

# **Italian Opera Buffa**

## **Gioachino Rossini 1792-1868**

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### **Characteristics of Opera Buffa Styles**

- **The Venetian playwright Carlo Goldoni provided a widely imitated model in his sentimental comedies which reformed the Opera Buffa libretti and lifted them out of the slap stick of the Comedia del Arte genre.**
- **Even comic episodes had a serious purpose as a yardstick to measure a hero or heroine. This is considered the "middle style". There are many similarities between the seria and buffa style.**
- **Ensembles increasingly gain prominence in Opera Buffa and are perfected by Rossini. Lengthy finales with every act are the norm at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.**

## **Characteristics of Opera Buffa Styles**

- **In Rossini's Opera Buffa arias have many repetitions, rapid declamations to the limits what is possible of the human voice.**
- **Arias and ensembles have often exaggerated contrasts of tempo.**
- **Lyric arias of the hero and heroine are embellished with rapid coloratura.**
- **Primo Buffo Bases express the comic elements in the operas.**

## **Primo Buffo Bases in Opera Buffa**

- Buffo Bases can be found in all social classes from the lower servant to the bourgeois or the aristocratic type.
- Buffo bases often have obsessive desires to increase their social standing.
- Buffo bass characters often try to block a young man's attempt to court a young woman.
- Rossini's Buffo Bases continue the rapid pattern declamation which can already be heard in Mozart's Osmin in the Abduction from the Seraglio and will be continued in Donizetti's and Gilbert and Sullivan operas.
- The Buffo aria lacks the clear structure of the beginning ,middle and end that is characteristic of the Seria aria

## **Gioachino Rossini 1792-1868**

- **Rossini was born in Pesaro, which celebrates now each summer the festival dedicated to his operas.**
- **His parents were accomplished musicians and Rossini was educated in Bologna at the Liceo Musicale. He started composing operas in his teen years.**
- **His operatic musical career is divided in 3 periods from 1810 to 1829 .**
- **He composed rapidly and often in a few weeks 39 operas of which 15 are Opera Buffa, farsa or dramma giocosas.**
- **He was married to the Soprano Isabella Colbran and later to Olympe Pelissier, with whom he lived in Paris where his musical soirees were famous. He has a magnificent tomb in the church of Santa Croce in Florence.**

## **Rossini's Opera Buffa**

- 1. First period 1810-1814 Venice to La Scala Milan**
  - **1812 first breakthrough success: La pietra del paragone (the touchstone) at La Scala, which kept him out of the military**
  - **1813 L'Italiana in Algieri at Teatro San Benedetto Venice. A prima donna loved by a tenor, a baritone and a bass. Stendhal said: "Music of this kind makes you forget all the sadness of the world."**
  - **1814 IL Turco in Italia, La Scala Milan.**

## **Rossini's Opera Buffa**

### **2. Second period Naples 1815-1823 Teatro San Carlo, with the right to travel.**

- **1816 Il Barbiere di Siviglia. Rome Teatro Argentina**  
This is one of the greatest comic operas of all time. Beethoven told Rossini when he visited him: "Above all, make more Barbers." Verdi declared it the most beautiful Opera Buffa there is in 1898.
- **1817 La Cenerentola. Rome Teatro Argentina. Rossini's version of the Cinderella story.**

## **Rossini's Opera Buffa**

### **3. Period Europe and Paris 1822-1829**

- **1824 Director Theatre-Italien**
- **1825 Il Viaggio a Rheims (The journey to Rheims) for the coronation of Charles X of France. This was strictly at the time a coronation opera and Rossini withdrew it after 4 performances and used half of the music in his last Opera Buffa**
- **1828 Le Comte Ory. This opera effectively unites Italian and French opera styles. Italian lyricism is fused with French declamation and spectacle This Rossini's last Opera Buffa and one of only 2 operas written originally in French. (The other one is his last opera Guillaume Tell.)**

## **L'Italiana in Algeri**

- **The Bey of Algiers Mustafa is tired of his wife Elvira and gives orders for Elvira to marry his young Italian slave Lindoro, who pines for his Italian love back home.**
- **Meanwhile his fiancée Isabella had set off to find him, but was captured by pirates with her traveling companion Taddeo and brought to Mustafa, who falls in love with her. Isabella displays in her aria "Cruda Sorte" her power over men.**
- **Isabella now is courted by Taddeo, the newly found Lindoro and Mustafa.**
- **The Italians devise a plan to trick Mustafa. Lindoro and Taddeo persuade him to be inducted into the order of the Pappataci, who enjoy the good life and love and beauty by merely going to sleep, eat and drink.**
- **Isabella, Taddeo and Lindoro escape while the whole palace is drunk. Mustafa has no choice to forget Italian women and ask for forgiveness from his docile wife.**

## **Excerpts of L'Italiana in Algeri**

- **Isabella's aria "Cruda sorte" has drama and typical Coloratura embellishments for a Rossini heroine. Rossini liked what was at his time called the contralto voice. Today we would call this voice mezzo-soprano.**
- **The next selection that follows is the comic trio of the induction of Mustafa into the order of the Pappataci with the typical rapid pattern song style.**
- **# 4 and # 14**

## **Il Turco in Italia**

- **This is a Pirendellian play in a play. The poet pulls the characters like puppets on a string and assigns them to the plot.**
- **In contrast to Mozart's Abduction from the Seraglio, this time the Turk Selim comes to Italy to study Italian women and falls for the flirtatious Fiorilla, whose cuckold husband Geronio already had to put up with her lover Don Narciso.**
- **Selim encounters his former slave Zaida, who still loves him, but escaped his harem when he condemned her. He is confused about his feelings.**
- **Don Geronio finally asserts himself and threatens to divorce Fiorilla.**
- **After a masked ball with much confusion, Selim is reconciled with Zaida and Geronio generously forgives his wife and all ends well.**

## **Excerpts Il Turco in Italia**

- **# 15 is a comic trio of the poet pulling the strings and assigning Don Narciso and Don Geronio their roles like puppets in a play.**
- **# 22,23,24 are a duet between Don Geronio and Fiorilla. The cuckold husband does not succeed to control his capricious wife.**
- **This is a production from Opera Zurich and wonderfully shows the comic play and with in a play. Fiorilla is portrayed by Cecelia Bartoli.**

## **Il Barbiere di Siviglia**

- **The story goes back to the trilogy of Beaumarchais' play, already once set to music by Paisiello in 1782. Rossini apologized to the venerated master for being so bold to attempt it again. Paisiello's supporters interrupted the first performance.**
- **The beautiful vivacious Rosina, ward of Dr. Bartolo, is wooed by Count Almaviva with a serenade. Dr. Bartolo wants her for himself but Rosina enlists the help of the town's barber Figaro, who helps all damsels in need.**
- **Don Basilio, the old Music master intrigues and plots with Dr. Bartolo, teaching him about slander to swart the count.**
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## **Il Barbiere di Siviglia continued**

- **The count woos Rosina in disguise first as a soldier and then as Don Basilio's assistant. When Don Basilio stumbles on the ruse, they send him home in a comic quintet telling him he is sick and should go to bed.**
- **Dr. Bartolo has a marriage contract drawn up to avoid any rival's attempt to get Rosina.**
- **When the count's and Rosina's escape is swatted by Bartolo pulling away the ladder from the balcony, the trapped couple with Figaro's help and the bought Don Basilio as witness sign the marriage contract right under Bartolo's nose. Bartolo has to resign himself and is placated by the joyous count who leaves him Rosina's dowry**

## **Excerpts from Il Barbiere di Siviglia**

- **This is one of the most frequently performed Opera Buffa in the repertory.**
- **This Madrid production starts out in black and white and when love triumphs brings in the color with Count Almaviva and Rosina singing their last love duet in pink.**
- **We are presenting 3 selections**
- **# 4 the serenade of the count, a lyric tenor aria with high coloratura here sung by the foremost Belcanto Tenor in the world Juan Diego Florez.**
- **# 18 is the comic aria by Don Basilio about slander.**
- **# 34 is the comic quintet to send Don Basilio home to bed. Rosina is Maria Bayo. Don Basilio Ruggero Raimondi**

## **La Cenerentola**

- **Rossini's Cinderella story has a stepfather rather than a stepmother. The fairy godmother is Alindoro, the tutor of Prince Ramiro, who has to take a wife.**
- **Cenerentola is ostracized by her evil stepsisters and her stepfather Don Magnifico, who treat her as a lowly servant.**
- **On advice of Alindoro the Prince exchanges his role with Dandini, his valet, to observe any prospective bride under this disguise.**
- **The false valet and the kind Cenerentola fall in love.**
- **Alindoro helps Cenerentola to go to the ball. She gives the Prince a matching bracelet to seek her**
- **When he finds her, Cenerentola discovers that she was in love with a prince and in her happiness forgives her stepfather and stepsisters.**



## **Excerpts La Cenerentola**

- **# 7. I chose the comic ensemble when the false prince Dandini presents himself to Don Magnifico and his daughters**
- **# 8 following this is Cenerentola pleading with Don Magnifico to let her go to the ball.**
- **You have typically primo buffo bass characters here one of aristocratic stature Don Magnifico and the low servant Dandini. This is in contrast to the Bourgeois characters of Dr. Bartolo and Don Basilio in Il Barbiere di Siviglia.**
- **Cenerentola is Cecelia Bartoli, Dandini Alessandro Corbelli and Don Magnifico Enzo Dara**

## **Le Comte Ory**

- **This last Opera Buffa by Rossini has no longer a buffo bass role. The tenor is the lascivious buffo character of the Comte Ory.**
- **The libretto is written in French by a well-known French writer Eugene Scribe.**
- **Count Ory is the prototype of a Don Juan. He lived in Touraine during the Crusades. Half of the music of Il Viaggio a Rheims 4 out of 6 numbers in Act I and 2 in Act II are recycled in this opera.**
- **Count Ory under the disguise first of a hermit and later in a group of disguised nuns, who are his men, tries to pursue the virtuous Countess Adele who waits for her brother's return from the Crusades.**
- **Countess Adele is also adored by Count Ory's page Isolier (a trouser role), who comes to warn the Countess and her women of Count Ory's disguise as a nun.**

## **Le Comte Ory continued**

- **The opera culminates in the glorious trio with the Count mistakenly pursuing the page Isolier for the Countess and all having a romp in and around a bed until the Crusaders return and Count Ory's amorous attempts are swatted.**
- **You are hearing this trio from the Glyndebourne production**
- **# 18 and 19**
- **Countess Adele is Annick Massis, Count Ory Marc Laho, Isolier Diana Montague.**
- **The trio was newly composed for this opera.**



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## Playlist

### Rossini: Italian Opera Buffa

- A. L'Italiana in Algeri. Libretto by Angelo Anelli.  
Schwetzinger Festspiele Radio Symphony Orchestra Stuttgart  
Conductor Ralf Weikert  
DVD ARTHAUS MUSIK 100 121

1. # 4 Coro and Isabella

Cruda Sorte! Amor tiranno

Isabella Doris Soffel

2. # 14 Terzetto "Pappataci! Che mai sento!"

Induction into the order of the Pappataci.

Mustafa: bass Guenther von Kannen, Lindoro: tenor Robert Gambill, Taddeo:

Baritone: Enrico Serra

Total about 10'

- B. Il Turco in Italia. Libretto by Felice Romani  
Opera House Zurich 2002, Conductor Franz Welser-Moest  
DVD ARTHAUS MUSIK 100 369

1. # 15 Terzetto." Un marito scimunito". Comic ensemble: The poet manipulates the Cuckold husband and the disgraced lover for positions in his play.

Poeta Prosdocimo: bass Oliver Widmer, Don Narciso: tenor Reinaldo Macias, Don Geronio: bass Paolo Rumetz

2. Duetto: The flirtatious wife and the cuckold husband. Donna Fiorilla: mezzo-Soprano Cecilia Bartoli, Don Geronio: bass Paolo Rumetz

# 22 "Per piacere alla signoria"/Alle corte: in casa mia"

# 23 "No, mia vita. Mio tesoro"

# 24 "Ed osate minacciarmi!"/ Con marito di tal fatta".

Stop at the recitative (poeta)

Total about 11'53"

C. Il Barbiere di Siviglia. Libretto by Cesare Sterbini  
Teatro Real Madrid 2005. Conductor Gianluigi Gelmetti  
DVD Decca B0005295-09

1. # 4 Cavatina IL Conte d'Almaviva: tenor Juan Diego Florez  
“ Ecco, ridente in cielo”. Serenade to Rosina.
2. #18 “La calumnia e un venticello”. Comic aria of Don Basilio: bass Ruggero Raimondi, describing the effect of slander.
3. # 34 Quintetto, comic ensemble trying to tell Don Basilio he is sick and should go To bed. Rosina: mezzo-soprano Maria Bayo, Figaro: Pietro Spagnoli, Dr. Bartolo: Bruno Pratico, Count Almaviva: tenor Juan Diego Florez, Don Basilio: Ruggero Raimondi.

Total about 20'08”

D. La Cenerentola. Libretto by Jacopo Ferretti.  
Houston Grand Opera 1996. Conductor Bruno Campanella.  
DVD Decca 071444-9.

1. #7 “Ecco Dandini...Scegli la sposa”  
#8 “ Signore, una parola”  
Comic ensemble. The false prince Dandini (valet) is presenting Himself to Don Magnifico and his daughters Clorinda and Tisbe while The real prince disguised as valet looks on. This is followed by La Cenerentola pleading with Don Magnifico to let her go to the prince's Ball. La Cenerentola: mezzo-soprano Cecelia Bartoli, Don Ramiro, Principe Di Salerno: tenor Raul Gimenez, Dandini, suo camerie (valet): bass Alessandro Corbelli, Don Magnifico, Barone di Montefiascone: Enzo Dara, Clorinda: soprano Laura Knorr, Tisbe: Mezzo-soprano Jill Grove.

Total about 16'52”

E. Le Comte Ory. Libretto by Eugene Scribe and Charles Gaspard Delestre-Poirson.

Glyndebourne Festival 1997. Conductor Andrew Davis.  
DVD Kultur D 2983

1. # 18 Trio “A la faveur de cette unit obscure”

#19 Trio “J’entends d’icile bruit des armes”

Cut the last 2 ½ minutes of the finale when the rest of the ensemble enters  
Comic trio of the lascivious Le Comte Ory: tenor Marc Laho, pursuing Isolier,  
His page: mezzo-soprano Diana Montague, who is disguised and in love with the  
Virtuous Countess Adele, instead of his intended prey Countess Adele: mezzo-  
Soprano Annick Massis. This happens all in and around a bed.

Total about 15’05”

**Total Playing time about 74 ½ minutes**