

2018/19 SEASON

# STUDY GUIDE

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*The Barber of Seville*, 2016, Pacific Opera Victoria.  
Photo: David Cooper Photography

## Fast Facts

- The story is based on Beaumarchais' French comedy *Le Barbier de Séville* (1775)
- The full title of the opera is *The Barber of Seville, or The Useless Precaution*.
- *The Barber of Seville's* premiere in Rome of 1816 was a huge failure - the audience hissed and booed. One of the actors fell and had to continue singing with a bloody nose. Later on, a cat wandered onto the stage and distracted the audience. The public was quick to forget this rocky start, however, and the second performance was a resounding success.
- *The Barber of Seville* is an 'opera buffa', meaning an opera with comedic aspects.
- The entire opera was composed in only 13 days.
- The famous overture to *The Barber of Seville* was actually used for two earlier operas by Rossini: *Aureliano in Palmira*, and *Elizabeth, Queen of England*.
- Rossini wrote an average of two operas per year for 19 years, for a total 38 operas.
- Rossini then retired and lived 40 years without composing for opera again.
- *The Barber of Seville* was the first opera sung in Italian in New York city (1825).
- *The Barber of Seville* has been referenced in pop culture in television and advertising, notably featured in *Looney Tunes* with Bugs Bunny as the "Rabbit of Seville" and "The Long-Haired Hare."
- Figaro's aria, 'Largo al Factotum', was used as the overture to the 1993 film *Mrs. Doubtfire*, with the late Robin Williams singing along.
- *The Barber of Seville* is one of the best-loved and most-performed operas of all time. Between 2004 and 2017 it was the ninth-most played opera, boasting 5,472 performances at 1,130 productions worldwide.



James Westman (Figaro), *The Barber of Seville*, 2009, Manitoba Opera.  
Photo: R. Tinker

# Production Information



April 6, 9, 12, 2019

**Dress Rehearsal / Student Night:** April 4, 2019

Centennial Concert Hall

Music by Gioachino Rossini

Libretto by Cesare Sterbini

Approximately 3 hours in two acts, including one 20-minute intermission

Premiered at Teatro Argentina in Rome, February 20, 1816

Sung in Italian with projected English translations

## PRINCIPAL CAST

Count Almaviva	Tenor	ANDREW OWENS
Rosina	Mezzo Soprano	ANDREA HILL
Figaro	Baritone	ELLIOT MADORE
Dr. Bartolo	Baritone	STEVEN CONDY
Don Basilio	Bass-Baritone	GILES TOMKINS
Berta	Soprano	ANDREA LETT
Fiorello	Bass	DAVID WATSON

Manitoba Opera Chorus

Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra

Conductor	TYRONE PATERSON
Director	ALAIN GAUTHIER
Set design	KEN MACDONALD
Costume design	DANA OSBORNE
Lighting design	BILL WILLIAMS
Stage manager	ROBERT PEL
Assistant stage managers	KATHRYN BALL, HEATHER LEE BRERETON
Projected titles	SHELDON JOHNSON



# The Barber of Seville



An advertisement for *Liebig's Extract of Meat* (a widely used product from the mid 1800s to the early 1900s) depicts a portrait of Rossini along with several scenes from *The Barber of Seville*.

# Synopsis

## The plot of *The Barber of Seville* in a minute:

One evening in Seville, Count Almaviva (disguised as “Lindoro”) serenades Rosina from outside the home of her guardian, Dr. Bartolo. Figaro arrives on the scene, and the two contrive to sneak Almaviva inside to meet with Rosina. Meanwhile, Bartolo conspires with Don Basilio to marry Rosina for her fortune. When Almaviva enters the house disguised as a drunken soldier, his disorderly behavior creates confusion. Pretending to be Lindoro, Almaviva takes the opportunity of this distraction to deliver a letter to Rosina.

The next day, Almaviva returns disguised as the music tutor “Don Alonso,” substituting for Basilio who he claims is ill. Bartolo falls for the ruse, and during a “music lesson” Almaviva (still pretending to be Lindoro) and Rosina make plans to run off together. Bartolo, realizing he has been tricked, determines to marry Rosina that very night. He convinces Rosina that Lindoro, working for Almaviva, has deceived her. Heartbroken, she agrees to marry Bartolo. Later, Figaro and Almaviva sneak into the house with a key that Figaro had snagged earlier. Almaviva reveals his true identity to Rosina. Basilio, instructed by Bartolo to bring a notary, appears and agrees to bear witness to the marriage of Rosina and Almaviva. Bartolo, arriving too late, begrudgingly accepts that he has been beaten.



Victor Ryan Robertson (Almaviva) and  
Nikki Einfeld (Rosina),  
*The Barber of Seville*, 2009, Manitoba  
Opera.

## FULL SYNOPSIS

### Act I

**Scene 1** - One evening, Count Almaviva is outside the home of Dr. Bartolo with a troupe of performers. Disguised as a poor student named “Lindoro,” he sings up to Rosina’s balcony, serenading her. Soon Figaro, a barber, arrives on the scene, reflecting upon his fortune at always being in high demand for managing the affairs of the city. Almaviva and Figaro realize that they know each other; upon discovering that Figaro serves as a general factotum to Bartolo’s household, Almaviva enlists his help to arrange a meeting with Rosina. Bartolo has other ideas; with his sights set on Rosina’s fortune, Bartolo determines to marry her straight away, and instructs his servants to deny anyone entry into the house. Spurred to action by the promise of gold, Figaro devises a plan; Almaviva will disguise himself as a soldier and claim to be billeted at Bartolo’s house.

**Scene 2** - Meanwhile, Rosina has become enamored of Lindoro, and writes him a letter expressing her affection. Bartolo and Don Basilio discuss rumours that say Count Almaviva has arrived in Seville, and of his interest in Rosina; they conspire to discredit the Count and foil his attempts to court Rosina. Figaro confirms to Rosina that Lindoro has fallen in love with her, and agrees to deliver her letter to him. Almaviva, dressed as a soldier and pretending to be drunk, arrives and makes a scene when he insists that he has been billeted to Bartolo’s house. While Bartolo searches for a writ that exempts him from housing soldiers, Almaviva (pretending to be Lindoro in disguise) slips a note to Rosina. Bartolo notices, and demands to read the note; much to his frustration, Rosina hands him her laundry list! Almaviva’s disorderly behavior throws the household into chaos, and the ruckus attracts the attention of the police. The Count narrowly avoids arrest by secretly revealing his identity to the officer in charge.



# Synopsis

## Act II

**Scene 1** - The following day, Almaviva returns in another disguise. This time he is the music tutor “Don Alonso,” sent by Basilio (who he claims is ill) to give Rosina her music lesson. Bartolo is suspicious at first, but Almaviva produces Rosina’s letter and says that he can claim he received it from a mistress of Almaviva, and leverage it as proof that the Count is just toying with Rosina. Bartolo, accepting Don Alonso as a co-conspirator against the Count, permits him to stay. A delighted Rosina instantly sees through Almaviva’s disguise, recognizing Lindoro. When Bartolo dozes off during the music lesson, the young lovers finally have the chance to plan their elopement. Figaro arrives to give Bartolo his shave, and manages to pocket the key to Rosina’s balcony, through which Rosina and Almaviva plot to make their escape that evening. The plan almost unravels when Basilio shows up, but he is quickly set upon by Rosina, Figaro, and Almaviva, who convince him (with the help of a bribe) that he does indeed look ill, and would be better off at home resting. Bartolo discovers that he has been tricked, and flies into a rage. He meets with Basilio and sends him to bring a notary to the house that evening to officiate his marriage to Rosina. Armed with the letter, he convinces Rosina that Lindoro is nothing more than an agent of the Count, and has been leading her on. Heartbroken, Rosina agrees to marry Bartolo, who sets off to summon the police to arrest the Count.

**Scene 2** - Figaro and Almaviva sneak into Bartolo’s house during a thunderstorm that evening, using the purloined key. A furious Rosina confronts Lindoro about his duplicity, only to soften upon learning the Count’s true identity. Delighted to be together at last, they hasten to depart – but not before Basilio appears with the notary. Never one to let a good opportunity slip away, Figaro persuades the notary to officiate the marriage of Rosina and Almaviva, and Almaviva convinces Basilio to act as the witness. By the time Bartolo arrives with the police, he is too late to interfere. Defeated, he accepts the whole situation philosophically, and gives his blessing to the happy couple.



*The Barber of Seville*, 2009, Manitoba Opera.  
Photo: R.Tinker



# Principal Characters

Name	Description	Pronunciation
Figaro	A barber and jack-of-all-trades	FEE-gah-roh
Count Almaviva	A wealthy Spanish noblemen	Al-mah-VEE-vah
Rosina	Bartolo's ward	Roh-ZEE-nah
Doctor Bartolo	Rosina's guardian; a doctor	BAR-toh-loh
Don Basilio	Rosina's music teacher	Bah-ZEE-lee-oh
Berta	Bartolo's housekeeper	BER-tah
Fiorello	Count Almaviva's servant	Fee-oh-REL-loh



Victor Ryan Robertson (Almaviva), Peter Strummer (Bartolo), and Nikki Einfeld (Rosina),  
*The Barber of Seville*, 2009, Manitoba Opera.  
 Photo: R.Tinker

# The Principal Artists



## Andrew Owens

*Count Almaviva*

Winner of the Zarzuela prize at the 2015 Francisco Viñas International Singing Competition, American tenor Andrew Owens has quickly built a reputation as one of the most promising singers of his generation, exhibiting a beautiful Italianate timbre, soaring top notes, and effortless agility. Mr. Owens has played the role of Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville* with Florida Grand Opera, Seattle Opera, and North Carolina Opera.

"Andrew Owens' facile tenor and marvelous range of expressions keep his Almaviva constantly amusing."

- *The News & Observer*, 2016



## Andrea Hill

*Rosina*

Mezzo soprano Andrea Hill made her opera stage debut with Opéra National de Paris, and has performed throughout Europe and North America. A passionate chamber and concert singer, she has participated in festivals in France, Norway, and the United States. In addition to her appearance as Rosina for Manitoba Opera's *The Barber of Seville*, this season she will also appear as Hansel for Edmonton Opera's production of *Hansel and Gretel*, and as Orphée in *Orphée et Euridice* with Opéra Théâtre de Metz Méropole.

"Andrea Hill is in effect a revelation... Her clear, bronze tinted mezzo seduces as much as her impeccable diction. Her singing stays permanently scrupulous, without searching out effect and without the slightest vulgarity." (translated from French)

- *ResMusica*, 2014



## Elliot Madore

*Figaro*

Canadian baritone Elliot Madore is renowned for his signature role of Pelléas in *Pelléas et Melisande*, which he has sung in productions across Europe and North America. Mr. Madore makes his Manitoba Opera debut this season as Figaro, reprising a role he played for the Metropolitan Opera. This season he also appears in productions with Opernhaus Zürich, Dutch National Opera, and the San Francisco Symphony.

"Madore has a lovely lyric baritone with a recognizable timbre, even from top to bottom, capable of both power and nuance, with an impressive range, particularly an excellent top register..."

- *La Scena Musicale*, 2015

# The Principal Artists



## Steven Condry

*Doctor Bartolo*

Steven Condry enjoys a career filled with notoriety and acclaim for his creative portrayals of the great “buffo” roles, and is admired not only for his robust and nuanced voice, but also for his natural acting ability. *The Washington Times* enthused that he has “the comic timing of John Candy and a voice that remains flexible, rich and true through every intricacy,” and Anthony Tomassini of the *New York Times* offered that he would “vote the prize for the most naturally clear diction of the cast to the hardy baritone Steven Condry.”

Renowned for his interpretation of Dr. Bartolo in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, recently, the *Boston Music Intelligencer* raved of his “most delightfully surprising and truly brilliant performance.” He has performed the role at Houston Grand Opera, San Francisco Opera, Washington National Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, Portland Opera, among many others.



## Giles Tomkins

*Don Basilio*

Giles Tomkins’ operatic roles include Don Basilio (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*), Raimondo (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), Pistola (Falstaff), Superintendent Budd (*Albert Herring*), Leporello/Commendatore (*Don Giovanni*), and Sergeant of Police (*Pirates of Penzance*). He has been engaged by Vancouver Opera, Toronto Operetta Theatre, Pacific Opera Victoria and Edmonton Opera. Mr. Tomkins performed the role of Colline in Manitoba Opera’s 2014 production of *La Bohème*.

On the contemporary music scene, Mr. Tomkins starred as Gandalf in Dean Burry’s *The Hobbit* with Canadian Children’s Opera Company and joined the cast of *The Bells of Baddeck*, Lorna MacDonald and Dean Burry’s music drama based on the life of Alexander Graham Bell.

“Don Basilio in the able hands of Giles Tomkins is also a creation of new and surprising qualities, at least as far as I’ve experienced. Here is a man with constantly startled eyeballs who lays on his innuendo like sticky jam, which is doubly funny in a beautifully sung bass-baritone. He glides as he walks and is hilarious as an understated presence.”

-James Strecker, jamesstrecker.com. 2011

# The Principal Artists



## Andrea Lett

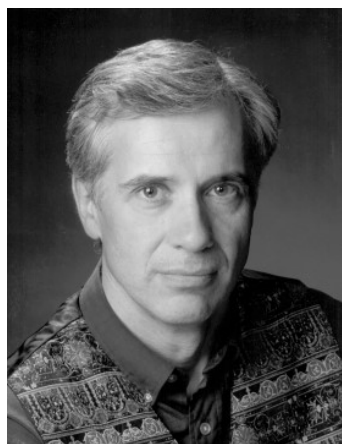
*Berta*

Praised for her “clear voice soaring to stratospheric heights” (*Opera Canada*), locally based emerging soprano Andrea Lett has performed across Canada with companies such as Saskatoon Opera, Manitoba Underground Opera, The Winnipeg Gilbert and Sullivan Society, and Opera Nuova, as well as San Francisco Opera and Santa Fe Opera.

Ms. Lett made her Manitoba Opera debut in 2018 as Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*.

“This young singer has all the right qualities to shine in the world of opera: she is beautiful, sings superbly, and is a remarkable actress.”

- *La Liberte*, November 2018



## David Watson

*Fiorello/Notary*

David Watson’s operatic career began here in Winnipeg when he appeared in Manitoba Opera’s 1979 production of *La Traviata*. He has since performed on concert and operatic stages throughout Canada, including numerous times for Manitoba Opera.

**Learn more about opera singers and their voices by reading our opera guide:  
“What Is Opera?” available online at  
<http://mbopera.ca/school-programs/study-guides/>**



# The Composer

## Gioachino Rossini (February 29, 1792 - November 13, 1868)

Gioachino Rossini, was born in Pesaro (now part of Italy, then part of the Papal States) on February 29, 1792. His mother was a singer of theatrical roles, and his father was a horn player in military bands. In 1799 his father was imprisoned for having been sympathetic to Napoleon's troops when they invaded Northern Italy. During this time, his mother took the young Rossini to Bologna; they were rejoined by Rossini's father in June of 1800.

By the time he enrolled in the Conservatory of Bologna at the age of 14, Rossini had learned to play the piano, to sing, and to play the horn, and had already demonstrated his knack for speedy composition. He had composed *Six Sonatas* for strings in just three days at the age of 12. These sonatas demonstrate his skill at writing clear, songlike melodies. A year later he wrote his first opera, *Demetrio e Polibio* (though it would not be performed until he was a young man). At the Conservatory he learned to play the cello, and was taught counterpoint by Padre Stanislao Mattei (who also taught Donizetti). While there he also studied the string quartets of Haydn and Mozart. He was so fond of Mozart, in fact, that he was nicknamed "il Tedeschino" meaning "the little German."

Rossini left the Conservatory after winning the prize in 1808 for his cantata *The Cry of Harmony on the Death of Orpheus*, and his opera career was launched with the successful production in Venice of his first comic opera, *The Marriage Contract*, in 1810. Even this early on, his operas were noteworthy for their animated ensembles, florid melodies, and driving rhythmic ostinatos, which would become the hallmarks of the bel canto style. Between 1810 and 1813, his operas were produced in Bologna, Venice, Rome, and Milan; the extremely successful *Tancredi* and *L'italiana in Algieri* thrust him into the international spotlight, and by the age of 21 Rossini had become the most celebrated name in Italian opera.

In 1816, Rossini wrote his best-known opera: *The Barber of Seville*. Using a new libretto written by Cesare Sterbini, Rossini set to work composing. He was familiar with an already-popular opera with the same title, written by Giovanni Paisiello. Rossini contacted the older composer, assuring him that the new opera would bear the title of *Almaviva, or The Futile Precaution*\*, to avoid eclipsing the previous works' success. Paisiello's supporters were livid, and caused disruptions at the ill-fated premiere on February 20, 1816. The opening night of the opera, which had taken Rossini all of 13 days to complete, was a complete disaster. As if the booing and hissing of hecklers weren't bad enough, a member of the cast suffered a fall and had to sing with a bloodied nose, and at one point in the evening a stray cat wandered onto the stage and meowed at the performers.



\*After Paisiello's death in June, 1816, the opera was retitled *The Barber of Seville*.

# The Composer

Embarrassed, Rossini fled the production and locked himself in his quarters. On the night of its second performance, a crowd gathered around Rossini's home, and the composer feared for his safety, refusing even to come out when he heard the crowd fanatically cheering his name.

In 1822 Rossini married his first wife, the Spanish opera singer Isabella Colbran. The two moved to Vienna for a brief time, where Rossini met Ludwig van Beethoven (then in failing health), whose words stuck with the younger composer:

“Ah! Rossini, you are the author of *The Barber of Seville*? I offer my compliments; it is an excellent opera buffa. I have read it with pleasure and I enjoyed myself. So long as there is an Italian opera, it will be performed. Never try to do anything other than comic operas; to want to succeed in another style would force your nature.”

Rossini left Vienna for England in 1823 by way of Paris, where he was jubilantly received. After a five-month residency at the King's Theatre in London, he returned to Paris and was contracted by Charles X of France to write five operas in French per year – a contract which made him a considerably wealthy man, and guaranteed him a substantial pension. In 1829, Rossini wrote his final opera, *William Tell*. At the age of 37, with 39 operas to his name, Rossini retired, leaving Paris to return to Italy, and turned his attention towards his other passions: cooking and enjoying fine foods.

Rossini's abrupt retirement is the cause of much speculation. Accounts of his life and his letters show that he was prone to manic and depressive periods, suggesting he may have struggled with what we now call bipolar disorder. He was deeply saddened by the passing of his mother in 1827, and he struggled with his own worsening health in his later years. He and Isabella separated in the 1830s; after her death in 1845, Rossini married Olympe Pélessier, who had been managing the retired composer's business affairs.

In 1855, Rossini returned to Paris, and began hosting gourmet dinners and musical gatherings that attracted renowned artists such as Franz Liszt, Camille Saint-Saëns, and Giuseppe Verdi. He even began to compose again – songs, and small works for chamber ensembles, which he whimsically titled “Sins of Old Age.” He died of pneumonia in 1868 in his home in Passy, France. Following his death, Olympe remained at the villa in Passy the rest of her life, and saw the bequeathal of Rossini's fortune to the founding of a free Academy of Music in his native town of Pesaro which is still active today. Her remaining wealth she bequeathed to charities for the support of French and Italian vocalists.

Rossini was buried in Paris, France, but his remains were transported for interment at the Basilica of Santa Croce in Florence, at the request of the Italian government in 1887.

# The Librettist

## Cesare Sterbini (1784-1831)

Although he was a well-respected librettist during his lifetime, few details survive about the life and career of Cesare Sterbini. Born in Rome in 1784, Sterbini was fluent in German, French, Latin, and Greek; he served as an official of the Vatican treasury, and he wrote poetry. His first libretto was written for Vincenzo Migliorucci's *Paolo e Virginia*, a staged cantata. The winter of 1815 found him working with the young Rossini, who set to music his melodramatic libretto for *Torvaldo e Dorliska*.

The opera was a flop at its premiere the day after Christmas that year. Less than a month later the two would collaborate on *The Barber of Seville* (originally titled *Almaviva, or The Futlie Precaution*), using Sterbini's libretto based on the popular play by Beaumarchais. This would become Sterbini's greatest achievement; even though he faded into obscurity after his death in 1831, his libretto for *The Barber of Seville* secured Sterbini's place in opera history.



## What is a Libretto?

Libretto means "little book" in Italian. It refers to the written text of an opera set to music by the composer. Today, we commonly refer to an opera as being "by" the composer of the music, but the text is a vital component and is normally written first. In earlier times it was often regarded as more important than the music, and it was common for audience members to purchase the libretto to read.

Early composers were usually contracted to set music to a pre-existing text. Only later did composers (such as Mozart and Verdi) work in close collaboration with their librettists. A few composers - notably Wagner - wrote their own texts.



# Musical Highlights

Listen to some of the most famous arias from *The Barber of Seville*!



Elliot Madore appears as Figaro in Manitoba Opera's 2019 production of *The Barber of Seville*.  
Listen to him sing "Largo al factotum."

<https://elliotmadore.com/audio.html>

Elliot Madore (Figaro).  
*The Barber of Seville*, 2015, Metropolitan Opera  
Photo: Karen Almond

Isabel Leonard sings Rosina's aria "Una voce poco fa."  
Listen at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5y0YWX1Vku>



Isabel Leonard (Rosina).  
*The Barber of Seville*, 2015, Metropoliatn Opera  
Photo: Karen Almond



Andrew Owens (Almaviva).  
*The Barber of Seville*, 2017, Seattle Opera.  
Photo: Jacob Lucas

Andrew Owens appears as Almaviva in Manitoba Opera's 2019 production of *The Barber of Seville*.  
Listen to him sing "L'amoroso e sincero Lindoro."

<https://soundcloud.com/seattle-opera/andrew-owens-as-count-almaviva>



# The Revolutionary Behind the Barber

**Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (January 24, 1732 - May 18, 1799)**

18th century, Paris: A boy, the son of a humble watchmaker, pursues opportunities throughout his life to test his wits and build his fortune. Finding himself in the service of the King of France, he navigates courtly intrigue, international espionage, and affairs of the state and the heart. He drives events that shape revolution and war in Europe and across the Atlantic, makes powerful political enemies, and weathers years in exile. It could be the synopsis of an opera, but is in fact the life story of Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, the French playwright who penned *The Barber of Seville*.

Not unlike Figaro, Beaumarchais (born Pierre-Augustin Caron) was observant, clever, and the master of a variety of valuable skills. As an apprentice watchmaker at the age of 21, he invented an escapement mechanism which enabled the crafting of smaller and more accurate watches. This invention (and the ensuing scandal, as the royal clockmaker tried to claim it as his own) brought Caron into the public eye, and drew the attention of King Louis XV, who asked for a watch set into a ring for his mistress, Madame de Pompadour.



Portrait of Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais  
by Jean-Marc Nattier (1775)

Once in the service of the King of France, and always seeking to improve his station, Caron adopted the moniker “de Beaumarchais,” after the name of a plot of land owned by his first wife, believing the name sounded nobler. Beaumarchais had studied music, and served as music teacher to the four daughters of Louis XV, attaining the appointment of music advisor to the royal family. With his keen mind for business and finance, Beaumarchais’s ventures and professional liaisons afforded him the wealth and opportunity to purchase two noble titles: Secretary-Councilor to the King (1761), and Lieutenant-General of Hunting (1763).

Beaumarchais was an accomplished dramatist; in addition to *The Barber of Seville* (and its sequels, *The Marriage of Figaro*, and *The Guilty Mother*, which were set as operas by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Darius Milhaud, respectively) he wrote at least a dozen other dramatic works, including the libretto to Antonio Salieri’s opera *Tarare*. If it seems that Beaumarchais’ life and exploits are dramatic, it should come as no surprise that many of the characters and situations in his dramas are autobiographical in origin. His writing often features revolutionary themes, especially concerning the artifice of social strata and the gross inequality of privilege enjoyed by the aristocracy. His works were on occasion the subject of censure; King Louis XVI was so uncomfortable with a scene in *The Marriage of Figaro* in which Figaro directly confronts Count Almaviva that he prohibited the play for several years from being publically performed.

# The Revolutionary Behind the Barber

Beaumarchais served as aide and confidant to Louis XV, and to his successor, Louis XVI, engaging in clandestine activities on behalf of the crown that ranged from settling blackmail threats to laundering money and dealing arms. He was sent to London ostensibly to purchase Portuguese currency, but in actuality was a spy, and delivered reports to the king's Foreign Minister, the Comte de Vergennes, on the growing tensions between England and its North American colonies. He became an outspoken advocate for the colonies, and urged Vergennes to convince Louis XVI that France should intervene, supporting the colonies with its military. With a loan from the French government, he set up the cover firm *Roderigue Hortalez et Compagnie* to buy outdated arms from France and sell them to American revolutionary forces, thus supplying the colonists while funding the reequipping of France's own army.



Portrait of Charles Gravier, le Comte de Vergennes  
by Antoine-François Callet



*Storming of the Bastille*  
by Jean-Pierre Houel

In 1792, at the height of the French Revolution, Beaumarchais was accused of treason and briefly imprisoned. He fled Paris after his release, and remained in exile first in England and then Holland. After four years his name was cleared, and he returned to Paris, where he lived until his death in 1799. America's Congress never paid Beaumarchais for the weapons he delivered during its revolution, and only settled that debt with his descendants 36 years after Beaumarchais' death for a fraction of what was actually owed.

"Beaumarchais can be described in many ways: as a fortune-hunting adventurer, a raffish opportunist, a calculating survivor willing to flatter the powerful when he needed their patronage. But he was, above all, an instinctive libertarian whose whole life [. . .] 'was an assertion of individuality against the constraints of social privilege.' That is why he helped shape the 18th century and why he still speaks to us today: he realised nothing was more subversive than comedy."

- Michael Billington, "How to Stage a Revolution"

# A Brief History of Barbers



*"To the Barbers, Wigmakers, Water and Steambath providers alone belongs the right to shave and style facial hair, to give baths, to make wigs, to offer steam baths, and to create all other sorts of hair products... others can interfere only at the risk of having their products, hair supplies, and utensils confiscated, and paying a penalty of 300 livres."*

-Article 58, Statutes of the Paris Wigmakers' Guild (1718)

At the time that *The Barber of Seville* was premiered, the role of the professional barber was changing throughout Europe. Up through the 1700s, barbers – then called barber-surgeons—performed a wide range of tasks relating to caring for the personal needs of others. These tasks included trimming hair and shaving beards, cleaning and pulling teeth, and even rudimentary surgery and blood-letting (for centuries it was believed that “bad blood” was a cause of many maladies, and needed to be periodically drained from the body). As physicians in Europe were forbidden from performing surgeries, those duties fell to the barber-surgeons, who also handled embalming and autopsies.

Over time the practice of surgery evolved into its own discipline. Royal decrees in France (1743) and England (1745) forbade barbers from performing surgery, and the College of Surgery was founded in England in 1800, further separating the roles of barber and surgeon. The skillful hands of the barber were set more exclusively to the fields of hair, skin, and scalp care, and the modern barbering profession grew towards what we recognize today.

We know from Rossini's opera that Figaro does more than just trim hair and style wigs for the other characters in *The Barber of Seville*. Several lines in the opera identify some of the medical duties of the sly barber:

“In this house I am barber, surgeon, botanist, apothecary, veterinary...” - Figaro (describing his duties)

“... he has made a hospital of the whole household.”  
- Bartolo (referring to Figaro)

“...a purge for the lawyer Bernardone who yesterday fell ill with indigestion.” - Figaro (listing his upcoming appointments)



James Westman (Figaro)  
and Peter Strummer (Bartolo),  
*The Barber of Seville*, 2009, Manitoba Opera.  
Photo: R. Tinker



# Student Activities

Curriculum Connections to the Manitoba curriculum Frameworks for Grade 9 - 12 are provided below each activity. For a more in-depth look at the connections, view our Manitoba Curriculum Connections documents at <http://mbopera.ca/school-programs/study-guides/>.

## Activity #1: Using the Five C's, Have your Students Analyze the Opera as Drama

**CHARACTERS:** Are they interesting? Believable? Are their actions, words, thoughts consistent?

**CONFLICT:** What conflicts are established? How are they resolved?

**CLIMAX:** To what climax does the conflict lead?

**CONCLUSION:** How well does the conclusion work? Is it consistent? Satisfying? Believable?

**CONTEXT:** What are the historical, physical, and emotional settings? Sets and costumes?

- Give students the synopsis to read and have them re-tell the story after they have read it.
- Ask comprehensive questions.
- Present and discuss the composer and librettist.
- Listen to excerpts from the opera. Watch a DVD of the opera. Have students identify and recognize recurring themes.
- Discuss the historical background, emphasizing the visual and performing arts and history-social science frameworks. Discuss the results of certain events. Whom did they affect? How? Why? Did any changes occur as a result?
- Review the glossary of terms.
- Have the students watch for references to themes in the opera in their everyday lives. The internet, radio, TV, magazines, and movies often refer back to classics.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.2.1; 2.1.2; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M2; DR-C1; DR-R3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-M2; M-C2; M-R1

## Activity #2: Create a Poster, Set, Costume, Media Release, or Ad

- Choose a time and place to set your production.
- Have the students design a poster for *The Barber of Seville* including such details as the date, the time, and the people involved.
- Have them draw a set for a production of the opera.
- They might also sketch a costume, wig, and makeup for a character in *The Barber of Seville*.
- Have the students write a media release about *The Barber of Seville* including the date, the time, the people involved, and why it would be exciting or fun to attend.
- Have the students create an ad for the opera. Include whatever you feel is the biggest “selling point” of the opera - what makes it exciting? Why should people come to see it?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.3.5; 2.3.4; 4.1.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-C2; DR-C3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-C2; M-C3



### Activity #3: A Review

#### *Step 1 – Think-Group-Share*

Individually, students will write, in point-form, the answers to the following questions:

1. What did you like about the opera? What did you dislike?
2. What did you think about the sets, props, and costumes?
3. If you were the stage director, would you have done something differently? Why?
4. What were you expecting? Did it live up to your expectations?
5. What did you think of the singers' portrayal of their characters?

Break the students into groups to discuss their feelings and reactions to the production. Have the students write on poster papers their answers or important points of their discussion. Encourage the students to go beyond the questions posed.

#### *Step 2 – Class Discussion*

Have the whole class examine the poster papers and discuss the different ideas from each group.

#### *Step 3 – Outlining your review*

Go over the essential aspects of a review including a clearly stated purpose, a coherent comparison/contrast organizational pattern, a summary paragraph capturing the interest of the reader, precise nouns, and revision for consistency of ideas. You might give your students a few samples of reviews for arts events – or ask them to bring in some reviews they find themselves. Have the students fill out the review outline, then complete a rough draft.

1. Purpose (why are you writing this and who is your audience?)
2. Plot Synopsis (including who sang what role, etc.)
3. Paragraph 1 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
4. Paragraph 2 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
5. Paragraph 3 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
6. Summary/Closing Paragraph

#### *Step 4 - Peer Conferencing*

Students will exchange reviews to critique and edit. Encourage the students to focus on effective coordination of ideas in sentences and the correct use of grammar and punctuation.

#### *Step 5 - Creating the final draft*

Have students make the appropriate adjustments to their reviews. You could also have the students type the pieces and organize them into a newspaper.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.1; 1.1.2; 1.2.2; 3.1.3; 3.3.1; 4.1.3; 4.3.1; 4.3.2; 4.3.3; 4.4.1; 4.2.2; 5.2.1; 5.1.1

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-R1; DR-R2; DR-R3; DR-R4

Music Curriculum Connections: M-R1; M-R2; M-R3; M-R4

### Activity #4: Have Your Students Act Out the Story

Have students consider the characters and the role they play in the story. Choose one of the following:

COUNT ALMAVIVA / ROSINA / FIGARO / DR. BARTOLO / DON BASILIO

If you were going to play this character, you would have to discover, create, and imagine background, personality, and physical qualities. Some clues are provided in the story and the music and some you need to make up yourself.

*Pretend you are that character and answer the following questions:*

1. What motivates you? How does this affect your actions? What obstacles stand in your way?
2. What steps in the opera do you take to achieve your objectives? What are the results?
3. What obstacles are beyond your control (laws, social status, others' actions)?
4. What are your (character's) greatest strengths? Greatest weaknesses?
5. What is your relationship to the other characters?
6. How is your character's personality expressed through the music of the opera?
7. Can you think of a modern-day character who has similar characteristics and traits?
8. If your character were alive today, how would s/he be more or less successful?
9. What different steps would s/he take to achieve an objective?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.1; 2.1.2; 3.3.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M1; DR-M2; DR-M3

### Activity #5: Write a Letter from One Character to Another

Have the students choose a moment in the story and have one character write a letter to another. Explore how they would be feeling about the events of the day.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.2; 1.1.3; 2.3.5; 4.2.2; 4.1.2; 4.1.3; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-R3

### Activity #6: Cast *The Barber of Seville*

Have the students cast modern-day singers or bands as the performers in *The Barber of Seville*. Who did you choose? What are their costumes like? What did you base your decisions on?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.3.1; 2.2.1; 2.2.2; 4.1.2; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M1; DR-C3; DR-R3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-C2; M-R4

## Activity #7: Research and Report

Have the students study the history and politics of Rossini's time, particularly the year when *The Barber of Seville* premiered (1816). What authors were popular? What scientific discoveries were being made? What was the social and political life in Europe at the time (as well as in Canada)?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.2.1; 2.2.2; 3.3.1; 3.3.3; 3.2.2; 3.2.3; 4.3.1; 4.3.2; 4.3.3; 4.2.2; 4.2.3; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-C2

Music Curriculum Connections: M-C2

## Activity #8: *The Barber of Seville* Mood Board

Often before artists and designers create their work, they make a mood board to set the tone for the piece. This is usually a poster-sized piece of paper covered in images and words, usually from the pages of magazines and newspapers, that together communicates the complex mood of the piece in a way that words can't. It's the same as making a collage, except a mood board is for the purpose of communicating a focused concept.

Have your students go through a stack of old magazines and newspapers to create a mood board for *The Barber of Seville*. They can create one each or work together on a large one for the class. Consider elements like colours, textures, phrases, faces, patterns, and images that represent the opera.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.3.5; 2.3.4; 2.2.3; 4.1.1; 4.1.2; 4.1.3; 4.4.1; 5.1.1

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M3; DR-R3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-R2

## Activity #9: Musical Interpretation of Literature

### *Step 1 - Prepare a Musical Outline*

Working in small groups, have your students choose a play, novel, or story that they've read and think about how they'd go about adapting it into an opera. Have them write out an outline and try to structure the beginnings of the opera. Which parts of the drama would be highlighted with which types of music? Would they have a large chorus to back up the principal singers or would the opera be more intimate? Which singing voices (soprano, baritone, tenor, etc.) would best suit each character?

### *Step 2 - Compose and Perform an Overture*

How could the elements of music (ie., rhythm, pitch, dynamics, etc.) be used to communicate the mood of the piece within the overture? Which instruments would be used? Allow students some time to work on composing their overture based on their answers to these questions. Students can then perform their overture for the class either as a composed and rehearsed piece or improvised. Alternatively, they may choose to present their overture by describing the characteristics of the elements of the music within their piece.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.2; 2.3.5; 2.2.1; 3.1.2; 3.1.3; 4.1.2; 4.4.3; 4.4.2; 4.2.5; 5.1.1; 5.1.2; 5.1.4

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-CR2; DR-M1; DR-M2

Music Curriculum Connections: M-CR2; M-CR3; M-M3

## Activity #10: Active Listening

Play the first few minutes of *The Barber of Seville* CD. Ask your students to listen closely to the music and jot down their thoughts, feelings, and first impressions. Then have your students share their reactions with the classroom. Ask them to listen again and pay close attention to the elements of music (rhythm, pitch, dynamics, etc.) then explore questions such as the following:

- What are the instruments used to make the music?
- How does this music make me feel?
- What is the mood of the piece?
- What type of emotions do the singers bring forth?
- Does the music have a steady beat or pulse?
- What is the size of the ensemble?
- What do the singing voices tell us about those characters?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.1; 1.12; 1.2.2; 2.3.1; 2.2.3; 4.4.3; 5.2.1

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-R1

Music Curriculum Connections: M-R2



Luigi Zamboni (1767-1837), Italian opera buffo bass-baritone for whom the role of Figaro was written. Portrait by Giovanni Antoni Sasso.



**Activity #14: Opera Comprehension Tests***The Opera*

1. \_\_\_\_\_ A theatrical production incorporating both vocal and instrumental music, drama, and sometimes dance.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ The lowest male vocal range.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ An instrumental introduction to an opera.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ The area where the orchestra is seated.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Considered the first opera.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ A song for solo voice in an opera.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ The highest female vocal range.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ A song for two voices.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ The lowest female vocal range.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ The Italian word meaning “little book.”
11. \_\_\_\_\_ The middle male vocal range.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ The person who is in charge of all the action on the stage.

*The Barber of Seville*

1. Who is the composer? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Who wrote the libretto? \_\_\_\_\_
3. In what year did the premiere performance take place? \_\_\_\_\_
4. In what language is the opera performed? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Who wrote the play that inspired the libretto? \_\_\_\_\_
6. True or False: The first performance *The Barber of Seville* was considered a success. \_\_\_\_\_
7. The role of Figaro is sung by a \_\_\_\_\_ (name the singing voice).
8. The role of Rosina is sung by a \_\_\_\_\_ (name the singing voice).
9. The role of Doctor Bartolo is sung by a \_\_\_\_\_ (name the singing voice).
10. How many disguises does Count Almaviva wear in the opera? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Which two characters get married at the end of the opera? \_\_\_\_\_
12. What does Rosina give Dr. Bartolo when he demands to see her letter? \_\_\_\_\_

## Answer Key

### General Opera

1. Opera
2. Bass
3. Overture
4. Orchestra pit or “the pit”
5. *Daphne*
6. Aria
7. Soprano
8. Duet
9. Contralto
10. Libretto
11. Baritone
12. Stage director

### *The Barber of Seville*

1. Gioachini Rossini
2. Cesare Sterbini
3. 1816
4. Italian
5. Pierre Augustin de Beaumarchais
6. False
7. Baritone
8. Mezzo soprano
9. Baritone
10. Three
11. Rosina and Count Almaviva
12. laundry list

Manitoba Opera would be pleased to receive a copy of any work related to this opera produced by your students. Please forward to:

Scott Miller  
Education and Outreach Coordinator  
Manitoba Opera, 1060 - 555 Main St., Winnipeg, MB R3B 1C3

or

[education@mbopera.ca](mailto:education@mbopera.ca)

# Winnipeg Public Library Resources

## Books

The New Grove Masters of Italian Opera: Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Verdi, Puccini  
[by Philip Gossett]  
New York : Norton, c1983  
Call Number: 782.1092 NEW

The Barber of Seville  
Beaumarchais, Pierre Augustin Caron de  
Chicago: I. R. Dee, 1988  
Call Number: 842.5 BEA

The Figaro Plays  
Beaumarchais, Pierre Augustin Caron de  
London: Dent, 1997  
Call Number: 842.5 BEA

Music at the Limits  
Said, Edward W.  
New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.  
Call Number: 780.9 SAI 2008

## DVD

The Barber of Seville  
Fo, Dario  
West Long Branch, New Jersey: Kultur, 2009.  
© 1992.  
Call Number: DVD 782.1 BAR

## Scores

Opera's Greatest Hits  
London, New York: Amsco Publications, 2007.  
Call Number: SCORE 782.1 OPE 2007

## Sound Recordings

The Worlds Very Best Opera for Kids - In English!  
[Place of publication not identified]: The Children's Group, 2003.  
Call Number: CD JUV WORLDS

## Overtures

Rossini, Gioacchino  
[Place of publication not identified]: Deusch Grammophon, 1991.  
Call Number: CD CLASS ROSSINI OVE

## Electronic Resources (Available on Hoopla)

The 50 Greatest Pieces of Classical Music  
London Philharmonic Orchestra  
United States: X5 Music Group  
Made available through Hoopla, 2014.  
Call Number: STREAMING

If you need recommendations for additional resources, please contact:

Scott Miller  
Education & Outreach Coordinator  
smiller@mbopera.ca



*The Barber of Seville*, Manitoba Opera, 2009.  
Photo: R.Tinker





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*The Magic Flute*

*Aida*

*Carmen*

*La Bohème*

*The Daughter of the Regiment*



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# About Manitoba Opera

Manitoba Opera was founded in 1969 by a group of individuals dedicated to presenting the great works of opera to Manitoban audiences. Manitoba Opera is the province's only full-time professional opera company. The company attracts internationally renowned artists, highlights the best local talent, and is supported by the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra.

## Chorus

The Manitoba Opera Chorus, under the direction of Chorus Master Tadeusz Biernacki, is hailed for their excellent singing and acting abilities. The chorus boasts a core of skilled singers who give generously of their time and talents. Some are voice majors at university, a few are singing teachers, but most work in jobs that aren't music related.

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## **Works Cited (General)**

*This study guide was compiled accumulatively and includes information from the following sources accessed since 2000:*

BehindTheNames.com  
Bellevue University  
The Billboard Illustrated Encyclopedia of Opera  
britannica.com  
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cia.gov  
ClassicalMusic.about.com  
Dmitry Murashev's's Opera Site libretti & information  
Encyclopedia of Manitoba  
Encyclopedia of the Opera by David Ewen  
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musicwithease.com  
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operabuffa.com; Opera Columbus Study Guide  
Opera News  
Operas Every Child Should Know  
Opera Lyra Ottawa Study Guide  
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schubincave.com  
A Season of Opera  
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