2013-2014
HOT SEASON FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
TEACHER GUIDEBOOK

The Barber of Seville
Nashville Opera

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**Thank you, teachers,** for giving your students this wonderful opportunity. They will certainly enjoy the experience. You are creating memories of a lifetime, and Regions is proud to be able to help make this opportunity possible.

Jim Schmitz
Executive Vice President
Area Executive
Middle Tennessee Area
Dear Teachers~

We are so pleased to be able to partner with Nashville Opera to bring students to the invited dress rehearsal of *The Barber of Seville*.

We thank Nashville Opera for the use of their extensive study guide for adults. It will help you prepare your students for the performance with a synopsis, opera background, and musical information. Additional information and short explorations are included in this booklet for you to share with students.

Please look particularly at the opera rehearsal information, which will help students understand the special factors present in an invited dress rehearsal.

Enjoy!

**TPAC Education**

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*Modern day Seville still has buildings from before the 17th century, when *The Barber of Seville* is set: the Seville Cathedral (upper left) and the General Archive of the Indies (lower right) with all the records of the Casa de Contratación, or House of Trade. This organisation approved all voyages of exploration and trade after the discoveries of Christopher Columbus. Seville became the exclusive port of entry in Spain for all goods from the New World.*

Photo from Wikipedia Commons
Most final dress rehearsals are almost exactly like a performance. The director will stop the action if needed, but it is exceedingly rare and generally only for a technical malfunction on the stage. Like theatre, an opera dress rehearsal is the final chance before the performance to make a complicated collaboration come together seamlessly.

The Nashville Opera’s rehearsal schedule begins with two weeks at the opera rehearsal space in the new Noah Liff Opera Center. Stage action is mapped out, the performers experiment with their characters, and the director’s ideas for the flow of the opera are shared with the cast. The time period may seem short for such a large production. It only works because opera singers begin rehearsals knowing every bit of their music by heart and having rehearsed it themselves over a period of months, sometimes years. If they do not know the role on the first day, the director has the right to replace them immediately. The opera company will fly in a new singer to take over their part. Once opera singers learn a particular role, they keep it in their repertory and play the role many more times at different opera companies around the world.

Four to five days before the first performance, the set is “loaded in” to the theater, and the lights are hung and focused. Students will notice a table in the middle of the orchestra level seats for the stage manager, the director, and the designers. This serves as a central location for communicating with the singers and crew onstage, the conductor in the orchestra pit, and the technicians in the lighting booth. During the final dress rehearsal, students may notice lighting changes as the designer makes final adjustments.

Opera rehearsals use a skilled piano accompanist, but once the company moves into the theater, the performers will have a Sitzprobe rehearsal (a German word meaning to sit and try out.) The Sitzprobe is a “sing-thru” with the orchestra and conductor, concentrating on the nuances of the music only without staging. It is the first time that the orchestra and singers put together the work that they have been doing in separate orchestra rehearsals and staging rehearsals.

A piano tech rehearsal is held without costumes to let the singers get used to the set and give the set crew their first chance to practice scene changes. The next rehearsal is a piano dress rehearsal that adds costumes. Finally, the orchestra dress rehearsal puts all the elements together: lighting, set changes, costumes, the orchestra, and the supertitles (the English translations of the lyrics, called the libretto.) The supertitles will be in operation at the final invited dress rehearsal.

The final dress rehearsal allows the last polish before the performance, and invited dress rehearsals add the final important element to the opera, an audience. Because of the strenuous nature of the singing, a singer may choose to “mark” on the final dress rehearsal in order to preserve their voices for all the performances. “Marking” does not have the same meaning in opera as it does in theatre. In theatre, it means just going through the blocking and the words of the lines. In opera, it specifically means that the singer may choose not to sing at full volume, not pushing their voice to the utmost. All of their acting and vocal expression will be at full power, however, with all the passion and conviction that opera requires. You will be their first audience; they are ready and excited to give you the story and the music.
**Step 1~Know the story!**

In opera, it is important to know as much as possible about what is going on beforehand, including the ending. By all means, read the synopsis and libretto; listen to a recording! Once the music, the voices, the setting, the lights, and the dramatic staging come together at the performance, audience members will be better able to fit all the elements seamlessly together into the plot. The plot then becomes the springboard for the real power of opera, the music.

**Step 2~Experience the music!**

Composers use many tools to communicate with music. They create melodies that evoke a variety of emotions. They use tempos (how slow or fast) and dynamics (how loud or soft) and rhythms (the frequency and pattern of beat). They choose particular instruments to add color to the music they have written. Think of instrument choice as a type of painting for your ears! The term “soundscape” is often used in describing the music of an opera, and it can set the atmosphere and give information about character and plot. What is it telling you?

**Step 3 ~Understand the singers!**

Opera singers are vocal athletes. They practice every day to exercise their vocal chords and their extensive breath control. The combinations of notes that they have to sing are very difficult, and the things that they can do with their voices are extreme. You can easily compare a regular singing voice and an opera singing voice to a weekend jogger and a gold-medal-winning Olympic track champion! BUT, the reason that their voices are prized is that they can express so much emotion on a grand scale.

**Step 4~Plunge in!**

This is the most important step. Everything about opera is over-the-top, on the edge, enormous in every way. It’s an art form that thrives on its intensity and passion. Opera stories portray people at their most extreme, and the singers and the music communicate in ways that words alone cannot. You have to let go, allow yourself to stop thinking and analyzing and simply FEEL THE EMOTION!

(with acknowledgements to Opera 101 by Fred Plotkin for idea organization above)
Opera and Cartoons?

Many people are familiar with the overture of The Barber of Seville because of a peculiar pairing. In 1950, the team of creative artists at Warner Brothers led by director Chuck Jones, released a Looney Tunes cartoon entitled The Rabbit of Seville. Bugs Bunny, running from Elmer Fudd and his shotgun, leads the hapless hunter onstage in the middle of Rossini's opera, and the two of them are drawn into the performance as they continue their chase. This short became one of the best-known and favorite cartoons of animators and the general public, and the music from Rossini's opera became even more familiar. There are plenty of examples of cartoons set to classical music, with Disney's Fantasia heading the list. Music from many different operas is used to underscore commercials, television shows, and movies.

What do students think of this usage of classical and opera selections? Does it dilute the music to attach it to another storyline or to use it to sell products? Ask students to think of an example of current music that they particularly like; would they approve other uses for the music? What if it was used to sell a product or promote a cause they didn’t like? How would they react?

Barber or Factotum or both?

One aria from The Barber of Seville, “Largo al factotum,” translates as “Make way for the factotum.” A factotum is a person whose job involves doing many different types of work, from the Latin, fac, to do everything, (imperative of facere do+ totum everything,) This aria has become especially famous in popular culture because of the passage “Figaro - Figaro, Figaro, Figaro, Figaro, Figaro - Figaro, Figaro - Figaro!”

A barber in the 17th century not only cut hair and shaved beards, but he would remove lice, extract teeth, and do various forms of minor surgery, as well as perform other personal services. Figaro is this kind of barber, who does a bit of everything, (including matchmaking!) and he is needed to solve problems by everyone in town. Barbers were often self-taught, but in the 16th and 17th centuries barber-surgeon guilds developed to increase the quality of training. Ask students to do an internet search for barbers in the 17th century and see what kinds of interesting details they discover.

Breathe like Singers

The power of opera singer’s breath control is formidable. They must be able to sing very complicated musical passages, to sustain long notes, and to project their voices without microphones. They work all the time on their abdominal muscles, particularly the diaphragm muscle which runs along the bottom of the ribcage.

☞ Pay attention to your breathing. What part of your body is moving? Place your hands on your stomach just below your ribcage and try to push them out slightly as you breathe in.

☞ Keep your hands in place, take a breath in, and say “ha!” You should feel your diaphragm jump.

☞ Try to fill your lungs with the biggest breath you can, and let it out as slowly as you can with a hissing sound.

☞ Try it again and while you are hissing have a partner count how long you can make the hissing sound or (harder) how long you can make the sound “ahhh.” If you were to practice this every day, you would build the muscle and be able to make sound for longer periods of time, as opera singers can.

Every once in a while during the performance, try to pay attention to which passages seem to require the most breath control.
Barber of Seville

An Opera in Two Acts

Music by Gioachino Rossini
Libretto by Cesare Sterbini
First performance: Teatro Argentina, Rome, February 5, 1816

The libretto was based on Pierre Beaumarchais’s comedy Le Barbier de Séville (1775)

Sung in Italian with projected English translations

Directed by
John Hoomes

Conducted by
Dean Williamson

Cast and Characters

Rosina, Dr. Bartolo’s ward.................................................. Sandra Piques Eddy, mezzo-soprano
Figaro, a barber.................................................................................. Corey McKern, baritone
Count Almaviva, a local nobleman........................................... Taylor Stayton, tenor
    Dr. Bartolo, Rosina’s guardian................................................................. Peter Strummer, bass
Fiorello, a servant to the Count.................................................... Jeffrey Williams, baritone
Berta, a servant to Dr. Bartolo................................................................. Ariana Wehr, soprano
Don Basilio, a music teacher.............................................................. Tom Corbeil, tenor
Sergeant................................................................................................. Zac Engle, tenor

Performances

Thursday, January 30, 2014    7:00pm
Saturday, February 1, 2014    8:00pm

Andrew Jackson Hall
Tennessee Performing Arts Center
Nashville, Tennessee

Featuring the Nashville Opera Orchestra

Opera Insights Preview Talks 1 hour before each performance in the theatre.

Tickets
Tickets available from Nashville Opera Box Office
615-832-5242
or
Tickets available at all Ticketmaster outlets
615-255-ARTS

Study Guide Contributors
Chandra McKern, Education Director
The Story

Time and Place: 17th century; Seville, Spain

Act I

Scene 1: Outside Dr. Bartolo’s house
Count Almaviva, who is in love with Rosina, has come to serenade her (“Ecco ridente”), accompanied by his servant Fiorello and some musicians. After his song, he dismisses his companions. The Count hides from Figaro as he arrives. The barber has access to all the houses in Seville and knows the town’s secrets and scandals. When he arrives, he describes his busy life as a barber, the jack of all trades! (“Largo al factotum”). The Count then asks Figaro’s help in arranging a meeting with Rosina, who is unaware of the Count’s rank and knows him only as ‘Lindoro.’ Figaro advises the Count to disguise himself as a drunken soldier, ordered to be billeted with Dr. Bartolo, so he can gain entrance to the house. For this suggestion, Figaro is richly rewarded.

Scene 2- Dr. Bartolo’s house
The scene begins with Rosina’s cavatina, "Una voce poco fa". Knowing the Count only as Lindoro, Rosina writes a letter to him. As she is leaving the room, Bartolo and Basilio enter. Bartolo is suspicious of the Count, and Basilio suggests spreading terrible rumors about the Count to drive him out of town. (“La calunnia è un venticello”). The Doctor tells the music teacher of his plans to marry Rosina, and his suspicions that the mysterious soldier may well be the Count Almaviva, who has been seen nearby. Don Basilio suggests a trick that may make Rosina lose interest in the soldier.

Rosina returns, accompanied by Figaro, who has news about Dr. Bartolo’s wedding plans. Rosina presses Figaro for information about the young man she has seen and heard beneath her window. First, Figaro teases her by telling her that ‘Lindoro’ is indeed dying of love for ‘someone.’ Finally, he admits that the ‘someone’ is Rosina. The barber suggests that she send a note to her love. She gives him a letter which she had already written, and Figaro sets out to deliver it. Dr. Bartolo comes in to question Rosina about the identity of the serenader. From her blushes and the ink stains on her fingers, he figures out that she has written to the stranger and suspects that Figaro has been her messenger. He furiously cautions her not to try to outsmart him.

Count Almaviva arrives, disguised as a drunken soldier demanding a place to stay. Suspicious of the intruder, Dr. Bartolo goes off to search for a license which allegedly exempts him from the law requiring him to house soldiers. When he leaves, the Count slips a note to Rosina. Berta, the maid, Figaro, and Basilio arrive, shortly followed by the police whom Dr. Bartolo has summoned. The ‘soldier’ is arrested but immediately released when he reveals his true identity to the police. Everyone except Figaro is amazed by this turn of events, and everyone comments on the crazy events of the morning.
Act II- Dr. Bartolo’s House

Dr. Bartolo suspects that the “drunken soldier” was a spy planted by Almaviva. The Count returns, this time disguised as Don Alonso, a music teacher and student of Don Basilio (“Pace e gioia sia con voi”). He has come to give Rosina her music lesson in place of Basilio who, he says, is ill at home. Don Alonso also tells Dr. Bartolo that he is staying at the same inn as Almaviva and has found the letter from Rosina. He offers to tell Rosina that it was given to him by another woman, proving that Lindoro is toying with her on Almaviva’s behalf. This convinces Dr. Bartolo that Don Alonso is a true student of Don Basilio, and he allows him to give Rosina her music lesson (“Contro un cor”). Figaro arrives to give Dr. Bartolo his shave and manages to snatch the key that opens the balcony shutters. The shaving is about to begin when Basilio shows up looking perfectly healthy. The Count, Rosina, and Figaro convince Basilio, with repeated assurances and a quick bribe, that he is sick with scarlet fever (“Buona sera, mio signore”). Basilio leaves for home, confused but richer. The shaving begins, sufficiently distracting Dr. Bartolo from hearing Almaviva plotting with Rosina to elope that night. Dr. Bartolo hears the phrase “my disguise” and furiously realizes he has been tricked again. Everyone leaves.

The maid Berta comments on the crazy household (“Il vecchiotto cerca moglie”). Basilio is summoned and told to bring a notary so Dr. Bartolo can marry Rosina that very evening. Dr. Bartolo then shows Rosina her letter to Lindoro. Heartbroken and convinced that she has been deceived, she agrees to marry Dr. Bartolo and tells him of the plan to elope with Lindoro. A storm passes. Figaro and the Count climb over the wall. Rosina is furious until Almaviva reveals his true identity. Basilio arrives with the notary. Bribed with a valuable ring and threatened with a couple of bullets in the head, Basilio agrees to be a witness to the marriage of Rosina and Almaviva. Dr. Bartolo arrives with soldiers, but it is too late. Count Almaviva explains to Dr. Bartolo that it is useless to protest (“Cessa di più resistere”) and Dr. Bartolo accepts that he has been beaten. Figaro, Rosina, and the Count celebrate their good fortune. Everyone is happy with the results, especially Figaro who has been well-paid for all his successful schemes.

The Barber of Seville through the years...

Earlier in this century opera companies performed The Barber of Seville with a lot of freedom, vocally speaking. Singers added high notes wherever they wanted to, and changed the music to suit themselves. Technically speaking, they got away with murder, by that; we mean that years ago many great singers- especially the male ones- didn’t have the technique to sing all those difficult fast passages. Today we have higher standards for Rossini singing; we expect people to sing accurately and in good taste. If a conductor wants to be true to Rossini, he goes back to the original casting for his leading lady-Rosina as a mezzo-soprano. As early as the middle of the nineteenth century, sopranos were appropriately the role, since it was thought that the sounds of the soprano voice would be better suited to this lively young woman. Nowadays, we expect whoever is singing Rosina to sing what the composer wrote. Barber has endured all sorts of stagings and design schemes, especially in the past quarter-century. Most of the major American houses tend to produce it in a traditional way.
Music and What to Listen For

There are few real “songs”, rather fragments which are repeated and changed and assembled in different ways. There are many duets and ensembles. Rossini has been accused of using too many ensembles, but the really good singers may have forced him to do it. Rossini continually reused themes from his earlier operas. To show the extent of this borrowing, the original sources are indicated below where applicable. He borrowed from Hayden and others for Barber of Seville.

Overture

It is said that Rossini wrote an overture based on Spanish themes for The Barber of Seville, but it was lost after the first performance. The one used today was composed for an earlier Rossini tragedy, used again for a second opera and finally became attached to this comic opera. It doesn’t contain any music from the opera itself as overtures usually do, but it does set the mood. The overture contains an example of the “Rossini Crescendo, meaning a gradual increase in volume of the musical passage. In rewriting it for Barber of Seville, Rossini returned it to its original form.

Act I

Ecco Ridente in cielo- The Count Almaviva has fallen in love with Rosina. He is disguised as the poor student Lindoro, at the beginning of Act I. He stands outside of her house and serenades her with this beautiful bel canto aria.

Largo al factotum- This iconic aria is sung at the first entrance of the title character and the repeated Figaro’s are one of the most familiar parts of operatic singing. Figaro sings “I am respectable, highly acceptable, in any circle I feel at home. I am the king of lather and foam.” Later in the aria, he brags about having access to every house in town: "I, as a barber, have access to all houses, with my guitar as well as comb and scissors," indicating that he is held in very high regard.

Una voce poco fa- Rosina is smitten with Lindoro’s song, and sings about the voice she has just heard and her love for him in this cavatina. She tells the audience that she is a gentle, obedient girl, but if she doesn’t get her own way – watch out! In this piece we hear the incredible capabilities of the highly trained female voice over an enormous range of pitches from the lowest to the highest and frequently at lightning speed. The character tosses it off as though she were doing something routine.

La calunnia è un venticello – Don Basilio’s aria in which he explains to Dr. Bartolo how spreading small rumors about Count Almaviva can be used as a weapon to eventually destroy him.

A un dottor della mia sorte- Bartolo threatens Rosina, telling her that she will have to be better at her trickery to deceive someone of his importance.

Alto la! (Figaro, Bartolo, Count, Rosina, Berta, Chorus, Official) Figaro tries to quiet down the Count Almaviva (now in disguise as a drunken soldier) and Bartolo who are quarreling. The police arrive because of the commotion, and everyone tells their version of the story at once. The guard tries to arrest the count, but once the Count reveals who is he is, he is released. Everyone is frozen in astonishment.
About the Opera

The Barber of Seville is technically classified as an Opera Buffa, a full-length Italian comic opera with recitative rather than spoken dialogue. The Barber of Seville made its first operatic appearance only seven years after the debut of the successful stage play. The Barber of Seville is Rossini’s best known and best loved work. An interesting point is the speed at which Rossini created his work. His piano-vocal score is about 300 pages long. It took Rossini between 13 and 19 days to complete this opera. What is most enchanting about the opera is that everyone likes all of the characters; each person has his own distinct identity. Dr. Bartolo’s huge key, Figaro’s razor and strap, even Berta’s sneezes are recognizable by audiences everywhere.

Beaumarchais- French Playwright (Beaumarchais Trilogy)

Born a provincial watchmaker’s son, Beaumarchais rose in French society and became influential in the court of Louis XV as an inventor and music teacher. The libretto Rossini had to work with was an Italian adaption by Cesare Sterbini of Beaumarchais’ French Play Le Barbier de Séville, completed in 1775. It was part of a trilogy including (Barber of Seville), Le Mariage de Figaro (the Marriage of Figaro), and La Mère Coupable (The Guilty Wife). They were some of the most important French plays, for the trilogy spans the most turbulent period of French history. All three plays enjoyed great success, and they are still frequently performed today, in theatres and opera houses.

Beaumarchais’ somewhat controversial comedies were probably as amusing to sophisticated French audiences of that time as popular television sitcoms are to many of us today, and they ran into censorship problems because they stepped on the toes of the nobility. It is worth noting that Beaumarchais himself was a man of many talents and accomplishments. He was not only a writer but also an inventor, musician, court spy for the French monarchy, and an amazingly strong supporter of the American French Revolution. He contributed his own fortunes to support the colonial rebels.

Beaumarchais’ play, Le Barbier de Séville, had already been turned into an opera, through with a different libretto, by Giovanni Pasiello, and had been a triumph in Vienna in 1783. The existence of this earlier work was to cause Rossini problems more than three decades later at the premiere of his own opera. The premiere of Rossini’s opera was a disastrous failure: the audience hissed and booed throughout, and several on-stage accidents occurred. Many of the audience were supporters of Rossini’s rival, Giovanni Paisiello, who provoked the audience to dislike the opera. In particular, Paisiello and his followers were opposed to the use of basso buffo, which is common in comic opera. The second performance met with quite a different fate, becoming a roaring success.
About the Composer

Quick Stats

Full Name: Gioacchino Antonio Rossini
Dates: February 29, 1792 – November 13, 1868
Nationality: Born in Pesaro, Italy. Died in Passy, France.

Life and Career
Gioacchino Rossini was born on leap day of 1792 into a family of musicians in Pesaro, a small town off the Adriatic Coast of Italy. Rossini’s parents began his musical training early, and by the age of six he was playing the triangle in his father’s band. When the Austrians restored the old regime in Italy in 1796, Rossini’s father was sent to prison for having supported Napoleon; Anna took Gioacchino to Bologna, earning her living as a singer until she was eventually joined there by her husband.

Gioacchino remained at Bologna while his father played the horn in the bands of the theatres at which his mother sang, and he was taught to sight-read, play accompaniments on the pianoforte, and sing well enough to take solo parts in the church when he was ten years old. He was also a capable horn player, following in the footsteps of his father. In 1807 the young Rossini was admitted to a cello studio at the Conservatorio of Bologna, and to the counterpoint class of Padre P. S. Mattei. His compositional influences, however, are generally ascribed not to the teaching strict compositional rules he learned from Mattei, but to knowledge gained independently while scoring the quartets and symphonies of Haydn and Mozart.

When he was 18, Rossini produced his first opera, La Cambiale di Matrimonio. Between 1810 and 1813, Rossini produced operas of varying success, leading up to the enormous success of his opera Tancredi in 1813. Rossini continued to write operas for Venice and Milan during the next few years, but their reception did not compare to the success of Tancredi. In 1815 he retired to his home at Bologna, where he was offered a contract at the Teatro San Carlo and the Teatro Del Fondo at Naples, to compose for each of them one opera a year.

His 1815 opera Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra was well received, starring Isabella Colbran, who became the composer’s wife. In the beginning of the next year, his next opera, Il Barbiere di Siviglia, was so successful that although he reused the libretto of Giovanni Paisiello’s opera, the fame of Paisiello’s work was transferred to Rossini’s. Between 1815 and 1823 Rossini produced twenty operas, including Otello, borrowing from both Shakespeare’s play and Verdi’s opera. The opera La Cenerentola, or Cinderella, was as successful as Barbiere. In 1821, three years after the production of this work, Rossini married Isabella Colbran and returned to Bologna.

In 1824 he moved to Paris and became musical director of the Théatre Italien, and was rewarded with the offices of chief composer to the king and inspector-general of singing in France. The successful 1829 production of Guillaume Tell, the overture to which is one of the most famous works in all of classical repertoire, brought his career as an operatic writer to a close. He returned to Paris in November of that year and continued to compose music, but his life during the period from 1832 to his death in 1868 was mostly quiet and secluded. He died at his country house at Passy on November 13, 1868 and is buried in Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris.
Barber of Seville and Rossini- FUN FACTS

• Figaro in The Barber of Seville is the same character as in Mozart’s The Marriage of Figaro
• The aria and the overture of the Barber of Seville have been parodied in numerous animated cartoons including Woody Woodpecker (The Barber of Seville), Bugs Bunny (The Rabbit of Seville), Tom and Jerry (The Cat Above and the Mouse Below and Kitty Foiled) and The Simpsons (Homer of Seville)
• The Seinfeld Episode “The Barber” uses music from The Barber of Seville instead of its usual incidental music.
• The aria is sung by a Robin Williams voiced animated bird in the opening credits of the 1993 movie Mrs. Doubtfire.
• Rossini’s lyrical style earned him the nickname “The Italian Mozart”
• Rossini was the most famous composer in the history of opera
• His first opera was written when he was only 13 or 14, but it wasn’t staged until he was 20 years old
• Rossini wrote The Barber of Seville in just 2-3 weeks!
• Beethoven said that The Barber of Seville would be played as long as Italian opera exists. So far he’s right!
• Rossini was an amateur chef, and had many dishes named after him, including the Tournedos Rossini, a dish still popular today!
• Rossini left a large part of his fortune to the town of Pesaro, which used the money to found a Music conservatory dedicated to Rossini.
• Rossini was known to write at lightning speed. He felt one should wait to write the overture for an opera “until the evening before opening night.
• A characteristic mannerism in his musical writing earned him the nickname of “Monsieur Crescendo”
• After Rossini’s death, Giuseppe Verdi immediately began collaborating with multiple composers on a requiem for Rossini. The music was written but was never performed; instead Verdi reused parts of it for different works.
• The barber pole is a familiar symbol around the world, yet few people know that it symbolizes the medical activities many barbers once practiced. The red and white spiral stripes represent the bandage with which the barber wrapped the patient after drawing blood.
• Sir Arthur Sullivan visited Rossini one morning. When he entered the house, Rossini was working on a small piece of music. Sullivan asked, "Why, what is that?" Rossini answered him very seriously, "It's my dog's birthday and I write a little piece for him every year."
On Operatic Voices

All classical singers fall into one of the categories listed below. A singer cannot choose his/her voice-type…it is something they are born with. Composers usually assign a voice type to a character based on his/her personality or age. Read these descriptions for specific examples.

**Women**

**Soprano:** The highest female voice, with a range similar to a violin. In opera, the soprano most often plays the young girl or the heroine (sometimes called the Prima Donna), since a high bright voice traditionally suggests femininity, virtue, and innocence. The normal range of a soprano is two octaves up from middle C, sometimes with extra top notes. Most women are sopranos. The role of *Berta* is sung by a soprano.

**Mezzo-Soprano:** Also called a mezzo; the middle female voice similar to an oboe in range. A mezzo’s sound is often darker and warmer than a soprano’s. In opera, composers generally use a mezzo to portray older women, villainesses, seductive heroines, and sometimes even young boys. (This is a special operatic convention, called a “trouser role” or a “pants role”) The mezzo’s normal range is from the A below middle C to the A two octaves above it. The mezzo in *Barber of Seville* is *Rosina*. Rosina can also be a soprano.

**Contralto:** The lowest female voice, similar in range to a clarinet. Contraltos usually sing the roles of older females or special character parts such as witches and old gypsies. The range is two octaves from F below middle C to the top line of the treble clef. A true contralto is very rare – some believe they don’t exist at all!

**Men**

**Counter-tenor:** The highest male voice, which was mainly used in very early opera and oratorio (a genre of classical vocal music similar to opera but generally based on a religious topic and accompanied by a choir). The voice of a countertenor sounds very much like a mezzo-soprano’s voice and they often sing the same repertoire. Like the contralto, true countertenors are very rare. There is no counter-tenor in *Barber of Seville*.

**Tenor:** Usually the highest male voice in an opera. It is similar to a trumpet in range, tone, color, and acoustical ring. The tenor typically plays the hero or the love interest in an opera. The roles of Count Almaviva and Don Basilio are sung by tenors. His voice ranges from the A below middle C to the G above.

**Baritone:** The middle male voice, close to a French horn in range and tone color. The baritone usually plays villainous roles or father-figures. In *Barber of Seville*, **The Barber** is a baritone.

**Bass:** The lowest male voice, it is similar to a trombone or bassoon in range and color. In serious opera, low voices usually suggest age and wisdom. In *Barber of Seville*, the character of **Bartolo** is a bass.
Recommended Recordings

Audio

Bizet: Il Barbiere di Siviglia (The Barber of Seville)

Audio

1. Metropolitan Opera and Chorus, 1996
   Performer: Roberta Peters, Giorgio Tozzi, Robert Merrill,
   Fernando Corena, et al.
   Conductor: Erich Leinsdorf

2. The Philharmonia Orchestra and Chorus, 1957
   Performers: Maria Meneghini Callas, Bariella Carturan, Luigí Alva, Mario Carlin, Tito Gobbi, Fritz Ollendorf, Niccola Zaccaria
   Conductor: Robert Bengalio
   Label: Angel Records

Video

Bizet: Il Barbiere di Siviglia (The Barber of Seville)(DVD)
Actors: Annick Massis, Yasu Nakajima, Luca Grassi, Luigi Di Donato, Marcello Viotti
Directors: Tiziano Mancini, Pier Luigi Pizzi
Date: 2005
Language: French
About our Cast

The Nashville Opera Association is honored to present the following artists in this production of The Barber of Seville:

**Director**

John Hoomes, Artistic & General Director of Nashville Opera  
**Nashville Opera Credits:** The Magic Flute, Salome, Lucia di Lammermoor, La Voix Humaine, The Lighthouse, Faust, Surrender Road  
**Other appearances:** Florentine Opera, Augusta Opera, Nevada Opera, Sarasota Opera, Indianapolis Opera, Arizona Opera, Opera Carolina, Opera New Jersey

**Conductor**

Dean Williamson  
**Nashville Opera Credits:** Cenerentola, The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat, Roméo & Juliette, Samson & Delilah  
**Other Appearances:** Opera Cleveland, San Francisco Opera, Seattle Opera, Chautauqua Opera

**Figaro**

Corey McKern, baritone  
**Nashville Opera Credits:** Cenerentola, Le Nozze di Figaro, La Boheme  
**Other appearances:** Opera Hong Kong, Sante Fe Opera, Austin Lyric Opera, St. Louis Symphony, New York City Opera

**Rosina**

Sandra Piques Eddy, mezzo-soprano  
**Nashville Opera Debut**  
**Other appearances:** The Metropolitan Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, Austin Lyric Opera, Pittsburgh Opera

**Count Almaviva**

Taylor Stayton, tenor  
**Nashville Opera Debut**  
**Other appearances:** The Metropolitan Opera, New York City Opera, The Glyndebourne Festival, Chicago Opera Theater, Bayerische Staatsoper

**Dr. Bartolo**

Peter Strummer, bass  
**Nashville Opera Debut**  
**Other appearances:** Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, Washington Opera, Houston Grand Opera, New York City Opera

**Don Basilio**

Tom Corbeil, bass-baritone  
**Nashville Opera Debut**  
**Other appearances:** Canadian Opera Company, Florida Grand Opera, Fort Worth Opera, Chicago Opera Theater
NASHVILLE OPERA

2013.14 season brought to you by

Bizet’s THE PEARL FISHERS
Oct 10, 12, 2013 • TPAC
The Patricia & Rodes Hart Production

Michael Nyman’s THE MAN WHO MISTOOK HIS WIFE FOR A HAT
Nov 8, 9, 10, 2013
The Noah Liff Opera Center

Rossini’s THE BARBER OF SEVILLE
Jan 30, Feb 1, 2014 • TPAC

Verdi’s OTELLO
April 11, 13, 15, 2014 • TPAC

Get tickets! nashvilleopera.org  615.832.5242

THE PEARL FISHERS
THE BARBER OF SEVILLE
THE MAN WHO MISTOOK HIS WIFE FOR A HAT
OTELLO
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*A fund of the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee