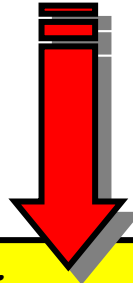




An Irreverent
Guide© for
ENJOYING:
*Des Moines
Metro Opera's
2009 Summer
Festival
Season*



Puccini: TOSCA *
Weber: DER FREISCHÜTZ *
Rossini: THE BARBER OF SEVILLE*

***Involuntary musical targets coopted
to demonstrate that "enjoying the opera" is NOT
an oxymoronic phrase!**

Acknowledgements

Greatly appreciated and effective in the development of this *Guide*, were the support, constructive comments and just plain, patient tolerance of:

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- McB McManus, Director of Marketing and Public Relations, DMMO.
- Members of the DMMO audience who volunteered commentary on the 2008 Festival *Guide*.

**Constructive criticism of this
Irreverent Guide will be accepted,
(but probably not graciously).**

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J.P Cooney
and
Sondra S. Cooney

AN IRREVENRENT GUIDE
FOR ENJOYING THE
DES MOINES METRO
OPERA'S
2009 SUMMER
FESTIVAL SEASON



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Greetings!

Des Moines Metro Opera is pleased to again partner with Dr. James Cooney in offering these offbeat, amusing and informative roadmaps to the operas of the 2009 Summer Festival Season! Dr. Cooney has captured the essence of these three great operas in a way that entertains, educates and enlightens.

Many people are involved with the creation of an opera production, from the conductor to the singers to the backstage technicians, all to create a magical experience for you in the theatre. A great deal of thought and consideration has gone into each of the elements you'll see and hear on the stage. It is our hope that this Guide will help you to appreciate and enjoy these works of art, and that it makes your experience with us this summer even more memorable.

Thank you for showing your interest in these Irreverent Guides to Opera, and as always, thank you for your continued support of Des Moines Metro Opera.

Sincerely yours,



Robert L. Larsen
Founder and Artistic Director

Cautionary Caveats for our Consumers

At the invitation of the Des Moines Metro Opera, an **Irreverent Guide to Enjoying Opera** was first created for the company's 2008 Summer Festival. That document incorporated all three productions into one volume. For the 2009 Festival, discussions of all three productions are again integrated into one document.

Background on the eccentric evolution of the **Irreverent Guides** series is found on pp. 141-142. For the unwary and/or uninitiated reader, there are several generic sections common to each of the 2009 opera discussions. A brief description of the general objectives of these sections follows. Therefore, you will know what you are getting into, or--- what to avoid!


- In response to long ago whiny whimpers, the section(s) *Tersely Telling A Tuneful Tale* was begrudgingly developed as a standard part in each **Irreverent Guide**. In all honesty, it is a seriously stripped-down synopsis of our operatic opus and its major musical moments.

These *Terse Tales* target two commonly impatient sub-classes of our ribald readership: 1. those who have short spans of attention AND/OR 2. those who spent their educational years (and probably beyond) insisting they only had sufficient time to scan synopses of assigned materials and only at the last moments before a critical confrontation with reality like "the final exam" OR later in life, the stockholders' meeting or perhaps, --- an operatic performance.

Occasionally, a *Terse Tale* is presented in alliteration. You ask, why use this ancient and somewhat arcane poetic style? Well, it is fun to manufacture and judging from its "rah, rah" readership reception, it must be fun to read; or maybe we are all a bit weird. Whatever!

Why only "occasional" alliteration you ask? Well it all depends on where I was the night before composing the copy. That stuff requires a reasonably clear head. Capisce?

- Integrated into the *Terse Tales* section(s) are materials highlighting and briefly discussing major musical sections of the opera. To distinguish these musical musings from the *Terse Tale* telling, the following format styles will be used:

- ✓ Musings on the opera's musical highlights will be in this font type style contained in a 
- ✓ Each selected musical highlight (aria, ensemble, etc.) will be titled with its opening words in the opera's original language. That will be followed by an approximate English translation.
- ✓ Musical (but wordless) interludes (e.g. an overture) will also be described in this font style type/grey box format.
- ✓ On-stage plot events will alliteratively appear in this font type style, but without the benefit of being boxed-in.

- Opera, as any art form is a product of its society and culture at a specific point in time. As that temporal point regresses into history, the on-stage and off-stage circumstances creating the opera frequently vanish into an archival dustbin.

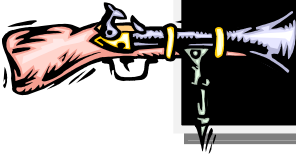
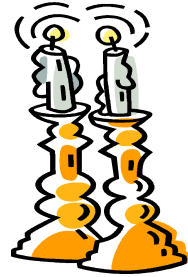
We argue that such absence is a loss to the understanding and enjoyment of an older piece when heard in contemporary times. Therefore, a *Background* piece has been developed for each of the three operas contained in this *Guide*. Each sets forth, albeit slightly, the sociology and perhaps, anthropology of the opera under the microscope.

The *Backgrounds* are designed to add to your opera viewing pleasure through enhancing understanding of how another time, place and circumstance probably influenced an artistic product. Enjoy!

WHERE DO I FIND--- ?

Tosca

p. 11



DER FREISCHÜTZ

p. 42

THE BARBER
OF SEVILLE

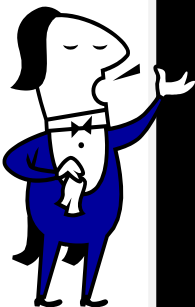
p. 86



EVERYTHING ELSE:

p. 135

- A Concluding Cogitation:
19th Century Nights at the Opera:
An Orgiastic Experience. P.135
- Reminiscing References.p.139
- About *Irreverent Guides*. p.143
- About the Authors.p.144



Composer: *Gioachino Rossini*

Librettist: *Cesare Sterbini*



An Opera Buffa,
in two or perhaps, three acts
--- details to follow, eventually.

Il Barbiere di
(The Barber of Seville)
Sivigilia

Original Language: Italian
Première: Teatro Argentina, Rome
February 5, 1816

Where Can I Find---?



A Concise Clarification to Preclude Confusion! 88.

Barber Byplay 90.

Finally, the Opera! 99.

A Sly But Significant Subtitle 100.

Who is this "Clip and Comb" Conspiratorial
Crowd of Pseudo-Spaniards Puling Phrases
of *Italiano-amore malattia*?¹²² 101.

Tersely Telling a Tuneful Tale Through
Alliterative Analysis and Musical Musings.
(a.k.a. Pap for the Impatient)103.

Act I. A sixteenth century, serene (so far),
sequestered square in Seville, sleeping silently
in pre-dawn darkness 105.

Act II. The flip side of the Act I façade:
the grumpy Guardian's great room facing onto
the serene square. Only a minimum of *tempus*
has *fugit* since Act I ended. . . . 111.

Act III Still, the flip side of the Act I façade:
the grumpy Guardian's great room facing onto
the serene square.¹²³ A rainy afternoon. . . . 120.

¹²²Also known as (a.k.a.), the Cast.

¹²³For some scenic variation, the final setting is frequently switched to a music room in the Casa, as the initial plotting and scheming of this portion emerges from an alleged vocal lesson.

A Concise Clarification To Preclude Confusion!



Your soon to be witnessed performance of *Barber* began evolving towards this Des Moines Metro Opera production well over two hundred and fifty years ago with the 1732 birth of a Paris watchmaker's son christened Pierre-Augustin Caron.¹²⁴

The events that led from that birth to that of Rossini's *Barber* are a numerous and colorful lot. Unfortunately, they also encompass several countries, languages, and not to mention--- a raft of really interesting people: fictional, factual, heroic and/or (hiss!), villainous. Certainly all that creates a cache of complexities that could contribute to customer confusion, not clarity it!

To further chaotically complicate, rather than simply simplify our singing-saga's scenario, *Barber* has an operatic sequel, *The Marriage of Figaro*.¹²⁵ That paired continuation of course also confounds our *Irreverent Guide* guidance to you.

Therefore---in consideration of customer comprehension, and to keep all of us from drowning in a deluge of debatable data, we offer the following Global Positioning System (GPS) modified if you will, for operatic orientation.

- We start simply enough with that Frenchman named Beaumarchais (nee Caron) who had been trying his hand at playwriting

¹²⁴ M. Caron eventually converted his birth moniker into "Beaumarchais." That occurred courtesy of the first of his several wives. His premiere Madame inherited some property known as Le Bois Marchal (the Marchais' Woods). Our hero trimmed those trees into a new name: Beaumarchais (beautiful Marchais). It had more cachet than Caron.

¹²⁵ Not a usual occurrence in Opryland. Wagner's *Ring* cycle is one of the few other inter-opera continuations that come to mind.

(circa mid-late 18th century). He returned from a Spanish sojourn with a traveling trunk full of stage-worthy characters and situations.

- Shortly thereafter, he whipped-up some of that trunk's traveling baggage into a successful play. It premiered in Paris while the American Revolution was revving up. The play was (en français) *Le Barbier de Seville* (*The Barber of Seville*).

- That play was later joined by another Beaumarchais bauble, *Le Mariage de Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*). This stage success showed up coincidentally while the French Revolution was beginning to roil. *Mariage* picked up almost all of the *Barber's* central characters, moved them ahead several years and spun that crew into comedic action concerning a 17th century extended, dysfunctional family's folderols.

- Over many subsequent years as bees to honey, the two plays attracted multiple composers eager to make the masterpieces into musicales. One of the first to arrive was the great Mozart and his equally blessed librettist, da Ponte. That pair was more attracted to marriage than a shave and haircut so, they used the second play's plot as the textual guide for their brilliant *Le Nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*).

- Several years thereafter, Rossini young in operatic career, but already quite successful, tackled the shave and haircut play. The rhythmic result was and still is an unbelievable success, *Il Barbier di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*).



Besides Plays, Beaumarchais was a really busy boy!

Beaumarchais, our operatic *Barber's* progenitor, is frequently referenced simply as "a successful Parisian playwright." That does little justice to the man, his life, and most importantly, his escapades.

A quick summary of his resume would indicate that he was, in somewhat chronological order: wondrous watchmaker, mechanically-inclined inventor, musician with tutorial talents especially for the French royal family, prudent politician, fugitive-in-exile, King's spy, publicly popular pamphleteer, publisher-savior of Voltaire's works, arms dealer plus revolutionary-supporter of both the American (1776) and French (1789) versions, quite a lover and perhaps, an 18th century edition of Bluebeard.¹²⁶ A fitting subject for his own opera? Perhaps, but not right now.

Rossini was not the first customer into the Barber's shop.

Beaumarchais actually took the first operatic swing at his *Barbieri*.¹²⁷ He originally developed the play as an opera in the style of opera-comique.¹²⁸ He submitted it for production at the Paris-based Opera

¹²⁶ To some readers, it will be viewed as unfortunate that we have exorcised most of Beau's background "stuff" along with its scent of salacious capering amid the collapsing French court. However, space and time call, "Cut and keep to the chase!"

¹²⁷ This was not Beaumarchais only operatic venture. In 1787, he developed the libretto for Antonio Salieri's opera, *Tarare*. (Salieri was Mozart's alleged *bête noir*.) The piece was a success despite being very advanced for the time. It has been described as almost "Wagnerian" in its textual and musical integration!

¹²⁸ That is with musical set pieces (arias, ensembles and choruses) surrounded by spoken dialogue.

Italiens. Unfortunately, he struck out. The opera was rejected, so the ever-resourceful Beaumarchais converted it into a play.¹²⁹

The first composer successfully at operatic bat with Beaumarchais's barber was Giovanni Paisiello,¹³⁰ a somewhat contemporary (1740-1816) of our boy Beau (1732-1799). In 1782, Paisiello's very successful operatic *Barbiere* was composed while he was under the careful care of Catherine the Great of Russia as her in-residence Court composer. Despite the fact the opera's sunny Spanish setting was born in a St. Petersburg winter environment, the work soon gained fame throughout Europe.

Another musical makeover of *Il Barbiere* appeared some fifteen years after the Paisiello success. This time by a Parisian-based composer Nicolas Isouard. M. Isouard was a prodigious creator of operas¹³¹ and a listee on at least, the lower level of Paris's pantheon of memorable artists. His *Barbiere*, although not a disaster, was critiqued as somewhat "ho-hum." Today, it appears to have been lost amid the thicket of his other works.

Before his death in 1816, Paisiello did have one final burst of glory related to his singing spin of the Spanish barber. Rossini, in that year a brilliant musical upstart, gave homage to Paisiello along with a request to operatically revisit the old gentleman's *Il Barbiere*. The request granted, Rossini ever the politician, named his version *Almaviva, ossia l'inutile Precauzione* to demonstrate respect for Paisiello's version. While it

¹²⁹ Beaumarchais's operatic libretto and music are lost somewhere in history's dustbin. While it is assumed that the libretto basically followed the subsequent play, nothing is known about our boy Beau's musical score.

¹³⁰ Paisiello, Italian by birth, was a prodigious composer of 18th century-style operas touting up a total of some ninety before shuffling off this mortal coil. His works were quite popular internationally, but they did begin to fade from performance under the impact of the changing operatic styles of the 19th century, especially those of Rossini and later, Verdi.

¹³¹ More than forty, up to the point he retired from the game.

pleased the old composer, it did not help Rossini. The premiere was all but booed from the stage by a pro-Paisiello claque.

Quickly thereafter though, the tide of public and critical favor began to turn in favor of Rossini. Fortuitously, Paisiello perished before the tide totally shifted. He did not live to see both his operatic masterpiece and most of his other compositions relegated to dusty shelves. They grew out of musical fashion under the onslaught of operas a la mode “Code Rossini.”¹³² That Code captivated Europe and changed the continent’s musical face.¹³³



[**Note to Reader:** Here we digress briefly for some definitions, that if undefined will make further discussions difficult.]

In the sixteenth century origins of opera, things were simple so to speak. “Opera” literally was an artistic stew: music, singing, scenery, dancing, costumes etc. All this stuff was stuffed into a story that had its origins from tales of very ancient times, mythology or, the Bible. It was always very serious stuff and seldom ended “happily ever after.”

As opera began to catch on, all the gloom, doom, moralizing and massacring was depressing the box office. So, some comic relief was slipped in. Turns out that was the first step on a very slippery slope of operatic subject sub-specialization.

First thing you know, folks are talking about serious operas AND comic operas. To sound more learned, these opera types were labeled. VOILA!

¹³² See p. 94.

¹³³ Paisiello’s *Il Barbiere* remains a masterful opera even alongside the Rossini opus. Still frequently performed today, comparatively its musical creativity is noticeably dated.

Simple “opera” had begat *opera seria* (*serious opera*) which in its turn begat *opera semiseria* (*sort of serious opera*) or, serious with some funny stuff thrown in.

Soon though, those were not sufficient, The funny stuff supporters lobbied for a full funny-stuff opera. It was begat as *opera buffa*. or as we know it today, comic opera, of which our *Barber* is the quintessence.

Now all this begetting, continues to roll and operatic sub-specialties begin to seriously abound. Further each major opera-loving country (Italy, Germany, France, etc) would not share internationally, linguistically the label “begotten” in their operatic cultures. Further to frustrate, each begat label signified a different set of content expectations: as examples, music (arias, ensembles etc.) plus spoken language, but no recitative (musical mimicking of spoken language) OR music, plus recitative OR --- ENOUGH, we’re stopping here!

Rossini dealt masterfully with only two operatic “begats,” *seria* and *buffo* and almost exclusively in the Italian milieu. So, let us forget the other label stuff. We do not need it, at least for a shave and haircut. For now just remember as operas historically mature and multiply there is a lot of arcane obfuscation occurring. You have been warned!



*The Rossini “Style”
of Operatic Composition.*

Rossini through his work, quite literally broke the strangle hold of 18th century Italian operatic “tradition” on 19th century Italian operatic composition. He developed new patterns that moved this nationalistic operatic form into vastly new directions.

In the Rossini dominated period, techniques of singing and melody were altered significantly, and the growing “romantic” influence roused

antique and stifling dramatic conventions.¹³⁴ Perhaps most importantly, the role of the composer in general was advanced to that of creative artist;¹³⁵ the balance of power among composers, singers and impresarios was significantly shifted towards the composer.

The Rossini “type” opera issued a challenge of change through its musical form, orchestral style, rhythmic vitality, and, perhaps most importantly, through the role of the music in defining and shaping the on-stage drama.¹³⁶ All these conventions became classified as the **Code Rossini**.¹³⁷ Through at least the first half of 19th century, that Code served for European opera as its “do and don’t” equivalents of Roberts Rules of Order. It was the template used by most other composers to guide them in structuring the musical development of a “successful” operatic work.

The Fingerprint of the Rossini “Sound.”



Most of us who enjoy music but are not musicians, eventually learn that almost every composer has a distinctive sound, much like painters have their individual and (usually) recognizable artistic style. Like fingerprints (or snowflakes) there are an infinite number of these styles but each one is unique from the others.

In Rossini’s works especially with his buffa operas like *Il Barbiere* and *Cenerentola*, his “sound” begins with a musical effervescence, a bubbly well-aged champagne of notes. To that is added a blending of voices, frequently in brilliantly arranged ensembles and so precisely balanced

¹³⁴ Apart from radically altering acting and staging, this influence also opened a wealth of new subjects and techniques for the operatic stage.

¹³⁵ Up to that point, operatic composers were considered “musical hacks.” Their only function was to create vocal music to show off singers’ voices.

¹³⁶ Rossini’s operatic influences are generally credited to have affected most works of Italian origin that emerged during his lifetime. Further, the popularity of his work internationally influenced non-Italian composers and their efforts.

¹³⁷ No relation to Da Vinci’s.

yet differentiated, that your ears can only marvel. Further aural enrichment arises with the addition of language precisely rhymed and articulated (in the mouths of the right singers) so that it creates a pace of its own, both integrated with and independent of its accompanying music. Finally, he introduces a technique that uniquely differentiates him from all others,¹³⁸ the “Rossini crescendo.” As his work builds towards a climax, it’s verbal and musical rate increases with almost geometric rapidity. It approaches a speed so excessive that one thinks distinctive words and notes will not survive the onslaught. However, they do, up to and through an explosive finale.

Rossini’s Compositional “Customs.”



Apart from the above though, it needs to be said that charitably at best, Rossini was a lazy composer. He was always late with his commissions. Perhaps as a result of chronic procrastination, some of his finest work was done in remarkably short periods of time. *The Barber of Seville* was composed in somewhere between seven to fourteen days; *La Cenerentola* birthed a year after *Barber* took much longer, three weeks more or less! However, some biographers claim the librettist took twenty-two days for the words and Rossini took twenty-four for the music. Whatever, it probably was much quicker than any of us could do.

Rossini’s operatic overtures¹³⁹ were always composed last and usually the night before the premiere performance of the opera. The composer claimed the pressure inspired him. That may be, but it definitely drove his operatic managers to the verge of violence. To force his completion of overtures for both *Otello* and *La Gazza Ladra*, the producers barricaded¹⁴⁰ Rossini in the opera house and refused to let him out until the music was delivered. In the case of *Barber*, time apparently ran out even before the creative juices flowed. Rossini therefore “borrowed” one

¹³⁸ If none of the preceding have not.

¹³⁹ Many of these have also become concert hall favorites.

¹⁴⁰ For *La Gazza*, his prison was an elegant salon in the venerable La Scala opera house.

of his existing overtures. Evidently, those early operatic audiences had no short-term musical memory at least for overture retreads or were too polite to cry “foul!”¹⁴¹

As Rossini developed more operas, especially opera seria, he grew in stature as a dramatist. However, almost from the get-go, he was a consummate composer of overtures. Unfortunately, his chronic procrastination tended to interfere with his development of a large archive of original overtures. The truth be told, a great number of his overtures were used for more than one opera and several for more than two.¹⁴²

In his later works, Rossini began to abandon traditional overtures. It is largely assumed this resulted from his desire to involve the audience in the action quicker. One suspects, however, he was just tired of being barricaded in those dusty, drafty backstage rooms.

Apart from his habitual lack of punctuality, his compositional demeanor was at least unusual, if not downright eccentric. He always composed in his bedroom (unless barricaded elsewhere) and in his dressing gown. He also never shaved during his compositional fervor. This latter practice led to much joking about an unshaven composer creating an opera about a barber. Be that as it may, Rossini is alleged to have claimed that he did not shave himself; therefore, it would have been necessary for him to go to a barber frequently for shaves. If he had taken that much time from composition, the opera would never have been finished. *Good point!*

¹⁴¹ It appears there were more fun and games getting a finalized overture for our factotum Figaro than there were for our operatic Count to woo and wed his Countess. For further facts on this finagling, see p 105.

¹⁴² Rossini did not limit recycling of his music to overtures. He also used arias and ensemble pieces in more than one opera. His duet “Questo cor ti guira amore” was used in six operas. Charitably (again), such repetitiveness probably could have resulted more from his chronic habit of accepting too many operatic contract assignments over short periods of time than it did from procrastination. Further, in his defense, it appears he only borrowed from himself.



Unlike the Sturm und Drang associated with getting many previous **Irreverent Guide**-subject operas on-stage,¹⁴³ the *Barbiere* preambles were comparatively peaceful. Its first step onto the stage, however, shared a great deal of premiere pain with Puccini's *Butterfly*.

The whole affair began with a commission for Rossini to write two operas for the Venetian carnival season of 1816.¹⁴⁴ At this time, the composer was already well regarded by the Italian opera-fanatic public. Although he was only six years into his nineteen year, opera-writing career, he had produced 15 of his eventual 39 operas. In brief, he was a known and bankable quantity. The first opera of the commission *Torvaldo e Doliska*¹⁴⁵ was premiered on schedule, December 26, 1816.

Although the subject of the second opera had yet to be identified much less started, on the 26th Rossini agreed to have Act I of the second opera ready in three weeks! Because of the limited compositional time, Rossini and his librettist Sterbini decided to adapt Paisiello's *Barbiere* opera. Although more than 25 years old, Paisiello's work was still quite popular, as was its now elderly composer.

Rossini, no political fool, requested Paisiello's permission to adapt the earlier plot assuring the new libretto would be a "reversification" of the

¹⁴³ As examples, see the **Irreverent Guide** issues for *Un Ballo*, *Lucia*, *Samson et Dalila* and *Les Contes*.

¹⁴⁴ The commission was initiated by the Impresario of the Teatro Argentina, Duke Cesarini.

¹⁴⁵ Although it remained in Italian repertoire for many years, it was never a critical success.

original. The proposed opera was also to be renamed *Almaviva or the Useless Precaution*. Paisiello agreed,¹⁴⁶ however his partisans did not.

The new version of the old opera was created between December 26, 1815 (the first commissioned opera's premiere) and February 5, 1816 (the day before the actual premiere of the second opera). Acrimonious disagreement still exists between one school of musicologists who insist the opera was created in thirteen days versus those cheering for fifteen days.¹⁴⁷ All do agree that however long it took, the work was completed between 12/26/15 and 2/5/16. Whatever, it was fast!

The good news was the rapid readiness of the piece for its opening night. Even though, as to be noted in the subsequent operatic analyses, certain parts of the opera were borrowed from already existing Rossini materials, the show did start as contractually scheduled. Then came the bad news!

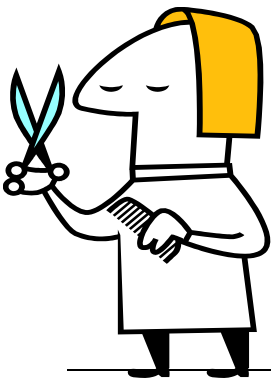
While Paisiello may have blessed the Rossini re-do, the Paisello clique joined forces with the anti-Rossini clique to turn the first night into a fiasco of classic proportions. Similar to the events that trashed the *Madama Butterfly* premiere outing, *Il Barbiere* was faced with an auditorium packed with folks that felt Rossini's work, yet unheard, was inferior to their pal Paisiello. They were determined to convince at least the Venetian opera-going world of their musical judgment acumen.

The cat-calls, the whistling wine bottles etc. were so voluminous and constant, the performance could not even be heard by anyone other than the singers. If that were not bad enough, a series of on-stage mishaps trumped the on-going trashing in the auditorium. Included among the documented disasters were:

¹⁴⁶ Despite Paisello's documented acquiescence to Rossini, it is alleged he looked forward to a Rossini disaster and primed his clique to assist such an effort.

¹⁴⁷ These people aren't busy enough!

- The strings on Almaviva’s guitar snapped during his Act I serenade to Rosina;
- Figaro’s guitar suffered the same fate;
- Basillo fell making his entrance bleeding his nose. This bo-bo even further amused the crowd when he staunched the flow of blood from his nose, on his costume;
- The very complex Ensemble that closes the final scene of Act I was in full flight when a cat appeared on stage. For reasons undocumented, the animal was chased in various directions by the evening’s Figaro, and Bartolo. The cat struck a compromise by running under Rosina’s skirts.
- As was the custom of the day, Rossini as the composer was presiding over the performance at a piano placed in front of the orchestra. He had chosen to wear a coat whose color and style offended the audience.¹⁴⁸ That did not help as things on-stage and in the auditorium began to degenerate. Amid the chaos greeting the final curtain, the composer ignored the whole melee, rose to applaud the singers and urged the audience to do the same. That simply increased the hooting and hissing. It is said Rossini then went home, promptly went to bed--- and slept soundly! The second night’s performance however, was a major triumph and international success swiftly followed. Go figure!



FINALLY, THE OPERA!

“I CANNOT HELP THINKING THAT *IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA* FOR THE ABUNDANCE OF TRUE MUSICAL IDEAS, FOR ITS COMIC VERVE AND THE ACCURACY OF ITS DECLAMATION, IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL *OPERA BUFFA* THERE IS.”

GIUSEPPE VERDI, 1898

¹⁴⁸ Think about that folks!

A Sly But Significant Subtitle?

Beaumarchais's play which introduced to the world to the barber Figaro, was subtitled *The Useless Precaution*. That subtitle was co-opted by Rossini and his librettist when the play was used as the basis of their opera. Further, *The Useless Precaution* label was creatively and symbolically used throughout the opera.

It first occurs in Act I when Rosina in response to a question from Bartillo, tells him that the paper she dropped "accidentally" off the Casa's balcony was from a trendy new opera, *The Useless Precaution*.

Rossini et. al. in a little inside joke at their own expense have Bartolo indicate he does not care for opera, it is "an exotic and irrational entertainment—usually a semi-serious play, a long melancholy boring, poetic rigmarole in the worst taste!"

Subsequently, the title again pops up during the Music lesson sequence when Rosina announces the song she will sing is the rondo from *The Useless Precaution*. Bartolo observes that she is always "prating" about that opera.

Finally, as the opera's plotting and scheming begin to resolve in the lovers favor, Bartollo confesses to Figaro that he (Bartolo) was the person who removed the ladder from the balcony--- hoping to block an elopement. That gesture backfired beautifully, and as Figaro subsequently observes to Bartolo, "That was the real useless precaution!"

In a heavy-handed attempt to lead the audience to a plot conclusion they are quite capable of reaching on their own, the phrase "Useless Precaution" is sometimes translated into English (albeit erroneously) as *The Guardian Outwitted*.

*Who is this "Clip and Comb"
Conspiratorial Crowd of
Pseudo-Spaniards Puling Pleasant
Phrases of Italiano-amore malattia ?*



- **Fiorello** (bass). Like *Don Giovanni's* Leporello, this Fiorello fellow is the facilitating factotum to our undercover Count (see below). Unlike Leporello though, he has no humor and is in fact, a competitive candidate for the Castilian Curmudgeon of the Year contest!
- **Count Almaviva** (tenor). An amiable aristocratic splinter from the royal House of Hapsburg's Spanish seedlings.¹⁴⁹ Our Count, concealing his Hapsburg heritage, is currently ambling through Andalusia canvassing for a Countess.
- **Figaro** (baritone). At his business base, a barber--- but not in the tradition of the Sweeney Todd, Fleet Street demonic branch. Our fine fellow Figaro is in fact, a top-of-the-line factotum.¹⁵⁰ Much in demand by Seville's fashionable and not-so-fashionable families, Figaro famously finagles and facilitates all forms of "must-do" missions from marcelling and manicuring through mate matching and marital maneuvers. His brio is as boundless as the bounty bestowed on this barber for his beneficial behavior. Bravo!
- **Rosina** (soprano/ mezzo-soprano).¹⁵¹ Securely sequestered but lyrically lovable, this sensationally sweet Señorita can be a formidable foe and/or a clever co-conspirator. Whatever devious demeanor is demanded for her

¹⁴⁹ Because of its more than half a millennium longevity, this royal house has more variations on the spelling of its household name than a politician has promises. The most frequent are "Hapsburg" versus "Habsburg". We have opted for Hapsburg as it is usually used in reference to the Spanish royal line of that hapless house and Spain is the setting for our singing. Interestingly, the varieties of "Hapsburg" spelling in current vogue do not seem to egregiously excite etymologists.

¹⁵⁰ Especially when faced-off against the fatuous, frumpy Fiorello (see above).

¹⁵¹ This role was originally written for the mezzo-soprano voice. However, over the years because of its brilliance and the opera's popularity, it was co-opted by sopranos. Today among lyrical ladies, it is a showpiece for both vocal ranges. In the DMMO production, the role will be sung by a soprano.

to fly the coop of her casa-caged captivity, she complies. For her cool cooperation, she is christened a countess. Her coloratura cacophony has carried the day!

- ***Dr. Bartolo*** (bass). Dreaming of dominating a donna's dowry, this bad guy of a barrister and a grumpy guardian has warped wishes for wooing and wedding his ward, the sensational sweet Señorita (see above). His demeanor's is so despicably detestable, we will "bravo" when our Barber et. al. best him.

- ***Don Basilio*** (bass). Not much better in behavior than Bartolo, Basilio is at best, a great grifter. He claims to be a churchly cleric as well as a practitioner of many less pious professions. Whatever, poor performance predominates all his practices, except for scheming and conniving. This Don, masqued as a music master, has his notes soured by the sensationally sweet Señorita and her co-conspirator combo of Sevillian senors. Good riddance to this rotter of a roué!

- ***Bertha***¹⁵² (contralto). The housemaid in our grumpy Guardian's Casa, she is compliant to that doctor's demands, especially when it comes to sequestering a sweet Señorita. She is bested by the Barber though. As the consequence of his apothecarian ability, she spends a great deal of on-stage time, sneezing.

- ***Ambrosius***. (bass). The male counterpart to our Casa's conspiratorially compliant house cleaner. He too is bested by the Barber's mortar and pestle magic. As a consequence, his stage time is largely dominated by semi-sleeping.

- ***Magistrate, Notary, Officer***¹⁵³ (bass), ***Street Musicians and Soldiers***. These chorusing, but clearly concerned citizens of Seville attempt to enforce civil order in that cacophonous Casa situated on what had formerly been, a sequestered, serene square in Seville. To the man, they try to maintain serenity manfully. To the man,¹⁵⁴ they are mostly successful. Bravo!

¹⁵² In various editions, she is named Bertha or Marcellina.

¹⁵³ In some scenarios, he is a sergeant. Rank really does not rankle the role though as long as he is loudly officious.

¹⁵⁴ Remember this takes place before gender equity.

*Tersely Telling a Tuneful Tale
Through Alliterative Analysis
and Musical Musings*
(a.k.a. Pap*for the Impatient)



*FYI, according to Webster's New World Dictionary (2nd ed.),
PAP= "any oversimplified or tasteless writing." Got the picture?

- Before an Overture opens our operatic opus, a Hapsburg Court Count (Almaviva) under the incognito cover of a countenance-concealing cloak, has been casing the colorful corners and serene, but sequestered squares of scenic Spain.

- While on this secretive sight-seeing sojourn, he suddenly spied on Madrid's meadow, a delectable donna (Rosina) primly promenading on that popular Prado.

- He was swiftly smitten and quickly concluded he should coronate her his Countess. Unfortunately, there were **COMPLICATIONS!**

- Specifically, the country-cruising Count was seen by the sweet Señorita's (a.k.a. a countess-yet-to-be) suspicious chaperone. Since she was in Madrid only to briefly peruse the Prado, she was rapidly returned to her real residence, which was situated on a sequestered, serene square in sunny Seville.

- Amid that Seville square's cozy covey of casas, our countess-catching complications were further confounded: the sensational Señorita seems to be continuously confined to her Casa's corner balcony by either a protective papa or a grumpy guardian

(Dr.Bartolo).¹⁵⁵ Whoever, the countess-to-be's caretaker is certainly a crabby and covetous chaperone!

- As a consequence, how can our Count create a convenient conversation with the lady in question ? A conundrum!
- Our Count is quite confounded, so he simply stays secreted around the serene square in Seville, occasionally sending a sub-rosa serenade to his sought-after Señorita, while contemplating the cul-du-sac his countess (to-be) catching has crashed him into.
- NOW! The Overture occurs and then, the opus will officially open!

Il Barbiere Overture

Off the operatic stage, many overtures have circumspectly worked their way into popular public consciousness through concert halls, live action and cartoon movies, TV and radio commercials, etc. The *Il Barbiere* Overture is one of that select band whose music, if not its operatic origin, is instantly recognizable when heard. Such immediate celebrity if you will, is largely a result of the music's bubbly enthusiasm, and its rapidly increasing pace climaxing in one of those masterful Rossini crescendos. It is just plain excitingly infectious for the human spirit.

In the interest of equity though, it should be acknowledged that in the *Barbiere* Overture are the musical seeds of what will become Rossini's Overture to *William Tell*. The *Tell* theme subsequently appropriated by the Lone Ranger of long-ago radio, is too much with many of us to not get caught up in Rossini's *Barbiere* syncopated sounds that will mature years later into the hoof beats of "the great horse Silver!"

Sorry, got carried away in adolescent memories! At any rate-

The *Barbiere* Overture begins quietly, almost musically musing; it shortly softly generates some stern almost militaristic qualities. Then--- it picks up speed and begins to generate those *William Tell*-like rhythms (yet-to-be).
(TO BE CONTINUED)

¹⁵⁵ Do not let his medical moniker mislead you. Titles in those times were topsy-turvy from today. Consequently, the Doctor is actually a barrister/lawyer; the Barber (to be shortly entering this ensemble), actually is also a physician-surgeon. Do not say, "Yes, but---?" Accept it and move on!

Il Barbiere Overture (CONTINUED)

The race is now on! Familiar themes begin to energetically emerge, submerge and then resurface. All this occurs at that foretold, rapidly increasing pace. Finally, the orchestra spins into the musical paradise know as the Rossini Crescendo. It is only a poor conductor and/or orchestra that cannot rouse an audience into a frenzy of appreciation after the composer's final "Ba-boom!" Points worth remembering about this remarkable piece: 1. As with Mozart's Overture to *The Magic Flute*, this opus contains no music from the actual opera, yet it conveys the buoyant comic mood of the work perfectly; 2. The Overture used at the 1816 premiere was NOT composed for *Barbiere*, Rossini, behind schedule as usual, "borrowed" an overture from another of his operas; and, 3. The overture he used was later lost, so there is no certainty about its sounds, though its thought to be the overture to his *Il Turco in Italia* Overture.

The loss was no problem! The ever resourceful Rossini borrowed another overture he created for his opera *Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra*. That is what we hear today! However, to me this brio *Barbiere* music does not conjure up a grim Queen Elizabeth I-like spirit. Does it do it for you?

- CURTAIN UP! Cue the confounded Count and his rowdy retinue. Break a leg!

Act I.

A sixteenth century, serene (so far), sequestered square in Seville sleeping silently in pre-dawn darkness.¹⁵⁶

- Into that serene, sequestered Seville square, the Count's chronically complaining chief cook and bottle washer (Fiorello) hustles a hired-herd of motley musicians acquired to accompany the Count's coming crooning to the sensationally sweet Señorita.

¹⁵⁶ The major focus of the serene square stage-setting is on the Casa wherein the grumpy guardian sequesters our sensationally sweet Señorita. An imposing second floor, well-secured balcony is usually the Casa façade's most noticeable feature.


Piano, pianissimo / Softly now, softly there.

A standard stage technique is to open a sequence with a group of characters speaking or singing at each other (and the audience) about how, who, when, where and what is or was or will be going on. It is a quick and cheap path for plot exposition.

Barbiere's opening ensemble is such a technique. Accompanied by tippy-toe, be quiet(!) music, the Count's recruited combo, his belligerent butler and eventually himself creep on stage making mucho noise to urge one and all to be quiet. Since they have been there before, they identify quickly and obviously just for us, the Casa and its Señorita to be serenaded. Thus, in a very few moments we learn a lot!

- For many moons, this combo and crooner have been an on-going aural occurrence on the serene sequestered square in Seville. Such perpetual, perfect-pitch pandemonium has peeved property owners, promoted realtor rage and encouraged no increase in casa curb appeal!

- The Count ambulates on and commences to conduct and croon a serenade to the sleeping Señorita. The song is sweetly sung and then--



Ecco ridente in cielo / Far, in the eastern heaven---

The message being delivered in this brief, lovely interlude is basically, "Day is breaking. So, get up and come to the window! Let me see you! "

"Ecco ridente—" the Count's opening aria, is a cavatina, which means in the format of 19th century Italian opera, it is the entrance aria of a principal character, slow paced and with no crazed canary-like cadenzas.

The cavatina originated in the early stages (pun!) of 18th century opera. Initially it was a musically simple aria (e.g. no vocal fireworks). However, by the early 19th century, "slow" was added to its characteristics.

"Ecco ridente—" was not the aria used at *Barbiere*'s premiere. The tenor had insisted on singing another piece that allegedly was not even Rossini's. It proved to be a musical and vocal disaster. The next night Rossini, true to form, borrowed one of his arias that already had been used in two of Rossini's other operas! That is the piece we hear today.

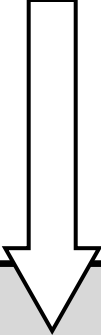
The substitute was a great success, as the audience evidently had no short-term memory triggering their earlier meetings with that retreaded music.

- A pregnant pause prevails. Damn! No sign of the now should-be-sleepless, Señorita. Unfortunately, also an on-going occurrence! Alas!

- The playing people are paid-off plentifully and gratefully go galumphing off to garner another gig.

- The Count is concerned; he is consistently check-mated by the continuously closed Casa. Still, he stubbornly seeks that sensationally sweet Señorita to be his companionable Countess. However, with no more new and/or monumental maneuvers now in mind, our main man only wistfully watches and waits, concealed by the Casa's corner.

- THEN--- to rescue our concerned Count, the cavalry comes charging on in the form of a singular force-of-nature: a bravissimo barber (Figaro)! Although Seville is still sleeping, in a fortissimo song filled with sufficient force to rouse the resting residents, the factotum flings the facts of Figaro's fame and fortune. In a succinctly sung summation, he surmises that he is the town's most useful citizen and fortune's favorite. This character's cascade of "can do" claims concusses the Count. BRAVO BARBER!



Largo al factotum / I am the busiest man in town.

Barbieri is quite literally crammed with operatic musical gems. At the top of that popularity pecking order is the *Largo al factotum* --- Figaro's introductory aria. Its music perfectly introduces him to us. Even if there were no words, the melody would tell you all needed to know about this brilliant character. The music bubbles with enthusiasm, and the words punched out at warp speed, provide an entertaining insight into Figaro's "professional" capacity and the wide-ranging demands made on this fine figure of a factotum. The pace and busy-ness of his day are definitely and delightfully demonstrated.

The lengthy but amiable aria is off-stage also, a great concert recital favorite of baritones. Finally, thanks to no less a personage than Bugs Bunny faking it as Figaro in a classic movie cartoon, the aria (and its singer) has taken on an image in the public's mind of "the" typical male operatic icon to be paired with the singing, horned-helmeted fat lady.

- Our Hapsburg hero is made happy as is the belting Barber, by determining that as a duo, they had previously been productively plotting pals.

- Queried by his past plotting pal concerning his undercover ambulation across Andalusia (with special emphasis on Seville), the Count tells his tale of thwarted love and the cruelly checkmating Casa.

- "No problem," proclaims the Barber! "That Casa is my cup of tea. I am the factotum that makes its family facilely function. The sensationally sweet Señorita will shortly be your Senora!"

- No sooner sung/said than the subject Señorita slips into sight with a billet doux she has developed. How shall she send it to her secretive serenader, she musically muses?

↓

Non e venuto ancora / I can't see him anywhere.

A recitative* sequence (for alliterative enlightening, follow the arrows) begins with *Non a venuto*--- as Rosina looking for her serenader, makes her first appearance, albeit barricaded on her balcony. Shortly, Bartolo will follow. The sequence will then have all four principals on-stage for the first time and Rossini uses it to maximum advantage. In a very few recitative-style lines, the composer indicates the essentials of both Rosina and Bartolo for the benefit of Figaro and Almaviva. While the guardian is ruthless, the girl is quite clever and fearless. Consequently, the Count is even more captivated. Thus motivated, he launches into his second serenade after Bartolo beats it from the balcony._____

*A convention unique to opera, the recitative melodically imitates the spoken voice. It is a substitute for spoken dialogue and is very "de rigueur" in many but not all operas. Why? That is a long story, so let us just move on.

→ • The sweet Señorita sees the two senors. Before she can deliver her delicate document to that duet of Dons, her grumpy, grungy guardian gratuitously bursts onto the balcony demanding the document.

→ • Oops! The Donna dexterously drops the billet doux to the Dons downstairs. No fools they, they quickly conceal it. The Donna

CONTINUED →

then cleverly cajoles the grumpy Guardian to find the document dropped downstairs.

→ • As the dupe descends, the Count speed-reads the Donna's (a.k.a. the sensationally sweet Señorita) dropped document. It says, "Identify yourself my sweet serenader and your ultimate intentions! Whatever they are makes me no mind! Later today, when my grumpy, grungy Guardian goes gamboling from this confining Casa, I will escape to you." --- or words to that effect.

→ • (This Miss's mother obviously never taught her that personal parlance with people you are just passing in the park or promenading on the Prado is not prudent; nor should one elope with just anybody-- - especially before the first date!)

→ • Nervous, with the note unfound and other nonsense nagging at his nerves, the grumpy Guardian decides he will wall off the balcony.

→ • Also, he is weary of this ward-watchful, wary warden work. Therefore, as an added precaution, he will marry the sensationally sweet Señorita. She has one devil of a dowry, you know!

→ • Meanwhile, under the balcony, the sweet Señorita's circumspect correspondence has encouraged the Count in his countess-quest.

→ • The Count's correspondence celebration is somewhat curtailed when the fantastic factotum (a.k.a. Figaro) fills him in on the Casa's comings and goings: the grumpy guy is in fact just a grim guardian NOT a protective papa. That is good for our Count's courting! However, that non-familial fact facilitates the grim Guardian's foul fishing for his ward's wealth.

→ • The grim Guardian does shortly quit the Casa to meet with mendacious minions that will tout suite, manipulate his misbegotten marriage mission coup!

CONTINUED →

• While the Señorita seeks her serenader's sobriquet, the serenader himself is still swathed in secrecy to secure the family fortune from fortune-hunting females. Therefore, he is silent on his career as a Count. In his soon-to-be sung serenade to his sensationally sweet Señorita, now situated to be seen (and serenaded) from the square, he sells himself as a struggling student (Lindoro). Now--- to the singing of the serenade.

→ **Se il mio nome saper voi bramate/You want to know who comes--?**

Few operatic principals are gifted by composers with back-to-back arias. *Turandot's* Liu is one such exception. Another is Rossini's gift to Almaviva--- the two back-to-back *Barbiere* serenades.

By shortly following the Count's earlier cavatina, the more florid style of *Se il mio--* is clearly defined. The aria probably could qualify as everyman's concept of a Spanish serenade.

Accompanied only by guitar, the piece is quietly lovely (People are still sleeping, you know!) In its text, the Count spins his incognito tale of the starving student (Lindoro) with nothing to offer his beloved except his heart, etc.

Musically encouraged by both Rosina and Figaro, the Count continues his romantic rhythms with increasing enthusiasm. The serenade however, never reaches satisfactory musical closure, as Rosina suddenly has to beat it off the balcony. Someone is coming! "Lindoro" is left bereft in mid-scale.

↓
All' idea di quell metallo / When I hear your lordship mention---

As Rosina disappears, an extended rollicking musical sequence begins between the finagling Figaro and the captivated Count. (See below for alliterative analyses of the remaining action.) In what is essentially the Act I (or if you prefer, Scene 1) finale, the sequence offers a range of operatic musical forms: recitatives, short arias, duets (a.k.a. ensembles). Irrespective of form, the musical tone remains buoyant and celebratory; its pace continually increasing a la Rossini. In the right throats, it is both a musical and acting tour de force for the two male principals.

In the course of this musical cascade, Figaro very much in charge of the situation, hatches his sure-fire scheme to secure the Señorita, gives the Count a lesson in drunken demeanor, and provides directions to his tontorial parlor (dictated in a brief, but delightful aria). The romp ends with the pair exiting while still happily dueting; Figaro fantasizing about a big boost to come to his factotum finances, and the Count contemplating his clever countess soon-to-be.

→

- Despite the Donna's dramatic departure, the Count is completely captivated. He must meet this Miss today! The factotum must facilitate a Casa-capitulation for the Count's easy entry to a Donna date!

- The Barber beams as he has a scheme! Today, the troops are trundling into town. Our courting Count, impersonating an important infantry-individual, will be quartered in the Casa by official order --- much better than being billeted and bedded in the barracks.

- As final filigree, our courtly Count must pretend to be pie-eyed from pinot. Who would suspect a soused soldier as a sweet Señorita seeking-spy?

- To finalize this frenetic facilitation, the re-found friends will fraternize shortly at our factotum's facial facilities.

- As the damask drape drops, the dynamic duo of Dons departs.

P.S. In its original form as the men and their music exit, the Count's bane of a butler (remember him?) is brought back on. In recitative style, he lets loose with (again) a Leporello-like series of complaints against Almaviva. He then ends the Act with a threat to quit the Count. The sequence fortunately, is quite short but anticlimactic, considering what musically has proceeded it; also, it adds nothing to the progress of the plot. Fortunately, it is often axed in performance. Be surprised!

Act II (or, Act I, Scene 2).¹⁵⁷

Place: The flip side of the Act I façade: the grumpy Guardian's great room facing onto the serene square.

Time: Only a minimum of *tempus* has *fugit* since Act I ended.

- This Act's action begins with alacrity; no orchestral "on-your-guard" to get us oriented.

¹⁵⁷ If you have forgotten these fuzzy facts, see p.5, footnote #2. Prepare to be surprised, again!

- The Scene simply starts with a song from our sweet Señorita setting forth her determination to dispose of any one dumb enough to deter her from seeing and subsequently singing with, her starving student suitor.

Una voce poco fa / Once a song at break---

Una voce--- is one of the great and glorious arias of the female repertoire and probably the justification for mezzos and sopranos diva-ish dishing each other to claim it as exclusive property of “their” vocal territory. In the aria, Rosina by herself is letting herself (and us) know her tenuous temperament and how she will combat her guardian’s unacceptable attentions and intentions.

Despite its frequent florid flights, the aria begins firmly grounded and slow-paced. Its early declamatory stage (pun!) sets forth in firm musical strides, her love for the starving student. As she musically moves into outlining her guardian-besting belligerence, the melody seems to move against the words. The more combative her planned demeanor, the more the music lightens, quickens and bounces along. Her vocal “crazed-canary” carrying-on also compounds. This exhaustive example of bravura belting ends brilliantly way up in the vocal rafters.

- Then, with her vocal fires briefly banked, our scheming but still sweet Señorita recitatively reflects on how to route another billet doux to her studious suitor. A secure delivery is daunting; all those around are simply simple sycophants of her greedy Guardian. Save one?
- The facilitating factotum seems friendly with the Señorita’s suitor. Could he safely secure the document’s delivery?
- No sooner speculatively sung than that factotum friendly with her starving student, sidles into the salon to sing of that studious suitor to the Señorita.

- Suddenly, galumphing is overheard! The grumpy Guardian fast following our factotum?
- Quickly! To hide and hear the household's hated hector, our facile factotum flings his figure under the cover of concealing curtains.
- The bad guy Guardian bursts in bellowing that the blasted Barber has made the maids and menservants miserable with medicinal ministrations and nauseous nostrums.
- This graceless Guardian then buries our devious Donna under a bullying barrage about her business with the Barber.
- However, the devious Donna consistently checks her cruel chaperone's tantrum of tricks and tirades. Then, she coolly quits the scene!
- This grumpy guy just won't give up though. The senior servants are summoned and subjected to an instant replay of baleful bullying about the Barber.
- To no avail! The factotum's phony pharmaceuticals have silenced the senior servants; one can only seriously sneeze sequentially (Berta) and the other (Ambrosius), yawningly yawns perpetually.
- Thus bested, our bad guy Guardian vows to vent his venom on the factotum, when found.
- Then like a faux *deus ex machina*, the grumpy Guardian's guide for grifting (Don Basilio) slithers into the salon. While a pitiful practitioner of many problematic professions, this charlatan cum cleric is currently cloaking his machinations playing a pedantic purveyor of note-worthy euphony (a.k.a. music master).¹⁵⁸
- Always the beatific bearer of bad news, the mangy music master confides to the ward's weary watchdog that the no- account

¹⁵⁸ As will shortly be seen though, he is best at creating only note-worthless cacophony!

Count from the Madrid meadow has been seen sight-seeing in Seville! Horrifically, he has been spotted, sauntering in this serene square where now we speak! Could he be seeking your winsome ward?

- At that alarming announcement, the two cut-rate Dons immediately coalesce into a council of conspiracy.
- The mangy music master snakeishly suggests a simple solution. Spread a scandal! Assemble a wagonload of word-of-mouth maligning to hurtfully harass that hapless Hapsburg and harry him out of town! It is only slightly louche and low-cost too!

La Calunnia è un venticello / Start a slander, the merest nothing---

As the possible ancestral role model for Gilbert and Sullivan's "patter songs," *La Calunnia* is quintessential Rossini in music and text.

Musically, the piece begins slowly, slimily insinuating the innocuous start of a rumor meant to ruin. The music picks up its pace faster than the words—the words continue their slow insinuating rhythm and tale for a while. However, by the time the two match in rapid pace, their story is now describing a veritable storm built from an untrue scandal---- impossible to control let alone stop. The "innocent" victim is finally hounded out of polite society!

A classic high-ranking member of the basso repertoire, the aria appears frequently in concert halls apart from the opera. It is again, the perfect matching of text and music. Even if you could not get the gist of the text, the music alone would probably communicate to you the central thrust of its argument.

- To calumny-creation, the cretinous chaperone's cantus conclusion is, "Stifle the scandal scheme! It takes too much time! Nuptials are niftier and quicker. Better than communicating calumny, concoct a contact! Make my marriage our mission for mañana!"--- or words to that effect.
- As these devious but determined Dons depart to do their dirty deeds, the drapes divulge the buried Barber (remember him?) as the sequestered Señorita scoots swiftly into the Sala.

- To our Donna, the Barber regurgitates the devious Dons' duplicitous dealings. He also with certainty states that the starving student's sweetheart is our sensational Senorita. SI! SI!

Dunque io son! / Then it's me!

When Figaro teasingly reveals to Rosina that Lindoro's ladylove is in fact R-O-S-I-N-A, a delightful duet begins.

Rosina launches into musical filigree waxing rhapsodic over the fact she is loved! Figaro in turn, fills the girl in on the details of the coming meeting with Lindoro. He also comments admirably (for benefit of the audience) as to Rosina's scheming abilities.

As the duet moves forward, Figaro advises that the student wants a token of Rosina's affection, a letter. The girl plays hard-to-get on that subject, but then finally produces the already written letter--- gaining more admiration sotto voce, from the Barber.

As the music reaches its rapid climax, Figaro leaves to deliver the document, commenting on the mystery of women.

Throughout, the music is light and happy, and finally expands into the characteristic Rossini rapid pace. The vocal filigrees also expand, on the part of both Rosina and Figaro.

Here again we hear a perfect matching of musical and textual communication.

- As our Donna dreams of her dietary-deficient Don, the grumpy bad guy who is also a bumptious barrister, bustles on to berate and otherwise bully her. Little does he know that before long the beauty he is besieging will brilliantly best him!

A un dottor della mia sorte / I'm a lawyer of experience.

A un dottor --- is Bartolo's major aria, and in the Rossian manner, a true tour de force and a concert favorite! Musically and textually, it begins in a pompous pedantic manner. It is Bartolo's intention to let Rosina know he is a distinguished lawyer, a formidable forensic foe and deserving of her admiration and respect. Wrong!

His didactic manner continues as he warns her of his prosecutorial skill. He then begins to musically examine "evidence" that she has musically mentioned. That musical maneuver was to maintain her manufactured myth masking the message in that mysterious missive she managed deflect from the Casa's curmudgeon. As if conducting a trial, the bumptious Bartolo asks and answers his own questions, in an attempt to shred her story.

With no musical response to his brilliant barrister brief, he urges her to confess! All will be forgiven! Her continued silence infuriates both the song and the singer; the musical pace and volume increase.

Bested by the Senora's silence, Bartolo explodes musically and storms off to arrange our Donnas domicile detention.

- The Donna also departs determined to defuse any gyrations the grumpy Guardian is getting together. He will be beaten before he even begins! You can bet on it!
- The she-servant person, still sneezing, sweeps in (pun!) summoned by the sounds of the unseeingly set-to between the Casa's senior Senor and sequestered Señorita. Its Andalusian angry argot was audible in the outside avenue. A curious crowd is congregating!
- The servant's searching for the source(s) of the Sala's sour sounds, is suddenly segued to a commotion in the Casa's corridor created by a soused soldier.¹⁵⁹ The Count, now cloaked by several incognito cover-ups, is the cause of the commotion.
- Despite his miasma of merlot, he is given a courteous Casa "come-in" by the sneezing servant.

Ehi, di casa-- buone gente /Oh, good morning! Who's at home here?

Now begins an expanding ensemble that despite its position comparatively early in the piece it marks the beginning of the Act I Finale. Within the context of *opera buffa*, this type of ensemble is an essential characteristic. By its conclusion, all principal characters must be on stage enthusiastically participating in the musical exchange by definitively expressing their point of view to the situation. The musical pace will be increasingly rapid, the dialogue delivered in an articulate "patter." It is beautifully composed and delivered, chaos. In effect, it is the operatic equivalent of a Christmas pudding, delightfully stuffed with memorable music in lieu of mellow mincemeat!

In delivery, the ensemble is organized by compositional design, not genre mandate, into three sections. *Ehi, di casa* constitutes the first portion. It begins with two of the singers brought onto an empty stage by a logical situation, a knock at the door. The music begins as a calm exchange between the still-sneezing servant Berthe and the drunken, but courteous soldier, Almaviva. The music with its quiet militaristic beat matches their mood and dialogue modestly. Then the bullying barrister Don Bartolo, bustles on and we now have a duet between two of the principals (Almaviva and Bartolo), Berthe ever the soul of discretion, smells something burning in the kitchen and cuts off-stage for cover. (TO BE CONTINUED)

¹⁵⁹ Soused soldier née starving student Lindoro, née Count Almaviva. Keep track! This is just at the beginning of getting complicated!

Ehi, di casa-- buone gente (continued)

Shortly, Señorita Rosina, summoned by the set-to, sashays into the Sala and joins the singing, We now have a trio interspersed with frequent duet-al and solo asides, both independent and overlaid with whatever else is being stingingly slung.

The trumpeting tone of the trio and the din of a duel* brings both Berthe and Basilio back. We now have a quarreling quintet! Soon, a sextet. Figaro, fixing to finalize the filigreed flights of fighting, not to mention the dubious duel and with his barber basin at the ready, barrels into the battle. He also wisely warns, "Cool it! The cops have been called and are coming!"

Too little, too late! The gendarmes are at the gate and the paddy wagon is in position!

*(see below)

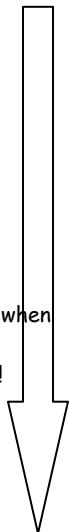
Note to readers still with us. The on-stage action concerning the *Ehi, di casa---* portion of the Ensemble are alliteratively attacked and arranged below in order of performance.

- The courtesy of the Casa is quickly curtailed as the household's senior Senor stomps in to send the soused soldier somewhere else--- anywhere else but the Sevillian sector of Andalucia!
- The blustering barrister's barrage of do not "come-a to my Casa" crashes quickly. The slurring soldier stubbornly settles down into the barrister's bucolic billet, ignoring all semantics to send him somewhere else.
- The sweet Señorita drawn to the din slips in to the Sala and sees the soldier.
- Amid the "sturm und drang", our soldier slips to the sweet Señorita, the noteworthy news that he is her starving student sweetheart. S'wonderful!

- However, and in the meantime, the grumpy Guardian's been goading the garrisoned guy so gracelessly that a duel develops. Mon dieu!
- This is not a serious exchange of épées. The essential excitement is really a handkerchief hoax to hide a letter launch between lovers. However, the senior Senor in mid-sword swipe sees the sweethearts' switcheroo.¹⁶⁰ He demands the document which had been dropped.¹⁶¹ The dexterous and devious Donna demurely delivers the local laundry list.
- BRAVO! The bumptious barrister is beautifully befuddled by enumerated britches, bloomers and bustiers,
- The embarassed barrister, now doubly determined to conquer the Beaujolais besotted soldier, restarts his sword a-swinging.
- The Sala's capacity is crowded further as our factotum fellow saunters in shadowed by the mangy music master. Called by the commotion, the two seek the sources of the Sala's sights and sounds.
- All those already Sala-situated, attempt to recount for the factotum fellow and the mangy music master, the reason for the riotous room. That only manufactures a more mal-melodious mêlée creating a crashing of continuous crescendos.
- Those continuously crashing crescendos coming from the Casa cause a cadre of civil constabulary to quickly come calling.

¹⁶⁰ This is one of those operatic plot things that is more quickly comprehended when sung and seen than read in bed. Trust me!

¹⁶¹ This is really a clumsy crowd of conspirators; they keep dropping documents!



Fermi tutti, nessun si mova / In the King's name, stay where you are now!

One of the great glories of words set to music as opposed to just words, is that with the former, multiple conversations at the same time can be communicated through musical variations. Just plain words from multiple speakers simultaneously, would be just plain gibberish.

The previous *Ehi, di casa*--- is an example of music's ability to communicate multiple points of view at the same time. A non-musical reading of the same material in the same manner would be mental mush!

As *Ehi, di casa* ends there are seven singers on stage, all the opera's principals and comprimarios (save one) . They engage in a lively septet, ending the ensemble's first part. Now, Rossini ups the ante! The civil guards crash in with the subtle Rossini equivalent of a police raid.

At musical forte, the chorus of guards and their sergeant take center stage. They demand to know what is occurring. With the exception of the Count, each principal takes a musical turn to blame the commotion on a sauterne-saturated soldier. The interplay among the singers is very quick and overlapping. It climaxes with the arrest of the Count/soused soldier!

The Count presents the Sergeant with a paper. It is silently read and the Count is straight away released, to the consternation of all the others. With a deliberate musical slowness, each of the observers expresses their mystification at this sudden turn of events: the guilty guy is getting off! The guards refuse to listen to the protests of the principals et.al. All are ordered to disperse.

- *Cripes!* The coming of the constabulary has only compounded the cacophonous chaos.
- The soused soldier, although arrested after being cited by the Casa crowd as the cause of the chaos, is cut loose by the constabulary. Why? We suspect that this Seville security squad has been silently shown a "do not go to jail" card 'cause our Count character is a cousin to the Crown.
- While that says it all for the civil soldiers, the card's secrecy from the Casa crowd causes cries of confusion. "Who is this character that can be cleared so quickly and quietly of creating an uncivil climate?"

- "Peacify your palaver," the put-upon police proclaim to the puling people! "Go home! **¡Vete a casa!**"
- Regretfully, that appropriate order to restore order cannot be obeyed. This current "scene of the crime" Casa is the hacienda hailed as home by most of this musically muttering mob. So, where do they go? Ay Carumba! Another angst!

Mi par d'esser con las resta/ All this noise and this commotion---

The final part of the ensemble finds all on-stage complaining about the continuous cacophony. It has spoiled their sunny dispositions, handed them headaches and lurched them about so much, they should be seasick. In these last musical moments, we have finally reached the pinnacle of a Rossini finale: maximum volume, pace and pronunciation. Lose your place and you will be drowned in a deluge of sublime sounds.

- Confounded once again, the crowd demurs to depart. Instead, they commence to comment how all this commotion has caused terrible trauma to their temperament. En chorale, they effectively end the ensemble observing, "This eternal pitter-patter 'tis enough to drive one mad."
- That chorus of chaos closes the curtain!

Act III (or, Act II sometimes).

PLACE: Still, the flip side of the Act I façade: the grumpy Guardian's great room facing onto the serene square.¹⁶²

TIME: A rainy afternoon, but the same din-filled day of the constabulary's chaotic call on the Casa.

¹⁶² For some scenic variation, the final setting is frequently switched to a music room in the Casa as the initial plotting and scheming of this portion emerges from an alleged vocal lesson.

- With no percussive pleading for people to plotz in their places, the performance proceeds to promptly play.
- Our now befuddled barrister is ruefully ruminating in recitative, that the mañana melee' mulched a "buenos días" into a "buenos disaster."
- He surmises the soused soldier was sent by that no-account Count to case the Casa concerning the whereabouts of the winsome ward.
- Unfortunately, that premise is prevented from further processing by a din at the door. A cleric (Don Alonzo) comes in.
- That is no cleric! That is the clever Count --- once again, under another incognito cover.
- (How commendable! The Count's cast of covert characters is more comprehensive than the creatures in Lon Chaney's cinematic closet!)
- Bundles of banal blessings are then beatifically bestowed by the charlatan cleric onto the Casa's surly senior Señor.

Pace a gioia sia con voi./ Heaven send you peace and gladness.

As the Count in a charlatan cleric comes into the Casa, Bartolo's recitative moves into a musical ensemble between himself and the conning Count. It focuses almost exclusively on the continual bestowing of obsequious blessings. The introductory music is politely regal for that purpose. However, Bartolo's asides advertise his mounting but musical annoyance at the cleric's constant forelock tugging. The Count also adds to the melodic mélange with frequent asides offering himself strategic advice. Their asides, although independent, appear as a fast-paced duet. That dynamic "independent" duet periodically reverts to the more regal blessings.

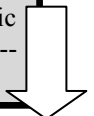
This very clever sequence both in terms of words and music, ends with Bartolo at the height of impatience.

Now, no more musical mincing! We are going into rough-stuff recitative to assist, considerable conniving.

---on to
Recitative!

Insomma, mio signore----/ And pray sir---

This long recitative passage between the pseudo-cleric and the embattled barrister begins with a demand for the yet-to-be known cleric's name as well as his plans while on the premises. Considerable conniving then occurs as alliteratively outlined below. Movement back into a melodic mode will materialize when the Music Lesson sequence shows up--- shortly.



- The cleric confronted by the Casa's commander-in-chief, confesses he calls himself Don Alonzo an apprentice of and co-conspirator to Don Basilio.
- That clerical co-conspirator of the Casa's Senior is ailing, done in by a disabling disease and confined to his simple cell in the Cloister. Consequently, he cannot come to the Casa to deliver to the Donna, this day's didactic "do-re-mi" duties.
- However, Alonzo is the alternate offered by the bed-ridden Basilio. The pseudo-cleric also quietly confesses (pun!), he is his pious peer's companion in calumny-creation! "So you say," our Senor says, suspiciously.
- Our Count is quick; He senses the senior Senor's suspicions. Therefore, to subdue the Senor's suspicions, he spontaneously concocts a sham scheme to skewer the Count's courting and secure the sweet Señorita for the senior Senor.
- Putting forward his plan, the pseudo-cleric proposes, "Grumpy Guardian, before lyrical lessons in graceful gargling for your winsome ward, let us gab about generating gossip grungy enough to hassle a Hapsburg." The grumpy Guardian gladly goes for it.
- Alonzo and Almagro are billeted in the same Seville-situated Bed and Bistro. There, the conniving pseudo-cleric copped onto a communication to the Count from the Casa's commander's winsome ward.
- The calumny concocting, but clever Count (a.k.a. Lindoro) counsels the Casa's commander to let him (the pseudo-cleric) use the copped communication to convince the sweet Señorita of Seville, she is being conned by a conspiracy of her starving student and the no-account Count.

- (If the pseudo-cleric's calumny concoction seems a confusing con and very likely, illogical--- even to the lowest-IQ, live with it! That is how Opryland operates!)
- (The Count actually concedes confidentially that his concocted communication con was possibly as porous as a kitchen colander. However, he was caught he thought, by the Casa's chief's concerns about the pseudo-cleric.)
- Never mind! The sweetheart Señorita is summoned. She sashays in smiling at the pseudo-cleric since she spies through the clever Count's (a.k.a. her lothario Lindoro) disguise. "Sweet Señorita, sing your songs at the spinet," the Casa commander commands!

Music Lesson Sequence:

Contro un cor che accende amore / When a heart by Cupid's arrow---

Two tales (at least) are told about *Contro un cor* and its evolutionary progress since the Rossini writing.

The first more than twice-told tale is: This sequence was originally written as a trio among Amalviva (as Don Alonzo), Rosina and Bartolo. (Some sources describe it as a duet--- not going to go there though, we are far enough afield already!) The original trio was allegedly lost at some point after the premiere. The composer rather than dashing off another entry (as was his usual custom), left the filling of the void in the vocal lesson to the discretion of the prima donna presiding at the performance. She could substitute her own song. (Always a dangerous option.) Such substitutions still occasionally occur, but some of the substitutes are truly bizarre. One notorious performance had *Over the Rainbow* as the chant of choice!

While a good story, numero uno is apt-to-be apocryphal. Tale two probably has more truth--- some of which hopefully follows. As earlier noted, Rossini originally wrote the part of Rosina for a mezzo-soprano. This darker voice, in the mind of the composer, presented more musical contrast among the tenor and baritone voices of the other two principals. In addition, Rossini had no tolerance for the operatic custom of his day wherein singers freely embroidered arias to show off the "glories" of their voices rather than the composer's intent.

Rossini fenced off that practice by reducing to paper the precise embellishments that would be permitted within the piece--- a practice other composers bypassed, because singers ruled.

However, Rossini had the clout and cohones to counter that practice. However---in the latter part of the 19th century after Rossini's death, coloratura sopranos who had long coveted the part because of its musical richness made their move! With the cooperation of conductors not wishing to dish it out with their divas, Rosina's music was modified---(CONTINUED)

Contro un cor che accende amore--- (CONTINUED)

---sufficiently to permit these covetous canaries to co-opt the part for their own. However, Rossini's compositional complexities precluded *Contro un cor che* from satisfactory adaptation. Clever composer! Therefore, it became operatic custom that the soprano singing the sequestered *Senorita* was permitted to select her own song, an aria of choice from elsewhere.

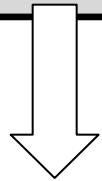
Under the impact of the Rossini revival in the 20th century, as well as the availability of more true mezzo-soprano voices, the soprano's dominance of the role eventually was diminished to a "sharing" with mezzos. As for *Contro un cor*, today a soprano will usually substitute; a mezzo will deliver "the Rossini real thing."

The musical course of *Contro un cor* is certainly coloratura country. But apart from its bel canto vocalizing, it is a banal ballad basically about the power of love. Never mind its mindless message though, because among the roulades and runs there are secreted messages that the starving student (*Rosina* thinks) will save the winsome ward from the grumpy Guardian and enfold her forever in his educated embrace. The grumpy Guardian himself, although overseeing the "lesson," is oblivious to what is occurring.

- As our *Señorita* sweetly sings, her loving *Lindoro* softly and simultaneously sings, assuring her of a favorable future.
- At the same time, the senior *Senor* nodding nearby and soothed by the *Señorita*'s song, has missed the melodic mixed message passed between the plotting, but playful pair.
- Responding risibly to the roulades and scalar scaling, our bullying barrister becoming blissfully beatific, begins to, as only a basso can, bray a ballad.

Quando mi sei vicina/ Tell me if you have seen her.

This lovely albeit very brief musical moment, is *Bartolo*'s rejection of "modern opera." He recalls an older quite lyrical melody from his youth. However he shortly stops singing, but as the orchestra continues, he begins to dance.



- Before long, the barrister's ballad becomes a bad bit of balletic ballroom--- Fred Astaire should not fret, as the footwork is very flat-footed!
- As it is time for the Senor's shave, our barber bows on mid-balletic ballroom. Never one to miss some mischief, our main man with the moustache wax, merrily mimics the mansion master's musical mincing.
- Caught however in mid-mince by the mansion master, the barber segues swiftly to insist on the Senor's shaving schedule.

The Recitative Returns.

As Figoro's fancy footwork finishes, a recitative mode begins between the barber and Bartolo. It contains a considerable amount of plotting and scheming as well as fleet footwork to keep sudden unseen speed-bumps from slowing the lovers' move to marriage.

- The Senor resists being razored, but the factotum facilitates the Casa commander's capitulation to a clipping.
- In preparing to barber the barrister, a great deal of monkey business is merrily manufactured including crockery crashing cacophonously in the Casa's closet. Ay carumba!
- Amid the chaos, our never-flustered factotum filches from the belligerent, but beautifully besieged barrister, a critical key to the Casa's kingdom. Bravo!
- The balcony's lock will now not limit the lovers from leaving as they have covertly conspired. Slipping shortly to Seville's marriage-mill chapel, they can surely and swiftly be sanctioned as senor and senora!
- However, their emerging elopement is inevitably endangered as the supposedly seriously sick, mangy music master materializes (remember, Don Basilio?) . Muchos problemas!

- The “problematic” are signaled by a sophisticated segue from recitative to ensemble.

An Ensemble Emerges: *Don Basilio!*

In a delightful lively passage, the quartet of principals quickly assesses the threat that the unanticipated arrival of the cleric presents to their various schemes. He is plainly a problem all the way around, but not always for the same reason. They line up lyrically in a united choral front to convince the cleric he is in fact quite ill in appearance, and he should immediately return to his cloistered cell to husband his health.

- The pseudo-cleric (a.k.a. Count) quickly convinces the Casa commander that the music master is a menace to their deception of the Donna through their calumny concoction concerning the Count's contact with other Sevillian señoritas. Si! Si!
- Count, Donna and barber believe the anticipated elopement is endangered also. This out-of-cloister cleric will inquire with too many questions. These will unquestionably clue in the Casa commander, who up to now they have definitely duped with the circumstances of the Count's coup!
- Consequently, all in question join in a quartet to queer the cleric's questions.
- The quartet convinces the already confused cleric character that he is undoubtedly under-the-weather. “Cloister and care for yourself,” they choral out! “Seek your cell and succor yourself,” they sing!
- He seemingly succumbs to their sensibilities, although he is certainly more swiftly seduced to seek a sick bed by the incognito Count's proffer of a purse packed with glittering gelt.
- Convinced by the crowd that he has been caught by a case of catarrh, the conned but conniving-prone-cleric confesses he will seek

the solace of his chapel-convenient cell and slurp soothing soup.
Farewell friar!

The Ensemble Extended: *Buona sera, mio signore / Fare you well, sir.*

In a happy quartet, the four principals repetitively bid good-bye and good wishes to the departing Don Basilio who they have convinced his death bed is imminent. The piece contains all the buoyant elements of Rossini's music.

In it, the composer invents an almost infinite number of musical notes and vocal combinations through which to say, "So long, it's been good to know you!"

Basilio obligingly, but somewhat confusedly acknowledges their advice and agrees to go. As the piece approaches a conclusion, the pace rapidly increases in the style of that "true" Rossini climax.

- That sidetrack settled, the long-suppressed shaving session starts up. As it begins, the barber beautifully blind-sides the soon-to-be, stubble-shorn senior Senor to the elopement enabling efforts¹⁶³ the lovey-dovey dueting duo spin at the spinet.
- Suddenly, the semi-shaved Senor aurally awakes to the emerging elopement arrangements. The conniving couple is confronted, but they calmly and cleverly counsel the now ballistic barrister to cool his concerns. Que sera, sera!

¹⁶³ The following facts are furnished to facilitate following these elopement enabling events as they play into the plot:1. Tonight is the time the two will take off at midnight [of course]; 2. The sweet Señorita will escape the Casa's confinement by beating it onto the balcony which will be broachable through the barrier for which the barber has "borrowed" the key; 3. There, led by her loving Lindoro. the Donna will descend a fireman's-ladder filched by the fast-fingered factotum. .

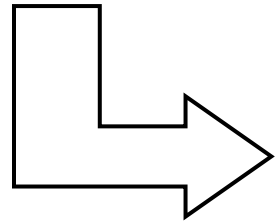
Ensemble:

Rosina, deh, ascoltatemi. / Rosina, I must talk to you.

The orchestral introduction begins by mimicking the stropping of a razor and the application of shaving soap. Shortly, Rosina and Lindoro's duet begins in almost conspiratorial tones. As the elopement details are developed, Figaro attempts to distract Bartolo from the duo's dealings .

Bartolo eventually catches on. At that point, the music becomes fast paced with Bartolo confronting the barber and the lovers. They in turn, in a spirited trio, musically advise him to control himself. They are going to do what they have planned to do! They then leave with the doctor frustrated, but bent on vengeance.

- The cuddly couple and the facilitating factotum quit the Casa to seek a quieter conspiratorial corner. The still stubbled-Senor is left in sinister solace
- Suddenly, he summons the servants. The senior servant is sent to swiftly seek out the psychosomatically-sick cleric and convey this co-conspirator back to the Sala, for a serious seminar on sweetheart separation.
- The now sneeze-less señorita servant is catapulted to cover the Casa corridor against incoming complications. However, she is swiftly (re)summoned to secure the Sala! The senior Senor will be her substitute to cover corridor-country. The senior Senor has surmised the señorita servant may not now support the senior Senor's sweet Señorita sequestering.
- Left to herself, the señorita servant sings.



Aira di Sorbetto (a.k.a. the Sherbet/Sorbet Aria):

Il vecchiotto cerca moglie / Spite of sixty years to carry--.

There were certain de rigueur conventions of Italian opera in the early 19th century, the Code Rossini notwithstanding. One of these inviolate “musts” was the Aria di Sorbetto. Such a piece must conform to the following: 1. Occur late in the opera; 2. Have little bearing (if any) on the plot; 3. Be sung by a secondary character that had little or no solo opportunity elsewhere in the opera; and, 4. Does not have to be written by the opera’s composer---a hand off to a hired hack raised no eyebrows. *Il vecchiotto* is a perfect example of such a piece. Certainly a curious convention, especially from our contemporary view. What was its *raison d’etre*? Quite simple and logical actually.

As subsequently described in **An Orgiastic Experience (see p. 135)**, a 19th century evening at an Italian opera house was not only cultural, it was also a culinary and social event of some significance. The Sorbet Aria was a signal to the audience that the evening was drawing to a close, so have your last helping of food and gossip. In modern times, its equivalent purpose is the last call in a bar or the food court of a ballpark. In the opera house, it signaled the victuals vendors to hawk their wares one final time to the audience. Therefore, as a consequence of this event, no one was really listening or watching the stage; so, what occurred should be of little musical or plot consequence since it would probably be missed by most spectators. In a perverse way, think of it as the musical equivalent of the 7th inning stretch.

Despite its dismissive role (pun!) in *Barbieri*, this sung serving of sherbet is a delight in words and in music. In the piece, the now not sneezing but singing, servant, Berta delivers her long-held views on love and marriage--- (Love is an universal evil!). Her overall conclusion: “I will die an old maid!” Musically, her monologue is very catchy and lyrical with each phrase sung with great deliberation and punch. It is definitely worth a listen and decidedly in the same class as the other sung delights of *Barbieri*.

As earlier noted, Rossini’s music was not always Rossini’s music. As example, in *La Cenerentola*, Clorinda’s sorbet aria *Sventurata mi credea*, was not written by the composer. As a consequence, the aria is often axed in performance under the tyranny of today’s frequent slavish concern for compositional purity. If it was good enough for Rossini, why is it embargoed from our enjoyment? Whatever! It appears though, Rossini did compose *Il vecchiotto*, and therefore, the compositionally-correct police permit its performance. Enjoy!

- Now sherbet-sated, our singing she-servant sallies forth from the Sala.

Return of Recitative Rhythms

Bartolo returns with Basilio in tow. As alliteratively outlined below, between this dunderheaded duo, there develops an extended recitative of deception discovery, scheming and disinformation distribution.

- As the barrister and now cured-cleric are coming into the Casa, they conclude the pseudo-cleric (Don Alonzo/Count/Lindoro/etc.) was in fact the Count! They also feel there is some factotum funny-stuff flying about. All that causes the Casa commander to certify that a contract for marriage to his wily ward must be notarized, NOW!
- The clerical Don is dispatched, despite a dismal downpour, to navigate the notary to this neighborhood. A key to the Casa is contributed to ease such an effort.
- As the pseudo-cleric/Count had previously proposed, the domicile's Don decides to deceive his Donna with her own covert correspondence.
- The sweet Senorita is summoned and shown the correspondence she created and sent to her starving student.
- The Casa commander cleverly convinces her the correspondence was then circumspectly communicated to the Count by the starving student. Why this charade? So the Donna can be delivered to the clutches of the no-count Count.
- This convoluted con convinces the Donna she has been duped.
- (Why she's conned by these less than logical-lies about the letter and her lover does not speak well about her wisdom or fairly about her faithfulness! On the other hand, one's intuition infers that

her main man's multiple incognitos have muddled her mental musing. Maybe?)

- (In defense of her decisions, that Hapsburg hunk has been publicly painted as profligate! Therefore, in her consideration, it could be that that Count per se was a "no prize prince.")
- To seal her silly, senseless sweetheart sell-out, she succumbs to the senior Senor's marital maneuver. "Marry me this minute," the Donna demands!
- She also sets foolishly forth to the Senor the scheme to snatch her from the Casa and send her, she surmises, to her starving student.
- To protect that scheme from succeeding, the barrister barrels off to begin barricading the building and---to assure her security, he sagely sends the Senorita swiftly to her suite.
- The Sala now being silent, a storm stirs up!

Storm Music

Rossini appears to have had a thing for storm music as such compositions figure in several of his operas including *Barbiere*, *Cenerentola* and perhaps most famously remembered (but probably for the wrong reason), *Guillaume Tell*. Rossini did do a good storm, though.

Barbiere's begins with the musical sounds of rising wind. That is shortly followed by raindrops starting to slowly fall. Their pace and intensity increase until we have a full-fledged storm with howling wind and thunder. The effect is usually heightened by back-stage furnished thunder and lightening. The storm gradually loses its intensity and ends as it began with slow, random raindrops.

- As the clouds clear, the Count and his co-conspirator creep into the Casa via the barricaded balcony, which they bravely breasted by putting into play the purloined passkey.
- As the duo drips dry and ruminate recitatively, they are delivered a diatribe by the Donna who has dropped by. She is definitely direct and dictates she is done with this deceptive duo!
- (Remember! The Donna is still dwelling under the delusion that her Don is the loving Lindoro, not that no-count Count.)

- The confronted Count's quick questions cue up the cause of her concern and confusion.
- Amidst her diatribe, the duped Donna does disclose she loved (loves?) Lindoro.
- With that disclosure, the Don divulges his deception, Not only is he the loving Lindoro, he is the no-count Count.
- The Donna is delighted, doubly so when the Count (she now knows is no longer a no-count Count) queries her commitment to becoming his Countess!
- The question creates the operatically inevitable ensemble!

Ah! Qual colpo inaspettato! / Almaviva! Your romantic intimation---

Rosina with a great deal of musical filigree says "Yes!" and then, rhapsodizes at length over the coming happiness. The Count also offers lyrical commentary as to his delight at their rapturous future. Figaro, not to be left behind, offers commentary for our benefit (as if we could not already hear!) as to the lovers' rapture.

Unfortunately, as the trio reaches the usual heights of a Rossini climax, Figaro looks out the window. What he sees, as he warns the Count, is three men coming into the Casa. They are trapped! Unless--- they go out the way they came in via the ladder on the balcony. "Of course," they musically exult as they start to exit!

BUT---

Recitative Returns:

Disgraziati noi! Come si fa? / Here's a pretty mess. What shall we do?

One final complication before the denouement, wherein the lovers are finally and legally united! The alliteration following will factually fill you in, up to the Finale.

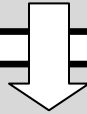
- The factotum is flummoxed! "The ladder," he laments. "is lost!" Their quick and quiet quitting of the Casa is now queered!
- Heroically, the trio hide behind the hacienda's highboys!
- Soon, the strangers seen in the street silently sidle into the Sala. But there are only two! The third is tardy?
- The duo that has dropped in, the trapped trio covertly conclude, are the conspiratorial cleric and as a companion, the neighborhood notary.

- The factotum fakes-out those fellows by fooling the neighborhood notary with some nose-hair nonsense about nuptials for his nearby niece (a.k.a. the sweet *Senorita*) and the Hapsburg hunk.
- The cleric coincidentally coughs up some concerns about the missing *Casa* commander. The Count counters that concern with a conundrum for the cleric: "Take my cash and be quiet, or I will kill you!"
- The cleric is convinced by the cash.
- Now quieted, the cleric in combination with the wily wig-whitener, witness the wedding writ. The Count has caught him a Countess!
- (WAIT! Do not leave the Loge so fast my friends. We have a Finale facing us before you can flee this theatrical facility!)
- As the newly nuptualized nuzzle, the tardy third of the street-seen trio troops in with troops and the sherbet-sated, she-servant. "Take these thieves in charge," the tardy one tells the troops!
- "How tragic. You are too late with too little!" begins the tale told to the tardy-one. "Your trumped-up trickery has been trashed!"
- Sweet justice has surfaced in Seville! You see, the missing member of street-seen trio is the *Casa* commander!
- The Count cheerily confirms to the surprised senior *Senor*, his wily ward in now a Hapsburg highness. Hoo! Hah!

Cessa di piu resistere, / Silence, resist my will no more--!

The Count in a powerful, but loving aria, first appropriately berates Bartolo. He then turns to his bride assuring that her "woes are past" and a new day is dawning.

The chorus joins joyfully in wishing the happy pair much joy, "now that the knot is safely tied!"



One More Recitative Review

In somma, io ho tutti I torti! / So I'm in the wrong all the way around!

Bartolo finally concludes he has no one to blame but himself. All agree! He admits he foolishly facilitated the wedding by removing the balcony ladder. To that, Figaro cites the opera's subtitle, "a useless precaution."

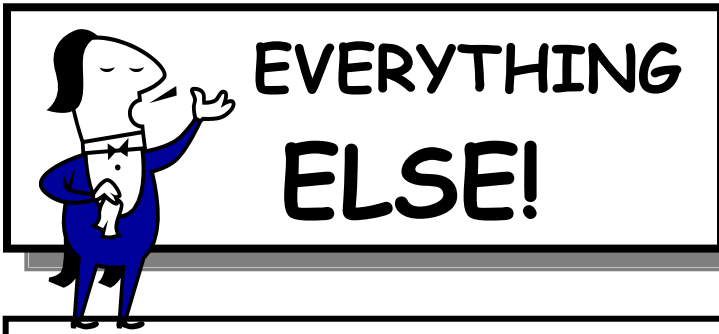
One piece of good news is offered. Rosina will not need a dowry from Bartolo! The grumpy Guardian now thoroughly bested, but spared a dowry donation, blissfully blesses the bridal pair. "What's done is done!" BRAVO!

Di si felice innesto / The lantern I had lighted—

Figaro initiates the final joyful, rollicking chorus by blowing out his lantern, now no longer needed to light an elopement. The principals and chorus join in wishing the Count and his new Countess an end to their troubles and a “joy attended” future! The final musical words wish, “*Si vegga in voi regnar*”/ “All hail the happy pair!”

Arrivederci, Rossini!





A CONCLUDING COGITATION

19th Century Nights at the Opera: An Orgiastic Experience.

"Opera once was an important social instrument -- especially in Italy. With Rossini and Verdi, people were listening to opera together and having the same catharsis with the same story, the same moral dilemmas. They were holding hands in the darkness. This has gone. Now perhaps they are holding hands and watching television?"

Luciano Berio, Italian composer, 1989.

Good News, Bad News. Once upon a time, opera was the only major entertainment¹⁶⁴ game in town. Today, a similar prospect could be considered really bad news and---scare the devil out of a lot of people!

History dictates that opera, in a primitive form,¹⁶⁵ began in Italy at the close of the 16th century. It rapidly matured in form and spread quickly

¹⁶⁴ We know! In some circles opera is regarded as an almost religious experience. However, at its essence--- it is entertainment!

throughout Europe. It gained an early hold on the public's attention for the simple reason that any other big alternative "bread and circus" events readily accessible to us today, had yet to be invented. For at least another 300 years post-1600, there were not to be any football, baseball or other big sporting events (a.k.a. entertainment). Movies, TV or big rock concerts also would not be in evidence. Perhaps worst of all, there was no publicly participatory politics to pump up the polis. The ruling royals undemocratically kept a lid and monopoly on that lively art. Reduces revolutionary excesses, you know. The good news however is that opera despite being the only entertainment option for several hundred years, was also very democratic--- especially the Italian form.¹⁶⁶ The opera house was accessible (physically and financially) to the hoi polloi (a.k.a. us members of the great unwashed mob), not just the hoi oligio (a.k.a. the upper crust).¹⁶⁷

Noshing and Schmoozing. In brief, what one could do (decently) between 16th to 20th century dusks and dawns when the daily day jobs were done, was attend the opera!¹⁶⁸ However, in those long gone halcyon days, people did not especially come to opera only to listen to

¹⁶⁵ The first opera is credited to be *Dafne* composed in 1597 Florence by Jacopo Peri. It's music and libretto are lost somewhere in history's dustbin---maybe just as well.

¹⁶⁶ Other European countries especially France and what became Germany and Austria had their operatic entertainments also. However, they tended to be more formalistic and focused than those of the Italians. Therefore, we are going to stick singularly to the Italian style in deference at least Puccini and Rossini. Also pragmatically, we have limited space and time for dawdling digressions. Those are our rationales to cut out inter-cultural comparisons. OK?

¹⁶⁷ While almost all levels of society could see the show, through artful architecture the "hoi polloi" were allocated to alternative areas from the "hoi oligio." Such an architectural achievement did affect the opera house, its operas and their performances. More on those substantive affects shortly.

¹⁶⁸ The 300+ year life span of opera wherein it was a attraction for a major part of the population is said to have ended with the premiere of Puccini's *Turandot* (1926). That "end of the run" occurred in a large part due to the development of multiple other entertainment forms that captured the public's attendance. However, it was also said to result from a compositional hiatus of melodic, romantic operas. A large segment of the opera-going public rapidly lost interest post-Puccini, in newer 12 tone or atonal modernistic operatic forms.

fancy vocalizing. It can be convincingly argued that the music was strictly background. Noshing and schmoozing big time with your neighbors was the main event!

A night at the opera¹⁶⁹ was a social occasion encompassing not only the on-stage occurrences, but an opportunity to sumptuously and continuously dine and down potent potables in your box or from a basket, schmooze with friends during entr'actes and/or, gamble in the outer lobby.¹⁷⁰ In those times, the prudent composer spun out sufficient melodies to last well past midnight. Such length added bonus points to a critic's review and public perceptions.

So What? “All that sounds like fun,” you seem to say, “But what does it have to do with our operas?” Well, it has a great deal to do with the on-stage occurrences. The opera house's customary off-stage activities dictated what should be seen and heard on-stage. It was those long-ago dictates that have created many of what we today consider operatic eccentricities. Compositional creativity did not bring forth all that music and scale scaling. Much of it was imposed by 18th and 19th century rules for the operatic road.¹⁷¹ The following are offered as examples of those “road rules.”

- Overtures apart from artistic design, became de rigueur to quiet the considerable socializing and shut down the serpentine wandering throughout the auditorium. Overtures per se morphed into lengthy overtures to assure a leisurely finish to the current banquet course being

¹⁶⁹ Edith Wharton opened her Pulitzer-prize winning novel *The Age of Innocence* describing a 19th century New York City night at the opera.

¹⁷⁰ A considerable portion of Rossini's fortune came from his cut of the opera houses' outer-lobby gambling table action during performances of his works. His cut was always a negotiated part of his contract with the opera house.

¹⁷¹ As discussed on p. 94, the Code Rossini was a strong compositional governing force for at least the first half and then some, of the 19th century

consumed--- do not want to rush the dinner guests into heartburn you know.¹⁷²

- Many on-stage vocal customs and character movements were dictated by off-stage social or culinary requirements. One of the more intriguing is the so-called aria di sorbetto. The on-stage on set of this piece was the equivalent to the last call in a contemporary bar. Therefore, the music occurring during this on-stage point was considered disposable; no one would be listening as they were taking a last run at the buffet line or the champagne bucket.¹⁷³

- Until Rossini and Verdi rose to compositional clout, singers ruled! The voice was all! Composers had little voice (pun!) in the performance as it spun out. Audience interest was in the performance of principals, usually not the rest of the on-stage “stuff.” Since each composer developed his opera for specific individual’s voices, arias were strategically placed in a performance to permit those stars to shine. It also explains some of the odd placement¹⁷⁴ of such moments throughout the piece.

- As a further variation on the “singers’ rule,” once an opera had premiered, what subsequently was performed on stage under the name of that opera, was anyone’s guess. There were no copyright laws, no licensing of productions, etc. Therefore anyone in the opera “business” vocal or managerial, with sharp elbows was free to abridge and/or insert what, where and however they wanted.

As curious as all this “frolicking” may seem to modern eyes, before we get too smug, let’s think of our modern sports arenas, their private boxes with high priced décor, booze, broads and chow. There are omni-present vendors for the great-unwashed crowd that is boxed out of the private boxes, but keeps in constant physical and verbal movement. Similar to the 19th century Italian opera house, no? Only the venue has changed,

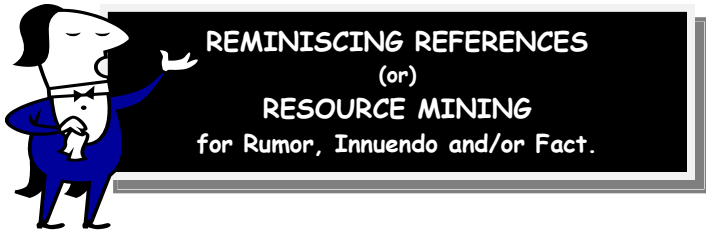
¹⁷² For notations on the wandering *Barbiere* Overture and Rossini's compositional habits related thereto, see p.,95 and p. 105.

¹⁷³ For a discussion of this aria type and how it affects *Barbiere* see p. 129.

¹⁷⁴ Vis-à-vis libretto logic.

and there is no fat lady singing, unless “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” counts!

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose!



In this comparatively advanced technological age of information access, the persistent data digger can usually find more about a given subject, than the human brain can effectively process. That is both good news and bad. While such a surfeit permits a maximization of information for a minimum of effort, it also exposes the weak underbelly of archival information and the need to separate the chaff from the wheat in a field of conflicting “facts.”

It is continually amazing to discover through cross-referencing how assumedly simple rock solid facts can wildly vary among references. Due diligence on “factual” selection is therefore mandatory up to a point. Then, it becomes a matter of, “Oh, what the hell! This is my best guess.”

Individual **Irreverent Guides** are not designed to be exhaustively referenced academic treatises. However, they are semi-conscientiously constructed to optimistically demystify opera while entertainingly informing members of a potential audience. Consequently, they are built on the best basis of factual assessment among often-warring alternatives

For the reader, now having been warned about possible pot-holes in at best, a rocky narrative road, listed below are some reference resources used in construction of this current multi-opera **Irreverent Guide**:

General references:

- David Hamilton (Ed.), The Metropolitan Opera Encyclopedia, Simon and Schuster; 1987. This is a smorgasbord of operatically and musically-related factoids. While the individual entries are brief, overall the reference is comprehensive, up-to-date and accurate.
- Roger Parker (Ed.), The Oxford Illustrated History of Opera, Oxford University Press, 1994. More in depth than the Met Encyclopedia, it provides excellent historical background, but was not designed as a handy-dandy reference, if that is what you are looking for.

Composer/ opera specific references:

- Karl Kohrs (Ed.), The New Milton Cross'Complete Stories of the Great Operas; Doubleday and Company, 1955.
- Milton Cross and Karl Kohrs, The New Milton Cross More Stories of the Great Operas; Doubleday and Company, 1955.

These two basic texts of operatic plots and associated information originated with Milton Cross, the longtime host of the Saturday afternoon broadcasts of the Metropolitan Opera. They have been frequently revised and updated. Their telling of the plots is quite complete, but not excessive. Unfortunately, care needs to be exercised in using the newer editions, as some errors have randomly crept in that Mr. Cross would not have tolerated.

- Philip Gossett et.al. (Eds.), Masters of Italian Opera (Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Verdi, Puccini); WW Norton and Company, 1983. Good basic information on the lives and works of five major Italian composers. Quite useful and readable. Its style cuts to the chase and doesn't overburden the researcher with excessive peripheral detail.

- Susan Nicassio, Tosca's Rome, The Play and The Opera in Historical Perspective. University of Chicago Press, 1999. An always-intriguing discussion of the Puccini and Sardou works, with a scholarly lodging against the actual history of Rome and as it relates, Europe. The text largely encompasses the historical time period of the opera/play. A fascinating read, even if you are not researching.
- Charles Osborne, The Complete Operas of Puccini, DiCapo Press, 1981. Intriguing narratives of Puccini's operas and backgrounds on their creation. Succinct, but full of interesting and informational details.
- John Wood (Trans.) Beaumarchais's Barber of Seville and The Marriage of Figaro. Penguin Books, 1964. The original source plays for the Mozart, Rossini and Paisiello operas; also contains an excellent introduction by Dr. Wood detailing Beaumarchais's career, the creation of the plays and the history of their times.

Recordings (including their accompanying background essays and librettos):

- Tosca; Callas, DiStefano and Gobbi, Orchestra and Chorus of La Scala, Victor de Sabata, 1984.
- Der Freischütz, Behrens and Kolla; Bavarian Radio Chorus and Orchestra, Rafael Kubelik, 1980.
- Il Barbiere di Siviglia
 - Rossini version. Merrill and Peters, Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus, Eric Leinsdorf, 1958 (re-mastered 1986)
 - Paisiello version. Laki and Gulyas, Hungarian State orchestra, Adam Fisher, 1985.

The Internet (queried widely and wildly). Too many citations reviewed to list individually. WARNING for the careful researcher: cross-referencing, culling and correcting are musts! The web abounds with inaccuracies and informational conflicts.



A Guide to Irreverent Guides

Encouraged by several probably misguided regional opera companies, the **Irreverent Guides to Enjoying the Opera** series was initiated over six years ago. To date **Guides** for thirty-two operas have been produced. The majority of these were done pro bono for the companies to use in their educational and/or fund-raising programs. The rest were done for unwary and slower running family, friends or just unfortunate strangers in the street.

Each **Irreverent Guide** is designed for those of us who enjoy the operatic sound and spectacle, but do not necessarily understand (or really, want to understand) the technical nuances underlying the musical, visual and/or vocal fireworks.

The **Guides** originated in an oral tradition. Individual operas selected for their slightly off-the-wall stories (but great music) were translated into jaundiced and irreverent narratives. The first audiences for these were younger family members being lured into quasi-voluntary operatic attendance.

As time passed, the narratives began to show some signs of success (e.g. the kicking and screaming stopped). The audience drawn into the narrative circle expanded to include spouses of the original but now "adult" children, grandchildren as they appeared, and non-related adults--- primarily our slowest running friends and/or (again) unwary strangers on the street.

As larger audiences came back of their own free wills for more than one narrative session, the original oral tradition proved impractical. It was replaced by a written writ about the operatic occasion. Over time, the number of targets grew and **voila (!)**, the **Irreverent Guides'** slightly dysfunctional family was born.

Each **Guide** targeting one opera includes the full flavor of the traditional bad puns and sophomoric observations of the original oral sessions. It is leavened though with

a lot more historical, social, musical, political and (ho boy!) hanky-panky background than was formerly the case. Retirement unfortunately promotes research--- especially given the present quality of the narrator/author's golf game.

Currently our operatic victims are selected more by whim than systematic design. However, past selective options have included annually changing repertoires of regional opera companies,¹⁷⁵ dyspeptic moods of the author and/or creative bribery.

Our Operating Philosophy and Audience Personae. Built with a clear eye on Rube Goldberg's *Principles of Design*,¹⁷⁶ each *Irreverent Guide* is dedicated to the premise that "enjoyable opera" is not an oxymoronic phrase. Honoring that premise, as an overall collective, individual *Guides* are designed to be "entertainingly educational" as well as "irreverently informational,"--- and those are not oxymoronic phrases either!

The *Guides* are jerry-built with thigh-slappingly arcane and convoluted knowledge that will resonate **only** with a special few potential opera-going folks. Specifically, those who have a highly developed sense of curiosity about circumstances that drive artistic creativity (apart from impending starvation); the capacity to suspend disbelief; a tolerance for the improbable; and finally, an antic sense of humor.



If we still have your attention,
you obviously qualify for our
select readership.
So read, laugh and learn!

¹⁷⁵ They shall remain nameless. Legal action by them is always a potential.

¹⁷⁶ Primarily those entertainingly defying logic and common sense,

About the Authors

So our indiscriminate readership is aware which member of the **Irreverent Guides** "creative" team (JP or Sondra Cooney) is responsible for which gaffs, the division of work between the pair is, he writes them, but she makes them readable.

J.P. Cooney, while holding a PhD, definitely was not educated as a musicologist. Also, not a native Iowan, he does claim default citizenship of the state by virtue of family genealogy, marriage and University of Iowa degrees. He is several years retired from a long, but probably questionable professorial career in graduate health care education and research. However, most important for current purposes, he is a long-standing opera enthusiast about that art form's wacky, but rewarding wonderments.

S.S. Cooney a native Iowan, does have a musical background by virtue of education and training. She holds a graduate degree from UCLA and though (semi-) retired, she has had a long successful career in teaching, educational research and policy-development. She is a knowledgeable and fanatic lover of a wide range of musical types. Opera does make that list--- somewhat. For their (to-date) fifty-three years of marriage, equipped with a flaming red, felt-tipped pen, she has diligently pursued and purified JP's errant and "gone missing" commas, grungy syntax and banally baroque sentence structures. She perpetually persists in her quixotic editorial quest, as he never learns.

The Cooneys currently are most happy residents of a small island off Hilton Head (SC), breachable only by boat or Michael Phelps. In this idyllic but eccentric existence, they are companioned by the grumpy ghost of their formerly long-lived liver-spotted Dalmatian.

Major additional enjoyment to the island's idyllic atmosphere is provided by frequent forays onto and most importantly, off the island by other immediate family members. That traveling road show now touts up nineteen second and third generational members--- most of whom are at least willing to tolerate the opera, and some actually love it.

The Irreverent Guides Series

(Issues already released or scheduled to be shortly released,
into a potential but skittish opera-going public.)

COMPOSER	OPERA	ISSUE	DATE
Bernstein*	Candide	#21	4.08
Bizet	Les Pêcheurs de Perles	# 7	10.05
Blitzstein***	Regina	#24	6.08
Britten*	Albert Herring	# 8	4.06
De Falla	La Vida Breve	# 13	1.07
Donizetti***	L'Elisir d'Amore	#22	6.08
Donizetti	Lucia di Lammermoor	# 2	5.04
Gilbert & Sullivan	The Pirates of Penzance	# 15	4.07
Gounod**	Faust	#25	9.08
Gounod**	Roméo et Juliette	#17	10.07
Leoncavallo	Pagliacci	# 12	1.07
Mozart**	Le Nozze di Figaro	#27	3.09
Mozart	Die Zauberflöte	# 6	5.05
Mozart**	Don Giovanni	#19	3.08
Offenbach*	Les Contes d' Hoffmann	# 16	4.07
Poulenc*	Dialogues des Carmélites	#28	4.09
Puccini	Madama Butterfly	# 11	7.06
Puccini	Tosca	# 5	3.05
Puccini***	Tosca (a déjà vu view)	#30	6.09
Puccini**	Turandot	#29	4.09
Rossini**	Il Barbiere di Siviglia	#26	1.09
Rossini***	Il Barbiere (once more with feeling)	#31	6.09
Rossini	La Cenerentola	# 10	3.06
Saint-Saëns	Samson et Dalila	# 4	2.05
Strauss**	Die Fledermaus	#20	4.07
Verdi**	Aida	#18	1.07
Verdi	La Traviata	# 9	1.06
Verdi	Macbeth	# 3	10.04
Verdi	Nabucco	# 1	10.03
Verdi	Rigoletto	# 14	3.07
Verdi***	Un Ballo in Maschera	#23	6.08
Weber***	Der Freischütz	#32	6.09

Developed for: *Atlanta Opera Theater at Georgia State University
 **Opera Carolina
 ***Des Moines Metro Opera.