen to the music.
  o How would you describe the orchestral accompaniment in this duet? Is it showy or playful, or something else?
  o Do you notice a difference in the accompaniment between the Count and Bartolo’s respective musical phrases, particularly at the beginning of the duet? How does the accompaniment differ? Why might Rossini have chosen to accentuate the two characters’ lines differently?

• Bartolo is obviously frustrated and confused at this point.
  o Do you feel bad for him, or are you amused by his bewilderment? Why?
  o As evidenced by the Count’s last line in the duet, he is confident that everything is going according to his and Figaro’s plan. What do you think? Is their plan working?
**Guided Listening:** “Alfine eccoci qua – Ah! Qual colpo” and “Zitti, zitti, piano, piano – Ah disgraziati noi!”

CD 2, Track 13 (1:00 – end) and Track 14 (0:00 – 1:27) | Libretto pp. 36-37

Count Almaviva has just revealed his true identity to Rosina, and the two rejoice in their love for one another.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>ROSINA</strong></th>
<th><strong>FIGARO (aside)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ah, how glorious!</td>
<td>Let’s hurry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What a joyous happy ending!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almaviva, the Count, my lover.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With what wonder I now discover!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m so happy that I could die!</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>FIGARO (to himself)</strong></th>
<th><strong>ROSINA</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unexpected happy ending,</td>
<td>And no more grieving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now she knows who is her lover,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When my genius I uncover,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What a mastermind I am!</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>COUNT</strong></th>
<th><strong>FIGARO (imitating comically)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ah, how joyous!</td>
<td>Glorious…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What a truly happy ending!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How delightful to be her lover.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All life’s glory we shall discover.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What a happy man I am!</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>ROSINA</strong></th>
<th><strong>COUNT</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ah, my noble lord…but…you are so noble…</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>COUNT</strong></th>
<th><strong>FIGARO (urging)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not “my lord.” Do not call me by that title.</td>
<td>Finish, I beg of you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I entreat you, call me “husband.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That’s the title I adore.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>ROSINA</strong></th>
<th><strong>COUNT</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call you “husband.” Ah, how lovely!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing else would please me more.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>COUNT</strong></th>
<th><strong>FIGARO (imitating)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you happy?</td>
<td>Ruses…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>ROSINA</strong></th>
<th><strong>COUNT</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dearest beloved, my dearest husband!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oh how glorious…</td>
<td>No more deceit.</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>FIGARO (imitating comically)</strong></th>
<th><strong>FIGARO</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glorious…</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>ROSINA</strong></th>
<th><strong>COUNT AND ROSINA</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be united, no more ruses,</td>
<td>Love is kindly, love is sweet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[continued on next page]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGARO
No more billing, no more cooing,
It is getting very late.
Come, come, hurry, hurry!

ROSINA AND COUNT
You are my love…

FIGARO (interrupting)
Ah, good heavens, did you see that?
Below there, near the doorway,
I see a lantern, and two people
Coming nearer. What to do?

COUNT
You have seen them…

FIGARO
At the door!

COUNT
Coming nearer?

FIGARO
Yes, my lord.

COUNT
They have a lantern?

FIGARO
At the doorway, right outside there
At the door!

ALL THREE
What to do?

COUNT
Hurry, scurry, hurry, scurry,
Without noise or clitter-clatter,
Out the window, down the ladder.
Be as quiet as a mouse.

ROSINA
Hurry, scurry, hurry, scurry,
While your heart goes pitter-patter.
Out the window, down the ladder.
Let us quickly leave this house.

FIGARO
Hurry, scurry, hurry, scurry,
Without noise or clitter-clatter,
Out the window, down the ladder.
Let us quickly leave this house.

(They are about to go.)

Discussion Points

- Describe what you feel is a “typical” love scene, using stories with which you are already familiar as examples. How does this scene measure up – is it “typical” in your mind? Why or why not?

- This scene includes Count Almaviva, Rosina, and Figaro. In the piece, the characters often sing all together, but also have solo lines.
  - What is this set-up called? (Hint: this is similar to two people singing together, which is a “duet.”)
  - Why might Rossini have chosen to include Figaro in this scene? Does his presence make the scene more romantic or more comical?
Discussion Points (continued from previous page)

• This piece includes many “coloratura” phrases, which are characterized by quick, running notes that are sung while a word, or part of a word, is sustained.
  o How do the “coloratura” phrases help to tell what is happening in the scene? Do they accentuate the romantic nature of the interaction between the Count and Rosina, or Figaro’s attempts to hurry them along?

• Why is Figaro trying to get the two lovers to hurry? Whom do they see outside near the door, about to enter the house?
Resources: About the Composer
Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

A prolific and innovative composer, Gioachino Rossini has been called the greatest Italian composer of his time. His works were seen and heard around the globe, and several remain treasures of today’s opera houses. Looking at the landscape of his life, we find a terrain filled, not surprisingly, with many peaks of success, but also with some valleys of despair.

The composer’s early years provided a solid foundation for a lifetime in music. Born in Pesaro on the Adriatic coast of Italy in 1792, Gioachino Rossini was the son of musicians who performed in the opera house, his father playing horn in the orchestra and his mother singing secondary roles on stage. Occasionally raised by other family members while his parents toured with different opera companies, Gioachino had several music teachers and tutors as a child. By age 14, when he entered the Liceo Musicale (Music Academy) in Bologna, he had studied the horn, violin, cello, and harpsichord. Known for having a pleasant singing voice, he had also sung professionally.

As a student, Rossini was able to pursue his interests in opera and composing with gusto and vigor. Though he may have resisted the stricter theories of music composition, he took great interest in classical composers like Mozart and Haydn; historians and critics hear echoes of these masters in Rossini’s music. While at the Liceo, Rossini also worked at local opera houses as a continuo player, providing accompaniment on the harpsichord during recitative sections. It was also during his youth that he composed his first operas, demonstrating a particular talent for comedic pieces.

He left the Liceo without completing his degree to pursue several offers to compose new operas. Working for theaters in Milan, Rome, and Venice, Rossini was an especially speedy composer. In fact, when he was 20 years old, he wrote six operas within one year. He was able to complete so many pieces on a deadline because he
often plagiarized from his previous work, a practice not uncommon among composers of the time.

By 1813, when he was 21 years old, Rossini’s reputation as a composer of “opera seria” and “opera buffa” was well established by the successes of two works: *Tancredi*, an adaptation of Voltaire’s tragedy *Tancrède*, and *L’italiana in Algeri*, a comedy about a young Italian woman in a foreign land. Some of the melodies from *Tancredi* became extremely popular, with people often boisterously singing them in public.

Just a few years later, in 1816, Rossini produced what would be, arguably, his greatest triumph: *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, a setting of Beaumarchais’s comedy *Le Barbier de Séville*. Noted for its elegant melodies, superb ensemble writing and exhilarating rhythms, *Barbiere* has one of the fastest “patter songs” ever written, and its popularity has never diminished. A year later, in 1817, Rossini produced his version of Cinderella, *La Cenerentola*, which achieved a success parallel to *Barbiere*.

As a composer, Rossini is credited with several advancements and innovations in opera. He developed the modern orchestra for opera, regularly using brass and percussion, which was controversial for some purists in his day. He composed arias for specific singers and for the tastes of audiences, and codified the singer’s vocal ornaments by writing down the notes for solos, rather than allowing the singer to improvise. He took the old system of arias and recitatives to create “scena,” extended musical dialogues that better fit the scene’s dramatic intent. His format for opera structure was emulated and imitated for decades. Called the “Code Rossini,” the formula broke the action of an opera into specific segments that both covered the narrative, or story-telling, aspects of the opera, as well as suggested specific musical styles or formats for each section.

From 1815 to 1822, Rossini served as the musical and artistic head for two theaters in Naples, a city renowned for its rich history and culture. Also during this time, he met
and married his first wife, Isabella Colbran, a soprano who had sung in several of his operas. As her singing career declined, their marriage also waned.

He continued writing on a regular basis and by 1823, when he was 31, Rossini had written 34 operas. In 1824, he moved to Paris, and it was in the famed city that he wrote his final operas, in the French language, including *Le Comte Ory* (1828) and *Guillaume Tell* (1829). The latter, based on Schiller’s drama about the Swiss folk hero, featured a popular overture, part of which became the theme to TV’s “The Lone Ranger.”

One of the most unusual aspects of Rossini’s career is how early and abruptly he stopped composing for the stage. Following *Guillaume Tell*, created when he was 37 years old, Rossini never produced another opera, although he did continue to compose piano and orchestral works from his homes in Paris and Florence. After an extended period of physical and mental illness, Rossini found some stability in his later years, and became well-known as a sociable party host. He married Olympe Pélissier following the death of his first wife, Isabella, in 1845. When he died in 1868 at age 76, he was initially buried in Paris, but the Italians were so determined to re-claim the talented composer as their own, that his body was exhumed and he was re-buried in Florence in 1887.

With his prolific output, his worldwide success, and his innovations in operatic structure, Gioachino Rossini left a significant imprint on the opera world. His work has influenced generations of musicians and captivated innumerable audiences, from the 19th to the 21st centuries. When we listen to his work today, we are not just listening to music that has been applauded and celebrated for centuries, but are also experiencing the masterpieces of an opera revolutionary.
What is “bel canto?”

Directly translated, “bel canto” means “beautiful singing.” Bel canto singing was developed in the 17th century, when long lines of expressive melody began to replace more speech-like styles of singing in operas and other vocal music. These drawn-out melodies allowed the singer to demonstrate the unique qualities of his or her voice. The bel canto style of singing continued into the 18th and 19th centuries, where singers were expected to exhibit an even tone while executing difficult or virtuosic passagework, such as runs and trills. Although the style of singing remained constant from the 17th through early 19th century, the term “bel canto,” when applied to the operatic repertory, usually denotes only the operas of the early 19th century, particularly those of Bellini, Donizetti, and Rossini. The term is also extended to include Verdi’s early work. The works of these four composers epitomize early 19th century Italian opera: stylized, sensational, vocally demanding, and often formulaic.

Structure: What to listen for...

Bel canto operas share many formal similarities. The most common is a two-part aria structure. Bel canto arias begin with a slow “cantabile” section. “Cantabile” literally means “singable,” and the singing style of this section is characterized by smooth, warm, sustained vocal tones. In contrast, the faster “cabaletta” section that follows is full of vocal fireworks, with singers taking more liberties with phrasing. Historically, singers also improvised ornaments for many passages, much like jazz singers. Singers specializing in bel canto repertoire often possess a voice that is warm and rich with an expansive range, as well as the ability to sing complicated ornaments and phrases.

Italian Opera in the 19th Century

Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti lived during an explosion in Italian operatic production. In the early 19th century, Italy was not the unified nation it is today. The Italian peninsula was divided into many different kingdoms and city-states. The Republic of Venice included a number of towns and cities; the Pope controlled territory around
Rome; Naples and Sicily were kingdoms; and Trieste was ruled by Austria. All of these states supported several opera houses, in small towns and cities alike.

During this time, opera houses were frantically busy. They showcased the latest works of favorite composers, who were constantly writing to satisfy the public’s voracious appetite for new music. Operas were the Hollywood blockbusters of the time. The opera industry, with its superstar singers and master producers, turned out situation comedies (“opera buffa,” or comic opera), epics and tragedies (“opera seria,” or serious opera), and adventures (“opera semiseria”). In Italy, singing was a national sport, and opera was, first and foremost, entertainment, with drama often taking a back seat to vocal display.

New operas were usually commissioned by an “impresario,” an individual whose job was to organize a particular theater’s operatic offerings for the season. The impresario would first engage singers and then hire a composer and librettist. The number of singers hired, their relative popularity, and their voice types would determine the roles that the new opera would require.

The impresario might also ask a number of special requests of the composer. For example, “I’d like the soprano and tenor to sing a duet,” or “the last act should end with a chorus.” Composers usually wrote with the vocal abilities of the singers in mind. For example, Bellini wrote the role of Arturo in *I Puritani* for Giovanni Battista Rubini, known for his vocal agility and range.

**Expectations of Composers**

Bel canto composers were constantly under pressure. They were expected to produce work at a rapid rate — the norm was three to four operas a year — while holding down a musical post in a court, church, and/or conservatory. Composers also had to work within relatively narrow boundaries, taking into account the censorship laws of the state in which they were working, the requirements given to them by the impresario, and the preferences of the singers, not to mention the theater deadlines. Recycling of subjects, libretti, and even music was common. Rossini, for instance, was
famous for borrowing pieces of music from his older operas and simply inserting them into his new ones.

**In Recent History**
Bel canto opera was popular at its time, but as singers trained in the virtuosic technique of bel canto singing were replaced by a younger generation, the operas were performed less frequently. The advent of singers such as Maria Callas, Beverly Sills, Marilyn Horne, and Joan Sutherland, whose virtuosic singing and committed dramatic performances allowed them to star in these works, renewed interest in bel canto repertory, ushering in the “bel canto revival.” Today, works like *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and *Norma* have an appeal that transcends their era and remain in the standard repertory of opera houses around the world. Thousands of operas produced during this era are still unknown to the general public. In recent years some of these forgotten masterpieces have been brought to light by scholars and opera houses that wish to expand their repertories. Rossini’s *Le Comte Ory*, which had its Metropolitan Opera premiere in the spring of 2011, and Donizetti’s *Anna Bolena*, which opens the Met’s 2011-12 season, show that the bel canto revival is continuing today.
Resources: Il Barbiere di Siviglia Online Resources

Note: click on the blue link below the description to visit the corresponding page.

Video Clips

• Anthony Freud, Sir Andrew Davis, and Renée Fleming preview Rossini's THE BARBER OF SEVILLE
  Artist Interview, Lyric Opera of Chicago (2014)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBRCWRB849Q

• Barber of Seville Preview
  Production Preview, Canadian Opera (2014)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCLoFkw9r9g

• Accessible Arias: Pietro Spagnoli sings 'Largo al factotum' from the Barber of Seville
  Educational Video, Royal Opera House (2011)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHj9tQY3GvY

• Aria: “Largo al factotum”
  Opera Excerpt, Metropolitan Opera (2011)
  http://bcove.me/wqy092sh

• Ensemble: “Ma, signor”
  Opera Excerpt, Metropolitan Opera (2011)
  http://bcove.me/0dvlnp6r

• Latvian National opera -- Gioachino Rossini "Il Barbiere di Siviglia"
  Production Preview, Latvian National Opera (2011)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KgdKJyWXY

• Duet: “La bottega? Non si sbaglia”
  Opera Excerpt, Florida Grand Opera (2010)
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMFDUdMZzLs

• Aria: “Una voce poco fa”
  Opera Excerpt, Wichita Grand Opera (2009)
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWf4CwB0B60

• Duet (excerpt): “Dunque io son”
  Opera Excerpt, Schwetzinger Festspiele via Arthaus Musik (1988)
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yl9ST0EyEPc

Articles

• “How to stage a revolution” by Michael Billington for The Guardian
  (Friday 6 January 2006)
  Beaumarchais, the dramatist behind The Marriage of Figaro and Il Barbiere di Siviglia, was more
  than a mere playwright - he shaped the 18th century.
  http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2006/jan/06/classicalmusicandopera
Additional Resources: The Emergence of Opera

The origins of opera stretch back to ancient Greece, where playwrights used music and dance to augment moments of action in their stories. At this time, it was popular to write plays in Attic, a sing-song language, where half the words were sung and half were spoken. Dance was also a pivotal part of Greek drama; a chorus danced throughout scenes in an effort to highlight the play’s themes.

The philosopher Aristotle, in ‘The Poetics,’ outlined the first guidelines for drama, known as the Six Elements of Drama. Aristotle suggested that a play’s action should take place in one day, portray only one chain of events, and be set in one general location. Over the centuries, playwrights and composers took Aristotle’s advice more seriously. The tradition of including music and dance as an integral part of theatre continued through Roman times and into the Middle Ages. Liturgical drama, as well as vernacular plays, often combined incidental music with acting.

Opera can also be traced to the Gregorian chants of the early Christian Church. Music was an integral part of worship, and incorporated ancient melodies from Hebrew, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine cultures. The Church’s organization of music throughout the early Middle Ages gave it structure, codifying scales, modes, and notation to indicate pitch and rhythm. The chants were originally sung in single-line melodies (monophony), but over time more voices were added to compliment the main melody, resulting in the beginning of polyphony (many independent voices or parts sung simultaneously).

However, the Church objected polyphony, worried that the intricate weaving of melodies and words obscured the liturgical text. Since conveying the meaning of the text was the primary reason for singing in church, polyphony was viewed as too secular by Church leaders, and was banished from the Liturgy by Pope John XXII in 1322. Harmonic music followed, which developed as songs with one-line melodies, accompanied by instruments. Then, in 1364, during the pontificate of Pope Urban V, a composer and priest named Guillaume de Machaut composed a polyphonic setting of
the mass entitled *La Messe de Notre Dame*. This was the first time that the Church officially sanctioned polyphony in sacred music.

Another early contributor to the emergence of opera was Alfonso the Wise, ruler of Castile, Spain, in the 13th century. Also known as the Emperor of Culture, he was a great troubadour and made noted contributions to music’s development. First, he dedicated his musical poems, the “Cantigas de Santa Maria,” to Saint Mary, which helped end the church’s objection to the musical style. His “Cantigas” are one of the largest collections of monophonic songs from the Middle Ages. Secondly, he played a crucial role in the introduction of instruments from the Moorish kingdoms in southern Spain. These instruments, from the timpani to lute, came from Persia and the Arabic culture of the Middle East. Throughout the European Renaissance (14th – 16th centuries), minstrels and troubadours continued to compose harmonic folk songs which informed and entertained. Some songs were mere gossip; others were songs of love and heroes. These contained a one-line melody accompanied by guitars, lutes, or pipes.

Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) continued to reform church music by composing music in his native tongue (German) for use in services. He also simplified the style so that average people in the congregation could sing it. Luther turned to the one-line melodies and folk tunes of the troubadours and minstrels and adapted them to religious texts. His reforms had great impact upon the music of Europe: the common people began to read and sing music.

From the church at this time also emerged the motet, a vocal composition in polyphonic style, with Biblical or similar text which was intended for use in religious services. Several voices sang sacred text accompanied by instruments, and this format laid the groundwork for the madrigal – one of the last steps in preparing the way for opera. Sung in the native language of the people in their homes, taverns, and village squares, madrigals were written for a small number of voices, between two and eight, and used secular (rather than biblical or liturgical) texts.
When refugee scholars from the fall of Constantinople (1453) flooded Italy and Europe, their knowledge of the classics of Rome and Greece added to the development of European musical traditions. Into this world of renewed interest in learning and culture came a group of men from Florence who formed a club, the Camerata, for the advancement of music and Greek theater. Their goal was to recreate Greek drama as they imagined it must have been presented. The Camerata struggled to solve problems that confronted composers, and were interested in investigating the theory and philosophy of music. The Camerata also experimented with the solo song, a forerunner of the opera aria.

Not surprisingly, Greek and Roman mythology and tragedies provided the subject matter of the first librettists. The presence of immortals and heroes made singing seem natural to the characters. Composers used instrumental accompaniment to help establish harmony, which freed them to experiment with instrumental music for preludes or overtures. Development of the recitative and the instrumental bridge enabled writers to connect the song, dance, and scene of the drama into the spectacle which was to become opera. This connector-recitative later evolved into a form of religious drama known as oratorio, a large concert piece which includes an orchestra, a choir, and soloists.

Members of the Camerata – Jacopo Peri, Ottavio Rinnuccini, and Jacopo Corsi – are credited with writing the first opera, *Dafne*, based on the Greek myth. Their early efforts were crucial in establishing the musical styles of the new genre in the early 17th century. A sizeable orchestra was used and singers were in costume. *Dafne* became famous across Europe.

The Camerata set the scene, and onto the budding operatic stage came Claudio Monteverdi. He is considered the last great composer of madrigals and the first great composer of Italian opera. He was revolutionary in developing the orchestra’s tone-color and instrumentation. He developed two techniques to heighten dramatic tension: *pizzicato* – plucking strings instead of bowing them; and *tremolo* – rapid repetition of a single note. Modern orchestration owes him as much gratitude as does
opera. In his operas, such as *Orfeo* (1607), the music was more than a vehicle for the words; it expressed and interpreted the poetry of the libretto. His orchestral combinations for *Orfeo* were considered to be the beginning of the golden age of Baroque instrumental music.

Monteverdi’s experimentation with instruments and his willingness to break the rules of the past enabled him to breathe life into opera. He was far ahead of his time, freeing instruments to communicate emotion, and his orchestration was valued not only for the sounds instruments created but also for the emotional effects they could convey. In his work, music blended with the poetry of the libretto to create an emotional spectacle. His audiences were moved to an understanding of the possibilities of music’s role in drama.
Additional Resources: Reflections After the Opera

After every opera performance, the director, conductor, and performers reflect and evaluate the different aspects of their production, so that they can improve it for the next night. In a similar way, these Guiding Questions encourage active reflection, both individually and collectively, on your student’s opera experience.

Think about the portrayal of the characters in the production at the Met.

• How were the characters similar or different from what you expected? Try to identify specific qualities or actions that had an impact on your ideas and thinking.
• Did the performers’ voices match the character they were playing? Why or why not?
• Did any characters gain prominence in live performance? If so, how was this achieved? (Consider the impact of specific staging.)
• What did the performers do to depict the nature of the relationships between characters? In other words, how did you know from the characters’ actions (not just their words) how they felt about the other characters in the story?
• Stereotypically, most opera performers are considered singers first, and actors second. Was this the case? How did each performer’s portrayal affect your understanding of (or connection with) their character?

Consider the production elements of the performance.

• How did the director choose to portray the story visually? Did the production have a consistent tone? How did the tone and style of each performer’s actions (movement, characterization, staging) compare with the tone and style of the visual elements (set design, costume design, lighting design)?
• How did the set designer’s work affect the production? Did the style of the setting help you understand the characters in a new way?
• How did different costume elements impact the portrayal of each character?
• How did the lighting designer’s work affect the production?
• Did you agree with the artistic choices made by the directors and designers? If you think changes should be made, explain specifically what you’d change and why.
Additional Resources:
A Guide to Voice Parts and Families of the Orchestra

Voice Parts

**SOPRANO**
Sopranos have the highest voices, and usually play the heroines of an opera. This means they often sing many arias, and fall in love and/or die more often than other female voice types.

**MEZZO-SOPRANO, or MEZZO**
This is the middle female voice, and has a darker, warmer sound than the soprano. Mezzos often play mothers and villainesses, although sometimes they are cast as seductive heroines. Mezzos also play young men on occasion, aptly called “pants roles” or “trouser roles.”

**CONTRALTO, or ALTO**
Contralto, or alto, is the lowest female voice. Contralto is a rare voice type. Altos usually portray older females, witches and old gypsies.

**COUNTERENOR**
Also often known as alto, this is the highest male voice, and another vocal rarity. Countertenors sing in a similar range as a contralto. Countertenor roles are most common in baroque opera, but some contemporary composers also write parts for countertenors.

**TENOR**
If there are no countertenors on stage, then the highest male voice in opera is the tenor. Tenors are usually the heroes who “get the girl” or die horribly in the attempt.

**BARITONE**
The middle male voice. In comic opera, the baritone is often a schemer, but in tragic opera, he is more likely to play the villain.

**BASS**
The lowest male voice. Low voices usually suggest age and wisdom in serious opera, and basses usually play kings, fathers, and grandfathers. In comic opera, basses often portray old characters that are foolish or laughable.

Families of the Orchestra

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAMILY</th>
<th>INSTRUMENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STRINGS</td>
<td>violins, violas, cellos, double bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOODWIND</td>
<td>piccolos, flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRASS</td>
<td>trumpets, trombones, French horns, baritones, tubas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERCUSSION</td>
<td>bass drums, kettle drums, timpani, xylophones, piano, bells, gongs, cymbals, chimes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Additional Resources: Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adagio</td>
<td>Indication that the music is to be performed at a slow, relaxed pace. A movement for a piece of music with this marking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allegro</td>
<td>Indicates a fairly fast tempo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aria</td>
<td>A song for solo voice in an opera, with a clear, formal structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arioso</td>
<td>An operatic passage for solo voice, melodic but with no clearly defined form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baritone</td>
<td>A man’s voice, with a range between that of bass and tenor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ballad opera</td>
<td>A type of opera in which dialogue is interspersed with songs set to popular tunes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bel canto</td>
<td>Refers to the style cultivated in the 18th and 19th centuries in Italian opera. This demanded precise intonation, clarity of tone and enunciation, and a virtuoso mastery of the most florid passages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cabaletta</td>
<td>The final short, fast section of a type of aria in 19th-century Italian opera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cadenza</td>
<td>A passage in which the solo instrument or voice performs without the orchestra, usually of an improvisatory nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chorus</td>
<td>A body of singers who sing and act as a group, either in unison or in harmony; any musical number written for such a group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coloratura</td>
<td>An elaborate and highly ornamented part for soprano voice, usually written for the upper notes of the voice. The term is also applied to those singers who specialize in the demanding technique required for such parts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conductor</td>
<td>The director of a musical performance for any sizable body of performers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contralto</td>
<td>Low-pitched woman’s voice, lower than soprano or mezzo-soprano.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crescendo</td>
<td>Meaning “growing,” used as a musical direction to indicate that the music is to get gradually louder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diatonic scale</td>
<td>Notes proper to a key that does not involve accidentals (sharps or flats)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ensemble</td>
<td>From the French word for “together,” this term is used when discussing the degree of effective teamwork among a body of performers; in opera, a set piece for a group of soloists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<tr>
<td>finale</td>
<td>The final number of an act, when sung by an ensemble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fortissimo (ff)</td>
<td>Very loud.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forte (f)</td>
<td>Italian for “strong” or “loud.” An indication to perform at a loud volume.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>harmony</td>
<td>A simultaneous sounding of notes that usually serves to support a melody.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intermezzo</td>
<td>A piece of music played between the acts of an opera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intermission</td>
<td>A break between the acts of an opera. The lights go on and the audience is free to move around.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>legato</td>
<td>A direction for smooth performance without detached notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leitmotif</td>
<td>Melodic element first used by Richard Wagner in his operas to musically represent characters, events, ideas, or emotions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>libretto</td>
<td>The text of an opera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maestro</td>
<td>Literally “master”; used as a courtesy title for the conductor, whether a man or woman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>melody</td>
<td>A succession of musical tones (i.e., notes not sounded at the same time), often prominent and singable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mezzo-soprano</td>
<td>Female voice in the middle range, between that of soprano and contralto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>octave</td>
<td>The interval between the first and eighth notes of the diatonic scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opera buffa</td>
<td>An Italian form that uses comedic elements. The French term “opera bouffe” describes a similar type, although it may have an explicitly satirical intent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opera seria</td>
<td>Italian for “serious opera.” Used to signify Italian opera of a heroic or dramatic quality during the 18th and early 19th centuries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>operetta</td>
<td>A light opera, whether full-length or not, often using spoken dialogue. The plots are romantic and improbable, even farcical, and the music tuneful and undemanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overture</td>
<td>A piece of music preceding an opera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pentatonic scale</td>
<td>Typical of Japanese, Chinese, and other Far Eastern and folk music, the pentatonic scale divides the octave into five tones and may be played on the piano by striking only the black keys.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**pianissimo (pp)**  Very softly.

**piano (p)**  Meaning “flat,” or “low”. Softly, or quietly.

**pitch**  The location of a musical sound in the tonal scale; the quality that makes “A” different from “D.”

**prima donna**  The leading woman singer in an operatic cast or company.

**prelude**  A piece of music that precedes another.

**recitative**  A style of sung declamation used in opera. It may be either accompanied or unaccompanied except for punctuating chords from the harpsichord.

**reprise**  A direct repetition of an earlier section in a piece of music, or the repeat of a song.

**score**  The written or printed book containing all the parts of a piece of music.

**serenade**  A song by a lover, sung outside the window of his mistress.

**singspiel**  A German opera with spoken dialogue.

**solo**  A part for unaccompanied instrument or for an instrument or voice with the dominant role in a work.

**soprano**  The high female voice; the high, often highest, member of a family of instruments.

**tempo**  The pace of a piece of music; how fast or how slow it is played.

**tenor**  A high male voice.

**theme**  The main idea of a piece of music; analogous to the topic of a written paper, subject to exploration and changes.

**timbre**  Quality of a tone, also an alternative term for “tone-color.”

**tone-color**  The characteristic quality of tone of an instrument or voice.

**trill**  Musical ornament consisting of the rapid alternation between the note and the note above it.

**trio**  A sustained musical passage for three voices.

**verismo**  A type of “realism” in Italian opera during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in which the plot was on a contemporary, often violent, theme.
| **vocalise** | A musical composition consisting of the singing of melody with vowel sounds or nonsens syllables rather than text, as for special effect in classical compositions, in polyphonic jazz singing by special groups, or in virtuoso vocal exercises. |
| **volume** | A description of how loud or soft a sound is. |
References: Works Consulted


