

*Virginia  
Opera*

*Don Giovanni*

*By  
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*

**STUDY GUIDE**

**2009-2010 SEASON**

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## Table of Contents

Preface.....	4
Objectives.....	5
What is Opera.....	6
The Operatic Voice.....	8
Opera Production.....	9
About the Composer.....	10
Lorenzo da Ponte.....	12
The Don Juan Legend in Literature and Music.....	14
DON GIOVANNI: Comedy or Tragedy.....	16
Cast of Characters.....	18
DON GIOVANNI: A Musical Synopsis.....	19
Vocabulary: Words to Think About.....	28
Suggestions for Classroom Discussion.....	29
Discography.....	30

## Preface

### Purpose

This study guide is intended to aid you, the teacher, in increasing your students' understanding and appreciation of DON GIOVANNI. This will not only add to knowledge about opera, but should develop awareness of other related subjects, making the performance they attend much more enjoyable.

### Most Important

If you only have a limited amount of time, concentrate on the cast of characters, the plot and some of the musical and dramatic highlights of the opera. Recognition produces familiarity which in turn produces a positive experience.

### The Language

DON GIOVANNI is written in Italian. In Mozart's day Italian was the language most often used for opera. Da Ponte was a native Italian and Mozart, as an international composer, was well acquainted with the language (though as an Austrian his own language was German). The Virginia Opera will perform DON GIOVANNI in the original language, Italian, but an English translation will be projected on a screen above the stage. With these **Supertitles**, audiences can experience the beauty of opera in the original language, yet still understand the meaning of all that is being sung.

## Objectives

1. To understand how opera, as an art form, reflects and comments on society and the world in which we live.
2. To develop an awareness of how the study of certain art forms such as opera can communicate ideas of the past and present.
3. To develop a basic understanding of what opera is. Students should be able to identify the many elements (musical, visual, and dramatic) of an opera and understand how they work together to produce a unified, exciting, and emotional work.
4. To understand the process of adapting a story for the stage; what changes need to be made and why. Incorporated in this objective is a basic understanding of what makes a good opera.
5. To know the basic plot/story line of DON GIOVANNI.
6. To understand how music serves as a mode of communication in opera and the effect music has on characteristics and mood.
7. To develop some sense of appreciation for opera as a timeless art form that brings real characters, emotions, and situations to life.
8. To understand the working relationship between words and music in an opera. Students should understand how a composer and librettist work together to create significant, dramatic, and unified meaning.

## What is Opera?

**Opera** is a unique type of entertainment—a play that is sung throughout. Because it combines music and theater, opera can be the most moving of all the arts, and can tell a story in a way quite unlike any other. It does so by means of words, actions, and music.

The words of an opera are called a **libretto** (the Italian word for “little book”), much like the words of a play are called a **script**. There are important differences between a libretto and a script, however. For one thing, a libretto usually contains far fewer words than a script. The reason for this is the music. It can take more time to sing a line of text than to say it; also, words are often repeated in operatic music for reasons of musical form. Therefore, there are fewer words in an opera than in a play of the same length.

While the spoken word can clearly show what people are thinking, singing is much better at showing emotions rather than thoughts. For this reason, the plot of an opera is likely to be filled with dramatic situations in which highly emotional characters perform bold actions.

The way **librettists** (the people who write the words) use words is also different. Opera librettos are commonly made up of poetry, while this is not often true of the scripts for plays. In *DON GIOVANNI* many of the musical passages can be considered a type of sung poetry, complete with meter, accents, and rhyme. If you were to say the words that the characters sing, this would become very clear.

A librettist can also do something that a playwright cannot—he or she can write an **ensemble**. An ensemble is a passage in the libretto in which more than one person sings; often, several characters sing different vocal lines simultaneously. In a play, if all the actors spoke at once, the audience could not understand the words. In an opera, the music helps the audience to sort out the thoughts and feelings of each singer. Frequently, each individual character has a distinct musical or vocal style which distinguishes him/her from the other characters. We will see this when we compare the characters in *DON GIOVANNI*.

If the libretto of an opera is a special language, the score (or musical portion of an opera) is a special use of music. It is music that is meant to be sung, of course, but it has characteristics that many songs do not. **Operatic music is dramatic music, written for the theater.** For this reason, it must also be capable of describing strong feelings that invite the audience’s involvement with the story and their identification with people on stage. In addition, a good operatic composer can use music as a tool to define character and personality traits of his characters.

One way in which a **composer** (the person who writes the music) can use music is through the voices of the singers themselves. A human voice, especially when singing, can express all sorts of feelings. Composers know this and use this

knowledge to the fullest. First, they consider the personality of a character, and then choose a voice type (either high or low) that best suits this type of person. For example, younger characters are often sung by the higher voice types. There are five different voice categories (perhaps some students are familiar with these from singing in a choir):

**SOPRANO:** the highest female voice

**MEZZO-SOPRANO:** (also called ALTO) the lower female voice

**TENOR:** the highest male voice (like Pavarotti or Caruso)

**BARITONE:** the middle male voice

**BASS:** the lowest male voice

Each of these voice categories can be subdivided into more specialized types, such as “dramatic soprano”, “lyric soprano”, “coloratura soprano”, “basso-buffo”, depending on the specific type of music being sung. These distinctions are known as **vocal fachs**, from a German word meaning “mode”.

After a composer has chosen the characters’ voice types, he then tries to interpret the libretto in musical terms. A character may sing very high notes when agitated or excited, or low notes when depressed or calm. He or she may sing many rapid notes or a few long held notes, depending upon the mood at the time.

In an opera production, the ideas of the composer and librettist are expressed by the singers as directed by a **conductor** and **stage director**. The conductor is responsible for the musical aspects of the performance, leading the orchestra and the singers and determining the musical pace. The stage director is responsible for the dramatic movement and characterizations of the singers. He works with a **design team**—a set designer, costume designer, and a lighting designer – to determine the visual interpretation of the work. Just as the composer and librettist must work in close communion in the writing of an opera, the conductor and stage director must have a close collaboration to produce a unified interpretation of an opera. Both must collaborate with the singers and the design team (and sometimes a **choreographer**, if dancing is involved). For this reason opera is perhaps the form demanding the greatest degree of collaboration.

An opera then, is a partnership of words and music with the purpose of telling a dramatic story. While the story itself may be about everyday situations or historical figures, it usually has a moral or idea that the entire audience understands. This is one of the great features of opera—it unites a variety of people with different backgrounds by giving them a common experience to relate with.

## The Operatic Voice

A true (and brief) definition of the “operatic” voice is a difficult proposition. Many believe the voice is “born,” while just as many hold to the belief that the voice is “trained.” The truth lies somewhere between the two. Voices that can sustain the demands required by the operatic repertoire do have many things in common. First and foremost is a strong physical technique that allows the singer to sustain long phrases through the control of both the inhalation and exhalation of breath. Secondly, the voice (regardless of its size) must maintain a resonance in both the head (mouth, sinuses) and chest cavities. The Italian word “*squillo*” (squeal) is used to describe the brilliant tone required to penetrate the full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singers. Finally, all voices are defined by both the actual voice “type” and the selection of repertoire for which the voice is ideally suited.

Within the five major voice types (*Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, Baritone, Bass*) there is a further delineation into categories (*Coloratura, Lyric, Spinto, and Dramatic*) which help to define each particular instrument. The *Coloratura* is the highest within each voice type whose extended upper range is complimented by extreme flexibility. The *Lyric* is the most common of the “types.” This instrument is recognized more for the exceptional beauty of its tone rather than its power or range. The *Spinto* is a voice which combines the beauty of a lyric with the weight and power of a *Dramatic*, which is the most “powerful” of the voices. The *Dramatic* instrument is characterized by the combination of both incredible volume and “steely” intensity.

While the definition presented in the preceding paragraph may seem clearly outlined, many voices combine qualities from each category, thus carving a unique niche in operatic history. Just as each person is different from the next, so is each voice. Throughout her career Maria Callas defied categorization as she performed and recorded roles associated with each category in the soprano voice type. Joan Sutherland as well can be heard in recordings of soprano roles as diverse as the coloratura Gilda in *Rigoletto* to the dramatic Turandot in *Turandot*. Below is a very brief outline of voice types and categories with roles usually associated with the individual voice type.

	<i>Coloratura</i>	<i>Lyric</i>	<i>Spinto</i>	<i>Dramatic</i>
<b><i>Soprano</i></b>	Norina (Don Pasquale) Gilda (Rigoletto) Lucia (Lucia di Lammermoor)	Liu (Turandot) Mimi (La Bohème) Pamina (Magic Flute)	Tosca (Tosca) Amelia (A Masked Ball) Leonora (Il Trovatore)	Turandot (Turandot) Norma (Norma) Elektra (Elektra)
<b><i>Mezzo-Soprano</i></b>	Rosina (Barber of Seville) Angelina (La Cenerentola) Dorabella (Cosi fan tutte)	Carmen (Carmen) Charlotte (Werther) Giulietta (Hoffmann)	Santuzza (Cavalleria) Adalgisa (Norma) The Composer (Ariadne auf Naxos)	Azucena (Il Trovatore) Ulrica (A Masked Ball) Herodias (Salome)

<b><i>Tenor</i></b>	Count Almaviva (Barber of Seville) Don Ottavio (Don Giovanni) Ferrando (Così fan tutte)	Alfredo (La Traviata) Rodolfo (La Bohème) Tamino (Magic Flute)	Calaf (Turandot) Pollione (Norma) Cavaradossi (Tosca)	Dick Johnson (Fanciulla) Don Jose (Carmen) Otello (Otello)
<b><i>Baritone</i></b>	Figaro (Barber of Seville) Count Almavira (Marriage of Figaro) Dr. Malatesta (Don Pasquale)	Marcello (La Bohème) Don Giovanni (Don Giovanni) Sharpless (Madama Butterfly)	<b><i>Verdi Baritone</i></b> Germont (La Traviata) Di Luna (Il Trovatore) Rigoletto (Rigoletto)	Scarpia (Tosca) Jochanaan (Salome) Jack Rance (Fanciulla)
<b><i>Bass</i></b>	Bartolo (Barber of Seville) Don Magnifico (Cenerentola) Dr. Dulcamara (Elixir of Love)	Leporello (Don Giovanni) Colline (La Bohème) Figaro (Marriage of Figaro)	<b><i>Buffo Bass</i></b> Don Pasquale (Don Pasquale) Don Alfonso (Così fan tutte)	<b><i>Basso Cantate</i></b> Oroveso (Norma) Timur (Turandot) Sarastro (Magic Flute)

## Opera Production

Opera is created by the combination of myriad art forms. First and foremost are the actors who portray characters by revealing their thoughts and emotions through the singing voice. The next very important component is a full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singing actors and actresses, helping them to portray the full range of emotions possible in the operatic format. The orchestra performs in an area in front of the singers called the orchestra pit while the singers perform on the open area called the stage. Wigs, costumes, sets and specialized lighting further enhance these performances, all of which are designed, created, and executed by a team of highly trained artisans.

The creation of an opera begins with a dramatic scenario crafted by a playwright or dramaturg who alone or with a librettist fashions the script or libretto that contains the words the artists will sing. Working in tandem, the composer and librettist team up to create a cohesive musical drama in which the music and words work together to express the emotions revealed in the story. Following the completion of their work, the composer and librettist entrust their new work to a conductor who with a team of assistants (repetiteurs) assumes responsibility for the musical preparation of the work. The conductor collaborates with a stage director (responsible for the visual component) in order to bring a performance of the new piece to life on the stage. The stage director and conductor form the creative spearhead for the new composition while assembling a design team which will take charge of the actual physical production.

Set designers, lighting designers, costume designers, wig and makeup designers and even choreographers must all be brought “on board” to participate in the creation of the new production. The set designer combines the skills of both an artist and an architect using “blueprint” plans to design the actual physical set which will reside on the stage, recreating the physical setting required by the storyline. These blueprints are turned over to a team of carpenters who are specially trained in the art of stage carpentry. Following the actual

building of the set, painters following instructions from the set designers' original plans paint the set. As the set is assembled on the stage, the lighting designer works with a team of electricians to throw light onto both the stage and the set in an atmospheric as well as practical way. Using specialized lighting instruments, colored gels and a state of the art computer, the designer along with the stage director create a "lighting plot" by writing "lighting cues" which are stored in the computer and used during the actual performance of the opera.

During this production period, the costume designer in consultation with the stage director has designed appropriate clothing for the singing actors and actresses to wear. These designs are fashioned into patterns and crafted by a team of highly skilled artisans called cutters, stitchers, and sewers. Each costume is specially made for each singer using his/her individual measurements. The wig and makeup designer, working with the costume designer, designs and creates wigs which will complement both the costume and the singer as well as represent historically accurate "period" fashions.

As the actual performance date approaches, rehearsals are held on the newly crafted set, combined with costumes, lights, and orchestra in order to ensure a cohesive performance that will be both dramatically and musically satisfying to the assembled audience.



## About the Composer

Generally considered the world's greatest musical genius, as well as one of the greatest opera composers, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's adult life was filled with frustration and poverty. Although he created some of the most glorious music known to man, he died poor and unrecognized by his peers, laid to rest in an unmarked pauper's grave.

Mozart was born in **Salzburg**, Austria on January 27, 1756. His father, **Leopold**, was a court musician for the Archbishop of Salzburg and the family grew up in an atmosphere of musical instruction, practice and rehearsals. Leopold Mozart realized that his son was a musical genius when the boy was only three years old. At that early age he would climb up on the piano bench and play, by ear, difficult pieces that he had heard his father rehearsing with other musicians. Within a year or two he picked up a violin and played that, too, expertly. By the age of six, little Wolfgang had already composed minuets and other pieces of serious music, and his performance at the piano and violin was so brilliant that his father wanted to promote him around the world. Leopold set off with Wolfgang and his younger sister Nannerl on a tour of Europe, where the children played for important nobleman. While audiences admired the young prodigy and his sister, the Mozarts made little money from the tour, and Leopold's plans for financial success came to an end.

Between the ages of 10 and 17, Mozart composed music for special occasions at his school in Salzburg. At 12, he wrote his first opera – his favorite type of composition. Even at the age of 14, he displayed a genius for musical drama that leading composers of the period did not have and that, in fact, few before him had shown.

Leopold hoped that the Archbishop of Salzburg would give his son a permanent job, but the Archbishop did not understand Mozart's unique musical talent and offered him no position. Mozart went to live in **Munich** and then in **Paris** with his mother, who traveled with him to help keep his house. In Paris, they suffered in dreadful conditions of poverty. Unable to get any commissions for operas, Mozart turned to composing **chamber music** (music for small groups of instruments) – a far more marketable commodity. He also gave music lessons, which depressed him even further than his squalid living conditions; most of his pupils were children of aristocracy and had neither talent nor interest in music, studying only because it was fashionable. Throughout his life, a suitable position worthy of his talent was to elude Mozart. Returning to Salzburg at the age of 23, Mozart was given a job as a court organist, but was still treated menially and with disdain. Finally in 1780, he was given a commission from the Munich Opera for a full-length work. He composed **IDOMENEO**, a story based on ancient Greek heroes, following the popular tradition of serious opera at that time. The modest success of the opera encouraged the composer to leave Salzburg, which he found stifling, and to take up residence in **Vienna**, where he lived the remainder of his life.

During the next ten years, he composed an incredible number of pieces, including his most famous piano concerti, the remarkable last symphonies (numbers 35-41), ten of his most beautiful string quartets, the clarinet concerto, and his monumental Mass in C

minor. In 1782, he married **Constanze Weber**, who was also from a musical family. Although they were happy together, Constanze was extravagant and disorganized, unfortunately making their financial situation even more precarious.

In the last few years of his life, Mozart collaborated with the brilliant Italian **Lorenzo da Ponte**, who provided the libretti for three of the composer's greatest operas. Despite the brief success of these operas – THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO, DON GIOVANNI, and COSI FAN TUTTE – Mozart was still unable to make a decent living or secure a steady job. The pressure of this bleak economic outlook contributed to Mozart's declining health and by the time he wrote his last opera, THE MAGIC FLUTE (1791), he was near physical and emotional collapse. Despite this, he undertook the composition of his profoundly moving Requiem Mass.

The story of this **Requiem**, depicted in the popular play and film Amadeus, is one of the strangest in Mozart's biography. A mysterious man, wearing a mask, appeared one day at Mozart's door and offered the composer a commission for a Requiem (a special work for chorus and soloists to be sung during funeral services of the Catholic church). The unknown visitor stipulated one condition, however – his identity would remain a secret, even to Mozart. The composer began work, but he became obsessed by the suspicion that the devil or some supernatural force had asked him to write this Requiem and that it would be for Mozart's own funeral. He never lived to learn that a wealthy man had commissioned the work in secret so that he might later pass it off as his own composition.

By the end of 1791, Mozart was too broken in health and spirit to continue writing. He died at the age of 35 in December of that year, from what is believed to have been typhus. Since his wife was also sick at the time and unable to make proper funeral arrangements, he was buried in an unmarked grave in a pauper's cemetery.

If Mozart had only lived in a different era, his life as a composer might have been far easier. In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century in Germany and Austria, the only secure jobs for musicians were as players or composers in the courts of important people, either nobility or clergy. In addition to playing in small orchestras in such households and composing music for special events, composers also hoped to get commissions from Opera houses or orchestras for larger works. If, for example, an Opera company wanted to put on a new work for a special holiday, the manager would commission a composer to write the piece, paying him an appropriate sum of money. This practice still continues today.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were—as there are now—more talented musicians than good-paying jobs, making the support of a patron essential for financial security. In Mozart's case, his sometimes stubborn, wayward disposition and the jealousy of other players and composers prevented him from finding the success he so richly deserved. Mozart was not willing to cultivate the favor of the rich, preferring to concentrate his energies on his art. His fellow musicians were only too anxious to snap up the good-paying jobs, even if it meant resorting to various political intrigues. It is both tragic and ironic that one of the most beloved composers of all time died in poverty and unhappiness, without so much as a headstone to mark his resting place.

Mozart's compositions, though masterly in construction and profound in expression, can nonetheless be appreciated by people from all walks of life. They are unsurpassed in beauty, wit, and craftsmanship, and eloquently express the whole range of human emotions. His opera are notable for their complex portrayals of fully-rounded characters; his piano concerti are among the most stunning ever written. All of Mozart's works, in their amazing depth and variety, encompass the vast extent of the human condition and confirm his place at the head of the world's greatest composers.

## Lorenzo da Ponte

**Lorenzo da Ponte** is considered to be the greatest of Mozart's collaborators, having written the librettos for three of the composer's most celebrated operas: THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO, DON GIOVANNI, and COSI FAN TUTTE. His life was as colorful and dramatic as one of his opera plots. Born Emmanuele Conegliano on March 10, 1749, he was the son of a Jewish tanner and leather dealer living in a city near **Venice**. In 1763 his father converted to Christianity in order to re-marry, and the family adopted the name of da Ponte. Until the age of fourteen, Lorenzo had no formal education and was known as "lo spirito ignornate" (the witty ignoramus). He grew up speaking both Hebrew and Italian. As a teenager, he found in the attic the works of **Metastasio**, the greatest Italian librettist of the eighteenth century and the author of some twenty-seven **opera seria** (serious operas). Reading these works inspired the young da Ponte to pursue a formal education; with his brother, he entered a seminary for five years. At the age of nineteen his studies were interrupted by a long illness. His patron, a Bishop, died, leaving him and his family impoverished.

A year later da Ponte was offered a teaching position at another nearby seminary, and in 1770 he took holy orders and was later appointed Vice Rector. A visit to Venice the following year proved intoxicating; da Ponte fell in love with the magical city. What followed were a series of romantic adventures and involvements, including a friendship with the famous **Casanova**. It is rumored that the infamous playboy may have assisted da Ponte in retouching the libretto of DON GIOVANNI; (a better-suited assistant could not have been found!) Da Ponte began to write and publish what were considered to "radical" ideas (for example, "whether man is happier in an organized society or in a simple state of nature"). He was declared a subversive, forbidden to hold any teaching position in the Venetian Republic, and in 1779 was banished from the city for fifteen years because of his love affair with a married woman. Leaving Venice, da Ponte settled nearby on the Austrian border and began working as a translator and adaptor. He then traveled to Vienna on hearing a rumor that Emperor Joseph II was opening an Italian Opera Company. In **Vienna** he became associated with the court composer **Salieri** (known principally today as the main character in *Amadeus*), and was soon appointed Poet to the Imperial Theaters, in 1784. It was at this time that he began writing opera libretti, having his first great success in 1786. He met **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** in 1783; their collaboration began with the adaptation of Beaumarchais' THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO. Mozart, in a letter to his father, stresses the importance of the rapport between composer and librettist; "The best thing of all is when a good composer, who understands the stage and is talented enough to make sound suggestions, meets an able poet." In da Ponte, Mozart found the perfect partner.

Like Don Giovanni himself, da Ponte's numerous love affairs brought about his downfall, and he was banished from Vienna in 1791 as the result of another scandal. He fled to Trieste where he met and married the daughter of an English merchant, twenty years his junior. At the suggestion of his Casanova, he moved to London and there obtained the post of Poet to the Italian Opera. Mishandling of funds caused him to go into debt, and for a brief time he tried to make money back by working in an Italian bookshop in

London. He ended up fleeing his creditors in 1805, leaving for New York with his wife and children to join her relatives there. The former illustrious librettist began his life in America as a grocer, but eventually became a teacher of Italian, and in time was revered as the **Father of Italian Studies in America**. In 1825, he helped found what was to become **Columbia University**. He died on August 17, 1838, at the age of ninety. One of his last moments of glory was the New York visit of Manuel Garcia and his Spanish opera company, who presented the New York premiere of DON GIOVANNO at da Ponte's request.

## The Don Juan Legend in Literature and Music

The opera DON GIOVANNI is based on the popular figure of **Don Juan** – the dashing reckless seducer and adventurer—who has captured the interest and imagination of men and women for centuries. The character of a young, well-born man who defies all conventions for his personal pleasure may be found in mythology of all ages. The earliest known incarnation developed in sixteenth century Spain, where family honor and female virginity were held sacred. At that time there was a real-life seducer named the **Conde de Villamedia** who defied society and earned a disreputable national reputation. In 1630, a Spanish monk published a moralistic play on the subject, calling the “hero” **Don Juan Tenoria**. The monk’s name was Gabriel Tellez, but he published his play, Il burlador de Sevilla (“the playboy of Seville”) under the pen-name **Tirso de Molina**. Several of the incidents in this version of the story eventually found their way into Mozart and da Ponte’s opera:

1. In Naples, Don Juan makes love to a Dona Isabella while disguised as her fiancé Don Octavio.
2. He and his servant, Catalinon, arrive in Spain and meet a peasant girl, Thisbe, whom he seduces and abandons.
3. He disguises himself as the lover of Dona Ana, slips into her palace, and seduces her. Leaving the palace he is stopped by her father, the Comendador, whom he kills in a duel.
4. The King of Spain erects a statue in memory of the Comendador.
5. In another village, Don Juan finds a peasant wedding party. He beats up the husband and seduces the bride Aminta.
6. Isabella arrives from Naples, meets Thisbe, and both go to Seville to denounce Don Juan.
7. Don Juan finds the Comendador’s statue in a church and invites it to supper. The statue feeds him to scorpions and vipers and drags him down to hell, protesting that his daughter Ana is a virgin. Catalinon, the servant, has observed all this and reports it to the King. The living parties agree to marry.

The story of Don Juan made its way from Spain to Italy, where it was a favorite subject of the **commedia dell’arte**. The **commedia** was a form of improvisatory street theater in which familiar, stereotyped characters (such as Harlequin the clown, Pantalone the old man, etc.) were featured in comical plots. In the **commedia** performances of the Don Juan story, much emphasis was placed on the role of Don Juan’s servant and comic foil. Arlecchino (Harlequin). Thus, what began in Spain as a moralistic play written by a monk was transformed by the Italians into a popular comedy.

When the **commedia** incarnation of the Don Juan legend traveled to Paris in 1659, it was seen by the great French dramatist **Moliere**, who was fond of borrowing plots from the Italian comedies. In his version of the story, Moliere, a noted actor himself, performed the role of Sganarelle, Don Juan's servant. Several other versions of the legend emerged in the European theater. The Italian Carlo **Goldoni** presented his Don Giovanni Tenorio in 1736. In Vienna, Don Juan was the subject of a popular puppet show, in the "Punch and Judy" tradition. In 1781, the great composer **Gluck** (best known for his opera ORFEO ED EURIDICE) composed a ballet on the Don Juan theme. No less than seven Italian operas on the subject appeared before Mozart's version premiered in 1787. That very same year, Giovanni Bertati, a librettist who was a hated rival of Da Ponte, produced his DON GIOVANNI in Venice to a musical score by the composer Giuseppe **Gazzaniga**. Da Ponte used this libretto as a basis for his own. It was not an uncommon practice for composers and librettists to borrow from each other in those days before the invention of the copyright.

The story of the libertine Don Juan has continued to fascinate musicians, writers, and film makers to our present day. The English Romantic poet **Byron** wrote an epic poem, *Don Juan*; a German poem by Nikolaus Lenau was the inspiration for Richard **Strauss'** orchestral tone poem *Don Juan* of 1889. The contemporary composer and humorist Peter Schickel, better known as "**PDQ Bach**", composed and recorded a parody of *Don Giovanni* in the 1960s entitled THE STONED GUEST, which featured a character named Don Octave. In 1901, George Bernard **Shaw**, the great Irish playwright who regarded DON GIOVANNI as one of the supreme operas, produced his variation on the story with *Man and Superman*, in which the third act (often omitted in modern performances due to its length) is subtitled "Don Juan in Hell" and utilizes music from Mozart's opera. In this interpretation Don Juan finds himself in hell where he is pursued by women and becomes the prey, rather than the predator, defying convention with the proposition that women are the stronger sex. Hollywood, too, has been lured by Don Juan's charms as a vehicle for such matinee idols as John Barrymore (*Don Juan*, 1926), Douglas Fairbanks, Jr, (*Private Life of Don Juan*, 1934) and Errol Flynn (*The Adventures of Don Juan*, 1949).

Ingmar Bergman lent his interpretation of the story in *The Devil's Eye* (1960) and a rather unconventional treatment was produced by Roger Vadim in 1973 with *If Don Juan Were a Woman*, starring Brigitte Bardot. Though doomed to hell for eternity, the devil-may-care Don Juan has enjoyed quite a long life through the centuries as one of fiction's most popular and enduring creations.

## DON GIOVANNI: Comedy or Tragedy?

When Mozart and da Ponte wrote DON GIOVANNI they had little or no idea of the great intellectual debate which their masterpiece would inspire over the next two centuries: Is the work to be interpreted as a dark, moralistic tragedy or as a more lighthearted, comic piece? Different conductors and directors have often chosen to emphasize one interpretation or the other. To understand exactly what was intended by the work's creators, one needs to know a bit about the traditions of opera and theater at the time of DON GIOVANNI's birth.

According to eighteenth century theorists, the role of the theater was a didactic one: all drama had to instruct audiences to forsake evil and do good. In a typical **tragedy** the public was supposed to be moved to pity by seeing the hero of the drama overcome by the forces of evil. Both the main character and those surrounding him were drawn from the **higher classes**, and usually were such persons as kings, princes, nobles or mythological figures. In **comedy**, the focus was on the **middle and lower classes** – peasants, servants, commoners – where the baser human characteristics such as uncouthness, miserliness, incredulity and gluttony were held up to ridicule. By the late eighteenth century, the different social classes were brought together onstage, with their various attributes and foibles contrasted for the edification and enjoyment of the public.

These theatrical traditions are reflected in the operas of the time. The tragedies are called **opera seria** (serious operas); these deal with important people and grand events. The plot exposition is achieved through **recitative**, dialogue which is sung on musical pitches. There are different types of recitative common to opera seria: **recitative secco** (dry recitative), in which the words are sung with only a harpsichord as accompaniment, and **recitative accompagnato**, in which the vocal lines are accompanied by instruments of the full orchestra. The latter, sometimes called **dramatic recitative**, is exemplified in DON GIOVANNI by the introductions to Donna Anna's aria "Or sai che l'onore" and Elvira's "Mi tradi" (aria is the Italian word for "song") The arias in opera seria are quite formal, usually in an **A-B-A** structure in which the opening movement (A) is followed by a contrasting section (B), then a repeat of A with vocal ornamentation displaying the singer's virtuosity. The vocal embellishments are known as **coloratura**, characterized by fast runs and leaps (also called **fioritura**). Dramatically, these vocal ornaments were intended to express more intensity of emotion in the character, but more often than not they became a singer's self-indulgent moment of "showing-off".

The opposite of opera seria is **opera buffa** (comic opera). The characters in opera buffa are classified into three different types: 1) **parti serie** – "serious" characters, usually higher classes, who represent such virtuous qualities as courage, honesty, and faithfulness; 2) **parti buffe**: "comic" characters, usually the lower classes, who portray the opposite qualities such as inconstancy, cowardice, and servility; 3) **mezzi caratteri**: "middle" characters who borrow various characteristics from both of the other types. In opera buffa, the character differentiation is reflected in the musical language of the characters: a fast **parlando** (conversation-like vocal line) for comic characters (called "patter" when many words are sung as quickly as possible), and florid **roulades** (vocal

ornaments, like coloratura) for the serious ones. Nonetheless, all the vocal types can sing together, and an essential feature of eighteenth-century comic opera was the large **ensemble** at the end of each act, in which most of the major characters were featured together.

Although DON GIOVANNI has been subtitled a **drama giocosa** (humorous drama), Mozart himself listed DON GIOVANNI as an opera buffa in his catalog of works. In his memoirs, da Ponte recalled that the composer had originally intended this work to be written as an opera seria, and that it was the librettist who persuaded him to alter his point of view. Certainly, DON GIOVANNI contains all the above-described elements of both genres. The libretto includes all the character types from comic opera: Donna Anna, Donna Elvira, Don Ottavio, and the Commendatore are all **parti serie**, Leporello, Zerlina, and Masetto are all **parti buffe**, and Don Giovanni himself, who has both a serious and comic side and is equally at home with the nobles and the peasants, is a **mezzo carattere**. The musical score contains the formal arias of opera seria, but Mozart imbued the form with greater depth of characterization; every note and musical phrase is dramatically motivated. Mozart and da Ponte developed what has become known as the **chain finale**, a series of musical sections at the end of each act played without interruption of recitative for nearly twenty minutes, in which the plot builds to a climax. The music in these finales operated much as a movie camera does today; moving from a “wide angle” shot of the general situation to a “zoom” or “close-up” on a single character’s thoughts and feelings, then back to the broader scene.

Mozart and da Ponte had already blurred the distinction between opera seria and opera buffa in THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO, which contains such contrasting arias as Bartolo’s buffo patter song, “La vendetta” (“Taking vengeance”) and the Countess’s noble expression of her love, “Porgi amor” In DON GIOVANNI darker elements are more present; the plot goes beyond scheming servants and sexual politics to deal with murder, rape, vengeance, and eternal damnation. For many years, most performances of the opera stressed this darkness, ending the opera with the death of Giovanni and eliminating the epilogue, with its optimistic final sextet. This practice helped to reinforce the opinion of those who believed the opera to be a tragedy. The more current practice of restoring the original ending has re-shifted the balance back to what Mozart and da Ponte had intended, a work in which the humorous elements are balanced with the serious ones. This is what makes DON GIOVANNI such a unique, individual masterpiece – the fact that it is so filled with musical and dramatic variety, and, true to life, juxtaposes the comic with the tragic.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

Don Giovanni (Don Joe-VAHN-ee) an extremely licentious young nobleman.....	Baritone
Lepororello (Leh-poh-REL-loh) his servant.....	Bass
Donna Anna (Dohn-nah AHN-nah) a young noblewoman.....	Soprano
Don Ottavio (Don Oht-TAH-vee-oh) her fiancé.....	Tenor
The Commendatore (Cohm-men-dah-TOR-eh) her father.....	Bass
Donna Elvira (Dohn-nah El-VEE-rah) a noblewoman of Burgos, abandoned by Don Giovanni.....	Soprano
Zerlina (Tsair-LEE-nah) a peasant girl.....	Soprano
Masetto (Mah-zeht-toh) her fiancé.....	Bass
Chorus of peasant men and women, chorus of waiters, off-stage chorus of demons, musicians and servants.	

All three of the women in DON GIOVANNI are sopranos, but each type of voice is somewhat different. Anna is a **dramatic** or **dramatic coloratura soprano**. Her voice must be powerful enough to sing the dramatic aria “Or sai chi l’onore,” yet sensitive and agile enough to negotiate the **coloratura** phrases in “non mi dir.” Elvira is sung by a **lyric soprano**: her music is less heavily orchestrated than Anna’s but expresses an even wider range of emotions. Zerlina is a type of light soprano known as a **soubrette**, as befits her youth and innocence (Zerlina is sometimes sung by a mezzo-soprano). Don Giovanni himself is a **baritone**, while Don Ottavio is a **lyric tenor**; Mozart wrote some of his most demanding music for this role. Leporello is a **basso buffo**, or comic bass, and Masetto and the Commendatore are both **basses** –in the original production, both of these characters were portrayed by the same man.

## DON GIOVANNI – A Musical Synopsis

The Action takes place in and around Seville during the seventeenth century.

### Act One, Scene One

The Overture (orchestral introduction) immediately establishes the contrasting moods of the opera, which moves back and forth between the worlds of tragedy and comedy. It begins with the somber music which will recur in the opera's final scene, and is followed by a bubbly **Allegro** suggesting the **giocoso** elements of the opera. Without a break, the overture moves immediately into the music of the first scene as the curtain rises on a garden outside the house of the Commendatore. It is night.

Leporello is discovered pacing up and down, waiting impatiently for his master to appear. He grumbles about the life of a servant; he would like to be the master. He hides when Don Giovanni suddenly enters. Giovanni is pursued by Donna Anna, who tries to tear the cloak from his face and discover his identity (it is revealed later that he has entered Donna Anna's bedchamber and attempted to seduce her). A trio ensues, with Leporello commenting in **buffo** style as Giovanni struggles to free himself from Anna. She cries for help and runs off as her father, the Commendatore, enters. The old man challenges Giovanni to a duel; Giovanni refuses to fight so old an opponent, but the Commendatore insists and, after a brief combat, falls mortally wounded. After a solemn, moving trio between the men which underlines the serious side of the drama, the mood is broken with a recitative which restores the **buffa** atmosphere as Giovanni makes light of the whole affair. He and Leporello escape just as Donna Anna enters, followed by her fiancé, Don Ottavio, and several servants.

Donna Anna is horrified to discover her father's body and is consoled by Ottavio. Her mood shifts from grief to anger, as she demands that Ottavio help her take vengeance for her father's murder. The scene ends with an impassioned "vengeance duet" between Anna and Ottavio.

*In the first scene of the opera, Mozart establishes several different musical moods and styles. From Leporello's first little **buffo** aria to the dramatic duet of Anna and Ottavio, the audience experiences the worlds of both **opera seria** and **opera buffa**. **DON GIOVANNI** is filled with such musical and dramatic contrast.*

### Scene Two

A street, in the early morning. Don Giovanni and Leporello enter, deep in conversation. Leporello is chiding his master for leading a wicked life, but Giovanni's mind is already fixed on finding a new conquest. Even at this very moment he smells a women's perfume ("What a perfect sense of smell!" comments Leporello), and they both step aside as Donna Elvira enters. She sings of her pain and anger at being abandoned by her lover,

and vows that should she find him she will “tear out his heart”, a phrase which she repeats several times.

*Elvira’s character is instantly established in her first aria. Emotional, angry, determined; and yet vulnerable enough to forgive her lover, should he return. She sings in the grandiose style of **opera seria**, using many florid phrases of **coloratura**.*

As Elvira sings, Giovanni, not recognizing her, ironically offers to console the “poverina” (poor girl). Leporello in an **aside** (a remark made to the audience which the other characters cannot hear) makes the cynical observation that that’s how eighteen hundred “poor girls” have been consoled already. Giovanni approaches Elvira and finds, to his embarrassment, that she is a lady he formerly seduced in Burgos, married, and then abandoned. She reproaches him bitterly, but he escapes and leaves Leporello to explain everything. The servant attempts to console her, saying that Giovanni is really not worth bothering about; she is neither the first nor will she be the last. In further explanation, he produces a “non piccolo libro” (not very small book”), a catalog listing his master’s various conquests, and proceeds to describe Giovanni’s varied taste in feminine beauty. The figures are impressive—six hundred and forty women in Italy, two hundred and thirty-one in Germany, one hundred in France, ninety-one in Turkey. “But in Spain”, says Leporello, “in Spain there are already one thousand and three”

*Leporello’s aria, known as the “Catalog Song,” is one of the most famous arias in the **basso-buffo** repertory. It is divided into two sections. In the first, as he proudly lists the number of conquests, the music rushes along breathlessly, just as Don Giovanni rushes to add another name to the list. The second section, in which Leporello relishes describing the different “types,” is more playful and leisurely paced, with Mozart’s music artfully describing the various characteristics of different ladies.*

Leporello concludes with the “consoling” remark that it doesn’t matter what the woman may be like—as long as she is wearing a skirt, “you know what he does.” Elvira exits, outraged.

### **Scene Three**

The countryside near Don Giovanni’s palace, not far from Seville. A group of peasants are singing and dancing, celebrating the forthcoming marriage of their friends Zerlina and Masetto. Don Giovanni enters with Leporello, and is instantly attracted to the pretty young Zerlina. He offers to place the marriage under his “protection” and invites all the peasants to his palace for refreshments; it is clear, however, that he wishes Zerlina to remain behind. Masetto protests, but is discouraged by a threatening gesture from Giovanni. He yields grudgingly and exits with Leporello and the other peasants, leaving Zerlina alone with the Don. He flatters her, calling her a “jewel” with a “sugar-sweet face” and then, to her great surprise, offers to marry her himself. He points to a little house on his estate and invites her to join him there as his bride. (“La ci darem la mano” / “There we will join hands”). She is resistant at first, but begins to waver and eventually

succumbs to his cries of “Vieni!” (“Come!”) and replies, affirmatively, “Andiam!” (“Let’s go!”)

*The duet “La ci darem la mano” is one of the most famous and beloved in all opera. Here Mozart’s genius for revealing characterization through music is clearly demonstrated: the worldly Giovanni’s phrases are sinuous and seductive, the innocent Zerlina’s hesitant and somewhat nervous. When she yields to him, the two sing together in an expression of excitement and pleasure set to a rustic, dance-like tune. Giovanni’s singing in this “pleasant” manner shows his chameleon-like quality of adapting to circumstances. When he is seducing a noble lady, his music is elegant; with a peasant girl, he chooses a more “countrified” tone.*

Giovanni and Zerlina are about to exit, arm in arm, when Donna Elvira appears suddenly, and, in a short and indignant aria, warns Zerlina to “flee from the traitor!” (“Ah, fuggi il traditor!”) She exits, taking Zerlina with her. Giovanni complains to himself that everything seems to be going wrong today. He is joined by Donna Anna and Don Ottavio. Not recognizing Don Giovanni as her assailant (and the murderer of her father), Anna asks his friendship and assistance. No sooner does she start to explain than Elvira is back again on the scene. A quartet begins as Elvira once again denounces Don Giovanni, warning the newcomers not to trust him. Giovanni says that she is mad (“e pazza”); Anna and Ottavio are at a loss to know whom to believe, being impressed with Elvira’s “noble mien and gentle bearing”.

*The quartet, “Non ti fidar, o misera” (“do not trust, unhappy woman”) is an excellent example of one of opera’s unique features; the power to present several points of view simultaneously, with each individual characterized by the quality of his music. While Donna Elvira continues to sing a type of agitated **coloratura**, Giovanni comments in a stealthy **sotto voce** (“under the voice”), as Anna and Ottavio’s music expresses their sense of wonder and confusion.*

Elvira exits, followed by Don Giovanni, who says that he must look after the “poor, unfortunate woman”. No sooner does he leave than Donna Anna cries out “O Dei!” (“Oh my God!”). She has recognized Giovanni’s voice as that of her nocturnal assailant. In a dramatic recitative Anna describes to Ottavio the details of the attempted rape; how Giovanni entered her bedroom, his face concealed by a cloak, and tried to embrace her, and how she struggled to free herself, crying for help. She concludes her narrative with a brief description of her father’s murder, and once more calls on Don Ottavio to exact retribution.

*When Donna Anna finishes her **recitative** narrative, she demands vengeance in a formal aria, “Or sai chi l’onore” (“Now you know who would have torn my honor from me”). The aria is quite dramatic, expressing the determination of an angry and bitter woman. Six times she repeats the phrase “Vendetta ti chiego, la chiede il tuo cor” (“I ask you for vengeance, your heart asks for it also”). In addition to “vendetta” (vengeance), the text contains several other words that will be associated with Donna Anna throughout the opera: “l’onore” (honor), “traditore” (traitor), “padre” (father), and “sangue” (blood).*

*In this brief but effective aria Mozart and DaPonte have created a portrait of a woman hell-bent on revenge.*

At the end of her aria Anna goes off, leaving Don Ottavio to reflect upon the situation. He finds it difficult to believe that a nobleman could commit “so black a crime” and determines to discover the truth and avenge Donna Anna. The mood grows more lyrical as he sings of his love for her in the aria “Dalla sua pace la mia dipende” (“On her peace of mind mine depends”).

*The aria “Dalla sua pace” was interpolated into DON GIOVANNI after its Prague premiere, at the first Vienna performance, where the tenor was incapable of singing the difficult “Il mio Tesoro” in Act II. Sometimes in performance this aria is cut, but more often than not, both tenor arias are included. Its inclusion here serves as a moment of “rest” for the audience following the highly charged preceding scenes. At this point in the drama a moment of relaxation is a welcome relief from the mounting tension. It is the first truly subdued, peaceful music in the score (aside from the sensuous “La ci darem la mano” and the brief male trio at the Commendatore’s death) and contrasts with the preceding dramatic aria of Anna.*

Ottavio departs, clearing the way for Leporello, who grumbles that at all costs he must quit working for such a “lunatic”. Giovanni joins him and the servant tells his master about the most recent turn of events: as he was entertaining Masetto and the peasants, in came Zerlina with Donna Elvira, who warned everybody of Don Giovanni’s real character; Leporello managed to lead the ranting Elvira from the room and lock her outside in the street. Giovanni is completely unruffled by this news, and, in a brilliant and exuberant aria (“Finch ‘han dal vino” –sometimes called the “Champagne Aria”) looks forward to the approaching festivities at this palace. Before the night is over, he says, he will add another dozen names to his catalog.

#### **Scene Four**

The garden outside of Don Giovanni’s palace. Peasants are chattering, wandering about, or lying asleep on the ground, feeling the effects of the wine which Leporello has dispensed. Amongst them are Zerlina and Masetto, in the midst of a quarrel. Masetto accuses his fiancée of being unfaithful and deserting him on his wedding day; she assures him that she has been true to him (“He never so much as touched the tip of my finger!”) When he remains sullen she tells him, in a charming aria, that, if he doesn’t believe her he can beat her, punish her, do what he will—but afterwards they must make peace and live in contentment (Batti, batti”/”Beat me, beat me”).

Just as Masetto is won over, Giovanni’s voice is heard from off-stage; the hotheaded peasant grows instantly suspicious of Zerlina’s nervous reaction. Now begins the Finale to the first act, in which the music flows uninterrupted for nearly twenty minutes. Masetto hides in an arbor and observes as Giovanni enters and flirts with Zerlina. The Don attempts to lead her into the arbor where he will “make her happy” when, to his surprise, out steps Masetto. Giovanni lightly reproaches Masetto for leaving his bride-to-be alone,

and, as the sound of music is heard through the palace windows, he brings the two peasants into the party.

The music and mood become ominous as Donna Elvira, Donna Anna, and Don Ottavio enter, disguised beneath cloaks and masks. Leporello opens the palace window and a graceful (and well-known) minuet is heard from inside. Leporello notices the three masked figures and, at Giovanni's instructions, invites them to join the party. They accept, but pause before entering to sing a hushed and fervent trio, asking heaven's help and protection.

### **Scene Five**

A brightly-lit ballroom in Don Giovanni's palace. Don Giovanni is entertaining his guests with Leporello's assistance. Masetto warns Zerlina to be cautious, but Giovanni continues to flirt openly with her. Trumpets and drums announce the entrance of the three maskers; Giovanni and Leporello welcome them ceremoniously, and they echo Giovanni's cry "Viva la liberta!" ("Long live liberty!"). The Don then orders the on-stage musicians to strike up, and the dancing begins with a reprise of the minuet. Donna Anna dances with Don Ottavio and, as another orchestra plays a country dance, Giovanni dances with Zerlina, instructing Leporello to look after Masetto. A third orchestra begins a waltz and Leporello forces Masetto to dance this with him.

*The musical sequence shows Mozart's immense technical ingenuity. Three different dance rhythms are going on all at once. These dances are carefully divided into "classes" – the minuet for the aristocracy, the waltz for the lower classes, and the country dance – somewhat "in between" the two – performed as a compromise by an aristocrat dancing below his station with a peasant girl who is dancing above hers.*

Don Giovanni pulls Zerlina into an adjoining room; when Leporello notices their exit, he quickly follows. A moment later the peasant girl is heard screaming for help, prompting Masetto and the maskers to rush to her aid as they try to break down the door. Don Giovanni quickly appears, dragging Leporello and accusing him of being the guilty party (here the stage musicians stop playing and the full orchestra takes over). Giovanni's ruse fails to convince the three maskers; they remove their disguises and denounce Don Giovanni, warning him that he will be punished and that the entire world shall know of his crimes. In the ensuing confusion, Giovanni manages to escape as the orchestra thunders threateningly and the curtain falls.

### **Act Two, Scene One**

A street outside Donna Elvira's lodging at night. Having evaded his pursuers, Giovanni enters with Leporello, who is once again threatening to leave his master. They discuss this in a short **buffa** duet, "Eh via, buffone!" ("Come on, clown"). After the dramatic ending to the first act, this little scene re-establishes the fact that DON GIOVANNI is a **drama giocoso**. In the recitative which follows, Giovanni bribes Leporello to change his mind. The servant agrees, "Purchè lasciam le donne" ("Provided that we leave women

alone”). “Lasciar le donne? Pazzo!” (“Leave the women alone? You’re crazy!”), replies Giovanni. He then explains that women are more essential to him than the bread he eats and the air he breathes. “And you have the heart to deceive them all?” asks Leporello. Giovanni responds with his own peculiar logic: if he is faithful to only one, he is being cruel to the others; the solution is to be generous and love them all. At the moment, he is particularly interested in wooing Donna Elvira’s pretty young maid. To win her over, he will disguise himself as one of her own class, and forces Leporello to exchange cloaks and hats with him.

With her usual impeccable timing, Donna Elvira appears on her balcony. She sings sadly of her love for Don Giovanni. He hides behind Leporello (who is able to pass for his master in the darkness) and answers her with flattery and pleas for forgiveness.

*The trio “Ah, taci inguisto core” (“Oh! Be silent, unfair heart”) is one of the most beautiful musical scenes in the opera. Mozart’s music illuminates a hitherto unseen side of Elvira’s character; no longer angry and accusing, she is revealed at her most vulnerable. The music is tender and introspective as she expresses her bewilderment that she can still love a man who has so mistreated her. When Giovanni responds, he echoes her music (though his words are insincere) as Leporello comments in his typical **buffo** fashion.*

At first Elvira resists, but when Giovanni threatens suicide (a notion which makes Leporello shake with laughter) she relents and descends from the balcony. Giovanni moves into the shadows and watches as Leporello approaches her in the character of his master and addresses her affectionately. A comic scene ensues, with Elvira quite serious and Leporello obviously enjoying playing the gentleman. Suddenly Giovanni leaps out, pretending to be an attacker, and frightens them away, leaving himself alone to serenade Elvira’s maid. Accompanying himself on the mandolin, he sings a seductive and elegant melody, “Deh vieni alla finestra” (“Oh, come to the window”).

Before the object of his affections can appear, Masetto enters with a group of armed peasants. They are searching for Don Giovanni with murder on their minds. Mistaken for Leporello, the Don deceitfully offers to help them, and in the aria. “Meta di voi qua vadano” (“Half of you go in that direction”) he sends them off in different directions.

*The two consecutive arias show Giovanni’s chameleon-like character. In “Deh vieni alla finestra”, he is all smoothness, elegance and seductiveness. In “Meta di voi”, he adopts the musical language of his servant, using the familiar **buffo** “patter” style and angular musical accents.*

The men go off; leaving Masetto behind, Giovanni takes Masetto’s weapons under the pretext of examining them and gives him a good, hard beating before making his escape. Zerlina enters to find her fiancé lying on the ground, bruised and moaning. She comforts him the tender aria “Vedrai carino” (“You will see, my darling”) saying that she has a special cure for Masetto’s pains –her love. As she describes the beating of her heart, Mozart suggests the heartbeat in the pulsing of the music.

## Scene Two

A dark courtyard before Donna Anna's palace. Avoiding the light of approaching torchbearers, Leporello enters with Donna Elvira. The servant has grown tired of the game and is anxious to rid himself of her. In the darkness, he searches for an escape as Elvira pleads with him not to leave her (still believing him to be Giovanni). Now begins the great sextet "sola, sola in buio loco" ("Alone, alone in this dark place"). Just as Leporello locates an exit, Donna Anna and Don Ottavio arrive, dressed in mourning, preceded by servants bearing torches. In a brief duet they once again lament the Commendatore's death. Next Zerlina and Masetto enter and prevent Leporello and Elvira from escaping. All think that the servant is Giovanni and hurl accusations at him, threatening him with death. Only Elvira is sympathetic; she identifies herself, surprising everyone, and pleads for mercy upon the man whom she believes to be her husband. The others remain unmoved and converge upon Leporello, who quickly falls to his knees and admits his true identity. All express their amazement in a brilliant and exciting sextet, after which Anna exits.

The others are about to beat Leporello, and he pathetically begs forgiveness in a short **buffo** aria. He ends by describing how he had meant to escape, and inching closer towards the door, he sneaks out. Don Ottavio announces his intention to inform authorities of Giovanni's crime and have him arrested. He asks Elvira, Zerlina, and Masetto to remain with Donna Anna and console her with the assurance that vengeance is forthcoming, in the aria "Il mio tesoro" ("My treasure")

All but Elvira exit. In a dramatic recitative, she expresses her conflicting emotions; though Giovanni has callously betrayed her, she loves and pities him still. She elaborates on these feelings in the aria "Mi tradi quell'alma ingrata" ("That ungrateful soul betrayed me")

*The aria "Mi tradi" was interpolated into the Vienna production of DON GIOVANNI when the reigning **diva**, Caterina Cavalieri, insisted on a second act aria to show off her voice, which was well-suited to flashy **coloratura** singing. Mozart gave the singer her coloratura, but made it all motivated dramatically, a musical expression of Elvira's highly emotional, confused state of mind. (Later composers would use coloratura in "mad scenes", employing vocal outbursts of notes sung in rapid succession, running from low to high, to illustrate the wanderings of a demented mind).*

## Scene Three

A churchyard by moonlight, with a statue of the Commendatore. Don Giovanni leaps over the churchyard wall and exchanges cloaks with Leporello, who is complaining of his narrow escape from a beating. Giovanni tells him of his latest adventure, in which, mistaken for Leporello, he began the seduction of one of a servant. Leporello is far from amused. "What if she had been my wife?" he asks. "Even better!" replies Giovanni, roaring with laughter. His laughter is cut short by a sinister voice announcing that

Giovanni's laughter will end before dawn. The two men eventually realize that the voice comes from the statue of the Commendatore.

*With the statue's first line to Don Giovanni, Mozart introduces a completely new sound in the opera –three trombones, used only when the statue is visible on stage (not even in the Overture do the trombones appear when the statue's music is suggested). In the minds of eighteenth century audiences, trombones were associated with the supernatural and religious.*

Giovanni orders Leporello to read the inscription on the statue. "Here I await vengeance on the villain who took my life." The Don irreverently calls the statue an "old clown" and insists that Leporello extend an invitation to dinner. This he does in the duet "O, statua gentilissima" ("Oh, most noble statue"). The superstitious, terrified Leporello hesitates but is threatened by his master's sword and finally offers the invitation. The statue nods in acceptance; undaunted, Giovanni repeats the offer and is answered with a solemn "Yes." Master and servant leave to prepare for the dinner.

#### **Scene Four**

A room in Donna Anna's house. Don Ottavio once again attempts to console Donna Anna with assurances of Giovanni's punishment, and suggests that they may soon be wed. Anna rebukes him for speaking of marriage while she is still in mourning. He calls her cruel; she entreats him not to reproach her and reassures him of her love in a florid aria. "Non mi dir" (Do not say, my beloved, that I am cruel with you").

#### **Scene Five**

A brightly lit hall in Don Giovanni's palace. A table is set for supper. Giovanni orders his musicians to strike up as he sits down to dine. They play several popular opera tunes of the time, including the famous "Non piu andrai", Figaro's aria from Mozart's THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO. Leporello says he knows this piece "too well" (an inside joke at the time of the premiere in Prague, where the bass playing Leporello had also played Figaro). In a comic scene, Giovanni comments on the deliciousness of the food and wine, making the hungry Leporello's mouth water until the servant furtively snatches a few bites for himself. Elvira rushes in, voicing her love and pity for Giovanni and pleading on her knees for him to change his life. He mocks her, brazenly raising a toast to women and wine, and she exits, denouncing him. At the door, she screams violently and rushes out by another way. Giovanni sends Leporello to investigate, and the servant also screams in terror, running back in with the news that the statue is approaching. There is a knock, and, as Leporello hides under the table in fear, Giovanni goes to answer the door himself. The statue enters.

*The statue enters to a powerful diminished chord, recalling the beginning of the overture and the moment when the Commendatore was stabbed by Giovanni. The eerie rising and falling scales of the overture reappear, now made more terrifying with the addition of the trombones. A vocal trio, parallel to that of the Commendatore's death scene, develops*

*between Giovanni, Leporello, and the statue. The variety of dynamics in this scene is remarkably effective, with the sudden alterations of **forte** (loud) and **piano** (soft) having a disconcerting effect on the nerves.*

Giovanni orders Leporello to set another place at the table, but the statue explains that, being dead, it cannot eat mortal food. Instead, it invites Giovanni to go dine with it. Leporello attempts to decline for his master (“Sorry, he hasn’t got time”), but Giovanni accepts, saying that none shall ever call him a coward. He takes the statue’s offered hand and cries out in its icy grasp. The statue repeatedly demands that he repent, but the Don defiantly refuses. The statue disappears as flames engulf Giovanni and an invisible chorus of demons summons him to hell. With a final, anguished cry he disappears in the fire.

As the smoke clears, Donna Anna, Don Ottavio, Donna Elvira, Zerlina, and Masetto enter with officers of the law, to arrest Giovanni. Leporello emerges from under the table and explains what has occurred. Now that justice has been served and the criminal punished, Ottavio asks Anna if they can be wed; she promises to do so after a formal year of mourning has been observed. Elvira announces that she will return to the convent (from which Giovanni had abducted her). The peasants have less weighty decisions to be made: Zerlina and Masetto will go home to dinner and Leporello declares that he will go to the tavern to look for a better master. The six characters unite in singing the moral of the story:

“This is the end of the evil-doer. The death of wicked men is always suited to their life”.

The music of the final sextet begins as a **fugue** (an eighteenth century musical form similar to “round”) started by Donna Anna and Elvira in unison, with the others joining in counterpoint. It is bright and cheerful, ending the opera on an optimistic note and reminding the audience that this is not a tragedy but a **drama giocosa**. It is a brilliant ending to a brilliant musical drama. Yet, for some modern audiences, the moralizing tone of the sextet seems a bit empty and artificial. Giovanni may have been evil and amoral, but the world perhaps seems a bit pallid in his absence. The Don is one of the first examples in literary (and operatic) history of the type of character known today as the **anti-hero**. Perhaps the only other operatic role rivaling Don Giovanni in dramatic profundity is the title role in Bizet’s *Carmen*.

## Vocabulary

Supertitles	Coloratura (coh-la-rah-TOO-rah)
Opera	Opera Buffa (BOO-fah)
Libretto	Patter
Script	Dramma Giocosa (joe-COH-zah)
Ensemble	Overture
Score	Forte (FORE-tay)
Composer	Piano (pee-YAH-no)
Soprano	Allegro (ah-LAY-groh)
Mezzo-soprano	Finale (fee-NAH-lay)
Tenor	Tragedy
Baritone	Comedy
Bass	Opera Seria (SAIR-ee-ah)
Conductor	Recitativo (reh-chee-tah-TEE-voh)
Director	Secco (SHE-coh)
Design team	Accompagnato (ah-comb-pahn-YAH-toh)
Choreographer	Stromentato (stroh-men-TAH-toh)
Aria	

## Suggestions for Classroom Discussion

1. Compare the roles of men and women in 17<sup>th</sup> century Spain with today. Have sexual roles and attitudes changed? How?
2. Why has the character of Don Juan/Giovanni held such a fascination through the centuries? Discuss how he represents the idea of the individual's needs and desires in relation to society. Is he a hero or a villain? Should he be admired or despised? What are his good qualities? What are his negative qualities?
3. Discuss the psychology of the three women in Giovanni's life. How are they alike? How do they differ? How does Mozart's music reflect this?
4. In the society of DON GIOVANNI, the class structure was clearly delineated, as was the relationship between master and servant. Is there still a rigid class structure in the world today? Do people of different classes behave that differently from one another?
5. Compare da Ponte's version of the Don Juan story with the original play of Tirso de Molina. How is it similar, and how does it differ? Who are the corresponding characters in da Ponte's libretto" (for example, Molina's Catalinon became da Ponte's Leporello).
6. List and pronounce the key Italian words in the opera and have the class find the parallel words in English.
7. What ethical issues and dilemmas can be found in the opera? What does the opera "say" about crime and punishment, sin, and retribution?
8. After seeing the Virginia Opera of DON GIOVANNI, discuss the stage director's interpretation of the work. Did this production emphasize the comic or the tragic? What ideas were brought out? How did the sets and costumes contribute to this?
9. Discuss other aspects of the DON GIOVANNI performance, such as the following:
  - a. How clearly did the singers portray and differentiate their characters?
  - b. How specifically did the orchestral music help in establishing, maintaining, or switching the dramatic mood?
  - c. What instrument accompanied the recitatives most frequently?
  - d. What was the purpose of separating the musical numbers (arias and ensembles) by recitatives?
  - e. For which characters did you feel compassion or sympathy? With whom did you identify?

- f. Does the story and theme of DON GIOVANNI have any relevance to your lives today? In what ways?
- g. What issues brought up or discussed in class came out most strongly in your experience of the performance?

## **Discography**

There are many recordings of DON GIOVANNI available. Among those currently in the catalog, the following are recommended:

1. Cesare Siepi, Fernando Corena, Suzanne Danco, Lisa Della Casa, Hilde Gueden, Anton Dermota. Josef Krips conducting the Vienna Philharmonica. LONDON Records
2. Eberhard Waechter, Giuseppe Taddei, Joan Sutherland, Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, Grziella Sciutti, Luigi Alva. Carlo Maria Giulini conducting the Philharmonica Orchestra. ANGEL Records.
3. Thomas Allen, Richard Van Allan, Carol Vaness, Maria Ewing, Elizabeth Gale, Keith Lewis. Bernard Haitink conducting the Glyndebourne Festival Orchestra. ANGEL Records.
4. Ruggiero Raimondi, Jose Van Dam, Edda Moser, Kiri Te Kanawa, Teresa Berganza, Kenneth Riegel. Lorin Maazel conducting the Paris Opera Orchestra on the film soundtrack. COLUMBIA Record

