

The effect and communication of wolfgang amadeus mozart" don giovanni and gioacch...

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The History of Don Giovanni by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Il barbiere di Siviglia by Gioacchino Rossini

Don Giovanni premiered in Prague, the national capitol of the Czech Republic. Wolfgang Amadues Mozart declared his dedication to write the opera during the exuberant opera season of 1786-1787 after the debut of La Nozze di Figaro and it's great success in theatre in Prague. His declaration was delivered to his friend, Pasquale Bondini, manager of the Bondini opera company, who in excitement, accepted the offer and proposed it premiere the following opera season in his theatre. The following opera season, Don Giovanni premiered at the Nostic Theatre, in Prague, on October 29, 1787; the opera was met with tremendous praise, but perhaps it's greatest performance was given in Vienna, Austria, in 1788. Before the opera was brought to Vienna, Mozart made changes and necessary additions to the piece of work in order to increase its humor and therefore appeal to audiences (Mozart, Da Ponte, MacFarren).

Gioacchino Rossini's career as a pianist and composer grew gradually in his early years until the debut of his one-act opera, farsa, La Cambiale di matrimonio. From then on, Rossini's career took off in great strides. Two years later, Rossini was considered Italy's greatest composer of the time. He went on to compose other pieces of work, both serious and comedic. In 1814 and 1815, Rossini had written four new operas, one of which is Il barbiere di Siviglia. Although destined to become one of the greatest operas of all time, the performance was met with hostility and threatened violence when it opened in Rome in 1816. Rossini was seated up front in the orchestra, and,

unbothered by the chaos, still stood to applaud his performers at the end. The opera may have provoked such a response from the Roman audience because of it's, " direct confrontation between the old and the new," considering Giovanni Paisiello's *Le Barbier de Séville* by Guiseppe Petrosellini was still regarded with tremendous respect by the people of Rome (Plantinga, p. 132). The original play *The Barber of Seville* was completed in 1775 but never reached the spoken stage until two years later. Rossini was resented for portraying the original play in his two act opera since the play was beloved by the Roman people.

Although Rossini did all he could to ensure his opera would not be mistaken for that of Paisiello's earlier work, some similarities between the opera and play remained evident and could not be mistaken. Completely contrasting was the name in which Rossini's opera was first performed under, which was *Almaviva, ossia l'inutile precauzione* ([www. britannica. com](http://www.britannica.com)). Rossini added a new character and gave her a prominent aria in the second act, leaving the dramatic situations of the opera and play nearly the same, " a young count resorts to two subterfuges, first disguised as a soldier and then as a music teacher, to approach and win Rosina, ward of the jealous doctor Bartolo, who intends to marry her himself," (Plantinga, p. 132).

Both operas open to Almaviva, who make's an appearance under Rosina's window where he meets Figaro. However, differentiating is that in Paisiello's opera the characters exchange short songs written for their characters and Rossini's opening scene involves a chorus of serenaders and is all around more elaborately written. In comparison, " Paisiello's and Rossini's opening

scenes reflect not so much divergent individual approaches to a dramatic situation as altered operatic conventions," (Plantinga, p. 133). Still considered one of Rossini's greatest operas, the opera itself was derived from other composer's works, making it less original than fans would hope to receive from such a prolific composer. Rossini's attempt to rename the opera *Almaviva* was intended as a sign of respect however it was not received that way. Paisiello's personality was described by many as cold. *The Barber of Seville* was written to preserve his name so when Rossini wrote his opera, Paisiello interpreted it a sign of disrespect because the opera's success eventually wiped out the popularity of his play (Rossini, Sterbini, Martin).

Despite Rossini's comedy being plagued with pranks and mishaps during its debut, it went on to become one of Rossini's most well-known operas, growing in popularity after its troubled first performance. Similarly, Mozart's comedy, *Don Giovanni*, was met with great praise after its first performance. Both pieces of art were given their due appreciation after their initial debut. Rossini's personality displayed his vibrant characteristics, evident of his preference in writing vibrant, comedies as opposed to Mozart's preference in writing dramas.

Mozart chose the story of *Don Giovanni* for his opera in the hopes that it would form a basis much like the manner of *The Marriage of Figaro*. However, there are very set differences in the between the two operas. *Figaro* is well known for its reflection on the time period in which Mozart lived in and is also a much more standard comedic opera. *Don Giovanni* overall has a much grimmer tone, creating a darker comedy than previous known

works (Opera Guides, p. 8). The opera displayed an array of social classes, and so all audience attendees were able to identify with his characters. Different 'types' of characters displayed different characteristics. More serious characters (*parti serie*) displayed qualities of courage, honesty, and passion. Lower classes were represented by comic characters (*parti buffe*), whom displayed opposite characteristics from their serious counterparts. The opera certainly does not lack in any qualifying characteristics needed to label it a comic opera. The cast is complete by a set of 'middle' characters who display either both serious and comic qualities or none at all. Don Giovanni himself is a 'middle' character (*mezzo carattere*).

Unlike many pieces of work preceding its time, Mozart's Don Giovanni had a lot to say politically about society at that time. The opera adopted "a critical tone about society and were becoming concerned about issues like personal freedom and personal choice and misuse of justice and the right of the ordinary man to be protected by the law," (Opera Guides, p. 10). The opera's take on Italy's current political state could account for the dark, serious undertone of the comedy. Some aspects of Mozart's dark comedy are made more tragic by the fact that it is a comedy. Don Giovanni's character is a perfect example. Because of the characters comedic characteristics, the downfall of the hero becomes more dramatic. The positivity of comedy can mesh seamlessly with drama if used properly, for "happiness and humour are more effective on stage when used as a counterpoise to tears and sorrow than when used on their own," (Opera Guides, p. 12).

Something interesting to note about Mozart's comedy is that none of his characters sing of fate or destiny but instead of justice and vengeance, clearly setting a tone for rebellion throughout his opera. Because the writing of Don Giovanni followed the great success of The Marriage of Figaro, characteristics of the comedy can be compared to some of the more redeemable qualities of Figaro. Displayed with Mozart's Don Giovanni is Mozart's imitation of folk music, used in peasant scenes, adding a lighter or sillier feel to those scenes. If you were to look closely into the writing process of Don Giovanni one would find that Mozart stopped writing between the dates of June 24 and August 10, suggesting that he either gave up writing for a month or had a matter distracting him from his work. Mozart entered the opera's overture under the day before the opera's public production. He worked late into the night writing, his wife made efforts to keep him awake, although eventually he fell asleep anyways. The orchestra had to perform the overture at sight and despite the significant crunch in time, the performance was a success.

The operas discussed in this paper were both master works by their respective composers. Mozart's Don Giovanni started as a polite gesture and turned into one of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's most famous comedies. The opera, although labeled a comedy, has a prominent darker tone throughout, combining comedy and serious drama in a complimentary way that accents the distinctive nature of the opera's characters and subliminal political agenda.

Similarly, Gioacchino Rossini's *il Barbiere di Siviglia*, took a 19th century play and turned it into one of the most remarkable operas of its time. Rossini was known for his exuberant personality and ability to write pieces just as vivacious as he was. Despite Rossini's passion for lively entertainment and comedies, his opera was not originally received well by audience members. The opera did not really thrive until its performance in Venice. Despite getting off on a shaky foot, the opera eventually landed the composer the title of the greatest composer of his time. He was despised for the imitation he made of Paisiello's play *Le Barbier de Séville*, even though Rossini saw it more as a sign of admiration for Paisiello's work. After overcoming many hardships, Rossini was met with the proper credit and respect he deserved while his comedy *il Barbiere di Siviglia* went down in history as not only one of Rossini's best works but as one of the best operas of its time. Similarly, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote a comedy regarded one of the greatest operas of its time. Followed by the performances of *The Marriage of Figaro*, Mozart dedicated a year to writing his famous comedy, *Don Giovanni*, and was still finishing the overture the night before it's first performance. Following its debut performance, Mozart made changes to the opera before it's performance in Vienna in 1788, which has been regarded as the opera's most spectacular performance.

Both composers made a name for themselves in the opera world with more than just these two pieces of work, however it cannot be denied the profound impact both *il Barbiere di Siviglia* and *Don Giovanni* made in the opera world and the message they sent to the rest of the world as well. That is why these

operas are still being performed around the world today, prolonging the importance of their history and the music that was created to send their message.