

Figaro's Close Shave

The Barber of Seville

Styled by



STUDY GUIDE

Music by:

Gioachino Antonio Rossini

Libretto by:

Cesare Sterbini

First performed:

Rome, Italy on February 5, 1816.

That's almost 200 years ago!

Adapted by:

Al Simmons

CAST

(All characters are portrayed by Al Simmons)

COUNT ALMAVIVA	(A wealthy nobleman)	Tenor
FIGIORELLO	(Count Almaviva's servant)	Baritone
FIGARO	(A barber and "Jack-of-All-Trades")	Baritone
ROSINA	(A ward of Dr. Bartolo)	Soprano
DR. BARTOLO	(Rosina's guardian)	Baritone
DON BASILIO	(Rosina's music teacher)	Bass

This Study Guide has been created to prepare you for Al's interpretation of Rossini's comic masterpiece. Make the experience more meaningful and enjoyable by expanding your understanding of the opera and its history either before or after attending Al's show.

Materials in this Study Guide may be copied and distributed to students.

**“Every kind of music is good,
except the boring kind.”**
- Gioachino Rossini

INTRODUCING *THE BARBER OF SEVILLE!*

The Barber of Seville has been around for almost 200 years and continues to delight audiences worldwide. Its infectious humour and memorable melodies turn up today everywhere from Bugs Bunny cartoons to cell phone ring tones.

For all its success, the opera didn't have an easy birth. It was written in an unbelievably short time. From the start of the libretto arriving to the time of the finished score was three weeks. Rossini wrote non-stop, taking pages out of the hands of the librettist Cesare Sterbini while the ink was still wet and transforming them into the arias we know today. He managed his impossibly tight deadline by borrowing some of the music from his other operas. In fact, one of the most famous pieces from the opera, the overture, had actually been used as the overture for two of his other operas!



Gioachino Rossini in 1865

Opening night was a disaster. Everything that could go wrong did go wrong. Guitars broke, cues were missed, and arias were booed. By the time the weary singers got to the finale a cat wandered on to the stage and began meowing at the singers. The audience laughed hysterically and meowed back at the cat. Rossini was so upset that he stayed in bed all the next day pretending to be sick. Fortunately though, the tide of public opinion changed quickly, the opera was selling out within a few days... and the rest is musical history!



“Mozart roused my admiration when I was young; he caused me to despair when I reached maturity; he is now the comfort of my old age.” -Rossini

LISTEN TO: The Magic Flute by Mozart

**LISTEN TO TUNES
FROM AL'S VERSION OF THE BARBER OF SEVILLE**

Overture

Piano Pianissimo

Ecco Ridente (brief excerpt)

Una Voce Poco Fa (brief excerpt)

Largo Al Factotum

All'idea di quell metallo (excerpt)

La Calunnia e un venticello

Quando mi sei vicina

A un dottor della mia sorte (excerpt)

Ma vedi il mio destino (excerpt)

The Storm

ALSO:

***Die Walküre (The Ride of the Valkyrie)* by Richard Wagner (excerpt)**

***Queen of The Night* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (excerpt)**

***William Tell Overture* by Rossini**

There are other song excerpts but they are too short to mention.

Oh darn it I just mentioned them.

You will find these recordings at your public library.

“One cannot judge Wagner’s opera from a first hearing, and I certainly do not intend to hear it a second time.” -Rossini

LISTEN TO: Die Valcurie by Wagner

Vocal Categories

Women:

Soprano: The highest female voice is similar to a flute in range and tone colour.



A Soprano is most often the heroine in the opera since a high, bright sound can easily suggest youth and innocence. The role of Rosina is often played by a Soprano. LISTEN TO: a soprano voice sing *Una voce poco fa* from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* by Rossini

Mezzo-Soprano: The middle-range female voice is comparable to an oboe.



A Mezzo-Soprano, sometimes called an alto, can play a wide variety of characters including gypsies, mothers and even the part of a young man. LISTEN TO: a mezzo-soprano voice sing *Il Vecchiotto Cerca Moglie* from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* by Rossini

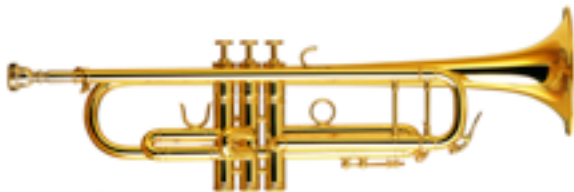
Contralto: The lowest female voice can be compared to an English horn.



Contraltos are usually given unique roles including fortune-tellers, witches and older women. LISTEN TO: a contralto voice sing Erda's Aria *Weiche, Wotan! Weiche!* from *Das Rheingold* by Richard Wagner

Men:

Tenor: The highest male voice has the resonant ring of a trumpet.



A Tenor usually plays the hero or the romantic lead. The handsome COUNT ALMAVIVA is a tenor. LISTEN TO: *Ecco Ridente In Cielo* - From: *Il Barbiere Di Siviglia*, by Rossini

Baritone: The middle-range male voice is comparable to a French horn in tone color.



The Baritone sometimes leads the funny business in comic opera or he is the villain in a tragic opera although sometimes Baritones are the hero. FIORELLO (The Count's servant), FIGARO (The Barber) and Dr BARTOLO (Rosina's guardian) are all Baritones. LISTEN TO: *Largo al Factotum* from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* by Rossini

Bass: The lowest male voice is close in range to a trombone.



Bass singers often portray old, wise, or foolish, comic men. DON BASILIO (Rosina's music teacher) has a Bass voice. LISTEN TO: a bass voice sing *La calunnia* from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* by Rossini

The following terms can be used to describe special characteristics in a vocal range:

Coloratura: A light, bright voice that has the ability to sing many high notes quickly. LISTEN TO: a coloratura soprano sing *Queen of The Night* from *The Magic Flute* by Mozart.



Lyric: A light to medium weight voice, often singing beautiful sweeping melodies. LISTEN TO: a lyric tenor sing *Ecco Ridente In Cielo* - From: *Il Barbiere Di Siviglia*, by Rossini



Dramatic: Dark, heavy and powerful voice, capable of sustained and forceful singing. LISTEN TO: a dramatic tenor sing *Vesti la Giubba* from *I Pagliacci*



Crooner: A singer, typically a male one, who sings popular sentimental songs in a soft, low voice. Al Simmons has a crooner voice. LISTEN TO: *That's Amore* by Dean Martin



You will find these recordings at your public library.

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Gioachino Rossini 1792 – 1868

Rossini was born in the town of Pesaro on the east coast of Italy. He came from a musical family; his mother sang and his father played the trumpet. Rossini spent much of his childhood in theaters where his parents performed.

Young Rossini was noted for his remarkable memory and ear for music. When he was 13 years old he watched a performance of an opera. He then went home and wrote out one of the songs from memory, complete with a piano score.

At 14 he wrote his first opera and learned to play the harpsichord, the trumpet, and the violin. Rossini had a beautiful voice and sang well and he was able to earn a good living as a teenager performing and composing.

He stopped writing operas when he was 37 and lived a life full of parties and fun for the next forty years. When he lived in

Paris, he hosted elegant dinner parties that were high social events written up in all the newspapers. He had always been a good-looking man in his youth and when he went bald in middle age, he dealt with it by buying seven toupees, one for every day of the week!

It is possible that Rossini loved to eat more than he loved music and there are humorous stories about his adventures with food. He is said to have composed an aria while waiting for his meal in a restaurant. He loved food so much that he composed some piano pieces about his favourites, entitled Radishes, Anchovy, Pickles, Butter, Dry Figs, Almonds, Raisins, and Hazelnuts.

Legend has it that Rossini shed tears only three times in his life: the first time after the fiasco of his first opera; the second when he heard Niccolò Paganini play the violin; and the third when a picnic basket containing turkey stuffed with truffles fell overboard during a boat trip.



Gioachino (,jō-ə- kē-nō) **Rossini in 1820**

THE SYNOPSIS of AI Simmons's adaption of *The Barber of Seville*

Place: Seville

Time: Seventeenth Century

The young Count Almaviva is in love with Rosina. He and Fiorello, his servant, quietly approach her house ("Piano, Pianissimo") where he serenades her ("Ecco ridente"). She doesn't come out onto her balcony because her overprotective guardian, Dr. Bartolo, keeps her confined to her room. The Count leaves broken hearted.



Figaro

Rosina is enchanted by the voice that has just touched her heart. ("Una voce poco fa").



Count

Figaro, the jack-of-all-trades, barber has access to all the houses in Seville and knows the town's secrets and scandals. He arrives and describes his busy life ("Largo al factotum").

The Count enlists Figaro's help to help him free Rosina from the clutches of her greedy, aged guardian, Dr. Bartolo.



Fiorello

Figaro devises a plan: the Count will disguise himself in order to gain access to Dr. Bartolo's house. The Count is excited about this plan and Figaro looks forward to being paid a bag of gold for his trouble. ("All'idea di quel metallo").

Dr. Bartolo plans to marry Rosina himself and he enlists the help of her music teacher, Don Basilio, to help him. Don Basilio claims that slander is the most effective way to get rid of the Count ("La calunnia"). They will lie to Rosina and tell her that the Count is a no good scoundrel.



Rosina

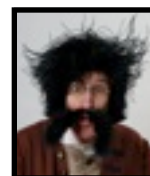
Dr. Bartolo sings a very lame love song to Rosina, ("Quando mi sei vicina") then he locks her in her room, just in case their plan doesn't work. ("A un dottor della mia sorte")



Doctor

Count Almaviva knocks on the door. He is now disguised as a substitute music teacher. Dr. Bartolo refuses to let him see Rosina. ("Ma vedi il mio destino!")

Figaro swoops in and gives the Doctor a shave and a haircut. He steals the key to Rosina's room. The Doctor discovers the Count's disguise and a hilarious chase ensues. ("Thunderstorm")



Basillio

After much chaos the Count and Rosina are united, and love triumphs over all. Do they live happily ever after? For the answer to that you have to listen to the sequel: Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro."

Rossini Time-Line

Rossini was born 16 years after The United States gained independence from Britain in 1776. He began writing operas soon after Napoleon crowned himself Emperor of France in 1804. He died in 1868 one year after Sir John A. MacDonalld became the first Prime Minister of a brand new country called Canada.

1789 The French Revolution begins with the storming of the Bastille. George Washington is elected the first president of the United States.

1790 George Vancouver begins his three-year survey of Northwest coast of North America. Benjamin Franklin dies.

1791 After writing *The Magic Flute* Wolfgang Amadeus **Mozart** dies. Lower Canada (Quebec) and Upper Canada (Ontario) are formed.

1792 Rossini is born in Pasaro, Italy. The first execution by guillotine takes place in France.

1793 King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette are executed and the Reign of Terror begins in France.

1794 Eli Whitney patents an invention which automates the removal of seeds from raw cotton and his **Cotton** Gin spurs the growth of the cotton industry and rise of slave labour in the Southern U.S. Alexander MacKenzie completes his journey across Canada by reaching the Pacific Ocean. Upper Canada becomes the first British territory to introduce an anti-slavery law.

1796 Rossini moves with his mother to Bologna, Italy.

1801 Beethoven composes *The Moonlight Sonata*.

1804 Napoleon declares himself emperor of France.

1805 Rossini's only appearance as a singer was in Ferdinando Paer's *Camilla* at Bologna's Teatro del Corso.

1806 At the age of 17, Rossini enters Bologna Academy and writes his first opera, *Demetrio e polibio*.

1810 Rossini receives a commission for an opera, *La cambiale di matrimonio*.

Tin cans are patented, making mass production of preserved food possible.

1812 Charles Dickens is born into a middle class family in Portsmouth, England, but his family will fall into financial hardship, and he will start factory work at age 12. The War of 1812 begins. The first of the Lord Selkirk Settlers arrive in what will soon become the Canadian province of Manitoba. Rossini's *La pietra del paragone* is produced at La Scala, Milan

1813 Composers Giuseppe Verdi and Wilhelm Richard Wagner are born. A new dance craze called **The Waltz** sweeps Europe. Rossini composes the "Di tanti palpiti" aria for his opera *Tancredi* while waiting for his risotto (rice) supper in a Venice restaurant. He has his first international successes with this opera seria (serious) as well as his opera buffa (comedy) *L'italiana in Algeri*.

1815 Rossini moves to Naples to become the director of Teatro San Carlo and Teatro del Fondo. He premieres his opera *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra*. The leading part is taken by Rossini's future wife Isabella Colbran. The Napoleonic wars end and massive emigration from Britain to Upper and Lower Canada begins.

1816 Rossini's *Otello* is produced and is greatly admired by other composers including Verdi. It only takes him two weeks to compose his most famous opera buffa (comedy) *The Barber of Seville*. The stethoscope, a medical instrument used to listen to someone's heartbeat is invented.

1817 The first steamboats appear on Lake Ontario.

1818 The premiere of Rossini's *Mosè in Egitto* (Moses in Egypt).

1821 Michael Faraday invents the electric motor.

1822 Rossini marries **Isabella Colbran**.

1823 Rossini travels to London and meets **Beethoven**. *Semiramide*, the last of Rossini's Italian operas, premieres in Venice.

1824 Rossini becomes director of Théâtre Italien in Paris.

1825 Rossini is appointed composer to King Charles X of France.

1826 Samuel Morey invents the internal combustion engine.

1827 Ludwig van **Beethoven** dies.

1828 A new opera called *Le comte Ory* is written by Rossini.

1829 Rossini composes his last opera, *William Tell*.

1832 Rossini begins work on his *Stabat Mater*.

1834 Jacob Perkins invents a refrigerator.

1837 Rossini returns to Italy where he suffers from a long illness.

1840 Italian violinist and composer Niccolò Paganini dies. Russian composer Pyotr Ilych **Tchaikovsky** is born.

1841 Antoine-Joseph Sax invents the **saxophone**.

1845 Rossini's wife Isabella dies.

1846 Rossini marries **Olympe Pelissier** and then leaves Bologna.

1848 French post-Impressionist painter Paul Gauguin is born.

1849 Walter Hunt receives a patent for the **safety pin**.

1851 Ginger ale is created in Ireland.

1853 **Potato chips** are invented in New York. A customer complained that the French Fries were too thick and soggy. The chef sent back the next batch sliced impossibly thin and overcooked. Everyone loved them!

1855 Rossini and Olympe settle in Paris.

1857 Rossini begins composing *Péchés de vieillesse*.

1863 Rossini's *Petite messe solennelle* is completed.

1865 Slavery in United States is abolished.

1867 John A. Macdonald becomes the first Prime Minister of a brand new country called Canada.

1868 C.L. Sholes receives a patent for an invention he calls a **'Type-Writer.'**

Gioacchino Antonio Rossini dies at the age of 76.



Isabella Colbran



Beethoven



Tchaikovsky



William Tell's Son



Olympe Pelissier



Potato chips



Type-Writer

A SHORT OVERVIEW OF OPERA

An opera, like a play, is a dramatic form of theatre that includes scenery, props, and costumes. In opera, however, the actors are trained singers who sing their lines instead of speaking them. An orchestra accompanies the singers. A conductor coordinates both the singers on stage and the musicians in the orchestra pit.

Opera consists of many dimensions: the human voice, orchestral music, scenery, costumes, special effects, drama, comedy, and occasionally, dance. The melding of these elements creates one incredible theatrical experience.

Opera originated in Florence, Italy, in the late 1500's where the first operas were based on a Greek myth. Opera soon became the most popular form of entertainment in Europe. We have many ways of enjoying music today: personal listening devices, radio, television, movies and live concerts. At the time Rossini composed this opera none of those options were available. Then, as now, folks could make their own music by playing the piano, guitar, violin or drums but if they wanted to watch a really big extravaganza they had to wait until an opera by their favourite composer arrived in town.

The written words or story of an opera is called a libretto. Composers write the score or the music for the opera. Sometimes the composer will also write the text of the opera, but most often they work with a librettist. In the past, the libretto was also bound and sold to the audience so that they could better understand what was happening. Today, the audience can easily follow the plot with the use of surtitles —the English translation of the libretto, which are projected onto a screen above the stage.

No need for surtitles with this show because Al has translated the original Italian libretto into English so the comedy can be more easily understood by all ages.

THE OPERATIC VOICE & PROFESSIONAL SINGING

Al Simmons is not an Opera Singer. True Operatic singers train for years to be able to sing properly. Operatic singing, which was developed in Europe during the 17th century, places far greater vocal demands on an opera singer than on any other type of singing. Opera singers rarely use microphones, and therefore must develop their voices to make a sound that will project and be heard above an orchestra and be heard throughout a large theatre.

After years of practice and study, an opera singer learns to use his or her body as an amplification device. By controlling the muscles of the diaphragm (a muscle beneath the lungs and above the stomach) the singer can regulate the amount of breath used. The diaphragm expands and contracts regulating the air that passes through the vocal cords, which, in turn, causes them to vibrate. If the cords vibrate quickly the note will be high, slow vibrations create low notes. As the sound passes through the mouth, it resonates in the upper chest cavities and the sinus cavities of the face and head. These cavities act as small echo chambers and help amplify the sound. The shape of the mouth and the placement of the tongue near the lips contribute to the tone and sound of the words.



Gioachino Rossini was born in 1792; a time when revolution was in the air.

The western world was in upheaval during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. For the first time, ideas sprang up that the class system was not a natural or a moral form of government and that people of all races and conditions (though not gender!) had basic rights and freedoms that should not be taken away by arbitrary rulers or governments. The United States fought a bloody war to become independent of Britain in 1776. In the space of a few years France swept away the monarchy and much of the aristocracy in a violent Revolution (1789 - 1799), became a dictatorship under Napoléon, and then abolished that. In Britain, the reform was less violent, but still focused on the issues of rights and freedoms.

The social contracts between landowners and tenants who worked the land began to break down, as landowners cleared estates of people, and raised livestock instead. As the industrial revolution began to take hold in earnest, people flocked to towns and cities to work long hours for low pay in mines and factories that were often dirty and dangerous. Many others crowded into boats to make the arduous crossing to the New World and a fresh start in life. Yet even in the New World, the idealistic new democracy based its economy on the human misery of slavery. A third means of escape was to join the military, and thousands of young men's lives were sacrificed in that way.

By 1848, things reached crisis proportions all over Europe and North America. In Canada the rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada, though suppressed, led the way to reform of unrepresentative government, and eventually to the creation of an independent country in 1867. In the United States north and south struggled for equilibrium, a struggle that eventually led to the Civil War (1861 -1865) and the Emancipation of the Slaves in 1863. Across Europe disenfranchised people took to the streets, a moment in history made vivid in Victor Hugo's book, *Les Misérables*.

In spite of human misery, there is much to celebrate about this period in history, including amazing achievements in the arts. The rise of a true middle class meant that there were many more educated people able to access the arts and to take up careers as artists. The first novels were written at this time because there was a literate public who had time to read long books, and the mechanization of printing presses brought the cost of printing down. Newspapers and magazines flourished.

An artist could scarcely avoid the subject of the social class structure and probing the nuances of an elaborately hierarchical society was a rich source of material – both for serious treatment (Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Verdi) and for comedy (Jane Austen, Mozart, Rossini).

Rossini's audience would have been exquisitely aware of the differences in class between Count Almaviva, Dr. Bartolo and his barber, a difference that would be underscored on the stage by their costumes. In fact, part of the fun of *The Barber of Seville*, is that it is a story about an upper class man (the Count) who is dressing up – or rather, down – to gain access to a middle class world. He is “on holiday” from his usual role in life, and the usual rules don't apply.

Many historians would identify the end of the First World War as the ending point of this long trajectory towards democracy. For many western countries this was a time when all people, including women, finally got the right to vote, to be educated, and to be free of arbitrary persecution. The reality was not, and is not, in place for many individuals, and even groups, in our societies, but no one was able to justify privilege as an entrenched system after this point in history.

Audience Etiquette

If you go to see a real full scale Opera in a theatre the following list will help you (and those around you) enjoy a night at the opera:

- Many people enjoy dressing up in formal attire but it is not necessary, dress to be comfortable.
- Arrive on time. Latecomers disturb the singers and the audience and will only be seated at suitable breaks - often not until intermission.
- Find your seat with the help of an usher.
- Remove your hat. This is customary and is respectful to the artists and to people sitting behind you.
- Turn off cell phones, ipods, pagers, digital watch alarms and all electronic devices.
- Leave your camera at home. A flash can be very disturbing to the artists and audience members.
- Save all conversations, eating and drinking, and chewing gum, for the intermission. Talking and eating can be disruptive to other audience members and distracts from your ability to be absorbed by the show. The audience is critical to the success of the show – without you, there can be no performance.
- Settle in and get comfortable before the performance begins. Read your program before the performance – rustling through the program during the show can disrupt everyone.
- Clap as the lights are dimmed and the conductor appears and bows to the audience. Watch as the conductor then turns to the orchestra and takes up his or her baton to signal the beginning of the opera.
- Listen to the prelude or overture before the curtain rises. It is part of the performance. It is an opportunity to identify common musical themes that may reoccur during the opera.
- Read the English surtitles projected above the stage.
- Sit still during the performance. Only whisper when it is absolutely necessary. A whisper can be heard all over the theatre. NEVER, (except in an emergency) stand during the performance.
- Sometimes it is hard to tell when a song is over, don't worry, just wait until you hear others cheering. Applaud and shout "Bravo!" for men, "Brava!" for women at the end of an aria or chorus to show your appreciation. You can also yell, "Bravissimo!" That's another way of saying "That performance was amazing!"
- Laugh when something is funny – this is a live performance and you are expected to respond! When the actors hear that you are enjoying the show they will have more fun and you will get to watch an even better performance.
- Listen for subtleties in the music. The tempo, volume and complexity of the music and singing often depict the "feeling" or "sense" of the action or character.
- Notice repeated words or phrases; they are usually significant.
- **Finally, have fun and enjoy the show!!!**



I remember the first time I heard Rossini. I was 7 years old watching Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd in the cartoon version of *The Barber of Seville*. Since then I have listened to a lot of Rossini's playful music. I enjoy his sense of humour. I wonder if he would enjoy mine?

When I was asked by Manitoba Opera to create a version of his famous work I sang out a loud and clear, "Yes!"

I started off by listening to the entire Opera over and over while reading various translations of the Italian words. I was surprised how really funny it was. The entire story was 3 hours, I had to shorten it to 45 minutes. I needed to decide which parts of the plot to keep and which parts to leave out.

I would be playing all of the rolls myself so it was necessary to change some words to keep the story moving. For instance, instead of trying to play the part of an entire chorus of 15 people I let the Count's servant Fiorello sing their words. The songs that were sung solo were no problem but I soon realized that I would have to be two or three people in the same songs. I decided that I would perform those songs as a kind of a puppet show.

In Rossini's time barbers had many jobs. A customer could get a shave and a haircut at a barber's shop, but a barber was also the town's dentist, doctor, veterinarian and wig maker. I made the decision to put my character's wigs and hats on styrofoam heads, that way I could quickly grab a hat to change characters in the middle of a song. I could also use the styro-heads like puppets and have a three way conversation.

Once I had the story-line and my song choices I had my friend Tadeusz Biernacki record the piano parts in a studio. I then spent weeks building the props and costumes and rehearsing. My sons and my wife and friends helped me a lot. *Al Simmons*

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