WHAT TO EXPECT FROM L’ITALIANA IN ALGERI

THERE ARE NO BLUSHING DAMSELS IN DISTRESS HERE—THIS IS ONE “ITALIAN GIRL” WHO knows how to get what she wants. The women of Rossini comedies stand in stark contrast to many stereotypes about women in opera: they sing richly and beautifully, but they also drive the action, lead the musical ensembles, and end the show in triumphant glory. All of this is accomplished to music of sparkling brilliance, hummable melodies, and intricate showpieces in which everything fits together like clockwork, even as it depicts a world turned upside down.

The Met’s production of Rossini’s L’Italiana in Algeri is by the great Rossini advocate Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, a champion for these comedies in the early years of their restoration to their original early 19th-century forms. The production focuses on a central courtyard as the single set, which transforms quickly from the site of a shipwreck to interior apartments, to the main space of the Bey’s palace, a flexible and witty backdrop that eliminates any dead time for set changes. Ponnelle’s designs, whether in set, costumes, or staging, are always directly responsive to the music, and make vividly clear the interlocking lines of the ensembles and the complex alliances and relationships that shift throughout the opera.

This guide is intended to help your students see beneath the surface of this comedy and experience it as more than just a fun bit of entertainment. By exploring the historical background of the opera and the way it is constructed, students will gain an understanding of Rossini’s comedy and what it has to say about romance—but also about freedom, respect, and the value of keeping one’s word. The information on the following pages is designed to provide context, deepen background knowledge, and enrich the overall experience of attending a final dress rehearsal at the Metropolitan Opera.

THE WORK:

L’ITALIANA IN ALGERI
An opera in 2 acts, sung in Italian
Music by Gioachino Rossini
Libretto by Angelo Anelli
First performed May 22, 1813
at the Teatro San Benedetto, Venice, Italy

PRODUCTION
James Levine, Conductor
Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, Production
Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, Set and Costume Designer
David Reppa, Associate Designer

STARRING
in order of vocal appearance
Ying Fang
ELVIRA (soprano)
Ildar Abdrazakov
MUSTAFÀ (bass)
René Barbera
LINDORO (tenor)
Elizabeth DeShong
ISABELLA (mezzo-soprano)
Nicola Alaimo
TADDEO (baritone)

Production a gift of an anonymous donor

The Metropolitan Opera is a vibrant home for the most creative and talented singers, conductors, composers, musicians, stage directors, designers, visual artists, choreographers, and dancers from around the world.

The Metropolitan Opera was founded in 1883, with its first opera house built on Broadway and 39th Street by a group of wealthy businessmen who wanted their own theater. In the company’s early years, the management changed course several times, first performing everything in Italian (even Carmen and Lohengrin), then everything in German (even Aida and Faust), before finally settling into a policy of performing most works in their original language.

Almost from the beginning, it was clear that the opera house on 39th Street did not have adequate stage facilities. But it was not until the Met joined with other New York institutions in forming Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts that a new home became possible. The new Metropolitan Opera House, which opened at Lincoln Center in September of 1966, was equipped with the finest technical facilities of the day.

Each season the Met stages more than 200 opera performances in New York. More than 800,000 people attend the performances in the opera house during the season, and millions more experience the Met through new media distribution initiatives and state-of-the-art technology.
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This guide includes several sections with a variety of background material on L’Italiana in Algiers:
- The Source, The Story, and Who’s Who in L’Italiana in Algiers
- A Timeline: The historical context of the opera’s story and composition
- A Closer Look: A brief article highlighting an important aspect of Rossini’s L’Italiana in Algiers
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- Student Critique: A performance activity, highlighting specific aspects of this production; and topics for wrap-up discussion following students’ attendance
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- The way the opera draws on 19th-century European stereotypes of “Turkish” culture
- Rossini’s use of music to create entertaining and memorable characters
- Creative choices made by the artists of the Metropolitan Opera for this production
- The opera as a unified work of art, involving the efforts of composer, librettist, and Met artists

This guide is intended to cultivate students’ interest in L’Italiana in Algiers, whether or not they have any prior acquaintance with opera. It includes materials for students with a wide range of musical backgrounds, and seeks to encourage them to think about opera—and the performing arts as a whole—as a medium of both entertainment and creative expression.

THE STORY

At the court of the Bey in Algiers, the ruler Mustafà wants to get rid of his wife because he is bored with her. Isabella and her companion Taddeo are shipwrecked, and Mustafà is excited that the ship has brought him an Italian girl to bring some variety to his life. Isabella is sure that she can use her cleverness and skills to escape this situation, and discovers that her lost love, Lindoro, is in the palace. Lindoro is overjoyed to see Isabella, who has been searching for him, and reassures her that he is still in love with her. With the help of Lindoro and Taddeo, Isabella tricks Mustafà into ignoring the escape of all the Italians, providing a happy end for everyone—she is reunited with Lindoro, and Mustafà resolves to be content with his own wife.

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Rossini’s recycling of an existing libretto was common practice for the time, but he made a number of changes to the text. These include the striking Act 1 finale in which each character imitates a noisemaker—‘din din’ for the bells, ‘tac tac’ for a hammer, and ‘bum bum’ for the cannon; new texts for Isabella that strongly define her as a take-charge Rossinian comic heroine; and the deletion of a love duet for Isabella and Lindoro—a surprising omission and a change that makes the opera less conventional as a comedy.

SUMMARY

At the court of the Bey in Algiers, the ruler Mustafà wants to get rid of his wife because he is bored with her. Isabella and her companion Taddeo are shipwrecked, and Mustafà is excited that the ship has brought him an Italian girl to bring some variety to his life. Isabella is sure that she can use her cleverness and skills to escape this situation, and discovers that her lost love, Lindoro, is in the palace. Lindoro is overjoyed to see Isabella, who has been searching for him, and reassures her that he is still in love with her. With the help of Lindoro and Taddeo, Isabella tricks Mustafà into ignoring the escape of all the Italians, providing a happy end for everyone—she is reunited with Lindoro, and Mustafà resolves to be content with his own wife.

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SYNOPSIS

Act I  Mustafà’s palace. In Algiers, at the seaside palace of the bey Mustafà, his wife, Elvira, complains that her husband no longer loves her, her attendants reply that there is nothing she can do. Mustafà himself bursts in. Asserting he will not let women get the better of him, he sends Elvira away when she complains. Mustafà says he has tired of his wife and will give her away to Lindoro, a young Italian at the court, to marry. Then he orders Haly, a captain in his service, to provide an Italian woman for himself—someone more interesting than the girls in his harem, all of whom bore him. Lindoro longs for his own sweetheart, Isabella, whom he lost when pirates captured him. Mustafà tells him he can have Elvira, insisting she has every virtue that Lindoro, in his attempt to escape Mustafà’s marriage trap, has insisted on.

Elsewhere along the shore, a shipwreck is spotted in the distance, and Haly’s pirates rejoice at their lucky find. Isabella arrives on shore, lamenting the cruelty of a fate that has interrupted her quest for her lost fiancé, Lindoro. Though in danger, she is confident of her skill in taming men. The pirates seize Taddeo, an aging admirer of Isabella’s, and attempt to sell him into slavery, but he claims he is Isabella’s uncle and cannot leave her. When the Turks learn that both captives are Italian, they are pleased that they have found the new star for their leader’s harem. Taddeo is shocked at how casually Isabella takes this news, but after a quarrel about his jealousy, they decide that they had better face their problems together.

Elvira’s slave Zulma tries to reconcile Lindoro and her mistress to the fact that Mustafà has ordered them to marry. Mustafà promises Lindoro he may return to Italy—if he will take Elvira. Seeing no alternative, Lindoro accepts, making it clear he might not marry Elvira until after they reach Italy. Elvira, however, loves her husband and does not want to help Lindoro escape. When Haly announces the capture of an Italian woman, Mustafà gloats in anticipation and leaves to meet her. Lindoro tries to convince Elvira that she has no choice but to leave her heartless husband.

In the main hall of his palace, hailed by eunuchs as “the scourge of women,” Mustafà, his wife, Elvira, complains that she has tired of her husband and will give her away to Lindoro, a young Italian at the court, to marry. Then he orders Haly, a captain in his service, to provide an Italian woman for himself—someone more interesting than the girls in his harem, all of whom bore him. Lindoro longs for his own sweetheart, Isabella, whom he lost when pirates captured him. Mustafà tells him he can have Elvira, insisting she has every virtue that Lindoro, in his attempt to escape Mustafà’s marriage trap, has insisted on.

In her apartment, Isabella readies a celebration feast for the bey, exhorting her fellow Italians to be confident. Mustafà arrives, and Lindoro pretends to make love while Taddeo reminds Mustafà to ignore them. Dressed in Turkish garb, he sees no choice but to accept the compulsory honor. When Isabella insists that he treat his wife gently, Mustafà bursts out in annoyance, while the others wonder what to make of his anger.

Elsewhere in the palace, Haly predicts that his master is no match for an Italian woman. As Lindoro and Taddeo plan their escape, Taddeo claims that he is Isabella’s true love. Lindoro is amused but realizes he needs Taddeo’s help in dealing with Mustafà, who enters, still furious. Lindoro says Isabella actually cares very much for the bey and wants him to prove his worthiness by entering the Italian order of Pappataci—literally ‘Silent Eaters.’ Believing this to be an honor, Mustafà asks what he has to do. Simple, says Lindoro: eat, drink, and sleep all you like and ignore anything else around you. In an aside, Haly and Zulma wonder what Isabella is up to.

Act II  Elvira and various members of the court are discussing how easily the Italian woman has cowed Mustafà, giving Elvira hope of regaining his love. When Mustafà enters, however, it is to declare he will visit Isabella in her room for coffee. She comes out of her room, upset because Lindoro apparently broke faith with her by agreeing to escape with Elvira. Lindoro appears and reassures her of his loyalty. Promising a scheme for their freedom, Isabella leaves him to revel in his feelings. After he too leaves, Mustafà reappears, followed by his attendants and the terrified Taddeo, who is to be honored as the bey’s Kaimakan, or personal bodyguard, in exchange for helping secure Isabella’s affections. Dressed in Turkish garb, he sees no choice but to accept the compulsory honor.

In her apartment, Isabella dons Turkish clothes herself and prepares for Mustafà’s visit, telling Elvira that the way to keep her husband is to be more assertive. As she gets ready, Isabella, knowing she is being overshadowed by Mustafà in the background, sings a half-mocking invocation to Venus to help conquer her victim. To make him impatient, she keeps him waiting, as her “servant” Lindoro acts as go-between. At length she presents herself to the bey, who introduces Taddeo as his Kaimakan. Mustafà sneezes—a signal for Taddeo to leave—but Taddeo stays, and Isabella invites Elvira to stay for coffee, much to Mustafà’s displeasure. When Isabella insists that he treat his wife gently, Mustafà bursts out in annoyance, while the others wonder what to make of his anger.

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Contemporary singing voices have usually been classified in six basic types, according to their range:

- **Soprano**: the highest-pitched type of human voice, normally possessed only by women and boys
- **Mezzo-Soprano**: the female voice whose range lies between the soprano and the contralto (Italian “mezzo” =middle, medium)
- **Contralto**: the lowest female voice, also called an alto
- **Countertenor**: a male singing voice whose vocal range is equivalent to that of a contralto, mezzo-soprano, or (less frequently) a soprano, usually through the use of falsetto
- **Tenor**: the highest naturally occurring voice type in adult males
- **Baritone**: the male voice lying below the tenor and above the bass
- **Bass**: the lowest male voice

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SYNOPSIS

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In her apartment, Isabella dons Turkish clothes herself and prepares for Mustafà's visit, telling Elvira that the way to keep her husband is to be more assertive. As she gets ready, Isabella, knowing she is being overheard by Mustafà in the background, sings a half-mocking invocation to Venus to help conquer her victim. To make him impatient, she keeps him waiting, as her ‘servant’ Lindoro acts as go-between. At length she presents herself to the bey, who introduces Taddeo as his Kaimakan. Mustafà sneezes—a signal for Taddeo to leave—but Taddeo stays, and Isabella invites Elvira to stay for coffee, much to Mustafà's displeasure. When Isabella insists that she treat his wife gently, Mustafà bursts out in annoyance, while the others wonder what to make of his anger.

Elsewhere in the palace, Haly predicts that his master is no match for an Italian woman. As Lindoro and Taddeo plan their escape, Taddeo claims that he is Isabella's true love. Lindoro is amused but realizes he needs Taddeo's help in dealing with Mustafà, who enters, still furious. Lindoro says Isabella actually cares very much for the bey and wants him to prove his worthiness by entering the Italian order of Pappataci—literally ‘Silent Eaters.’ Believing this to be an honor, Mustafà asks what he has to do. Simple, says Lindoro: eat, drink, and sleep all you like and ignore anything else around you. In an aside, Haly and Zulma wonder what Isabella is up to.

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VOICE TYPE
Since the early 19th century, singing voices have usually been classified in six basic types, three male and three female, according to their range:

SOPRANO
the highest-pitched type of human voice, normally possessed only by women and boys

MEZZO-SOPRANO
the female voice whose range lies between the soprano and the contralto

CONTRALTO
the lowest female voice, also called an alto

COUNTER TENOR
a male singing voice whose vocal range is equivalent to that of a contralto, mezzo-soprano, or (less frequently) a soprano, usually through the use of falsetto

TENOR
the highest naturally occurring voice type in adult males

BARITONE
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1525 The Turkish Ottoman Empire captures the city of Algiers and establishes a Regency there. Piracy, and the enslavement of the captured, are the major industries of the port city.

1671 Following a coup, Ottoman Algeria attains a degree of autonomy from the Sultan; the Dey (rendered as ‘Bey’ in the opera) is chosen by the Jannissary militia and its captains.

1782 Mozart composes Die Entführung aus dem Serail, an opera of lasting popularity set in the Ottoman Empire, dealing with themes of culture clash, love, and escape.

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A portrait of Rossini in 1820
(Bologna, Museo internazionale e biblioteca della musica)
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Rossini writes Il barbiere di Siviglia for Rome; this sparkling comedy further develops the comic style of L’Italiana. It is a staple of the repertory and is now Rossini’s most frequently-performed work.

Rossini’s Guillaume Tell premieres at the Paris Opéra; he then retires from writing operas and composes only small works for private performance.

The French army, during the Bourbon Restoration of the monarchy, blockades and invades Algiers, holding Algeria as an overseas possession until its independence in 1962.

The political map of the Mediterranean Basin looked very different in 1813 than it does today. There was no unified nation of Italy, and would not be until 1871, although the process moved in fits and starts through the 19th century. The dominant force in North Africa, where the opera takes place, was the Ottoman Empire, the center of which is now located in the nation of Turkey. It ruled Algeria from 1516 to 1830, until the empire was displaced by encroaching French colonialism. The Ottoman Empire and various European nations clashed repeatedly in military conflicts, and thus Turks made a compelling “Other” for Europeans to compare themselves to. Accordingly, there was a rich vein of both theater and opera that references this conflict. The most famous example is Mozart’s The Abduction from the Seraglio of 1782, a work that bears similarities to the concerns of Rossini’s L’Italiana in Algeri. In Mozart’s comedy, two pairs of European lovers find each other and their freedom in the end, but in a very different way from Rossini’s work. The wrathful harem master Osmin is spiteful but ultimately thwarted; the ultimately noble and sympathetic Pasha Selim exercises mercy and lets the lovers go free without any trickery.

The ultimate source of Rossini’s “Turkish” setting can be traced back to plot tropes in Greek and Roman theater: a woman enslaved by a tyrant has a lucky encounter with her lost love, and a successful deception leads to freedom. So while Rossini’s setting is roughly contemporary, and historically possible, it is more deeply rooted in literature than reality. Although there is little mention of religion in the text, the now-archaic and offensive term “Mussulman” is used for Muslim characters. For contemporary Italians, a much more provocative aspect of the libretto was Isabella’s rallying cry for the enslaved Italians—“Pensa alla patria” (“think of your country”), an inflammatory statement in not-yet unified Italy. For performances in Naples, which had recently been returned to the Bourbon monarchy, the scene was replaced entirely with something politically neutral.

Musically, composers were fascinated by the sounds of the Turkish military Jannisary bands. Mozart incorporated marches for the Turkish chorus in Abduction, and perhaps the most famous Turkish march appears in the fourth movement of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony (1824), a jaunty piccolo melody over clanging percussion in a march tempo. Rossini makes much less overt use of the Turkish style in L’Italiana; it is most prominent in the Overture where the percussion is marked as a ‘Banda Turca,’ including the large bass drum, cymbals, and the triangle. His extensive and innovative use of percussion earned him the nickname ‘Tamburrossini,’ from the Italian name for the large drum, tamburo grande. By the later nineteenth century this percussion grouping had lost its Turkish associations and become simply part of the orchestral fabric.
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**A CLOSER LOOK**

**ALGIERS, THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE, AND THE CREATION OF A “TURKISH” MUSICAL STYLE**

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The Guided Listening Activities are designed to introduce students to a selection of memorable moments from the opera. They include information on what is happening dramatically, a description of the musical style, and a roadmap of musical features to listen for. Guided Listening Activities can be used by students and teachers of varying levels of musical experience.

IN PREPARATION
For this activity, teachers will need access to a recording of L’Italiana in Algeri and the libretto.

"SE INCLINASSI A PREBDER MOGLIE": CD 1, TRACK 6

A duet between Mustafà and Lindoro, "Se inclinassi a prebder moglie" takes place early in the opera, after Mustafà has made it clear that he wishes to put aside his wife Elvira, and Lindoro has had a mournful cavatina lamenting his distance from his own true love. Mustafà has the perfect solution to everyone’s problems—Lindoro can be free to go home to Italy, if he will only marry Elvira and take her with him! Lindoro does not want to marry her, and carefully lays out his reasons for delaying any marriage, but Mustafà comes prepared with an answer to every objection. The repetitive structure of the duet creates a balance between Lindoro’s objections and Mustafà’s answers, and then brings them together so that Lindoro’s lyrical and ornamented music floats on top of Mustafà’s patter.

What to listen for:
• musical repetition, to match Lindoro’s statements and Mustafà’s responses
• the presence of patter-song, which sets one note per syllable to create the impression of very rapid speech
• Rossini’s simultaneous presentation of contrasting emotions

0:00 The duet opens with declamatory chords in the orchestra that lead into a quickly-descending scale in the violins, setting the tempo and tone for this engaging number. Lindoro’s vocal line is composed as very-fast moving patter, a virtuoso challenge for the singer to keep up with—the musical version of a tongue-twister. The music is fleet and conversational as Lindoro presents his objections, and this style will carry through the entire duet.

00:45 The orchestra repeats the music from Lindoro’s first phrase, with a slightly different vocal line for Mustafà and in a different key. This creates a structure of call and response, or question and answer, balancing the roles of the two characters. Rossini repeats the initial motif throughout the rest of the duet.

01:41 The music shifts into the minor mode as Lindoro’s continues his objections, now more desperate tone.

02:33 Operatic duets allow two characters to express their unity and solidarity, or to contrast and conflict with each other. Here, Mustafà’s patter underneath Lindoro’s florid line is a classic example of the latter, with comic results.

"CRUDA SORTE": CD 1, TRACK 7, 1:06–9:18

"Cruda sorte" is Isabella’s entrance aria as she arrives at the Bey’s palace following the shipwreck. Appropriately for the leading lady of the opera, she speaks up for herself immediately. The aria possesses a two-part structure common in Italian opera of the period. The first section is the cavatina, in a slow tempo and with extended lyrical lines, usually on a contemplative text. It is followed by the cabaletta, in a fast tempo with more extensive ornamentation, and text that resolves upon a course of action. Isabella’s initial dramatic statement of “Cruel fate!” is soon revealed as a mere stylistic posture by her pivot in the fast section to a position of confidence.

What to listen for:
• The cavatina/cabaletta form and the way it depicts an attitude of contemplation moving to resolution
• florid ornamentation by the singer

01:06 Dramatic chords in the orchestra lead to an equally declamatory opening statement by Isabella. With strong dotted rhythms, she drops down into the bottom of her vocal register.

01:31 The fully diminished chord on the word “terror” provides a touch of word-painting, emphasizing Isabella’s plight.

02:07 The cavatina section ends with a cadenza, an extended florid passage of music, unaccompanied by the orchestra and in a free tempo, created individually by the singer to showcase her particular voice.

03:30 The chorus enters, providing the dramatic impetus for the transition to the cabaletta, in which Isabella shakes herself out of her reverie, and the tempo and style of music become lively.

04:21 This section presents a small version of a “Rossini crescendo”: as the orchestra repeats the same music, more and more instruments join the texture, generating greater volume, emphasis, and excitement. Throughout this second section, Isabella’s music is highly ornamented; instead of singing plain scales, she fills them out with extra notes.
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In the Finale to Act 1, all of the various moving parts in the action come together for the first time. Mustafà is avidly wooing Isabella, who is actively plotting how to deal with him, as Taddeo looks to save himself from an unpleasant fate. Lindoro and Elvira arrive to say their farewells to the court, but Isabella recognizes her long-lost love and seizes the moment by scolding Mustafà for setting aside his wife and turning away from him—to his desperation. Throughout much of this finale, the focus is no longer on the specifics of the text but on the overall effect that the music produces: a kind of organized chaos.

What to listen for:
- the onomatopoetic wordplay: din din, tac tac, bum bum
- the way the addition of voices in layers builds drama and tension

0:00 The scene opens with recitative as Isabella asks Mustafà what is happening.
00:30 Isabella’s anger becomes evident in her extensive florid lines, as she expands her words out to extraordinary lengths.
01:35 The stretta, a fast-moving segment marked by multiple voices all taking part, begins. The successive entrances of each character parallel the text’s image of a ship on the ocean battered by the waves.
02:12 Each character participates in a vocal sound effect: Elvira and Isabella sound like a bell (“din din”), Lindoro like a hammer (“tac tac”), Taddeo a crow (“cra cra”), and Mustafà the cannon (“bum bum”).
03:45 The music repeats, a standard feature in operas of this period. The repeat heightens the confusion and lets the entire ensemble build back up to a satisfying close.
ENCOURAGING STUDENT RESPONSE IN ATTENDING THE FINAL DRESS REHEARSAL

Watching and listening to a performance is a unique experience that takes students beyond the printed page to an immersion in images, sound, interpretation, technology, drama, skill, and craft. Performance activities help students analyze different aspects of the experience and engage critically with the performance. They will consider the creative choices that have been made for the particular production they are watching and examine different aspects of the performance.

The Student Critique activity incorporates a reproducible sheet. Students should bring this activity sheet to the final dress rehearsal and fill it out during intermission and/or after the final curtain. The activity directs attention to details of the production that might otherwise go unnoticed.

The activity sheet is called My Highs & Lows. It serves to guide students toward a consistent set of objective observations, as well as to help them articulate their own opinions. It is designed to enrich the students’ understanding of the art form as a whole. The ratings system encourages students to express their critique: use these ratings to spark discussions that require careful, critical thinking.

The My Highs & Lows handout can be found at the back of this guide.

FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION

Students will enjoy starting the class with an open discussion of the Met performance. What did they like? What didn’t they? Did anything surprise them? What would they like to see or hear again? What would they have done differently? The discussion offers an opportunity to apply the notes on students’ My Highs & Lows sheet, as well as their thoughts about the visual design of the Met production—in short, to see themselves as L’Italiana experts.

L’Italiana is a comedy, but it raises a number of serious issues about relationships and the behavior of people in love. Mustafà is portrayed as ridiculous, but his threats against a number of characters are real, and potentially dangerous. Isabella and Lindoro have been separated for a long time, and she worries about his faithfulness to her, especially with the revelation that he was to be sent home to Italy with Elvira in tow. Taddeo is another largely comic character, who figures out that it’s better to go home free than to stay angry even if you’ve been tricked in love.

There are many statements about women and men in general throughout the opera, and students can debate which are meant to be taken seriously, and what the opera ultimately says about the “battle of the sexes.” You may like to use the following prompts in your discussion:

• Isabella makes her entrance in the opera supposedly lamenting her fate (“Cruda sorte!”). Is this meant to be taken seriously, or is there a conflict between the music and the words?
• Should we take the chorus’s comments about Mustafà as a great “woman-tamer” seriously, or are they meant to be ironic?
• What motivates Elvira to keep trying to change her husband’s mind?
• Do you think Mustafà’s change of heart at the end of the opera is sincere? Has he actually learned his lesson? If there were a sequel to the opera, would he do better in it?
STUDENT CRITIQUE

IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the My Highs & Lows reproducible handout found in the back of this guide.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS
AND L’ITALIANA IN ALGERI.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1
Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1d
Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

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FURTHER RESOURCES

IN PRINT

Gossett, Philip. Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. An extensive discussion of almost all aspects of early 18th-century Italian opera, including revisions, censorship, and how operas were produced, including many musical examples.


ONLINE
Website of the Rossini Festival in Pesaro: http://www.rossinioperafestival.it/?lang=eng The Pesaro Festival stages Rossini operas every summer and sponsors a scholarship on the composer.

Naxos Records Rossini page: http://www.naxos.com/person/Gioachino_Rossini/26313.htm A list of all Naxos recordings including music by Rossini; includes libretti for operas.

GLOSSARY

act/scene Acts and scenes are ways of categorizing sections of operas. An act is a large-scale division of an opera, and each opera will typically include from two to five acts. Acts can be subdivided into scenes, which are often differentiated by a change in setting or characters.

adagio Literally “at ease,” adagio is a tempo marking that indicates a slow speed. An adagio tempo marking indicates that the performer should play in a slow and leisurely style.

allegro Italian for “cheerful” or “joyful,” Allegro is the most common tempo marking in Western music, indicating a moderately fast to quick speed.

aria A song for solo voice accompanied by orchestra. In opera, arias mostly appear during a pause in dramatic action when a character is reflecting musically on his or her emotions. Most arias are lyrical, with a tune that can be hummed, and many arias include musical repetition. For example, the earliest arias in opera consist of music sung with different stanzas of text (strophic arias). Another type of aria, da capo arias, became common by the eighteenth century and feature the return of the opening music and text after a contrasting middle section. Nineteenth-century Italian arias often feature a two-part form that showcases an intensification of emotion from the first section (the cantabile) to the second section (the cabaletta).

articulation The smoothness or hardness with which a note is begun and ended. Articulation is a way of indicating the degree to which each note connects to the next, and can be seen while watching the bow of a stringed instrument player. A note can be attacked sharply and made short, or it can flow smoothly into the next note.

baritone Literally “deep sounding,” a baritone is what a typical male voice sounds like—the term refers to a male singer with a low but not extremely low vocal range. A baritone will sing notes that are higher than those sung by a bass and lower than those sung by a tenor. Uncommon until the nineteenth century, baritone roles have grown in popularity in opera since the works of Verdi, who often reserved the voice type for villains.

baroque A period of music history lasting from approximately 1600 to 1750. The beginning of the Baroque period coincides with the invention of opera as a genre, and its end coincides with the death of the composer Johann Sebastian Bach. The Baroque period saw the rise of modern tonality, an expansion of performing forces, and increased ornamentation. The term “baroque” means bizarre or exaggerated, and was used by critics in the Eighteenth century critics who preferred a simpler and less-ornamented style.
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The gestures of a conductor can be likened to a non-verbal language that the musicians understand. The conductor typically stands on a podium in front of the players and uses a baton to communicate the meter and tempo, and his or her non-baton hand to indicate dynamics, phrasing, and articulation to the musicians. The conductor’s body language and facial expressions provide additional cues about the intended expression of the music.

**Bel Canto**
Referring to the Italian vocal style of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, bel canto singing emphasize lyricism and ornamentation in order to showcase the beauty of the singer’s voice. Its focus on lyrical embellishment directly contrasts with a contemporary Germanic focus on a weighty, dramatic style. Bel canto singing is most closely associated with the music of Gioachino Rossini, Vincenzo Bellini, and Gaetano Donizetti.

**Cadenza**
An ornamented musical elaboration played in a free style by a soloist to display his or her virtuosity. Cadenzas are typically improvised—that is, created by a performer on the spot—though they can also be written out in advance. They most frequently occur near the end of a piece, at a point of harmonic tension when the piece is about to conclude.

**Chorus**
A section of an opera in which a large group of singers performs together, typically with orchestral accompaniment. Most choruses include at least four different vocal lines, in registers from low to high, with multiple singers per part. The singers are typically from a particular group of people who play a certain role on stage—soldiers, peasants, prisoners, and so on. Choruses may offer a moral or commentary on the plot, or participate in the dramatic action.

**Classical**
A period of music history lasting from approximately 1750 to 1830, bordered by the earlier Baroque period and the later Romantic period. Contrasting with the ornamentation common to the preceding Baroque period, Classical music is characterized by simple and elegant melodies, regular harmonic accompaniment, and contrasts between melodic themes. The composers most closely associated with the Classical period include Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Ludwig van Beethoven.

**Coloratura**
A rapid and elaborate ornamentation by a solo singer, particularly common in operas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Requiring vocal agility and a wide and high range, coloratura showcases the virtuosity of a singer by featuring repeating melodic figures, rapid scales, trills, and other embellishments.

**Conductor**
The person who directs the orchestra, setting the tempo, giving interpretive directions to the musicians, and generally holding all the musical elements of a performance together. In orchestra performance, the conductor typically stands on a podium in front of the players and uses a baton to communicate the meter and tempo, and his or her non-baton hand to indicate dynamics, phrasing, and articulation to the musicians. The gestures of a conductor can be likened to a non-verbal language that the musicians understand.

**Contralto**
A deep female voice, with a vocal range that extends lower than that of a mezzo-soprano. Contraltos are known for having a very wide range and for the power and depth of sound with which they can sing. As is the case for roles for basses, many of the earliest roles in opera for contraltos are comic roles, though nineteenth-century composers also wrote dramatic roles for female singers with a lower range.

**Crescendo**
A gradual raising of volume in music achieved by increasing the dynamic level. When music crescendos, the performers begin at a softer dynamic level and become incrementally louder. One of the most famous types of crescendos in opera, the Rossini crescendo, includes an increase in volume together with repeating melodic and rhythmic phrases, higher instrumental registers, and the gradual addition of instruments in order to create a particularly dramatic effect.

**Diminuendo**
A gradual lowering of volume in music achieved by decreasing the dynamic level. During a diminuendo, the performers begin at a louder dynamic level and become incrementally softer.

**Dynamics**
A musical trait pertaining to loudness and softness. During the eighteenth century, composers began indicating their desired intensity of volume in music by writing words such as piano (soft) and forte (loud) into the musical score. Dynamics encompass a spectrum from pianissimo (very soft) to piano (soft) to mezzo piano (moderately soft), all the way up to fortissimo (very loud). Music can shift to another dynamic level either suddenly or gradually, through a crescendo or diminuendo.

**Ensemble**
A musical piece for two or more soloists, accompanied by orchestra. Types of ensembles include duets (for two soloists), trios (for three soloists), and quartets (for four soloists). Sometimes singers will respond directly to one another during an ensemble. At other times, singers will each sing to themselves as if the other singers were not on stage. In ensembles, multiple characters may simultaneously express very different emotions from one another.

**Finale**
The last portion of an act, a finale consists of several musical sections that accompany an escalating dramatic tension. Finales frequently consist of multiple ensembles with different numbers of characters. When it occurs at the end of an early act in the opera, a finale may create a messy situation—and the resolution of this situation will only happen in subsequent acts. One type of finale common in comic operas, a chain finale, features characters entering or exiting from the stage to create unexpected combinations of characters, in turn increasing the opera’s dramatic tension.

**Forté**
Meaning “loud” or “strong” in Italian, forte is a dynamic level in music that indicates a loud volume. Adding the suffix “-issimo” to a word serves as an intensifier—since forte means “loud,” fortissimo means “very loud.”
The gestures of a conductor can be likened to a non-verbal language that the musicians understand. The conductor typically stands on a podium in front of the players and uses a baton to communicate the meter and tempo, and his or her non-baton hand to indicate dynamics, phrasing, and articulation to the musicians. For example, Mozart and Rossini wrote comic parts for bass voice, using musical repetition and low register for comic effect. Wagner and Mozart wrote serious parts for bass voice, focusing on the gravity that a low register can contribute to the overall musical texture.

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The simultaneous sounding of pitches to produce chords, and the relationship between different chords as they succeed one another. Throughout much of Western music, systems of rules govern these progressions to help create our sense of musical tension, expectation, and conclusion. Tonal harmony is based on progressions of chords in relationship to a tonic (or home) key. In the 19th century, as composers sought novel sounds to reflect the originality of their invention, they began to employ chords and progressions of greater dissonance and greater distance from the home key. As such dissonances moved beyond mere sound effects into the musical structure itself, the traditional theory of tonal harmony began to become insufficient as a way to understand and describe musical structure.

A type of articulation in which a melody is played with smooth connection between the notes. A legato passage does not should include any pauses between notes or any accents at the beginnings of notes, as the notes blend into one another without a break. In contrast, a passage that is played staccato features notes played in a separated manner.

Leitmotif

From the German for “leading motive,” a leitmotif is a recurring musical idea, or motive, that represents a particular person, object, idea, emotion, or place. This musical idea is usually a few seconds in length and can occur in the music’s melody, harmony, rhythm, or a combination of the three. Leitmotifs are most closely associated with the operas of Richard Wagner, where they are used repeatedly throughout the opera to provide unity; they also less frequently appear in operas of other composers, including Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Strauss.

The text of an opera, including all the words that are said or sung by performers. Until the early eighteenth century, a composer would frequently set music to a pre-existing libretto, and any given libretto could thus be set to music multiple times by different composers. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, collaboration between the author of the libretto, known as the librettist, and the composer became more frequent. Some opera composers, most notably Richard Wagner, where they are used repeatedly throughout the opera to provide unity; they also less frequently appear in operas of other composers, including Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Strauss.

A break between acts of an opera. At the beginning of an intermission, the curtain will fall (that is, close) on stage, and the lights in the auditorium, called the house lights, will become brighter. Intermissions provide audiences with a chance to walk around, talk with one another, and reflect on what they have seen and what could happen next. The break in the performance may also correspond with a change of time or scene in the story of the opera—the next act may take place hours or months later, or be set in a different location. Usually lights will dim and a bell may sound to indicate that the intermission is drawing to a close and the opera is about to resume.

A female voice with a range between that of a contralto and soprano. A mezzo-soprano’s voice is slightly deeper than that of a soprano, so mezzo-sopranos are often cast in supporting roles as older women, including nurses, confidantes, or maids.

A term applied to Italian comic operas from the mid-eighteenth through mid-nineteenth centuries. The plot of an opera buffa often features scenes and characters from everyday life and addresses a light or sentimental subject, concluding with a happy ending.

An eighteenth- or nineteenth-century Italian opera employing a noble and serious style. The plot of an opera seria often upholds morality by presenting conflicting emotions such as love versus duty, or by modeling enlightened rulers.

Featuring spoken dialogue, songs, and dances, an operetta is a short theatrical piece. Shorter in duration than operas, operettas typically feature a light subject matter, incorporate melodies composed in a popular style, and feature spoken dialogue. Most popular from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, the genre is the precursor of the American musical.

An embellishment to the melody, rhythm, or harmony of music, intended to make a melody more expressive or ornate. Ornamentation can be either indicated through symbols written into the music or improvised by the performer.

An instrumental piece that occurs before the first act as an introduction to an opera. After the conductor enters the orchestra pit and takes a bow, the music for the overture begins. Most overtures are a few minutes in duration, and set the mood for the opera—even featuring musical themes that will occur later in the opera.

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maestro
A title of respect used to address a conductor. The term is often applied to conductors with several decades of experience. However, performers often use this honorific when addressing the conductor.

melody
A succession of pitches that form an understandable unit. The melody of a piece consists of the tune that a listener can hum or sing. During arias, the singer will usually sing the main melody, though other instruments may play parts of the melody. Sometimes, such as during ensembles, multiple melodies can occur simultaneously.

mezzo-soprano
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soprano
The highest singing range for the female voice. Roles composed for soprano singers are typically among the leading roles in the opera and require soprano singers to show off their virtuosic flexibility and range.

tempo
Literally “time” in Italian, tempo refers to the speed of a piece of music. Tempo is indicated in a score by a variety of conventional (often Italian) words—such as allegro, adagio, vivace, moderato, grave, and many more—that not only provide direction on the composer’s desired rate of speed, but also carry associations of gesture and character. For instance, vivace indicates not only a brisk speed but also a lively spirit. Additional tempo markings may indicate when a composer asks for a section of music to be sped up (such as “accelerando”) or slowed down (such as “rallentando”).

tenor
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trill
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verismo
A movement in Italian theater and opera in the late 19th century that embraced realism and explored areas of society previously ignored on the stage: the poor, the lower-class, and the criminal. Its characters are driven by passion to defy reason, morality, and the law. In order to reflect these emotional extremes, composers of verismo opera developed a musical style that communicates raw and unfettered passions. Musically, verismo operas react against the forced ornamentation of the bel canto style and instead emphasize a more natural setting of the text to music. Before its exploration on the operatic stage, the verismo aesthetic first developed within the realm of literature.

pitch
The quality of a musical sound corresponding to its perceived highness or lowness. Scientifically, pitch can be measured as the number of vibrations (or repetitions) of a sound wave per second, which is called its frequency. A sound with a low frequency, like a bass drum, will sound low and have a low pitch, while a sound with a high frequency, like a siren, will sound high.

prima donna
Meaning “first lady” in Italian, the prima donna is the leading female role in an opera. The term may apply to the role or to the singer herself, who usually sings in the soprano register and is the star of the show. Since the nineteenth century, the term has also been applied to a singer of any gender with a self-centered and demanding personality.

recitative
A type of vocal writing between speech and song that imitates the accents and inflections of natural speech. Composers often employ recitative for passages of text that involve quick dialogue and the advancement of plot, since the style allows singers to move rapidly through a large amount of text. Recitative may be accompanied either by keyboard or by the whole orchestra.

Rhythm refers to the way music unfolds over time; it is a series of durations in a range from long to short. Along with pitch, it is a basic and indispensable parameter of music. Rhythm is perceived in relation to an underlying beat and within the context of a meter. Western musical notation indicates to the performer the exact duration of each note or rest.

Romantic
A period of music history lasting from approximately 1830 to 1900. Beginning in literature and later adopted by composers, romanticism reflected a newfound focus on individuality, nature, and emotional extremes. Music from the Romantic period often explores music’s redemptive power, focusing on the sublimity of nature, love, and the mysterious. Composers began to experiment with shortening and lengthening the standard forms and durations of musical works, and also added more expressive harmonies to convey the originality of their musical vision.

score
The complete musical notation for a piece, the score includes notated lines for all of the different instrumental and vocal parts that unite to constitute a musical composition. In an opera orchestra, the conductor follows the score during rehearsals and performances, while each performer follows his or her individual part.

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Literally “sung play,” a Singspiel is an opera with spoken dialogue. Singspiels are typically in German and are from the Classical or early Romantic eras. The plot of a Singspiel is usually comic in nature, and its music may include songs, choruses, and instrumental numbers that are separated by spoken dialogue.

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### L'ITALIANA IN ALGERI: MY HIGHS & LOWS

**September 30, 2016**  
**Conducted by James Levine**  
**Reviewed by**

#### THE STARS:  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAR POWER</th>
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