



Gioacchino Rossini / February 29, 1792 – November 13, 1868

### **THE BARBER OF SEVILLE: OVERTURE**

18th Century composers and musicians were largely dependent on the patronage of royal courts or the nobility. 19th Century composers and musicians, however, were supported by a new middle class audience. No longer were musicians glorified servants. In fact, solo performers like Paganini and Liszt became stars who were idolized by the public. The makeup of the new group that purchased tickets and filled the seats made an enormous difference in what was on the stage. Composers and producers catered to the sometimes vulgar tastes of their audiences. It is as simple as this: You can't make a living writing music people don't want to hear. As Yogi Berra said, "If they don't want to come, you can't stop them!"

In Italy, the rise of the middle class was especially rapid, and with it came the emergence of a corresponding audience for opera. Commercial impresarios, whose goal was to sell tickets and to make money, took over the presentation of the art form from the aristocracy, and composers altered their styles to fit the tastes of those paying good money to see their works. Never mind the depth of the plot, the development of the characters, the metaphysical message, or a musical experience for the orchestra, Italian opera became a showcase for singers and for singing.

Gioacchino Rossini became the dominant composer of this genre. He wrote an astounding number of operas, 38 in only 19 years. The demand for Opera Buffa was voracious, and Rossini dashed them off at the speed of light. New operas opened every week to respond to the public demand.

Rossini wrote his most famous work, "The Barber of Seville," in only 13 days. He was so sure of his ability to churn out entertaining operas that he once arrogantly proclaimed to a group of admirers, "Give me a laundry list or a menu, and I will set it to music." He had developed a formula for comic opera, and he used it at will. Rossini claimed also that he could write an aria in the time it took him to boil a pot of noodles. He became the toast of Italy and later the toast of Paris where he eventually settled.

He wrote his overtures even faster, sometimes on the days of their first performance. This drove promoters and impresarios crazy, and one had him locked up until he finished his contract, dropping each sheet of music out of a second story window when it was done.

His signature musical device was the crescendo, which you'll hear prominently tonight. All his overtures were different, but all featured crescendos.

But Rossini's overtures have nothing to do with the plot or music that follows, because Rossini did not want to let the musical cat-out-of-the-bag before the story started. So each overture does nothing to foreshadow what is about to follow. Overtures were simply to warm up both the audience and the orchestra, making this one a perfect way to start another great season.