

The Barber of Seville

[Opera buffa, in two acts; text by Sterbini. First produced at the Argentina Theatre, Rome, February 5, 1816.]

PERSONAGES.

Rosina, ward of Dr. Bartolo. Berta. Figaro, the barber. Count Almaviva, lover of Rosina. Dr. Bartolo. Basilio, a music-master.

[Officers, soldiers, etc.]

The scene is laid in Seville; time, the eighteenth century.

The story and the music of "The Barber of Seville" are as fresh and delightful as when the opera was first produced eighty-six years ago. Its story is almost as familiar as household words, and no music has been more popular on the operatic stage than its gay, brilliant arias. Count Almaviva loves Rosina, the ward of Dr. Bartolo, who wishes to marry her himself, but the Count is unable to get an interview with her until it is arranged for by Figaro, the factotum of the place. In spite of Bartolo's watchfulness, as well as that of Don Basilio, her music-teacher, who is only too willing to serve Bartolo, she succeeds in writing to the Count and telling him that his love is returned. With Figaro's help the Count gets into the house disguised as a drunken dragoon, but is promptly arrested. The next time he secures admission as a music-teacher upon the pretence that Don Basilio is sick, and has sent him to give Rosina her lesson. He further hoodwinks Bartolo by producing the letter Rosina had written to himself, and promises to persuade her that the letter has been given him by a mistress of the Count, which will break the connection between the two. He secures the coveted interview, and an elopement is planned. The unexpected appearance of Don Basilio, however, upsets the arrangements, and the disconcerted lover makes good his escape. In the mean time Bartolo, who has the letter, shows it to his ward and arouses her jealousy. She

thereupon promises to marry her guardian. At the time set for the elopement, the Count and Figaro arrive. A reconciliation is speedily effected, and the Count and Rosina are married just as Bartolo makes his appearance with officers to arrest the Count. After mutual explanations, however, all ends happily.

The opera opens, after a short chorus, with the Count's serenade, "Lo, smiling in the Orient Sky" ("Ecco ridente in cielo"), one of the most beautiful numbers in the opera. In the second scene Figaro sings the lively and well-known buffo aria, "Make Room for the Factotum" ("Largo al factotum"). A light and lively duet between Figaro and the Count leads up to the chamber aria of Rosina, "The Voice I heard just now" ("Una voce poco fa"), which is not only very expressive but remarkably rich in ornamentation. In the next scene occurs the calumny aria, "Oh! Calumny is like the Sigh" ("La Calunnia è un venticello"). It is followed by a florid duet and a dialogue between Rosina and Bartolo, closing with the bass aria, "No longer conceal the Truth" ("Non piu tacete"). The finale is composed of three scenes full of glittering dialogue and melodious passages.

The second act opens with a soliloquy by Bartolo, interrupted by a duet with the Count. The music-lesson scene follows in which the artist personating Rosina is given an opportunity for interpolation. In the next scene occurs a dialogue quintette, which is followed by a long aria for Bertha, "There is always Noise" ("Sempre gridi"), which the Italians called the "aria de sorbetto," as they used to eat ices while it was sung. In the eighth scene, after a long recitative, an instrumental prelude occurs, representing a stormy night, followed by recitative in which the Count reveals himself, leading up to a florid trio, and this in turn to the elegant terzetto, "Softly, softly, no Delay" ("Zitti, zitti, piano, piano"). A bravura and finale of light, graceful melody close the opera.