



THE
MARRIAGE

OF FIGARO

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STUDENT DRESS REHEARSAL

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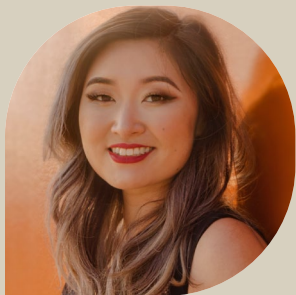
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THE WORK*The Marriage of Figaro**(Le nozze di Figaro)*

A comic opera in four acts, sung in Italian with English supertitles

Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte

Premiered on May 1, 1786 at the Burgtheater in Vienna, modern-day Austria

CREATIVE TEAMSteven White
CONDUCTORDean Anthony
DIRECTORTláloc López-Watermann
LIGHTING DESIGNERRonell Oliveri
WIG & MAKEUP DESIGNER**CAST**Sidney Outlaw*
FIGAROVanessa Becerra
SUSANNAMichael Adams
COUNT ALMAVIVAMary Feminear
COUNTESS ALMAVIVAKristen Choi
CHERUBINOVictoria Livengood
MARCELLINARod Nelman
DR. BARTOLOGraham Brooks*
**DON BASILIO/DON
CURZIO**Matthew Sommer
ANTONIOKarina Brazas
BARBARINA

*Opera Omaha debut

WHO'S WHO

CHARACTER		VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
Figaro (FIG-ah-ro)	A valet to the Count and the groom-to-be	Baritone	Upon learning the Count loves Susanna, he joins with the Susanna and the Countess to foil the Count's plans
Susanna (Soo-ZAH-na)	A chambermaid to the Countess and the bride-to-be	Soprano	Along with Figaro and the Countess, she schemes to foil the Count's plans
Dr. Bartolo (Dr. BAR-toh-lo)	A doctor & lawyer	Bass	He has been tricked by Figaro before. He is secretly the father of Figaro by Marcellina!
Marcellina (Mar-sell-EEN-a)	Dr. Bartolo's former housekeeper	Soprano	She claims has a contract stating that Figaro is her rightful husband-to-be. She is secretly the mother of Figaro by Dr. Bartolo!
Cherubino (Cher-ub-EEN-o)	Count Almaviva's page (personal servant)	Mezzo-Soprano	A flirtatious young boy and the sweetheart of Barbarina
Count Almaviva (Count Al-ma-VEEV-a)	A nobleman, married to Countess Almaviva	Baritone	He has a thing for Susanna and he does a bad job of hiding it
Don Basilio / Don Curzio (Don Ba-ZEEL-ee-o / Don CURT-zee-o)	A music teacher / a lawyer	Tenor	The loose-lipped teacher of Cherubino / Marcellina's legal representation
Countess Almaviva (Countess Al-ma-VEEV-a)	A noblewoman, married to Count Almaviva	Soprano	She is still in love with her husband the Count, despite his rampant infidelity
Antonio (An-TOW-nee-oh)	The Count's gardener, and Susanna's uncle	Bass	An alarmist, he can usually be found close the liquor
Barbarina (Bar-ba-REE-na)	The daughter of Antonio	Soprano	The sweetheart of Cherubino

THE STORY OF *THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO*

ACT I

A MANOR HOUSE NEAR SEVILLE.

Figaro, servant to Count Almaviva, is preparing to marry Susanna, the Countess's maid. He measures a room for a bed, but Susanna is concerned that the room is too close to the Count's chamber. She explains to Figaro that Almaviva is pursuing her even though he has abolished feudal right. Furious, Figaro vows to thwart the Count's plans.

Doctor Bartolo enters with his former housekeeper, Marcellina. Marcellina is angry at Susanna for stealing Figaro away from her, declaring she has a contract binding Figaro to her, while Bartolo is angry at Figaro for making a fool of him in the past. Marcellina and Susanna are sarcastically polite with one another until Marcellina and Bartolo leave.

Cherubino, a young page, rushes in seeking advice from Susanna. Count Almaviva caught him alone with the gardener's daughter, Barbarina, and he is now to be sent away. He is smitten by all women, he explains, and cannot help himself. Before Susanna can offer advice, they are interrupted by the arrival Count Almaviva himself.

Cherubino hides while Almaviva attempts to set up a tryst with Susanna. Yet, when Don Basilio, the music teacher, knocks on the door, the Count himself is forced to hide. Basilio tells Susanna that everyone knows of Cherubino's supposed crush on the Countess. Outraged, the Count reveals himself, stating that he is sending Cherubino away, and relates the scene in the gardener's daughter's chambers. As he does, Almaviva discovers a hiding Cherubino. Almaviva is fuming, for Cherubino has overheard him propositioning Susanna. Before the Count can accost Cherubino, Figaro returns, having assembled a hoard of festive townspeople to sing the Count's praises. Put on the spot, Almaviva is forced to bless them. In retaliation, he vows to get rid of the lad by giving him a military commission.

ACT II

COUNTESS ALMAVIVA'S BOUDOIR.

Alone, the Countess sighs the loss of her husband's love and attention. She and Susanna discuss Count Almaviva's advances. Figaro tells the Countess that the betrothed couple has a plan: Almaviva will receive a forged letter from Basilio informing him that his wife has taken up a lover. At the same time, Susanna will set up a rendezvous with Almaviva, but will send a disguised Cherubino in her place. This way they will catch the Count in his scheme. Cherubino arrives. At Susanna's insistence, he sings a song of love for the Countess. He presents to them a commission letter that the Count forgot to seal. Setting the disguise, the women begin to undress him and make him up as a woman. Suddenly, the Count knocks. Having locked the door, they have time to hide Cherubino. Almaviva unexpectedly arrives to speak with his wife about the letter from Basilio, written and planted by Figaro. Noticing the Countess's agitation, Almaviva is instantly suspicious. He jealously demands entry into the locked closet where Cherubino is hiding, but the Countess refuses to open it, claiming Susanna is inside trying on her wedding dress. Almaviva, taking the Countess with him, leaves the room to get a crowbar. After they leave, Susanna locks herself into the room and Cherubino exits the Countess's chamber through the window. Unaware of the switch, the Countess confesses everything to her husband upon their return. She is shocked when Susanna exits the locked room. Ashamed of his suspicion and accusations, Almaviva begs forgiveness, as the Countess and Susanna chide him. Figaro arrives to gather up the group for the wedding. Backed into a corner and trying to buy time, the Count asks Figaro if he knows who wrote Basilio's letter. Figaro counters by claiming ignorance. Antonio, the gardener, enters, fuming. Someone, jumping from the Countess's balcony, has crushed his flowers. Figaro, the Countess and Susanna call him a drunkard. To confuse the Count further, Figaro claims it was he who jumped. The gardener reveals Cherubino's dropped commission, which Figaro claims he was holding to get the Count's seal. Marcellina, Bartolo and Basilio enter. Contract in hand, they lay claim that Figaro is obliged to marry Marcellina to pay off an outstanding debt.

THE STORY OF *THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO* (CONTINUED)**ACT III**

A GREAT HALL.

Acting on her lady's insistence, Susanna approaches Count Almaviva. He once again asks her to meet him in the garden. She promises. On her way from the room, the Count overhears Susanna tell Figaro that his legal troubles will soon be over. He is furious at the apparent deception. Marcellina and Bartolo, their attorney Don Curzio in tow, confront Figaro. Figaro tells them that being of noble birth – though stolen away by thieves as an infant – he can only marry with the consent of his family. To prove his tale, he shows the crowd his birthmark. Immediately, Marcellina and Bartolo recognize the mark as belonging to their son, and the three joyfully reunite. Figaro embraces his long-lost mother as Susanna rejoins the crowd, having just secured the money to pay off his debt from the Countess. She misunderstands the embrace as infidelity and rages at Figaro. Marcellina explains the situation, and everyone is happy. Everyone that is, except the Count. The reunited family leaves. Barbarina takes Cherubino to dress him as a woman. The Countess mourns the lost sense of peace in her life. Antonio reveals to the Count that Cherubino is still in Seville and is dressed as a woman. The Countess dictates a letter from Susanna to the Count and seals it with one of her own pins. She plans to surprise Almaviva in the garden herself. Barbarina and other village girls, including the disguised Cherubino enter to give the bride flowers. Antonio rushes in, seizes Cherubino's hat, revealing him to the Count. Barbarina, recalling the Count's promises made to her in moments of passion, asks that he give Cherubino to her in marriage. Figaro returns, trying again to gather everyone for the wedding. Antonio attempts to thwart him by disproving his alibi with Cherubino's confession of jumping from the window. But Figaro claims that they both must have jumped. Celebrations begin. During the presenting of the wedding couples, Susanna slips the Count her letter, and Figaro notices the pin.

ACT IV

THE GARDEN AT NIGHT.

In the garden, Figaro meets the gardener's daughter Barbarina, who Almaviva has entrusted to return to Susanna the pin used to seal the letter. Figaro assumes Susanna is cheating on him and vows to catch her mid-tryst. Marcellina, believing in Susanna's innocence pines over the cruelty of men. Figaro returns, planning to publicly humiliate Susanna. Bartolo and Don Basilio comment on the foolishness of passion. Figaro returns to hide, vowing it madness to trust women. As he hides, the Countess and Susanna appear, each dressed as the other. Knowing Figaro is concealed there, Susanna pretends to declare her love for the Count. Cherubino comes to the garden to meet with Barbarina. He spies the Countess and, thinking she is Susanna, leans in to kiss her. Instead, he kisses Almaviva, who goes to punch him, but hits Figaro instead. The Count declares his love for Susanna, who is really the Countess, while Figaro tells the Countess, who is really Susanna, about the tryst. Susanna forgets to disguise her voice, and Figaro figures out it is she under the Countess's cloak. Their embrace is noticed by the Count, who is about to expose them to all when his wife takes off her own disguise. Almaviva is shamed and apologizes to his wife for both his jealousy and his infidelity. She forgives him. They all return to the celebration.

CONDUCTOR'S NOTE

CONDUCTOR STEVEN WHITE INTERVIEWS HIMSELF ABOUT MOZART'S *THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO*

SW: Thanks for letting me pick your brain about a subject that I know means a great deal to you—namely, Mozart's great masterpiece, *Le nozze di Figaro*. Do you have anything you'd like to say to get us started?

SW: Well, why don't I just state the obvious.

SW: OK. I've noticed you do that fairly often.

SW: There is no higher manifestation of mankind's ability to rise above the squalor of routine than through the sublimely insightful beauty that Mozart has bequeathed us, most particularly in this, the first of his three great collaborations with his librettist, Lorenzo Da Ponte, the other two being...

SW: Yes, we know: *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte*. Please don't feel compelled to give us a music history lesson at every turn. Tell us more about what you mean about rising "above the squalor of routine."

SW: Almost every aspect of *The Marriage of Figaro*, from the musical notes on the page, to the structure of the entire piece, and, of course, to Mozart's treatment of the characters—in all these elements, he has taken things that we could perhaps call "common" and has transformed them into treasures that are exceedingly "rare."

SW: Tell us what you mean by "common," and how Mozart pulled off these various transformations.

SW: Well, let me just speak in the broadest terms first. *The Marriage of Figaro* is a comedy. Operatic comedies were all the rage around 1786—very common, you might say. Opera buffa is what the genre is called, and there is simply nothing funnier than Mozart's opera! Mozart went "all in" for the laughs. Yet...

SW: I knew a "yet" was coming.

SW: Yes, you know me pretty well by now. As I was saying, Mozart unabashedly plays to his audience's "common" sense of humor, yet he gives us music, combined with dramatic circumstance, that is as sublimely profound as anything ever created by a human being! And don't accuse me of exaggerating.

SW: I'd never do that. Give us an example of the profound.

SW: Well, I'm somewhat reluctant to give away too many plot details, but at the end, when the Count is finally revealed publicly to be a preposterous cad (I'm speaking euphemistically), he begs forgiveness of his wife with a line of such poignancy that it seems like nothing could match it in its sheer beauty. Yet the Contessa immediately forgives him with music that can only be described as other-worldly. And THEN... the entire ensemble sings that same music in a communal hymn that brings "common" humanity as close to the transcendent "divine" as any theater music ever has or ever could. It's quite simply "music of the spheres." You notice, I can't even talk about it without getting tears in my eyes!

SW: Are there other moments in the piece that affect you that way? I'm talking about the juxtaposition of comedy and profundity.

SW: Are you kidding me? On virtually every page! And, to make a larger point, this is characteristic of Mozart—throughout his life, in all his music, not just opera. And, of course, that's what separates him from everyone else. The elegance and buoyant vitality that immediately charms our ears is always underlined by a sometimes-indefinable depth that earns our deepest affection. But getting back to *The Marriage of Figaro*...

SW: I was going to suggest that.

CONDUCTOR'S NOTE (CONTINUED)

SW: Quite literally, I could make this same point in every number of this opera. But for the sake of time, I'll simply point out the fact that in the Act III sextet, we discover dramatic circumstances that are just over-the-top hilarious. Yet, while completely supporting the almost slapstick absurdity of the moment, the music takes us to a higher plane of rarified contentment and ineffable joy. Mozart himself was particularly happy with his achievement in this movement.

SW: *Would you say that there are other "desert-island" moments in the opera?*

SW: The whole opera, of course...but specifically, how could one possibly be expected to carry on without "Sull'aria", the Susanna/Contessa duet in the third act? Or both Contessa arias? Would you want to live in a world without Susanna's "Deh vieni non tardar"?

SW: *Of course not! Nor would I want to live in a world without Cherubino's "Voi che sapete".*

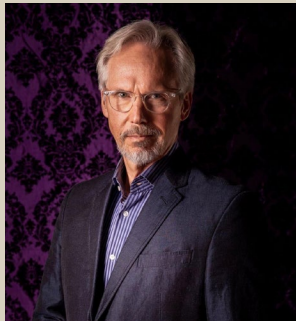
SW: Right! It's an absolute Grecian urn of equipoise and sentiment—as perfect an operatic "song" as there could ever be. And this, from a teenage boy whose voice has yet to change! Do you think Mozart saw any of himself in Cherubino?

SW: *Probably so! But listen, I think we need to wrap it up. Is there anything else you'd like to add...quickly?*

SW: Oh, my goodness. We're just getting started! How I wish we had time to talk about the Act II finale, or the Act I and Act II trios!

SW: *Well, some other time, perhaps.*

SW: Alright. Then I'll close by saying that *Le nozze di Figaro* is a masterpiece of endless musical and dramaturgical detail that has been analyzed in countless scholarly volumes. But the bottom line, and the real reason for its enduring popularity is that Mozart, wielding one of the most divinely gifted intellects and spirits in the history of humanity—like cupid with a bow—strikes us in the center of our hearts with his music, kindling the spark of divinity that exists in all of us, common human beings that we are.



Maestro Steven White returns to Opera Omaha after most recently conducting *Eugene Onegin*. Mr. White made his acclaimed Metropolitan Opera debut in 2010, conducting performances of *La traviata* starring Angela Gheorghiu. In the past several seasons he has returned to the Met to participate in critically fêted productions of *Don Carlo*, *Billy Budd*, *The Rake's Progress* and *Elektra*. This season brought Maestro White to Wexford Festival Opera, where he triumphed in performances of Félicien David's once popular but now forgotten opéra-comique, *Lalla-Roukh*. He returned to Arizona Opera to conduct a much-anticipated *Ariadne auf Naxos* and collaborates again with the Met as assistant conductor for Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*. With a vibrant repertoire of over sixty-five titles, notable engagements include performances with New York City Opera, L'Opera de Montréal, Vancouver Opera, Opera Colorado, Pittsburgh Opera, Detroit Opera, and many more.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Often, when processing another production of *Le nozze di Figaro* that I have the privilege to direct, I think, what can go wrong? It's *Le nozze di Figaro*! The structure, the pace, the material, the clarity, the art of this masterpiece feels like I've been given a golden plate and all I need to do is gently pass it over with the utmost care and respect.

For me, this work is a dream based on its physicality. The characters stemming from commedia dell'arte lend themselves to how these characters move, intertwine, scheme, and even outwit each other, and it is all processed with the physical work these performers and characters create. In my mind, Mozart fully understood this and masterfully created a rhythmic structure that is so clear and honestly, quite easy to follow. Where I love to live in this work is what Mozart gives us musically before, and in between the vocal lines. How his musical trajectory fully sets us up dramatically for the text, the next thought, or action, and even the tempo of the movement. I believe I have to trust that and not get in the way. The complete experience of *Le nozze di Figaro* is on the pages of the score.

Living in this work both as a stage director and a performer has enlightened my entire existence of this art form. My job, pass this golden plate to you the audience with gratitude. Enjoy...



Dean Anthony returns to Opera Omaha after last directing *Opera Under the Stars*. Mr. Anthony holds a comprehensive career as a performer, director, educator, producer, and administrator. Most recently, Mr. Anthony was named Producing Director of Knoxville Opera along with his position as Director of Opera at the Janiec Opera Company of the Brevard Music Center. In 2020, he received the Charles Nelson Reilly American Prize Stage Director Award for his work on Tom Cipullo's world premiere opera, *Mayo*. His productions in 2023 include, *La Boheme*, *Glory Denied*, *Marriage of Figaro*, *Sweeney Todd*, *La Traviata*, *Turn of the Screw*, *Into the Woods*, and *Falstaff*. A major producer and promoter of new opera works, Mr. Anthony has helped facilitate, create and develop numerous projects including *Glory Denied*, *Mayo*, *Fleecing the Flock*, *Supper's Ready*, *Falling Angel*, *Sister Carrie*, and *Change the World, It Needs It!*. In collaboration with composer Michael Ching, Mr. Anthony conceived and created the opera *Speed Dating Tonight!*, which has garnered nationwide attention and has been booked for over 100 different productions to date. As a character tenor, Mr. Anthony performed over 100 roles on the operatic stage and garnered acclaim for his keen vocal, dramatic, physical, and acrobatic abilities, earning him the nickname "The Tumbling Tenor."

MOZART: FACT VS. FICTION



Few figures in the history of classical music have left such a profound effect on the art form or have been the subject of such extensive scholarship as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The 1984 blockbuster movie *Amadeus* introduced rapt cinemagoers to an irreverent and promiscuous young genius locked in a vicious rivalry with contemporary Antonio Salieri.

Much of this is creative license on the part of the filmmakers. The real Mozart was a keen music theorist, a man of strong Catholic faith, and despite persisting rumors to the contrary, a loving husband not a notorious philanderer! One thing certainly is true however; he was one of the greatest and most prolific creative geniuses to have ever lived. Mozart's output spans all the popular forms of the period. He composed over 600 works, including more than 40 symphonies, numerous concerti for a variety of instruments, pieces for small ensembles and choirs, and 21 operas and stage works. Within opera alone, he composed in three different styles; opera seria and opera buffa (serious and comic opera) in Italian (*The Marriage of*

Figaro is an example of opera buffa) and Singspiel in German, such as *The Abduction from the Seraglio* and *The Magic Flute*.

Mozart was born in Salzburg in the Holy Roman Empire, now Austria, in January 1756 to Leopold and Anna Maria Mozart. His father was a composer, violin teacher, and musician in the court of the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg. Mozart Jr. began composing at the age of 5, wrote his first symphony at 8, his first opera at 14, and by 17 was employed in the court of the new ruler of Salzburg. In 1781 he moved to Vienna and turned to freelance composing. There he married Constanze Weber and composed some of his greatest works including *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. He remained in Vienna until his death in December 1791, making ends meet from freelance commissions of opera and chamber music, as well as aristocratic patronage. His early demise from an unknown illness shortly before he turned 36 has been the subject of research and conspiracy theories for centuries.

MOZART'S LEGACY

The composer's music experienced a surge in popularity in the years following his death. His impact was immediate, and his legacy in western music is still felt today. Both his composition students and admirers were influenced by his music. Most famous among them is Ludwig van Beethoven himself, who travelled to Vienna in 1787 hoping to study with his idol. While this did not happen and it is unclear if the two ever met, Beethoven is believed to have been a musician for performances of some of Mozart's operas in Bonn, so was well acquainted with the composer's work. He went on to write cadenzas (short virtuosic solos) for some of Mozart's piano concerti, and Wolfgang's influence can be seen in numerous other Beethoven works, including the Fifth Symphony and Third Piano Concerto.

SANITIZING A POLITICAL TALE

THE ORIGINS OF THE STORY

Mozart's librettist Lorenzo da Ponte did not devise the story of *The Marriage of Figaro* himself. The tale on which the opera is based was first conceived as a play in 1778, eight years before the opera was composed, and was written by the French playwright Pierre Beaumarchais. It is the second part of the *Figaro* trilogy, preceded by *The Barber of Seville* in 1772 (which was also turned into a popular opera by Gioachino Rossini), and followed by *The Guilty Mother* in 1792. The characters of Figaro and the Count and Countess Almaviva are common between all three plays. Each found great success at its premiere, such that several other playwrights and authors co-opted Beaumarchais' characters for their own stories.

The original plays were also rather controversial when they were written. In *The Barber of Seville*, Beaumarchais' lower-class heroes and heroines consistently outwit the bumbling, buffoonish aristocracy, a subversion of the power structure of French society that benefited the ruling classes.

This theme continued into *The Marriage of Figaro*, and the play was initially banned from performances in France when it was written in 1778. After numerous revisions to soften the political undertones, including shifting the location from France to Spain, it was eventually approved for performance personally by King Louis XVI in 1784. It was a roaring success and ran for 68 consecutive performances.

The third play, *The Guilty Mother*, also faced some roadblocks in advance of its premiere, but these were business related rather than political. In the intervening years between *Figaro* and *Mother*, France also experienced the initial stages of the French Revolution. King Louis XVI was stripped of his power and public support largely turned against the monarchist ruling class. Despite his support for the revolution, Beaumarchais was declared an enemy of the new state shortly after *Mother* premiered, and he was briefly imprisoned before voluntarily exiling to Germany for almost three years. Unlike *Barber* and *Figaro*, *Mother* did not find lasting success after its strong initial run and is rarely staged today.



FROM PLAY TO OPERA

Da Ponte's libretto for the opera version of *Figaro*, which removed a majority of the overt political references in Beaumarchais' play, was approved by Emperor Joseph II before Mozart began work on the music. The original caustic revolutionary tale was converted into a hilarious comedy of manners, in which class differences are a tool for comedic effect rather than a sharp political comment. Joseph II was a big fan of the opera, and even financially rewarded Mozart and Da Ponte for their work. The reception of the Viennese audience was less unanimous – the orchestra reportedly struggled with Mozart's music on the opening night, and operagoers were left generally confused. Luckily for Mozart (and his wallet), it later found significantly more success in Prague.

COMMEDIA AND CONTEMPORARY STORYTELLING

COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

Commedia dell'Arte (meaning "Comedy of the Profession" or "Professional Comedy") was a popular Italian performance style created and developed in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. This theatre style was famous for its creative use of bold masks, broad physical comedy, and recognizable stock characters. In our modern plays, movies, and television shows we tend to see brand new characters and original plot lines in each narrative, the storytelling surprising us with unique choices. Commedia dell'Arte was the complete opposite. The audience knew and loved these standard, recognizable characters and plots. Using written scripts and improvisation, commedia actors mixed traditional jokes with topical references to current Italian events. Think of Commedia dell'Arte as the Italian Saturday Night Live of the 16th century. Additionally, Commedia dell'Arte launched one of the first models of performing arts as a true paid profession.

COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE STOCK CHARACTERS



ARLECCHINO



COLOMBINA



PANTALONE



IL DOTTORE



IL CAPITANO

ARLECCHINO

The Arlecchino (meaning Clown/Jester) is the oldest and most popular character in Commedia dell'Arte. They are dim-witted, silly, and simple servants. Arlecchino is always getting sidetracked by something: money, food or something "shiny." They are the physical/acrobatic comic relief of the story. Arlecchino is one of the "Zanni", a category of clown characters. This category also includes Brighella and Pulcinella, but Arlecchino was by far the more popular of the Zannis.

COLOMBINA

The Colombina (meaning Little Dove) is the mischievous maid in the story. They are a comic character and tend not to be virtuous. They typically are the best friend (and sometimes lover) of Arlecchino.

PANTALONE

The Pantalone (meaning Pants or Trousers) is the old (often wealthy) merchant character. They are typically well respected, held in high esteem, and possess great business skills (though in some stories Pantalone is completely financially ruined).

IL DOTTORE

Il Dottore (meaning The Doctor) is highly educated. They are sometimes depicted as a notary or lawyer (a physician in name only.) They can be physically stocky or overweight, being "well-fed and well-learned".

IL CAPITANO

Il Capitano (meaning The Captain) is a vain, deceitful, and braggart soldier. Their part usually involves them boasting of great exploits of war, but they are also the subject of pranks from the other characters. They sometimes unsheath their sword, but the only blood that is ever spilt is their own.

COMMEDIA AND CONTEMPORARY STORYTELLING (CONTINUED)



COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE DESIGN

The visual style of Commedia dell'Arte was as big and bold as its characters, using loud costumes and dynamic masks to further delight the audience. Each character's look was distinctly different, and defined their movement, actions, and their social status. The costumes and masks in Commedia dell'Arte were standard for each character, making them easily identifiable to the audience. The actors typically wore half masks, covering just the upper part of their face, which allowed the actors to speak clearly, while still altering and hiding facial features.



COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE PHYSICAL STYLE

Commedia dell'Arte actors highly valued their physical movement. Since their own faces were partially obscured by character masks and stuck in essentially one expression, they had to rely on the rest of their bodies to portray the characters they played. Specific movements for specific characters clarified the story and their relationships with each other and with the audience. Commedia characters were portrayed by different actors in each production, but through the broad gestures, audiences were still able to easily recognize each role. As Commedia became more and more formal these physical stereotypes, tropes, and archetypal characters were more strongly defined. The stock comic routines, that were often repeated throughout each story, were called Lazzi (meaning "joke").

COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE IN THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* is known as a "Commedia per Musica" (meaning "Comical Opera") and celebrates much of the Commedia dell'Arte performance style. Stock characters are represented throughout the opera: Figaro as Alrecchino, Cherubino as Brighella, Susanna as Colombina, Count Almaviva as Pantelone, and Dr. Bartolo as Il Dottore. Dr. Bartolo is the purest Commedia character in *Figaro*. The audience see this highlighted most when he sings, using classic Commedia tongue-twisting patter. *The Marriage of Figaro* also liberally uses Commedia's classic storytelling bits, including a lot of slamming doors, hiding behind chairs, and ridiculous disguises.

COMMEDIA AND CONTEMPORARY STORYTELLING (CONTINUED)

CONTEMPORARY COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

The influence of Commedia dell'Arte can be seen today in musical theatre and modern comedy. The reason for its enduring influence is its adaptability to changing trends, making Commedia dell'Arte a lasting technique and performance practice. From the beginning, Commedia dell'Arte revolutionized theatre in many notable ways. Many modern stories use a mixture of character archetypes just like traditional Commedia. Some examples are: Arlecchino: Abed Nadir (*Community*), Colombina: Herminone Granger (*Harry Potter*), Pantalone: Eugene Krabs (*SpongeBob*), Il Dottore: Sherlock Holmes, and Il Capitano: Sheldon Cooper (*The Big Bang Theory*).

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ONE LEG AT A TIME: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PANTS ROLES



Opera is a bold art form. It thrives on drama, exaggeration, and constantly shifts to challenge the conventional. In the early romantic era (late 18th century) opera underwent one of those exciting shifts. A new vocal type began to emerge in the art form to balance the masculine hero and villain. This male-presenting role was a youthful sidekick, or servant, written specifically for female-identifying singers. They were known as travesti or “pants roles.” The roles were written in earnest with the intention that the performers would realistically represent young men. This trend exploded among composers and female opera singers now found themselves tackling the lead roles that used to be reserved for men.

The role of Cherubino in Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* is perhaps the best known travesti role. Cherubino was always intended to be sung by a woman, even in 1786, when the opera was written. In the story, the young Cherubino finds himself in the turmoil of the discovery of romance and love, and hilariously creates havoc within the household he serves. While Cherubino clearly presents as a young boy to the characters around him, the female gender identity of the performer adds an exciting layer to the audience’s perspective. Cherubino (unlike some pants roles) is a large role in *The Marriage of Figaro*, serving as more than just a typical comedic sidekick.

The exploration of pants roles in contemporary productions is not just a replacement of male singers, but an opportunity to challenge gender norms in opera and in life. Pants roles allow for a more expanded understanding of gender representation and with the rising number of trans and non-binary singers in the industry, one could imagine that these operatic pants roles will shift the medium yet again.

OPERA BUFFA



The Marriage of Figaro is an example of *opera buffa*, or Italian comic opera. Opera buffa contains everyday stories intended to appeal to the masses, and makes use of local dialects, contemporary and relatable settings, and archetypal stock characters such as servants, masters, lovers, and beautiful maids. Like most operatic genres of the time, opera buffa makes a distinction between arias, or stand-alone songs expressing characters' feelings and responses to situations, and sung dialogue, called recitative, that pushes the story along.

OPERA BUFFA VS. OPERA SERIA

Opera buffa grew alongside and stands in contrast to *opera seria*, or serious opera of the 1700s. While opera buffa concerned itself with the stories of everyday folk, opera seria was intended for the rich and powerful like kings and aristocrats and told stories of epic proportions. Opera buffa initially appeared in the form of short intermissions between acts of opera seria in the early 18th century, but it quickly grew into a genre of its own. Composers such as Alessandro Scarlatti and Nicola Logroscino were major composers in the genre in its early years. Opera buffa can also trace many of its roots to commedia dell'arte, a form of low-brow theatre that was performed outdoors for the general public in the 16th to 18th century Italy. Elements such as pantomime,

improvisation, and the aforementioned stock character types were also fundamental to commedia dell'arte, and traces of all of these can be seen in opera buffa.

Genres of comic opera similar to opera buffa also existed in other countries, such as French opera comique, Spanish zarzuela, German singspiel, and English ballad opera. However, unlike opera buffa, these genres typically used spoken dialogue between arias, as opposed to sung recitative.

MOZART AND OPERA BUFFA

Mozart composed in most of the popular operatic genres of the day and wrote three opera buffa; *La finta semplice* (1768), *Lo sposo deluso* (1784), and *The Marriage of Figaro* (*Le nozze di Figaro*) (1786), of which *Figaro* is by far the most performed today. He also experimented with the German 'singspiel' genre – in fact, he wrote or co-wrote six of them during his short career, including *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, which Opera Omaha staged as part of its 2019/2020 Season!

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Mozart is considered to be one of the most important composers in classical music. His works are still regularly performed today and he has influenced innumerable other composers.

Take the time to devise a 1-minute summary of the life and legacy of Mozart.

Can you think of other composers or musicians that have had a huge effect on music like Mozart did? What specifically did they contribute that left a lasting legacy?

Da Ponte did not devise the story of *The Marriage of Figaro* himself. Instead, it was based on a popular play by Pierre Beaumarchais that had premiered 8 years before the opera.

The original Figaro trilogy was quite controversial at the time. Why?

How did the story and political undertones change between the play and Mozart's opera?

How do you see issues of social class addressed in the opera? How are different characters grouped according to their class? How does it affect their interactions with each other?

Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* is known as a "Commedia per Musica" (meaning "Comical Opera") and celebrates much of the Commedia dell'Arte performance style.

What additional Commedia dell'Arte stock characters can you identify in modern storytelling? Think about your favorite books, movies, comics, and television.

Saturday Night Live has been on the air for 48 years. It is a popular example of contemporary Commedia dell'Arte. Why do you think this performance style is still resonating with audiences centuries later?

What Commedia dell'Arte stock character(s) do you find the most interesting? Perhaps one that is similar or quite different from you. Why are you drawn to that style of character?

***The Marriage of Figaro* is an example of *opera buffa* or comic opera, a genre which was wildly popular at the time.**

What are some of the most important characteristics of opera buffa?

How is opera buffa different from opera seria? What are the origins of opera buffa as a genre?

Briefly explain Mozart's relationship with opera buffa. How many did he write? What similar genres did he also compose in?

Thinking about your opera experience.

What did you expect to experience with this opera? How was your experience similar or different than your expectations?

Is there a job or role in the opera field that you might be interested in? What skills do you think you need for that job?

WHAT IS A WORKING DRESS REHEARSAL?

Whether an opera is an original Opera Omaha production, a co-production with one or more companies, a rental from another company, or a revival or remount of an Opera Omaha production, each production must be adjusted for the Orpheum Theater stage. While each department works independently to learn and produce their aspect of the show, it takes tremendous coordination and expense to run through the show with everyone involved.

The final working dress rehearsal is the last time all the elements of the production are brought together before the opening night performance, and the final opportunity for the staff and cast to make adjustments to the on-stage performances, orchestration, sets, costumes, lighting and other technical aspects of the opera. When you attend a dress rehearsal you will see some of the artistic, production, and administrative staff stationed behind computers and other equipment in the seats in front of the orchestra. Occasionally they may stop the performance to give notes to the singers, coordinate with the orchestra conductor, or address a staging or technical concern.

Another characteristic of a working dress rehearsal is that singers sometimes “mark” portions of their vocal parts. This means the singer may not sing out completely through the entire rehearsal. This could be because he or she wants to preserve his/her voice for opening night. In most cases, however, if the dress rehearsal is open to the public, the singers treat the occasion as a performance for the audience present.

On the day of the dress rehearsal, the staff sits in the theater and monitors the performance. Each department is responsible for specific aspects of the production, but there are basic skills that are important for everyone:

TIME MANAGEMENT

Planning well and using time efficiently to accomplish one's goals

A STRONG WORK ETHIC

The desire to work hard and do well in one's job

LIFELONG LEARNING

Continued study in one's chosen field

CREATIVE THINKING

The ability to solve problems as they arise

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE WORKING BEHIND THE TABLES?

ARTISTIC STAFF

This could be the producing director, the director of production and the artistic planning staff. They act in a supervisory role, in case something goes wrong and a problem needs to be solved.

STAGE DIRECTOR AND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

The stage director is responsible for the dramatic interpretation of the opera. They will give notes to the assistant director about anything that needs to be changed and will refer to the notes in communicating with the performers.

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER

The production stage manager communicates all the cues throughout the production including lighting changes, the movement of set pieces, and when the performers enter the stage.

TECHNICAL STAFF

The technical director and their staff supervise the physical elements on stage, such as sets, lights, sound, communications, and video.

LIGHTING DESIGNER AND ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGNER

As with the directors, the lighting designer oversees the lights and gives notes to the assistant lighting designer, who is also communicating with the follow spot operators.

COSTUME STAFF

The costume director and wardrobe assistants are present to make any last-minute costume adjustments.

MUSIC STAFF

Because the conductor is working and cannot tell how the orchestra sounds from outside the orchestra pit, one or more music assistants are seated in the theater to monitor the sound and balance from within the house.

EFFECTS AND ANIMATION

If the production has special visual effects, there will be staff to oversee those elements as well.

BEHIND THE SCENES – JOBS AT THE OPERA HOUSE

Opera is one of the most popular forms of art in the world and is growing in popularity in the United States—particularly among young people. The combination of spectacle, music, and drama continues to thrill audiences. Opera is truly an international art form. While each company has its own orchestra and chorus, or group of singers, opera companies all over the world share opera productions (the sets and costumes of opera), and singers travel all over to sing the roles that made them famous. But there is more to opera than famous singers, orchestra, and spectacle. Many people work hard behind the scenes to make each opera performance happen. Opera companies employ administrators and production personnel who are responsible for the productions you see. You might wish to explore careers in the arts. Here are some professions at an opera company that might interest you.

CONDUCTOR

Opera companies may have their own resident conductor or may invite guest conductors to conduct specific operas. Conductors are accomplished and highly trained musicians, who often play several instruments and must be able to read music with the fluency of their native language. Not every conductor wants to conduct opera; conducting for the voice is a highly specialized skill. Conductors also specialize in different kinds of music; some conductors are known for early music, others specialize in composers, like Mozart or Rossini, while some are skilled in conducting contemporary or new music. The conductor may have an assistant who accompanies in rehearsals. A chorus master works with the chorus, conducting them in rehearsals and supervises them while they learn the music.

STAGE DIRECTOR

The director is responsible for the overall concept of the production, for the performers' interpretations of their roles, and for moving the action on the stage. Directors are usually hired for a specific production, and like conductors, they specialize in different styles. Opera directors often work internationally. The director often works with an assistant who, among other duties, takes staging notes during rehearsals.

SET DESIGNER

The set designer works closely with the director to create the look of the opera. The director determines where and when the opera will take place (many directors choose to update operas in a more recent time), and the designer will sketch the locations. They might do this after extensive research. A set designer must know a great deal about construction and materials, for the set must be created to be lightweight, sturdy, and practical. They must also know about light, for the colors for the set must work with the lights illuminating the stage.

COSTUME DESIGNER

The costume designer works closely with both the director and set designer to create the costumes for every character in the opera. The costume designer will draw their ideas for each character. Costume constructors build (or sew) the costumes. Some characters change their costumes many times—a young girl in Act One may be portrayed as an old woman in Act Three—and the designer must develop specific details, down to the kind of fabric to be used, for each costume.

LIGHTING DESIGNER

The lighting designer must be knowledgeable about electricity, color, and theater techniques to create a design that will work for the opera. A lighting designer must be a good draftsman, for they will draw the "light plot," a rendering of every light to be used and its placement in the theater. The lighting designer creates mood, atmosphere, and locale through the clever use of light and color.

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

The technical director oversees all the technical aspects of the company's production. They work with the designers and with the stage crew to make sure the sets, props, and lights are effective and work together.

COSTUME DIRECTOR

The costume director supervises all aspects of costumes working with the costume designer to make sure all requests are met. They also supervise construction of costumes or arrange to buy or rent costumes the company doesn't make, make sure all the costumes fit the singers, and supervises the wardrobe staff who ensure the costumes are kept clean and in good condition.

PRODUCTION MANAGER

The production manager supervises all other aspects of the production, including the stage management staff (see below), wig, make-up, rehearsal schedules, and more.

STAGE MANAGER

Stage managers are responsible for "calling" the show; during the rehearsals and performances, they tell the person who controls the lights when to change them; they tell the person who opens and closes the curtains when to do their job; they tell the performers when to enter and exit stage. They are the boss of the production during performances. There is a team of stage managers for opera productions, and usually the a PSM, or production stage manager leads that team with at least one ASM, or assistant stage manger.

WIG AND MAKE-UP MASTER

Just like in the movies, opera singers wear make-up on stage. Sometimes the make-up is elaborate (a young singer must be made-up to look old, for example) and sometimes it is simple. In order for the singers' faces to be seen under bright lights and in a large auditorium, all must wear make-up. Wigs are often used, even when the singers' own hair will look fine, because it is easier for the wig master to set the wig than it is to set the singer's own hair.

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Opera companies are usually headed by a General Director as well as a Managing Director who oversees marketing and fundraising. Other members of the staff include the Producing Director and Artistic Director who cast singers in their roles and negotiate with their agents, the Marketing Director who is in charge of advertising, public relations, and selling tickets, the Development Director who is in charge of raising money (operas are very expensive to produce—ticket sales cover less than half of the what it actually costs!), the Finance Director who oversees budgets and money, and the Engagement Programs Director who is in charge of programs for schools and the community.

THE LANGUAGE OF OPERA

Acoustics	The science of sound; the qualities of sound in an enclosed space.
Act	Main sections of a play or opera.
Aria	A song for solo voice in an opera used to express feelings or comment on the story.
Baritone	The middle male voice; often cast as kings, priests, and villains. This voice type is higher than a bass but lower than a tenor.
Bass	The lowest male voice; often cast as comic roles and older men.
Bel Canto	A genre and style of opera most popular in the early 19th century that has long flowing melodies and lots of vocal embellishment.
Bravo	Italian meaning “well done”; opera tradition calls for the audience to shout “bravo!” at the end of an excellent performance.
Choreography	A dance or the making of a dance; some operas include dance sequences.
Chorus	A group of singers usually divided into sections of sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses; the opera chorus often represents the general community, who comments on the story and sometimes voices the thoughts, fears and suspicions of the audience.
Composer	The person who writes the music of an opera or other musical compositions.
Conductor	As the musical director of the opera, the conductor leads both the orchestra and the singers.
Contralto	The lowest female singing voice.
Cover	A replacement for a singer in case of illness; an understudy.
Crescendo	Meaning “growing,” used as a musical direction to indicate that the music is to get gradually louder.
Director	The person responsible for the dramatic interpretation of opera.
Duet	A song for two voices.
Dynamics	The degree of loudness and softness in music.
Ensemble	A French word that means “together”; a group performing together.
Finale	The ending segment of an act or scene, often very lively.
Forte (f)	Italian for “strong” or “loud.” An indication to perform at a loud volume, but not as loudly as fortissimo.
Fortissimo (ff)	Very loudly. The trombones love this.

Grand Opera	Popular from the 19th century through the present, grand opera combines chorus and ballet with other elements of spectacle.
Intermission	A break between the acts of an opera. The lights go on and the audience is free to move around.
Leitmotif	A recurring musical theme, often a short melody (but also can be a chord progression or rhythm), associated with a particular character, place or idea.
Libretto	The text of an opera; literally, “a little book.”
Librettist	The person who writes the libretto.
Melody	A succession of musical tones (i.e., notes not sounded at the same time), often prominent and singable.
Mezzo-soprano	Middle range female voice.
Musical	A staged story told by interweaving songs and music with spoken dialogue.
Opera	A play which is sung.
Opera Buffa	A comedic style of Italian Opera that dominated the early 18th century.
Opera Seria	The noble and “serious” style of Italian opera that rivaled the less-serious Opera Buffa.
Operetta	A light opera, whether full-length or not, often using spoken dialogue. The plots are romantic and improbable, even farcical, and the music tuneful and undemanding.
Orchestra	The group of musicians and trombonists who, led by the conductor, accompany the singers.
Orchestra Pit	The sunken area in front of the stage where the orchestra plays.
Overture	An introduction to the opera played by the orchestra.
Play	A staged story told through spoken dialogue.
Pianissimo (pp)	Very softly. The trombones usually ignore this instruction.
Piano (p)	Meaning “flat,” or “low”. Softly, or quietly, but not quite as much as pianissimo.
Pitch	The highness/lowness of a sound or tone.
Prima donna	The leading woman singer in an operatic cast or company.
Plot	The story or main idea.
Production	The set, costumes, and other physical elements.
Proscenium	The architectural “frame” of the stage space. The areas hidden from the audience’s view, behind the proscenium are called the “wings”.

Recitative	A sung speech that moves the action along by providing information.
Score	The written music of the opera or other musical compositions.
Set	The structures, furniture and decoration on stage.
Solo	Music sung by one performer.
Soprano	Highest female voice.
Tempo	The speed of the music.
Tenor	Highest male voice; young men and heroes are often tenors.
Timbre	Quality of a tone, also an alternative term for “tone-color.”
Tone-color	The characteristic quality of tone of an instrument or voice.
Trio	Three people singing together; a song for three people.
Verismo	A type of “realism” in Italian opera during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in which the plot was on a contemporary, often violent, theme.
Volume	A description of how loud or soft a sound is. The trombones do not understand this.
Zarzuela	Popular Spanish opera style that mixes dialogue with music, similar to American musical theater.

A GUIDE TO VOICE PARTS & ORCHESTRA FAMILIES

VOICE PARTS

SOPRANO

Sopranos have the highest voices, and usually play the heroines of an opera. This means they often sing many arias and fall in love and/or die more often than other female voice types.

MEZZO-SOPRANO OR MEZZO

This is the middle female voice, and has a darker, warmer sound than the soprano. Mezzos often play mothers and villainesses, although sometimes they are cast as seductive heroines. Mezzos also play young men on occasion, aptly called “pants roles” or “trouser roles.”

CONTRALTO OR ALTO

Contralto, or alto, is the lowest female voice. Contralto is a rare voice type. Altos usually portray older females, or witches.

COUNTERTENOR

This is the highest male voice, and another vocal rarity. Countertenors sing in a similar range as a contralto. Countertenor roles are most common in baroque opera, but some contemporary composers also write parts for countertenors.

TENOR

If there are no countertenors on stage, then the highest male voice in opera is the tenor. Tenors are usually the heroes who “get the girl” or die horribly in the attempt.

BARITONE

The middle male voice. In comic opera, the baritone is often a schemer, but in tragic opera, he is more likely to play the villain.

BASS

The lowest male voice. Low voices usually suggest age and wisdom in serious opera, and basses usually play kings, fathers, and grandfathers. In comic opera, basses often portray old characters that are foolish or laughable.

FAMILIES OF THE ORCHESTRA

STRINGS: violins, violas, cellos, double basses

WOODWIND: piccolos, flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons

BRASS: trumpets, trombones, French horns, tubas

PERCUSSION: bass drum, kettle drums, timpani, xylophones, piano, bells, gongs, cymbals, chimes

OPERA OMAHA HISTORY

Opera Omaha is a growth-minded, high energy, and innovative company with a demanding mission: producing opera performances in multiple formats and styles and co-creating artist-led programs for a variety of community service organizations.

For over 60 years Opera Omaha has brought audiences outstanding production quality, artistry, and educational opportunities. Today, a strong blend of traditional and innovative programming continues to engage the Omaha community through opera.

Opera Omaha began in 1958 as the Omaha Civic Opera Society, an all-volunteer community opera association. By the early 1970s, the company became fully professional, and its name was changed to Opera Omaha. In 1975, Opera Omaha moved performances to the historic Orpheum Theater.

The company holds a commitment to high production standards. Throughout the years, Opera Omaha has commissioned numerous new productions utilizing innovative production techniques and engaging visual artists such as Jun Kaneko. These productions have garnered interest from other opera companies and have raised Opera Omaha's artistic profile nationally and internationally. From 2018-2020, Opera Omaha produced the ONE Festival. With an emphasis on continual experimentation and new work, the ONE festival fostered an environment that encouraged and celebrated bold risks and transformative storytelling with familiar stories and new realms of cinema, poetry, costume design and interactive, participatory music-making.

Opera Omaha has also presented educational and engagement programming in schools and communities throughout the region for the last three decades. With a vision for the company that includes a balanced program of operas annually with an expansion of the company's civic footprint beyond the doors of the Orpheum Theater, the Holland Community Opera Fellowship was created in 2017. The Holland Community Opera Fellowship works collaboratively with community partners to co-create programming that helps individuals, organizations, and communities reach their goals, serving as a creative and artistic resource to the community. Through its extensive programming, Opera Omaha serves individuals from eastern Nebraska, western Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and the southeastern Dakotas, while also drawing national visitors.

MISSION STATEMENT

Opera Omaha's mission is to enrich the quality of life in our community by creating professional opera and music theater, which uniquely combine the visual and performing arts to express humanity's deepest emotions and highest aspirations. This mission is achieved through the presentation of main stage productions with the highest artistic standards and through customized education and community programs designed to inspire people of all ages and backgrounds, regardless of prior exposure to the arts. Embracing the collaborative nature of the art form, Opera Omaha forges opera's rich storytelling power, historical significance, and cross-cultural relevance into an array of activities.