

GIOACHINO ROSSINI

Il Barbiere di Siviglia

A Guide for Educators



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Opera 

Il Barbiere di Siviglia

Intrigue, disguises, and love triumphant: It's all in a day's work for Figaro, the barber of Seville. By the time Gioachino Rossini sat down in 1816 to write his great comic opera *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, both he and his leading character already enjoyed immense popularity and far-reaching fame. At just 24 years of age, Rossini was harvesting the fruits of international acclaim that he would savor for the rest of his life. And in the 41 years since Figaro had first set foot on the Parisian stage, in a play by the French watchmaker-turned-nobleman Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, the quick-witted barber had been feted by emperors, feared by kings, and embraced by two generations of composers and poets.

Wily, witty, and urbane, Figaro cut a dashing figure on the stage. But it was Rossini's music that granted the beloved barber his immortality. Soaring lyricism, subtle musical characterizations, and infinitely hummable melodies bring Beaumarchais's story to life in a way that has captivated operagoers for two centuries. Bartlett Sher's production, a staple at the Metropolitan Opera, whisks the audience back to the sun-drenched streets of 18th-century Seville. With its fast-paced zingers and cornucopia of musical treats, this beguiling tale proves that sometimes one clever barber is all it takes for everyone to live happily ever after.

This guide presents *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* as a piece of musical comedy that reflects profound social changes taking place at the time of its composition. The materials on the following pages are designed to provide context, deepen background knowledge, and help students engage with the opera with confidence and joy. Examining *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* in the context of historical events with which students may be familiar, such as the French and American revolutions, this guide will forge interdisciplinary classroom connections, foster critical thinking, and invite students to enjoy Rossini's impeccable comedy as well as the play—and historical moment—that inspired it.



MALTMAN



LEONARD



BROWNLEE



MURARO



BURCHULADZE

THE WORK

An opera in **two acts**, sung in **Italian**

Music by **Gioachino Rossini**

Libretto by **Cesare Sterbini**

Based on the play **Le Barbier de Séville** by **Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais**

First performed **February 20, 1816**, at the **Teatro Argentina, Rome, Italy**

PRODUCTION

Bartlett Sher

Production

Michael Yeargan

Set Designer

Catherine Zuber

Costume Designer

Christopher Akerlind

Lighting Designer

Kathleen Smith Belcher

Stage Director

Matthew Diamond

Live in HD Director

PERFORMANCE

The Met: Live in HD

Broadcast: November 22, 2014

Christopher Maltman

Figaro

Isabel Leonard

Rosina

Lawrence Brownlee

Count Almaviva

Maurizio Muraro

Dr. Bartolo

Paata Burchuladze

Don Basilio

Claudia Waite

Berta

Michele Mariotti

Conductor

Production a gift of The Sybil B. Harrington Endowment Fund

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Opera in the Classroom

The Metropolitan Opera Educator Guides offer a creative, interdisciplinary introduction to opera. Designed to complement existing classroom curricula in music, the humanities, STEM fields, and the arts, these guides will help young viewers confidently engage with opera whether or not they have prior experience with the art form.

On the following pages, you'll find an array of materials designed to encourage critical thinking, deepen background knowledge, and empower students to engage with *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. These materials can be used in classrooms and/or via remote-learning platforms, and they can be mixed and matched to suit your students' individual academic needs.

Above all, this guide is intended to help students to explore *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* through their own experiences and ideas. The diverse perspectives that your students bring to opera make the art form infinitely richer, and we hope that your students will experience opera as a space where their confidence can grow and their curiosity can flourish.

WHAT'S IN THIS GUIDE:

Philosophical Chairs: A series of questions that introduce the opera's main themes while sparking creativity and encouraging debate

Who's Who in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*: An introduction to the opera's main characters

Synopsis: The opera's plot

The Source: Information about the literary sources and/or historical events that inspired the opera

Timelines: Timelines connecting the opera to events in world history

Deep Dives: Interdisciplinary essays offering additional information and context

Active Exploration: Classroom-ready activities connecting the opera to topics in music, the humanities, STEM, and the arts

THROUGHOUT THE GUIDE, YOU'LL ALSO FIND:

Critical Inquiries: Questions and thought experiments designed to foster careful thinking

Fun Facts: Entertaining tidbits about *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

This guide invites students to explore the opera through:

Literature
Drama
Italian
French
Arts and Crafts
Costumes
Stage Design
History
Social Studies
Critical Thinking
Social and Emotional Learning

COMMON CORE STRANDS

This guide directly supports the following ELA-Literacy Common Core Strands:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.5

Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.11a

Recognize and illustrate social, historical, and cultural features in the presentation of literary texts.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.5

Add audio recordings and visual displays to presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.

Philosophical Chairs

Philosophical Chairs is an activity designed to foster critical thinking, active inquiry, and respectful dialogue among students. To play, participants agree or disagree with a series of statements, but the game doesn't end there. The most crucial element is what happens next: Participants discuss their points of view and can switch sides if their opinions change during the discussion. (For more tips on using Philosophical Chairs in a classroom or via a remote-learning platform, see the activity description in your Google Classroom.)

Each topic statement is deliberately open-ended yet ties into a number of the themes present in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*—including the wickedness of greed, the redemptive powers of love, and the endless comic potential of a clever disguise. Set the stage for this conversation mindfully. Offer students a brief overview of the opera's plot, setting, and context, and remind them how to build a safe space for productive conversation. Some of the topics might be confusing or hard—that's okay! As you and your students explore and learn about *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, you can return to these statements: What do they have to do with the opera's story? How might these questions help us explore the opera's story, history, and themes?

The Statements

- Serenades are romantic.
- Secrets must never be shared.
- Every town has a scandal.
- Wittiness is a sign of intelligence.
- Deception is a form of lying.
- Turning a blind eye is harmless.
- The ends justify the means.
- I will always choose love over money.
- Hand-written letters are charming.
- Love will never lead you astray.

Keep in mind that the *process* of this activity is just as important as the statements themselves. Philosophical Chairs is designed to nurture civil dialogue, and students should be encouraged to listen actively, honor one another's contributions, and show respect for a diversity of opinions and ideas.

Who's Who in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*

CHARACTER	PRONUNCIATION	VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
Figaro A barber	<i>FEE-gah-roh</i>	Baritone	The barber of Seville of the opera's title. Clever and resourceful, Figaro helps Count Almaviva and Rosina overcome the many obstacles on the path to true love.
Rosina A wealthy young lady from Seville	<i>roh-ZEE-nah</i>	Soprano	Beautiful and independent, Rosina will not allow Dr. Bartolo to stand between her and Lindoro (who is actually Count Almaviva in disguise).
Count Almaviva A Spanish count, in love with Rosina	<i>Count Ahl-mah-VEE-vah</i>	Tenor	In love with Rosina, Count Almaviva needs Figaro's help to win the woman of his dreams. Over the course of the opera, Almaviva will adopt many different disguises.
Lindoro A poor student, one of Count Almaviva's disguises	<i>leen-DOHR-oh</i>		Hoping Rosina will love him for himself (and not for his money), Count Almaviva disguises himself as the poor student Lindoro.
Don Alonso A music teacher, another of Count Almaviva's disguises	<i>dohn ah-LOHN-soh</i>		In order to be close to Rosina, Count Almaviva dresses as Don Alonso, a supposed student of Don Basilio, to give Rosina her singing lesson.
Dr. Bartolo Rosina's guardian	<i>BAR-toh-loh</i>	Bass	A greedy schemer, Dr. Bartolo hopes to marry his ward, Rosina, in order to get her money.
Don Basilio A music teacher, Dr. Bartolo's accomplice	<i>don bah-ZEE-lee-oh</i>	Bass	A friend of Dr. Bartolo, Don Basilio has a trick or two up his sleeve to keep Rosina away from Count Almaviva.



FIGARO



ROSINA



COUNT
ALMAVIVA



LINDORO



DON
ALONSO



DON
BARTOLO



DON
BASILIO

Synopsis

ACT I *Seville, Spain.* Count Almaviva, a Spanish nobleman, is in love with Rosina. Hoping to be loved for himself (and not for his money), the count has disguised himself as a poor student named Lindoro to woo her. As the opera begins, “Lindoro” comes to serenade Rosina outside the home of Dr. Bartolo, where Rosina lives under lock and key. Soon, Figaro, the barber who knows all the secrets of the town, arrives. Recognizing Lindoro as Count Almaviva, he tells the count that Bartolo is not actually Rosina’s father, but her guardian. In fact, Bartolo plans to marry her in order to get her fortune. Figaro hatches a plan. He suggests that the count disguise himself again, this time as a soldier, and demand lodging in Dr. Bartolo’s residence. This way, he will be close to Rosina. Almaviva is overjoyed, and Figaro looks forward to a nice cash reward from the count for his help.

Rosina, alone in her room, thinks about the voice she heard serenading her a short while before and admits that she has fallen in love with the singer. Knowing that Dr. Bartolo will never allow her to have contact with the unknown man, she decides to send Lindoro a letter by way of Figaro. Figaro arrives, but before Rosina can speak with him, Bartolo appears with Don Basilio, Rosina’s music teacher. Basilio tells Bartolo that Count Almaviva has been seen in Seville. Bartolo, who knows that Almaviva is in love with Rosina, is furious, and the cunning Basilio suggests that they get rid of the count by spreading wicked rumors about him. Bartolo decides to marry Rosina that very day, and he and Basilio leave to prepare the marriage contract. Figaro, who has overheard the plot, warns Rosina. When Rosina asks Figaro about the handsome young man she saw outside her window, Figaro says that it was the student Lindoro and promises to deliver her letter to him.

Bartolo, deeply suspicious, accuses Rosina of writing a letter to a secret lover. Just at that moment, shouting is heard: Count Almaviva, now disguised as a drunken soldier, has arrived at Bartolo’s home. Bartolo claims that he has official exemption from providing housing to soldiers, and in the commotion Almaviva manages to reveal to Rosina that he is, in fact, Lindoro, and passes her a letter of his own. Bartolo demands that Rosina hand over the note, but she tricks him by giving him her laundry list instead. The argument grows more heated, and Figaro, Don Basilio, and the servant woman Berta burst in, announcing that the shouting can be heard throughout the city. Soldiers arrive to arrest the drunken soldier. When he quietly reveals to them that he is actually the count, the soldiers promptly release him. Everyone except Figaro is amazed by this turn of events, and the main characters all reflect on the chaos and confusion of the day.



FUN FACT

When the English essayist and poet Leigh Hunt visited Italy in 1823, he found the peninsula in a state of Rossini-mania. In Italy, he wrote to a friend, “Mozart is nothing, and Rossini everything. Rossini is talked of, written of, copied, sung, hummed, [and] whistled from morning to night.”

ACT II Bartolo is still suspicious, and he suggests that perhaps the drunken soldier was a spy for Count Almaviva. The count returns, this time disguised as Don Alonso, a music teacher and student of Don Basilio, to give Rosina her singing lesson. Basilio, he claims, is ill. Bartolo is skeptical until “Don Alonso” shows him Rosina’s letter to Lindoro, claiming to have found it at Count Almaviva’s lodgings. He says that he will use it to convince Rosina that Lindoro is merely toying with her on Almaviva’s behalf. This convinces Bartolo that “Don Alonso” is indeed a student of the scheming Basilio, and he allows the lesson to go ahead. Bartolo finds the music boring and soon nods off. As he snores, Almaviva (whom Rosina believes to be Lindoro) and Rosina declare their love.

Figaro arrives to shave Dr. Bartolo. Bartolo is reluctant to leave Rosina alone with the singing teacher, and he sends Figaro to fetch towels. Figaro, always resourceful, uses the opportunity to steal the key to Rosina’s balcony door, then causes a diversion, forcing Bartolo to leave the two young lovers alone. Suddenly, Don Basilio, the true singing teacher, arrives. Figaro,

A BRIEF GUIDE TO OPERATIC VOICE TYPES:

SOPRANO the highest-pitched voice, normally used for female characters; some children can also sing in the soprano range

MEZZO-SOPRANO the voice lying between the soprano and the contralto (from the Italian word “mezzo,” meaning “middle”)

CONTRALTO the lowest voice range associated with female characters (also called alto)

TENOR the highest common voice type for male characters

BARITONE the voice below the tenor and above the bass

BASS the lowest voice type



Almaviva, and Rosina bribe him to leave. While Bartolo gets his shave, Almaviva plots with Rosina to meet on her balcony that night so they can elope—but Bartolo overhears them and flies into a rage.

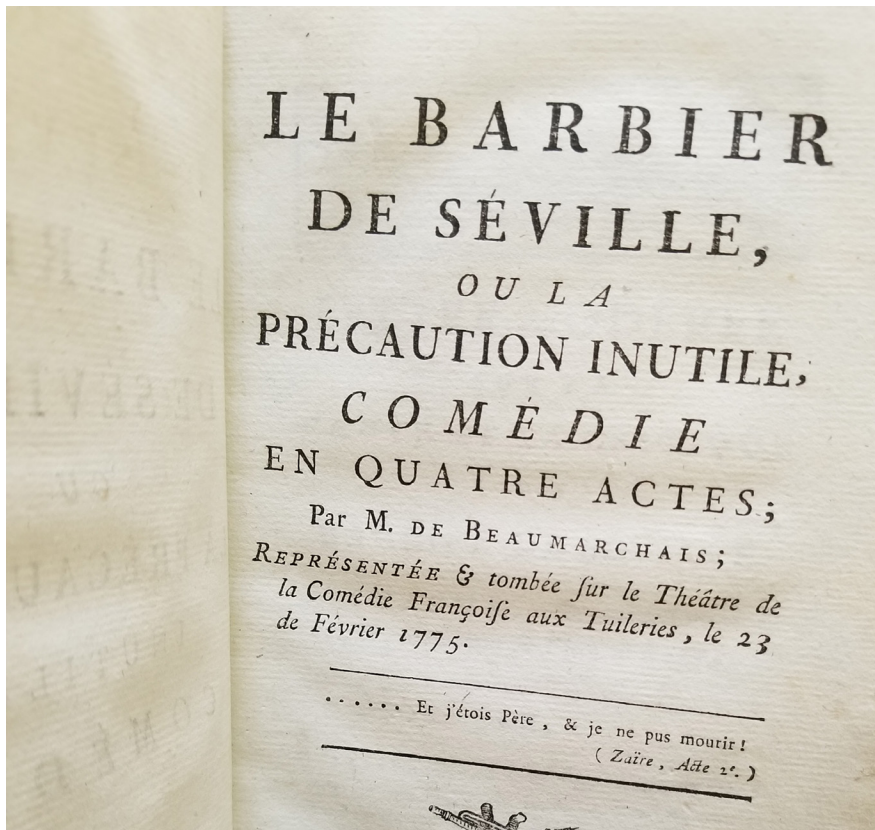
Berta comments on the crazy household. Bartolo summons Basilio, telling him to bring a notary so that Bartolo can marry Rosina right away. Bartolo then shows Rosina the letter she wrote to Lindoro, calling it proof that Lindoro is in league with the count. Heartbroken and convinced that she has been deceived, Rosina agrees to marry Bartolo.

While a thunderstorm rages outside, Figaro and Almaviva climb a ladder to Rosina’s balcony. Rosina appears and confronts Lindoro, who finally reveals his true identity. Basilio shows up with the notary, but bribed and threatened, he agrees to be a witness to the marriage of Rosina and Almaviva. Bartolo arrives with soldiers, but it is too late. He accepts that he has been beaten, and Figaro, Rosina, and the count celebrate this happy ending.

The Source

THE PLAY *THE BARBER OF SEVILLE* BY PIERRE-AUGUSTIN CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS

The three “Figaro” plays by Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais were among the most popular comedies of the late-18th century, and they remain among the very few theatrical works of the era that are still performed today. The first, *The Barber of Seville*, premiered in 1775. Both the play itself and the character Figaro were tremendously popular, and Beaumarchais soon set about writing two more plays featuring the same cast of characters: *The Marriage of Figaro* (first performed in 1784) and *The Guilty Mother* (1792). Within a few years of *The Barber of Seville*’s premiere, composers had already begun to adapt Beaumarchais’s comedies for the operatic stage; one of the most famous examples is Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*, 1786). Yet Figaro was, from the very beginning, steeped in music. Beaumarchais first wrote *The Barber of Seville* as a comic opera; when an impresario rejected this version, he set about writing the play. Even in the spoken comedy, opera looms large. Beaumarchais’s Rosine is a singer, performing in a fictional opera called *The Useless Precaution*. Rossini and his librettist Cesare Sterbini, aware of this history, referenced it in their own opera: During her singing lesson with Don Alonso, Rosina says that she will sing “an aria from *La Precauzione Inutile*,” the Italian name for *The Useless Precaution*.



FUN FACT

Rossini’s name may be found today not only on opera playbills but also on menus and in cookbooks. “Tournedos Rossini,” a tower of toasted buttered bread, filet mignon, hot foie gras, sliced truffle, and a rich sauce, was devised by French chefs in the 19th century in homage to the great musical and culinary master.

Timeline

THE CREATION OF *IL BARBIERE DI SIVIGLIA*

1775

The Barber of Seville, a comic play by Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, is premiered in Paris. The main characters, including Count Almaviva, Rosina, and the titular barber, Figaro, will appear again in two later plays by Beaumarchais: *The Marriage of Figaro* (1784) and *The Guilty Mother* (1792).

1786

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's opera *Le Nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*), based on Beaumarchais's second "Figaro" play, premieres in Vienna. By this time, Figaro is recognized and adored from Paris to Saint Petersburg, thanks in no small part to four other operas based on *The Barber of Seville* that have appeared since the premiere of Beaumarchais's work.

1792

Gioachino Rossini is born on February 29 in Pesaro, a town on the Adriatic coast of Italy. Both of his parents are musicians: His father plays horn, and his mother is an opera singer.

1804

The Rossini family moves to Bologna. Young Gioachino, a talented musician who already enjoys an active career as a performer, begins formal studies in composition. Soon, he will begin composing individual arias for operas being performed in the area.

1810

Rossini's first opera, a short farce, premieres in Venice. Although his next opera will not be performed until October 1811, Rossini's career soon gains tremendous momentum, and he writes seven more operas in the next 16 months.

1813

Two operas, premiered in February and May, give Rossini his first taste of international fame. One of these, *L'Italiana in Algeri* (*The Italian Girl in Algeria*), is still regularly performed today.

1816

On February 20, Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*) premieres at the Teatro Argentina in Rome. The opera, with a libretto by Cesare Sterbini, is prepared in a matter of weeks—some sources maintain that Rossini composed the music in a mere nine days!—and the opening night performance is a flop. In August, following slight revisions, the opera appears again, this time in Bologna and to thunderous acclaim.

1817

Riding the wave of success of the Bologna performance, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* is performed in eight more cities in Italy, as well as in Barcelona. The opera's popularity continues to expand: The following year, it will be performed no fewer than 22 times in London. A year after that, it graces the stage in Berlin. Soon, it will have been performed in cities as diverse as Vienna, Edinburgh, Saint Petersburg, and New York.

1824

By the age of 32, Rossini has written 34 operas and enjoys international acclaim of staggering proportions. In a biography of Rossini published the following year, the French novelist Stendhal writes of him that "Napoleon is dead, but a new conqueror is now spoken of from Moscow to Naples, from London to Vienna, from Paris to Calcutta." Rossini officially relocates to Paris.

1825

Il Barbiere di Siviglia becomes the first opera ever performed in Italian in New York City.

1829

Rossini's final opera, *Guillaume Tell* (*William Tell*) premieres in Paris. Following this, Rossini falls silent; for the remaining four decades of his life, he will never write another large-scale opera. Instead, he turns his attention and accumulated wealth to cooking and exchanging recipes with famous chefs.

1868

On February 10, the 500th performance of *Guillaume Tell* takes place with great fanfare at the Paris Opera. A few months later, on November 13, Rossini dies at his villa in the Parisian suburb of Passy. He is buried at Père-Lachaise cemetery in Paris.

1887

Two decades after Rossini's death, his widow, Olympe, transports his remains to Italy. In May, they are reinterred at the church of Santa Croce in Florence, where his final resting place may still be visited today.

Deep Dive

FIGARO AND THE OPERA BUFFA REVOLUTION

“Figaro killed off the nobility,” the French politician George Danton once declared. Figaro is “a revolution in action,” proclaimed Napoleon Bonaparte. And even though Marie Antoinette herself had played Rosine in Beaumarchais’s play *The Barber of Seville*, her husband, King Louis XVI of France, would soon quip that “the Bastille would have to be pulled down” before its sequel could be performed. By the time Rossini was born, in 1792, the Bastille had indeed fallen. The French Revolution was in its third bloody year, and Europe was reeling. Millennia-old social structures, predicated upon highly codified class relationships, were quickly eroding as new ideas about equality and citizenship sent seismic shocks through the political landscape.

But why would the political giants of the age, from Louis XVI to Napoleon, single out Figaro (both the character and the play) as exceptionally revolutionary? In fact, the history of opera itself offers a clue. Since the advent of opera around 1600, this musical genre had been the exclusive entertainment of the wealthy classes. Its characters were gods, mythological heroes, and the august figures of ancient Greece and Rome. Suddenly, in the middle of the 18th century, a new subgenre burst forth. This opera buffa (“comic opera,” in contrast to the earlier opera seria or “serious opera”) not only depicted low-class characters such as maids, servants, and barbers, but even portrayed these lowly characters outwitting their rich employers. At first, such comedies, which turned the established social order on its head, were enjoyed as benign entertainment. But by the 1780s, a wildly popular play about a quick-witted barber seemed downright dangerous: It was only one year after Figaro’s first appearance that a group of rag-tag colonies in North America declared their independence from the British monarchy and founded a country on the “self-evident” principle of equality for all. By the end of the century, Louis had been beheaded, and Napoleon’s armies were marching across the globe.



Count Almaviva pursues his wife’s maid, Susanna, in a print by Daniel Nikolaus Chodowiecki, 1785.

BY PERMISSION RIJKSMUSEUM, NETHERLANDS

Rossini was no stranger to the revolutionary tendencies of the time. The Napoleonic Wars had swept across Italy during his childhood. His father, Giuseppe Rossini, was briefly jailed in 1800 for incendiary political opinions, and social unrest across the continent would continue, unabated, throughout Rossini’s life. Paris would see two more major revolts, in 1830 and 1848, while Rossini lived there. And it was not until 1861, only seven years before Rossini’s death, that a series of revolutions on the Italian peninsula would lead to the unified Italy we know today. In 1816, when Rossini’s *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* was first performed in Rome, opera buffa as a genre was nothing new. But as the world continued to grow and change, Rossini’s irresistible music gave a new voice to the barber who embodied, reflected, and even advanced the transformations of the age.

CRITICAL INQUIRY

When the character of Figaro was first created, it was considered shocking that a barber (a servant) could outsmart noble characters. Can you think of any operas, plays, musicals, or other works of art that make a political statement? If you were to make a work of art (in any medium) expressing a political idea, what would it be?

Deep Dive

PLAYWRIGHT, WATCHMAKER, SOLDIER, SPY



Portrait of Beaumarchais, by Augustin de Saint-Aubin, after Charles Nicolas Cochin II, 1773

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

The madcap adventures of Figaro and Count Almaviva may seem larger than life, but they are well matched by the real-life experiences of the playwright known as Beaumarchais. Born in Paris as Pierre-Auguste Caron in 1732, the writer began life as a humble apprentice watchmaker, yet by his death in 1797, he was a celebrated dramatist with a noble title, having won, lost, and regained a fortune and passed through prison, exile, and three marriages in the meantime.

Like Figaro, Caron knew how to take advantage of every opportunity. In the 1760s, he successfully maneuvered himself into the royal court of King Louis XV after an advantageous first marriage to the widow Madame Franquet. Like many members of the aspiring middle class, Caron purchased a noble title, renaming himself “Beaumarchais” after one of his wife’s estates. Once in court, Beaumarchais made a surprising pivot from watchmaking to music (teaching the king’s daughters to play the harp), and his royal duties would ultimately include supplying water to the city of Paris and acting as an adviser for the king’s foreign affairs. In fact, this last title was a cover for his real position as a royalist secret agent: Beaumarchais traveled to London and Germany on dangerous missions to defend the King’s honor, and he even ran guns to the American rebels during the Revolutionary War.

Yet Beaumarchais’s lifetime was marked by huge social and political changes in France, and he had to think fast to stay on the good side of the ever-changing French authorities. During the French Revolution, Beaumarchais allied himself with the people’s (i.e., anti-royal) cause, spending almost all of his fortune on military weapons for revolutionary volunteers. Yet his past royal ties caused the playwright to fall under suspicion, and during the Reign of Terror he spent time in prison, narrowly avoiding the guillotine before fleeing in exile to Britain and Germany. It is still unclear how Beaumarchais escaped beheading—but then again, all spies have their secrets.

KEEP LEARNING

If you’d like to learn more about Beaumarchais’s life and literary output, check out the Oxford World’s Classics edition of *The Figaro Trilogy* (translated by David Coward). In addition to all three plays, this publication features an excellent introduction, with copious information about Beaumarchais, a scholarly discussion of each of the plays, and excellent historical context for the work.

Deep Dive

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

And they all lived happily ever after ... or did they? Figaro, Count Almaviva, and Rosina reappear in Beaumarchais's sequel *The Marriage of Figaro* (1784), a play adapted into an opera by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Lorenzo Da Ponte in 1789. Although *The Marriage of Figaro* is set only a few years after *The Barber of Seville*, this play reveals profound changes in the relationships between the lead characters.

The play takes place on the sumptuous Almaviva estate, where the Count's previously close friendship with Figaro has transformed into an intense rivalry—because the Count has his eye on Figaro's fiancée, Susanna (who is also Rosina's maid). Gone is the remarkable ability to work together that master and servant once displayed, since Figaro is disgusted by the Count's treatment of not



MARTY SOHL/MET OPERA

Rosina of Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and the Countess Almaviva of Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* are the same character from Beaumarchais's plays before and after marriage. Pictured here, Isabel Leonard is Rosina and Emma Bell the Countess.

frictions in the Almaviva household also stem from a deeper social struggle. Figaro and Susanna's cunning triumph over the Count, Almaviva's unsympathetic qualities, and the Countess's lack of agency each suggest that the power of the old nobility is finally over. The heroes of the hour arrive at success through their inner worth, not the situation of their birth.

Beaumarchais completed the Almaviva trilogy with *The Guilty Mother* (1792), a darker play adapted into an opera by Darius and Madeleine Milhaud in 1966. Yet many other artists have also imagined how the story ends. For two modern (and sometimes surprising) takes on the fates of each character during the French Revolution, check out John Corigliano and William Hoffman's *The Ghosts of Versailles*, which premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in 1991, or Elena Langer and David Pountney's *Figaro Gets a Divorce*, premiered by Welsh National Opera in 2016.

CRITICAL INQUIRY

Imagine you've been hired to write a sequel to *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*: What would happen? How might Almaviva and Rosina's relationship develop? Would Figaro learn any new skills? And what might Dr. Bartolo and Don Basilio do with their time?

only Susanna but also the other women in his household. Rosina, now the Countess, finds herself trapped in this unhappy marriage and needs Figaro's and Susanna's help to teach her husband a lesson—even though the Countess might also have her eye on a younger man ...

The lesson at the end of the play appears to be that forgiveness can always triumph over infidelity. Yet the