La Cenerentola

Dramma giocoso in two acts
Libretto by Jacopo Ferretti, after Charles Perrault’s Cendrillon and librettos by Charles Guillaume Étienne and Francesco Fiorini

Saturday, May 9, 2009, 12:30–3:30pm

Last time this season

The production of La Cenerentola was made possible by a generous gift from Alberto Vilar.
The Metropolitan Opera
2008–09 Season

The 32nd Metropolitan Opera performance of
Gioachino Rossini’s

La Cenerentola

Conductor
Maurizio Benini

IN ORDER OF VOCAL APPEARANCE

Clorinda, Don Magnifico’s daughter
Rachelle Durkin*

Tisbe, Don Magnifico’s other daughter
Patricia Risley

Angelina, known as Cinderella, Don Magnifico’s stepdaughter
Elina Garanča

Alidoro, former advisor of Don Ramiro and an angel in several guises
John Relyea

Don Magnifico, Baron of Monte Fiascone
Alessandro Corbelli

Don Ramiro, Prince of Salerno
Lawrence Brownlee

Dandini, Ramiro’s valet
Simone Alberghini

RECPITATIVE ACCOMPANIST
Robert Myers

Saturday, May 9, 2009, 12:30–3:30pm
This afternoon’s performance is being transmitted live in high definition to movie theaters worldwide. *The Met: Live in HD* is generously supported by the Neubauer Family Foundation.

Elina Garanča as Angelina in a scene from Rossini’s *La Cenerentola*

Chorus Master  Donald Palumbo  
Musical Preparation  Joan Dornemann, Robert Myers, Jane Klaviter, J. David Jackson, Caren Levine, and Hemdi Kfir  
Assistant Stage Directors  Eric Einhorn and Daniel Rigazzi  
Prompter  Jane Klaviter  
Met Titles  Sonya Friedman  
Stylistic Advisor  Philip Gossett  
Scenery, properties, and electrical props constructed and painted in *Metropolitan Opera Shops*  
Costumes executed by *Metropolitan Opera Costume Department*  
Wigs created by *Metropolitan Opera Wig Department*  
Ladies’ millinery by *Rodney Gordon*  

*La Cenerentola* is performed in the critical edition by Alberto Zedda and Philip Gossett, Fondazione Rossini, Pesaro, in cooperation with Casa Ricordi, Milan  

This performance is made possible in part by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts.  

*This production uses fire effects.*  

Before the performance begins, please switch off cell phones and other electronic devices.  

Yamaha is the official piano of the Metropolitan Opera.  

Latecomers will not be admitted during the performance.  

* Graduate of the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program  

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Act I

In fairy-tale times, Clorinda and Tisbe, daughters of Don Magnifico, are in the middle of one of their usual arguments. Their stepsister Angelina, who is called Cenerentola and serves as the family maid, sings her favorite song, about a king who married a common girl (“Una volta c’era un rè”). Suddenly Alidoro, tutor to the prince Don Ramiro, enters, dressed as a beggar. The stepsisters want to send him away, but Cenerentola gives him bread and coffee. Courtiers announce that Ramiro will soon pay a visit: he is looking for the most beautiful girl in the land and will hold a ball to choose his bride. Magnifico hopes that it will be one of the stepsisters: marriage to a wealthy man is the only way to save the family fortune. When everybody has left, Ramiro enters alone, dressed in his servant’s clothes so he can freely observe the prospective brides. Cenerentola returns, and the two are immediately attracted to each other (Duet: “Un soave non so che”). He asks her who she is, and Cenerentola, confused, tries to explain, then runs away. Finally, the “prince” arrives—in fact Ramiro’s valet, Dandini, in disguise. Magnifico, Clorinda, and Tisbe fall over themselves flattering him, and he invites them to the ball. Cenerentola asks to be taken along but Magnifico refuses (Quintet: “Signor, una parola”). Ramiro notes how badly Cenerentola is treated. Alidoro says there should be a third daughter in the house but Magnifico claims she has died. Left alone with Cenerentola, Alidoro tells her he will take her to the ball and explains that God will reward her good heart (“Là del ciel nell’arcano profondo”).

Dandini shares his negative opinion of the two sisters with the prince. But both men are confused, since Alidoro has spoken well of one of Magnifico’s daughters. Clorinda and Tisbe appear again, following Dandini, who still pretends to be the prince. When he offers Ramiro as a husband to the sister the prince does not marry, they are outraged at the idea of marrying a servant. Alidoro enters
with a beautiful unknown lady who, strangely, resembles Cenerentola. Unable to make sense of the situation, they all sit down to supper, feeling as if they are in a dream.

Act II
Magnifico fears that the arrival of the stranger could ruin his daughters’ chances to marry the prince (“Sia qualunque delle figlie”). Cenerentola, tired of being pursued by Dandini, tells him that she is in love with his servant. Overhearing this, Ramiro is overjoyed and steps forward. Cenerentola, however, tells him that she will return home and doesn’t want him to follow her. If he really cares for her, she says, he will find her. The prince resolves to win the mysterious girl (“Si, ritrovarla io giuro”).

Meanwhile Magnifico, who still thinks that Dandini is the prince, confronts him, insisting that he decide which of his daughters he will marry. When Dandini reveals that he is in fact the prince’s servant, Magnifico is furious (Duet: “Un segreto d’importanza”).

Magnifico and the sisters return home in a bad mood and order Cenerentola, again in rags, to prepare supper. During a thunderstorm, Alidoro arranges for Ramiro’s carriage to break down in front of Magnifico’s mansion so that the prince has to take refuge inside. Cenerentola and Ramiro recognize each other, as everybody comments on the situation (Sextet: “Siete voi?”). Ramiro threatens Magnifico and his daughters, who are unwilling to accept defeat, but Cenerentola asks him to forgive them.

At the prince’s palace, Ramiro and Cenerentola celebrate their wedding. Magnifico tries to win the favor of the new princess, but she asks only to be acknowledged at last as his daughter. Born to misfortune, she has seen her life change and declares that the days of sitting by the fire are over (“Nacqui all’affanno...Non più mesta”).
Premiere: Teatro Valle, Rome, 1817
The story is simple: a young woman is denigrated by her own family but ultimately exalted by a prince who sees her true value. Rossini’s operatic version of the Cinderella tale (“Cenerentola” in Italian) is charming, beautiful, touching in parts, and dramatically convincing. Jacopo Ferretti—on a tight schedule, juggling gigs with various theater managers, and contending with censors—resorted to a cut-and-paste method, pulling from a number of sources for his libretto. Though hastily assembled, the result was something new and well suited to Rossini’s special talents. Instead of the fairy godmother of the familiar version, the character of Alidoro (“wings of gold”) is introduced, a figure who manipulates the action and seems to possess magic qualities, though he is unmistakably human. Indeed, the story is less about magic and more about human nature. The opera, as a result, transcends its roots as a children’s tale in its humane and fundamentally realistic approach, making the title heroine’s transformation one of character rather than stereotype.

The Creators
During his lifetime, Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868) was the world’s foremost opera composer. He wrote more than 30 operas, both comic and tragic, before inexplicably stopping opera composition in 1829, at the age of 37, after his success with the grand Guillaume Tell (best known today for its overture). Rossini’s operas have always been admired for their charm, musical polish, and opportunity for extravagant vocalism. It is only within the past few decades that they have once again been recognized for their sophistication and dramatic insights. The libretto for La Cenerentola was provided by Jacopo Ferretti (1784–1852), a poet who also supplied librettos for Donizetti and other composers. Charles Perrault (1628–1703) penned the most famous version of the Cinderella story, in his still-popular collection Tales of Mother Goose, adding such now-popular features as the pumpkin carriage and the fairy godmother, neither of which appears in previous versions.

The Setting
Unlike most other versions, the opera places the story in a real locale, with the prince not a generic Prince Charming, but the prince of Salerno, an ancient seaside town in southern Italy.
The Music

The score of La Cenerentola seethes with the elegant buoyancy that is the hallmark of Rossini’s style. The solo parts require astounding vocal abilities, though the pyrotechnics always serve a larger dramatic purpose. The beautiful line with which the prince introduces his duet with Cenerentola, “Un soave non so che,” is a variation and expansion of the simple “Once upon a time…” ditty she sings in her first entrance. He is, quite literally, her dream come true. There is also genuine pathos, notably in the stately aria “Là del ciel nell’arcano profondo,” in which the bass consoles Cenerentola with the promise of divine justice. Great comedy, an area in which Rossini stands supreme, runs throughout the score. It is most apparent in the dexterous patter of the duet for two basses in Act II. The art of ensemble writing is another realm in which Rossini proved himself a master: his ensembles are reflections on a moment frozen in time, which examine a feeling, idea, or situation from every conceivable angle. Two remarkable examples are Act I’s “Signor, una parola,” when Cenerentola begs to go to the ball, and especially “Questo è un nodo,” the “ensemble of confusion” preceding the finale, in which each character tries to untangle the baffling knot of the situation with a florid vocal phrase. The final word, however, belongs to the title character, who concludes the evening with the solo “Nacqui all’affanno.” This musical depiction of latent heroism bursting out of the humblest character is an elegant encapsulation of the power of this archetypal fairy tale.

La Cenerentola at the Met

The opera had its Met premiere in 1997 in the current production, with James Levine leading a superb cast including Cecilia Bartoli, Ramón Vargas, and Alessandro Corbelli in his company debut. (The opera had previously been given 56 times by the short-lived Metropolitan Opera National Company, including six performances at the New York State Theater.) La Cenerentola has been revived in recent seasons with such singers as Olga Borodina, Sonia Ganassi, and Jennifer Larmore in the title role and Juan Diego Flórez, John Relyea, and Simone Alaimo in other parts.

To commemorate the event, Jacopo Ferretti, *La Cenerentola*’s librettist, composed a “tragedy,” *Jacopo*, in which the ghosts of two poets (including Giuseppe Petrosellini, the librettist of Paisiello’s earlier *Barbiere*) are summoned to judge Ferretti’s sins. First, triviality—the servant–prince Dandini compares himself to a “cavolo,” or cabbage. Next, anachronism—Ferretti names a 19th-century Roman madhouse in a story set in Salerno in an earlier period. And finally, blasphemy—Cupid is named “il guercetto amore,” the squinting God of Love. The fictitious Jacopo pleads in vain: it’s only an opera buffa. As punishment, he is forced to listen to an opera seria libretto by a rival, Michelangelo Prunetti. One stanza suffices. “Barbarous Rome! What a volley of stones! I die,” Jacopo laments, falling senseless.

Such spirited literary hijinks reflect only a momentary setback in the history of *La Cenerentola* (“Cinderella, or Goodness Triumphant”). By the end of the first season, the work had enchanted the Romans, as Rossini predicted it would. It is one of his few operas to remain in print and, with the exception of a period around the beginning of the 20th century, to have been performed regularly. Its popularity today dates from the legendary production by Jean-Pierre Ponnelle at Milan’s La Scala in 1973, conducted by Claudio Abbado.

We have the prudishness of Roman censors to thank for the existence of *La Cenerentola*. Rossini had originally planned a comic opera to a libretto by his previous collaborator Gaetano Rossi, based on a French farce that Ferretti—hardly impartial—described as “one of the least moral comedies of the French theater.” So many changes were demanded by the censors that Rossini asked Ferretti to choose a new subject. On December 23, 1816, they agreed on *La Cenerentola*; a little more than a month later, the opera had its premiere.

Both composer and librettist had help in achieving this minor miracle. Ferretti turned to earlier librettos derived from Charles Perrault’s fairy tale, especially the 1814 *Agatina, o La Virtù Premiata* by Francesco Fiorini, with music by Stefano Pavesi. The absence of magical elements like pumpkins, talking cats, mice, lizards, and fairy godmothers in Ferretti’s libretto simply repeats the similar situation in Fiorini’s version. The absence of a glass slipper, on the other hand, is attributable to the inevitable Roman censors: no bare feet, please—bracelets will do. (These were the same censors who insisted that Otello and Desdemona reconcile at the end of Rossini’s *Otello*.)

In composing the music to *La Cenerentola*, Rossini chose as a collaborator Luca Agolini, a Roman musician of some repute. Agolini wrote the secco recitative and three numbers: an aria for the prince’s tutor, Alidoro; a chorus to open the second act; and an aria for one of the sisters, Clorinda. Alidoro’s aria was replaced by Rossini himself in 1821–22 with a new piece for the same
character, “Là del ciel nell’arcano profondo.” Both the chorus and the Clorinda aria disappeared from the score early on. Except for the secco recitative, then, all the music performed here is Rossini’s. With two exceptions, all of it was newly composed for La Cenerentola in that frenetic January. Only the sinfonia was borrowed from La Gazzetta, a comic opera Rossini had just written for Naples, and Cinderella’s final rondo, the most famous piece of the score, is derived from Il Barbiere di Siviglia.

The history of this rondo is interesting. Rossini wrote a difficult aria, “Cessa di più resistere,” for the great tenor Emanuele García, the original Count Almaviva, for the conclusion of Il Barbiere di Siviglia. His first Rosina, Geltrude Righetti-Giorgi, clearly liked the piece. In the next series of performances of Il Barbiere, given in Bologna during the spring of 1816, it recurs, but sung by Rosina, again Righetti-Giorgi. And who was the original Cinderella? Righetti-Giorgi, of course. Who could resist the wiles of a prima donna assoluta?

Later, in the second half of the 19th century, La Cenerentola was subject to violent manipulations, together with many of Rossini’s operas. The orchestration was altered to bring it into line with later works. Rossini’s occasional use of a single trombone yielded to the oppressive presence of three trombones; two horns became four; percussion was sprinkled everywhere (there is no percussion in Rossini’s opera). In the original score two musicians alternate between playing flutes and piccolos; in the late-19th-century version, the piccolos are silenced, and the main tune of Cinderella’s rondo is announced by a flute.

There were changes to the vocal parts as well. Rossini wrote florid melodic lines for Cinderella, Ramiro, and Dandini, but even with access to his manuscript it can be difficult to be certain what notes he had in mind. Late-19th-century editors, who didn’t have the option of consulting the sources, invented what can only be called the most extraordinary nonsense, causing generations of singers to question their own sanity or that of the composer. In fact, while Rossini’s music is difficult to sing, it is always logical.

In the early 1970s, Alberto Zedda prepared the first edition of La Cenerentola based on Rossini’s autograph manuscript, housed today at the Accademia Filarmonica di Bologna. Only since then has it been possible to hear the opera again in a form Rossini would have recognized. That edition, prepared for republication by the present writer for the Fondazione Rossini of Pesaro, appeared in the Edizione critica delle opere di Gioachino Rossini. The edition of the Fondazione was presented for the first time in 1997 at the Metropolitan Opera with the premiere of this production and is the one performed here.

My favorite error in earlier editions is in Don Magnifico’s cavatina in Act I, where Cinderella’s stepfather, narrating the contents of his remarkable dream, complains to his daughters about the racket they’ve made: “Col cì cì, ciù ciù di botto mi faceste risvegliar” (“With your ‘cì cì, ciù ciù’ you suddenly woke me up”). Rossini’s differentiated nonsense syllables (“cì cì, ciù ciù”) were mistakenly printed as “cì cì cì cì,” and when Don Magnifico should let loose his repeated
sequence of “col ci ci, col ciù ciù,” he was forced instead to declaim again and again “col ci ci, col ci ci.” Ask any singer which version is more humane.

Finally, a word about cuts. Through much of the 20th century it was common practice to eliminate repeated passages in Rossini operas. Those passages, however, are intended to be opportunities for singers to introduce ornamentation. Rossini actually left a manuscript of variations that he prepared for a singer to use in the final rondo of La Cenerentola. While adopting Rossini’s added ornamentation is never obligatory for a modern singer (who must have the freedom to develop ornamentation appropriate to his or her voice), Rossini’s own suggestions for the rondo are made available for the first time through the critical edition.

La Cenerentola is one of Rossini’s most thoroughly delightful works. Rooted solidly in the opera buffa tradition, it also allows ample room for sentiment and wonder. The transformation (musically and dramatically) of Cinderella from her fireside home and her simple nursery song, “Una volta c’era un rè,” to the royal palace and luxuriant coloratura is lovely to behold. And what characters surround her: Don Magnifico, one of Rossini’s most fully realized buffo roles; the two chattering sisters; Dandini, the servant as prince, whose gross imitation of the style of his master is hilarious; and the prince himself, a dashing figure who actually gets to sing a love duet with Cenerentola—which is more than Lindoro and Isabella or Almaviva and Rosina are allowed.

While La Cenerentola shares with L’Italiana in Algeri and Il Barbiere di Siviglia much of the exuberance of Rossini’s style, its treatment of the heroine reveals a range of emotions that makes Rossini’s opera a precursor of the sentimental comedies for which Donizetti is renowned. —Philip Gossett
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The Cast

Maurizio Benini
CONDUCTOR (FAENZA, ITALY)

THIS SEASON  L’Elisir d’Amore and La Cenerentola at the Met, La Sonnambula in Cagliari, Aida in Palermo, and L’Elisir d’Amore at the Glyndebourne Festival.


CAREER HIGHLIGHTS  He made his conducting debut at the Teatro Comunale di Bologna with Rossini’s Il Signor Bruschino, and his La Scala debut in 1992 with La Donna del Lago (where he has since led Don Carlo, Pagliacci, Don Pasquale, Rigoletto, and La Sonnambula). He has also conducted La Scala di Seta, L’Occasione fa il Ladro, and Le Siège de Corinthe at Pesaro’s Rossini Opera Festival; Zelmira at the Edinburgh Festival; Attila, Luisa Miller, Faust, and La Traviata at Covent Garden; and Don Carlo in Barcelona. He was principal conductor of the Filarmonici of the Teatro Comunale di Bologna from 1984 to 1991 and principal conductor of the Wexford Festival from 1995 to 1997.

Elina Garanča
MEZZO-SOPRANO (RIGA, LATVIA)

THIS SEASON  Angelina in La Cenerentola at the Met, Romeo in I Capuleti e i Montecchi at Covent Garden, Charlotte in Werther and Octavian in Der Rosenkavalier with the Vienna State Opera, Charlotte with Munich’s Bavarian State Opera, Marguerite in La Damnation de Faust in Geneva, and Carmen this summer at Rome’s Terme di Caracalla.

MET APPEARANCES  Rosina in Il Barbiere di Siviglia (debut, 2008).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS  Adalgisa in Norma with the Vienna State Opera and in Munich, Dorabella in Così fan tutte and Cherubino in Le Nozze di Figaro with the Vienna State Opera, Sesto in La Clemenza di Tito at Vienna’s Theater an der Wien, Annio in La Clemenza di Tito and Dorabella at the Salzburg Festival, and Dorabella at Covent Garden, the Aix-en-Provence Festival, and Paris Opera. She has also sung Angelina at Paris’s Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, Sesto with the Paris Opera, and Giovanna Seymour in Anna Bolena with the Finnish National Opera.
The Cast continued

Simone Alberghini
BASS-BARITONE (BOLOGNA, ITALY)

THIS SEASON Dandini in La Cenerentola at the Met; Athanaël in Thaïs in Turin; the Four Villains in Les Contes d’Hoffmann in Madrid, Toulouse, and Tel Aviv; and Gottardo Podestà in Rossini’s La Gazza Ladra in Bologna.

MET APPEARANCES Dandini (debut, 2005).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS He has sung Dandini at the Glyndebourne Festival and at Washington’s Kennedy Center, Escamillo in Carmen in Taormina, Athanaël with Kentucky Opera, Don Alfonso in Così fan tutte with the Berlin State Opera (Unter den Linden), Raimondo in Lucia di Lammermoor in Avignon, Don Basilio in Il Barbiere di Siviglia and Capulet in Roméo et Juliette with the Los Angeles Opera, Banquo in Macbeth at La Scala, Ramfis in Aida with the Vienna State Opera, Leporello in Don Giovanni at Japan’s Saito Kinen Festival, and Figaro in Le Nozze di Figaro, Don Alfonso, and Dandini with Washington National Opera.

Lawrence Brownlee
TENOR (YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO)

THIS SEASON Don Ramiro in La Cenerentola at the Met, Lindoro in L’Italiana in Algeri in Philadelphia and Trieste, Giannetto in La Gazza Ladra in Bologna, Nemorino in L’Elisir d’Amore and Idrino in Semiramide at the Caramoor Festival, and Count Almaviva in Il Barbiere di Siviglia at the Vienna State Opera, Berlin State Opera (Unter den Linden), and in Hamburg, Dresden, and Baden-Baden.

MET APPEARANCES Count Almaviva (debut, 2007).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Count Almaviva at La Scala and San Diego Opera, Libenskof in Il Viaggio a Reims in Brussels, Lindoro with the Seattle Opera, and Don Ramiro in Philadelphia, Houston, Dresden, and Trieste. He has also been heard in concert with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Los Angeles Philharmonic.
Alessandro Corbelli  
BARITONE (TURIN, ITALY)

THIS SEASON  Don Magnifico in La Cenerentola at the Met, Dr. Dulcamara in L’Elisir d’Amore with the San Francisco Opera, Don Geronio in Il Turco in Italia in Copenhagen, and Bartolo in Il Barbiere di Siviglia at Covent Garden.

MET APPEARANCES  The title role of Gianni Schicchi in Il Trittico, Dandini in La Cenerentola (debut, 1997), Sulpice in La Fille du Régiment, Taddeo in L’Italiana in Algeri, and Dr. Dulcamara.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS  Don Magnifico at Covent Garden, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Paris’s Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, and the Glyndebourne Festival; Don Geronio with Munich’s Bavarian State Opera; Falstaff at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées; Sulpice at La Scala and Covent Garden; Gianni Schicchi at the Paris Opera and the Glyndebourne Festival; Leporello in Don Giovanni at the Rome Opera; Don Alfonso in Così fan tutte and Taddeo at the Paris Opera; Dandini at La Scala; and Don Geronio and Don Pasquale at Covent Garden.

John Relyea  
BASS-BARITONE (TORONTO, CANADA)

THIS SEASON  Méphistophélès in La Damnation de Faust and Alidoro in La Cenerentola at the Met, Bluebeard’s Castle with the Seattle Opera, and Norma in concert with Rome’s Santa Cecilia Orchestra.

MET APPEARANCES  Raimondo in Lucia di Lammermoor, Banquo in Macbeth, Alidoro (debut, 2000), Figaro in Le Nozze di Figaro, Garibaldo in Rodelinda, Colline in La Bohème, Giorgio Walton in I Puritani, the Night Watchman in Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, Don Basilio in Il Barbiere di Siviglia, and Masetto in Don Giovanni.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS  The Four Villains in Les Contes d’Hoffmann and Escamillo in Carmen at the Vienna State Opera, Figaro in Le Nozze di Figaro in Munich, Nick Shadow in The Rake’s Progress and Banquo at Covent Garden, Escamillo in Carmen at Paris’s Bastille Opera, and Cadmus/Somnus in Semele, Colline, and Raimondo at Covent Garden and with the San Francisco Opera. He is the 2009 recipient of the Beverly Sills Award.
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