

OPERA THEATRE **OTSL** of SAINT LOUIS

Opera on the GO!

THE BARBER OF SEVILLE

Study Guide



Photography by Philip Hamer

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Welcome!

Thank you for inviting Opera Theatre of Saint Louis's Opera on the GO! program into your school! We are so pleased to share this abridged production of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, and to introduce your students to the world of opera. In addition to our performance, two mini-workshops will allow students to experience some of the many elements that contribute to a fully-produced opera!



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Bayer Fund



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Synopsis

Count Almaviva, dressed as a poor young student named Lindoro, is serenading a young woman outside her window. Hearing the song, Figaro appears and recognizes the Count as a friend he's known for quite a while. Count Almaviva tells Figaro that he has been in love with the young woman behind the window since he saw her and her guardian travelling abroad. Not sure what else to do, he followed them back to Seville, but hasn't been able to see or meet her. Happily, Figaro tells the Count he knows exactly who lives in the house - the lovely Rosina, with her protective guardian, Dr. Bartolo. Count Almaviva asks his friend to help in encouraging Rosina to fall in love with him. There is just one catch - he doesn't want Rosina to know that he is a wealthy count, but wants her to fall in love with him for who he is on the inside. Figaro agrees, and the two come up with a plan that will enable Count Almaviva to enter Dr. Bartolo's house; he will disguise himself as "Don Alonso," a famous music teacher in Seville to teach Rosina to sing.

Alone in her home, Rosina admits to herself that she has fallen in love with the poor student who serenades her outside her window each morning. She's about to share this news with her friend Figaro when they hear the Doctor approaching. Figaro runs and hides as Dr. Bartolo comes to the house. He questions the maid Berta if Figaro has been around to visit Rosina, but she will not say a word. After the doctor storms off, Berta muses how love will make people crazy and wonders when someone will fall in love with her.

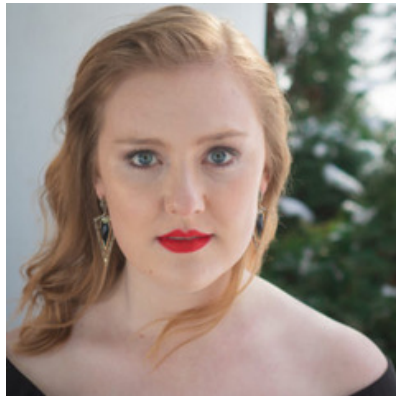
Count Almaviva and Figaro arrive at Dr. Bartolo's home, with the Count disguised as the music teacher, "Don Alonso." When called to her music lesson, Rosina recognizes him at once, but plays along to fool Dr. Bartolo until he dozes off. While the doctor is asleep, the Count and Rosina exchange flirtatious interactions. Bartolo eventually wakes up, catches on to the deception and banishes Figaro and the Count immediately.

Rosina, Figaro, and Count Almaviva manage to trick Berta and Dr. Bartolo into leaving the house so the neighbors don't start to talk about Dr. Bartolo's yelling. While they are gone, Figaro and Count Almaviva return. The Count and Rosina express their love for each other and agree to marry as soon as possible. As they plan their elopement, Figaro spots someone returning to the house. Berta and Dr. Bartolo return, but they are too late. Count Almaviva reveals his true identity, knowing that Rosina loves him for who he is and not his money, and the Doctor cannot argue. Led by Figaro, all five characters accept their lives happily.



Cast

Rosina



Meridian Prall
Mezzo-Soprano

Berta



Angel Azzarra
Soprano

Figaro



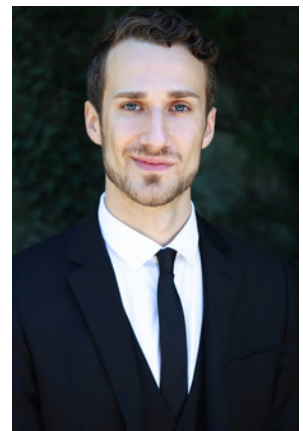
Kyle Miller
Baritone

Count Almaviva



Anthony León
Tenor

Dr. Bartolo



Hans Tashjian
Bass

Creative Team



Tara Branham
Stage Director



Tim Cheung
Music Director



Yee Eun Nam
Projection Designer

Set & Lighting Designer
Hans Fredrickson

Props Master
Meg Brinkley

Costume Designer
Stacy Michele Harris

Wig Master
John Metzner

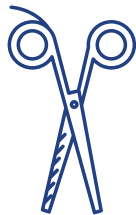
Stage Manager
Dora Trenbeath

Production Manager
Maggy Bort

Characters

Figaro (FEE-gah-roh).....Baritone
Count Almaviva (Al-mah-VEE-vah).....Tenor
Rosina (Roh-Zee-nah).....Mezzo-Soprano
Berta (BER-tah).....Mezzo-Soprano
Dr. Bartolo (BAR-toh-loh).....Bass

Figaro



A barber who knows everyone's business and helps his friends.

Count Almaviva



A young nobleman in disguise who falls in love with Rosina

Rosina



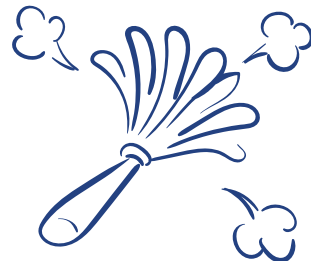
The feisty ward of Dr. Bartolo who falls in love with Count Almaviva

Dr. Bartolo



The guardian who takes care of Rosina because he wants to marry her.

Berta



Rosina's governess and maid who wants someone to fall in love with her too.

Gioachino Rossini



Gioachino Rossini was born in Italy in 1792 to a musical family. His mother was a trained singer and his father was a professional French horn player. Rossini began to study music when he was 13 and wrote his first opera when he was just 16 years old! Rossini was such a quick and skilled composer that at the height of his career he wrote three or four operas in a year. Between ages 20 and 30, he composed 20 operas including his most famous work, *The Barber of Seville*. When he was 30 years old, Rossini met one of his favorite composers, Ludwig van Beethoven. Beethoven congratulated Rossini on the success of *The Barber of Seville*, saying "It will be played as long as Italian opera exists."

Rossini is given credit as one of the greatest composers of opera because he developed the bel canto style of opera. Bel canto means "beautiful singing" and is characterized by balancing passages with decorative passages of fast notes that use the singer's whole range with beautiful long phrases that highlight the text. Until Rossini's time, singers decided how they wanted to show off their voices. Rossini was the first composer to include specific musical instructions about how and what he wanted the singers to sing. His music requires great musical range, power, and flexibility from the singer, as well as excellent acting skills. During his lifetime, Rossini wrote 39 operas, many of which are still performed today all over the world. Rossini retired early as a very wealthy man who enjoyed giving lavish dinners for all the most popular musicians of the time.

FUN FACT:

Rossini was born on February 29, 1792 - a leap day. February 29 is only added to the calendar every 4 years, so even though he had been alive for 24 years when he wrote *The Barber of Seville*, Rossini was technically only 6 years old!

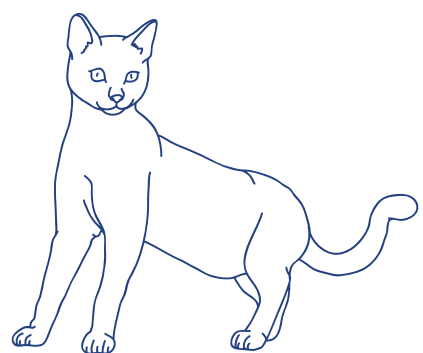
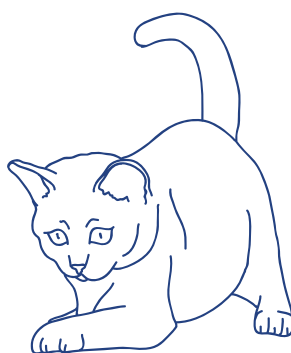
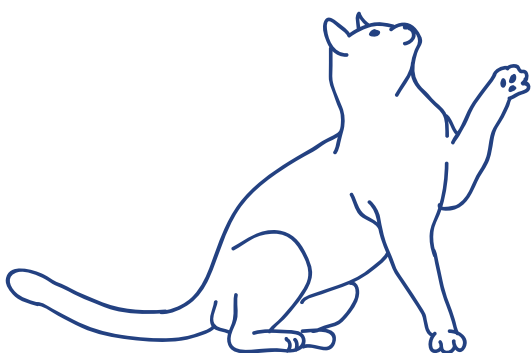
History of *The Barber of Seville*

Writing *The Barber of Seville*

Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* was based on a popular French play with the same name. At that time, it was common to use and re-use well-known stories for operas. Rossini was asked to write the opera just 67 days before it was scheduled to be performed for the first time. And before he could get started, he had to wait for the librettist to finish the words for the opera! As an extra challenge, Rossini was such a popular man that his friends would visit nearly every day and go out to eat every evening. Rossini was so busy that he wrote the ideas for *The Barber of Seville* on scraps of paper when he got the chance and wrote the music late at night when he finally returned home. Rossini finished writing the 600-page opera in just 18 days.

The First Performance

The first performance of *The Barber of Seville* was a total disaster. Fans of another competing composer sat in the audience planning to cause problems, and they found plenty of opportunities! First, they made fun of Rossini when he arrived in a special Spanish outfit. Then, the performer who played Dr. Bartolo tripped while entering the stage and had to sing with a nosebleed. Next, a cat came wandering on stage and after being shoed off, it came back, jumped into Dr. Bartolo's arms, and the audience members imitated its meowing! Rossini went home without celebrating and skipped the second performance the next night. The second performance was a complete success and the opera was recognized as a great work.



The Figaro Trilogy

Do you ever wish you could find out what happens to a character after a book, play, or opera ends? With Figaro you can! Rossini used a popular play as the material for *The Barber of Seville* which was only part of the Figaro story. Figaro is the main character in a set of three plays that follow the adventures of his life. *The Barber of Seville* introduces us to Figaro for the first time when he's a very young man. In *The Marriage of Figaro* we get to see the characters Count Almaviva, Rosina, Bartolo, and Berta again some years later. Figaro is working as Almaviva's butler and is about to marry Rosina's maid, Susanna, but once again he gets caught up in some crazy and confusing schemes. Twenty years later, we meet these characters one more time and Figaro must once again help Almaviva and Rosina out of another mess. The third part of Figaro's story was never very popular, but *The Marriage of Figaro* was turned into one of the most successful operas of all time by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.



Fun Fact:

Did you know that when barbers first began, they did a lot more than cut hair? The barber pole is a symbol from a time when barbers also performed surgery and dentistry. The white and red stripes represent blood and bandages. In the US, they have a blue stripe to match the flag. Barbershops were also places for social interaction and public debates - that's probably how Figaro knew everyone and everything!

Music Helps Tell the Story

Often in opera, composers help give hints about the character, setting, or mood of an opera through the music. Through the musical excerpts below, Rossini helps us understand the personalities, emotions, and situations of the characters through a variety of musical styles. Our performance will include these famous selections sung in English rather than the Italian language Rossini originally wrote it in.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Overture - An overture is an orchestral piece at the beginning of an opera that typically gives listeners a hint of the music they will hear during the opera. Rossini was famous for his overtures, especially the overture for *The Barber of Seville*. However, it doesn't reference any of the music from the opera because Rossini actually wrote it for an earlier opera. He was in such a rush to complete his opera that he just borrowed an overture he had already written, and it was a hit!

Largo al factotum della citta - Figaro's introduction aria is easily the most famous piece from this opera, and one of the most recognizable arias in all of opera. In the aria, Figaro tells the audience how popular he is because he is the most successful barber in Seville, and because he is so talented at helping people solve their problems. Throughout the piece, Figaro imitates his happy customers calling out to him. This aria is so popular that it has been used in cartoons and movies for years.

Io sono docile - The music in Rosina's famous aria gives us some clues about her personality. Even though she can be sweet, she can also be fiery when her temper is provoked. Rossini uses fast and difficult vocal passages to characterize Rosina's fiery temperament. The decorative vocal lines with extra notes, turns, trills, and extremely high notes is an example of the bel canto style. "Io sono docile" is the second part of another famous aria for Rosina called "Una voce poco fa."

Zitti, zitti, piano, piano - Meaning "hurry, hurry, quiet, quiet," this fast-paced trio for Figaro, Rosina, and Count Almaviva captures the nervous energy of the three characters trying to escape before Berta and Bartolo return. The fast notes and rhythm show their excitement, but Rossini makes a joke of the song. Even though they're singing "hurry, hurry," the three stay on stage singing instead of running away, and even though they sing "quietly, quietly," their excitement takes over and they sing loudly.

Musical Devices in *The Barber of Seville*

Patter Song: This fast-flying song is a favorite in comic operas and operettas. In it, many words or syllables are sung extremely quickly, often on just one pitch. It is almost always used to portray a comic character or a humorous situation, and Rossini was a master of this technique. Figaro's famous introduction aria "Largo al Factotum" is an example of this rapid-fire singing style. Listen to an example of Figaro describe his many responsibilities as barber and most popular man in Seville. He has so many roles, he can barely get them all out in time! Although not sung in our production, Dr. Bartolo has an equally impressive patter song, "A un dottor della mia sorte," in which he gets very annoyed that Rosina would treat a doctor of his caliber so poorly!

Roulade: This is a highly ornamented or embellished melody consisting of rapid passing notes sung on a single syllable. Rossini was one of the first composers to write down exactly how he wanted singers to ornament the music and show off their vocal technique. These embellishments are beautiful, but very difficult to sing and nearly every character in *The Barber of Seville* must be able to do them. Count Almaviva and Rosina have the most roulades, to indicate how in love they are. Rosina's music lesson is filled with impressive roulades that pass through many notes and require the singer to show off their full range. The roulade was a signature style of Rossini's writing style, and became a staple of Bel Canto singing.

Rossini Crescendo: Rossini was nicknamed "Signor Crescendo" because he used this technique so frequently! A crescendo is a gradual increase in volume in a piece of music. Rossini would take a simple melodic patter and repeat it again and again, each time a little louder than before and often getting slightly faster (in music, this is called an *accelerando*). Sometimes he would add instruments or voices for an even greater effect. Almost every Rossini overture uses this technique as well as many vocal passages. He also likes to use this technique to end the first half of his operas, getting faster and faster until his characters were all tangled up in a comedic frenzy and very confused!

Glossary of Opera Terms

Aria	A solo song in an opera or operetta.
Bel Canto	Meaning "beautiful singing." Bel Canto uses many decorative and quickly moving passages.
Bravo!	A compliment shouted by the audience to the performers after a very good show
Coloratura	Vocal writing that shows off a singer's agility through many fast and complicated passages
Duet	A song performed by two musicians
Ensemble	A selection performed by multiple musicians,; also means the whole cast performing the show together
Finale	The final musical number in an opera, usually involving soloists and chorus
Legato and Staccato	In Italian, "legato" means "tied together." Legato describes notes played or sung with a smooth connection. The opposite is "staccato" in which notes are played in a short, detached manner.
Libretto	The script of an opera
Melisma	A group of fast moving notes sung to the same syllable of a word. Melismas show off a singer's breath control and vocal flexibility.
Overture	The musical prelude at the beginning of the opera. Usually it introduces musical themes to be heard later in the performance
Patter Song	A fast aria with many words, usually funny and difficult to sing
Quartet	A piece performed by four musicians
Recitative	A free-style declaration usually "sung-spoken" as an introduction to an aria or chorus that moves the story forward

It may seem like opera has a fancy word for everything and singers are no exception! There are many different types of voices. The list below shows the 4 main voice types for men and women.

Soprano: The highest of the 4 voice types. Soprano voices can be light or can be dramatic. The kind of voice they have determines what kind of opera role they play.

Mezzo-Soprano: The lower of the female voice types. Mezzo-Sopranos are sometimes called Altos when they sing in an ensemble. Mezzos sometimes play young men in operas - this is called a "pants role." The role of Rosina can be sung by either a Mezzo-Soprano or Soprano.

Tenor: The higher male voice type. Some tenors can sing in the same range as altos (or higher) and are called countertenors. Tenors usually get to be the "leading man" or the hero in operas.

Bass: The lowest of the 4 types. Singers who sing between tenor and bass are called Baritones. In opera, the low basses are often bad guys, comedic characters, or father-figures.

Let's Put on a Show!

It takes a lot of people to put on an opera, even if it's a short one! Below are just some of the people who are involved in our production of *The Barber of Seville* and how they help get the show to you. If you're interested in music or theater, maybe one of these jobs would be a good fit for you!

Stage Director

- Creates the vision for the show
- Plans and runs all the rehearsals
- Helps singers and actors find the best ways to act and move on the stage

Music Director

- Rehearses and conducts all the music
- Works with the orchestra and singers on how to interpret the music
- Works with singers and instrumentalists on technique, language, and other skills

Singers

- Rehearses with the stage and music directors
- Memorizes lines, songs, and stage movement
- Performs the show in front of the audience!

Production Manager

- Works with the director to understand plans for the way the show should look
- Communicates between designers, stage managers, and directors
- Makes sure all the sets, costumes, equipment are being taken care of on time

Administrators

- Hires singers, directors and designers
- Schedules rehearsals and performances
- Makes sure everyone has what they need to put on a great show!

Designers

- Creates the sets and props
- Creates the costumes, wigs, and stage makeup
- Works with Stage Director and Production Manager to bring the show to life

Projection Designer

- Works with the Stage Director to understand the style of the show
- Creates videos and photography
- Puts together multimedia presentation to enhance sets, props, and costumes in creating the atmosphere of the show

Stage Manager

- Communicates between the Stage Director, Music Director, and the singers
- Makes sure everyone and everything is where it needs to be when it needs to be there
- Runs the show after the Stage Director leaves



Additional Resources

This study guide was compiled to prepare your students for the best experience with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis's Opera on the GO! production of *The Barber of Seville*. For more information and more ideas on in-class activities please check out these additional resources!

OTSL Patter Song Lesson Plan

Additional Study Guides for *The Barber of Seville*:

[Vancouver Opera](#)

[LA Opera](#)

[Pittsburgh Opera](#)

[Manitoba Opera](#)

[Palm Beach Opera](#)

General Music Resources & Lesson Plans:

- [PBS Learning Media: Metropolitan Opera Collection](#)
- [LA Opera Connects Lesson Plans](#)
- [Opera Arrangements for Middle & High School Choirs, Bands, & Orchestras](#)
- [Royal Opera House Create & Sing](#)
- [Kennedy Center Opera Collection](#)
- [SD Opera: Music & Science Curriculum](#)
- [The Getty: Performing Arts in Art Curriculum](#)

Dance & Movement Resources & Lesson Plans:

- [Kennedy Center Dance Collection](#)
- [PBS Learning Media Dance Hub](#)
- [New Victory Theatre: Movement](#)
- [Royal Opera House Create & Dance](#)

Lighting Design & Technical Theatre Resources & Lesson Plans:

- [Royal Opera House Theatrecraft](#)
- [Technical Theatre Terms](#)
- [Lighting Equipment](#)
- [New Victory Theatre: Set & Costume Design](#)
- [PBS Learning Media Technical Theatre Hub](#)