

# *Don Giovanni*



# Welcome!

The State Theatre is proud to present Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, captured in live performance at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, Italy's foremost opera house. This HD presentation captures all the grandeur and excitement of the live event.

This *Keynotes* performance guide has been created by the State Theatre Education Department to add to your understanding and enjoyment of the opera. We hope it will encourage you to take advantage of our other HD opera offerings this season.



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# About the Opera



*Il dissoluto punito, ossia il Don Giovanni (The Rake Punished, or Don Giovanni)*, most popularly known simply as *Don Giovanni*, is an opera in two acts with music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and libretto by Mozart's favorite collaborator, Lorenzo da Ponte. Mozart himself conducted the premiere, at the Estates Theatre in Prague, on October 29, 1787. The opera was rapturously received.

Few operas surpass *Don Giovanni* for sheer dramatic power. The opera begins as the libertine sexually assaults a Spanish lady and then slays her father. It ends with him being dragged into the fires of hell by the stone statue of the man he murdered. *Don Giovanni* was something new in opera, a hybrid of serious and comic opera forms. It contains elements of broad slapstick, but also dark and disturbing drama; the rational as well as the supernatural; an emphatic expression of personal freedom, along with a cautionary tale about defying social, moral, and religious convention. The title character embodies the opera's contradictions. He is a nobleman who sometimes behaves in the basest fashion. He is the embodiment of sin, but also the voice of liberty in the new Age of Reason. In short, *Don Giovanni* is one of the most complex and fascinating operas ever created.

**“There are three things in the world I love most: the sea, *Hamlet*, and *Don Giovanni*.”**

**—Gustave Flaubert**

## D.G. Trivia

- For the opera's Vienna premiere, Mozart had to write a new aria for Don Ottavio, since the tenor couldn't handle the florid melody of the original aria, "Il mio tesoro." The replacement, "Dalla sua pace," was so good that modern productions almost always include both arias.
- Soon after the opera's premiere, the cheerful prologue was dropped from the score. It was not regularly performed until the mid-20th century.
- In his play *Man and Superman*, based on the legend of Don Juan, George Bernard Shaw parodied *Don Giovanni*, including direct references to the final scene between the Commendatore and Don Giovanni.
- One of the many debates surrounding this complex work is whether or not, during the course of the opera, Don Giovanni actually succeeds in having his way with any of the women he pursues. (The score doesn't explicitly say.)
- During the banquet scene at the end of the opera, an onstage band entertains Don Giovanni with opera tunes of the day, which the audience would have recognized: *Una cosa rara* by Vicente Martín y Soler and Giuseppe Sarti's *Fra i due litiganti il terzo gode*. Both songs win Leporello's approval. Then the band strikes up a melody that will be recognized even by today's audiences: "Non più andrai" from Mozart's own *Marriage of Figaro*, which premiered the year before *Don Giovanni*. Leporello's opinion? "Unfortunately, I know this one all too well."

**Scene one: A garden by night.**

Leporello, Don Giovanni's servant, grumbles about his job (aria: "Notte e giorno faticar"). He keeps watch while his master attempts to seduce Donna Anna, the Commendatore's daughter. Suddenly, Giovanni, wearing a mask, rushes out of the house, hotly pursued by Anna and then her father. The Commendatore challenges the unknown assailant to a duel, while his daughter runs for help. Giovanni kills the old man. Leporello and his master make their escape.

Anna returns, accompanied by her fiancé, Don Ottavio, and finds her father's lifeless body. She charges Ottavio with avenging the murder (duet: "Fuggi, crudele, fuggi").

**Scene two: A street by night.**

Don Giovanni and Leporello, in search of fresh adventures, encounter Donna Elvira. Seduced and then abandoned by the libertine, she is looking to take her revenge (aria: Ah chi mi dice mai). As soon as Giovanni recognizes Elvira, he hurries away, leaving Leporello to explain to her that his master is true to no woman. He rattles off a long list of Giovanni's conquests (aria: Madamina, il catalogo è questo). Donna Elvira departs, determined to punish her faithless lover.

A peasant couple, Zerlina and Masetto, arrive with a group of friends to celebrate their approaching marriage. Don Giovanni appears, accompanied by Leporello, and immediately sets his sights on Zerlina. He attempts to get her alone by sending the others off to his country house for a wedding party. Masetto is led away by Leporello, but has clearly grasped the situation (aria: "Ho capito, signor sì"). Now alone with Zerlina, Giovanni attempts to seduce her with gallant promises (duettino: "Là ci darem la mano"). He is thwarted by the unexpected arrival of Donna Elvira, who denounces her betrayer and admonishes Zerlina to flee (aria: "Ah fuggi il traditor"). She leads the girl away.

Donna Anna and Don Ottavio arrive. Not recognizing him as the Commendatore's masked assailant, they seek Giovanni's help in finding and punishing the murderer. Donna Elvira reappears and tells them of Giovanni's wicked ways (quartet: "Non ti fidar, o misera"). Unable to convince Ottavio and Anna that Elvira is insane, Don Giovanni slips away. But Donna Anna has recognized his voice as that of her assailant and of the man who killed her father. She urges Don Ottavio to avenge the outrage (aria: "Or sai chi l'onore"). Ottavio vows to carry out the wishes of his beloved (aria: "Dalla sua pace"). In the meantime Don Giovanni directs preparations for the festivities, during which he hopes to possess the attractive young Zerlina (aria: "Fin ch'han dal vino").

**Scene three: A garden with two gates locked on the outside. Two alcoves.**

Masetto rebukes Zerlina for her unfaithfulness, but his bride soothingly reassures him that her virtue has not been compromised (aria: "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto"). Unconvinced, Masetto hides in an alcove to observe as Don Giovanni appears and resumes his seduction of Zerlina. The libertine, spotting the bridegroom, promptly invites him and Zerlina to the party. Three masked figures—Don Ottavio, Donna Anna, and Donna Elvira—arrive in search of Don Giovanni, who does not recognize them and invites them, too, to the celebration.

**Scene four: A brightly lit hall prepared for a lavish ball.**

During the festivities Don Giovanni attempts to seduce Zerlina, but his plan is thwarted by the arrival of Donna Anna, Don Ottavio, and Donna Elvira. After trying in vain to put the blame on Leporello, and threatening everyone in sight, Don Giovanni makes his escape.

## Scene one: A street.

Leporello has made up his mind to leave his master's service, but Giovanni bribes him to stay. Hoping to seduce Elvira's maid, Giovanni persuades Leporello to exchange cloaks and hats with him. Elvira appears at the window. Don Giovanni, concealed behind Leporello, professes his repentance to her (trio: "Ah taci, ingiusto core"). Trusting his words, Elvira goes off with Leporello, whom she has mistaken for Giovanni. The libertine is now free to serenade Donna Elvira's maid (canzonetta: "Deh vieni alla finestra"). The sudden arrival of Masetto, accompanied by armed peasants determined to kill the seducer, obliges him to give up this conquest, too.

Still disguised as Leporello, Don Giovanni convinces the posse that he is eager to join the manhunt. He cunningly manages to disperse the group, leaving himself alone with Masetto. He gives the peasant a thorough thrashing, steals his weapons, and runs off. Zerlina comes to the aid of her sweetheart, tenderly nursing his bruises (aria: "Vedrai, carino").

## Scene two: A dark courtyard.

In the dark, Leporello has managed to elude Donna Elvira (sextet: "Sola, sola in buio loco"). Donna Anna and Don Ottavio arrive on the scene. Leporello attempts to slip out through a door, but he is accosted by Zerlina and Masetto. Still dressed in his master's clothes, he is mistaken for Don Giovanni. The two couples surround him, bent on revenge, while Donna Elvira pleads for mercy for the man she thinks is Giovanni. Leporello removes his cloak to reveal his true identity. He begs everyone's forgiveness and, seeing an opportunity, makes his escape.

Certain by now of Don Giovanni's guilt, Don Ottavio swears vengeance on the villain (aria: "Il mio tesoro intanto"). Donna Elvira, however, cannot conceal her pity for the miscreant (aria: "Mi tradi quell'alma ingrata").

## Scene three: a graveyard with a statue of the Commendatore.

Don Giovanni meets Leporello in the graveyard and recounts his latest seduction: one of Leporello's girlfriends. Giovanni laughs at his servant's discomfiture. Suddenly, the statue marking the grave of the Commendatore begins to speak, intoning a dire prediction regarding Don Giovanni's fate. Undaunted, the libertine invites the statue to dine at his villa. Incredibly, the statue nods its head and accepts the invitation.

## Scene four: Donna Anna's room.

Don Ottavio, sure that Don Giovanni is soon to be punished, presses Donna Anna to marry him. Thinking it too soon since her father's murder, she asks him to be patient a little longer. When Ottavio chides her for making him wait, Anna reassures him of her love (aria: "Non mi dir, bell'idol mio").

## Scene five: A dining room and table laid for a feast.

Don Giovanni, in an exuberant mood, enjoys a lavish meal and some musical entertainment, while Leporello stands by, hungrily eyeing the banquet. Donna Elvira arrives to try to persuade the reprobate to repent his sins; he only laughs at her. Deeply hurt, Elvira leaves. Suddenly, she screams. It is the statue of the Commendatore, come to dinner as promised. Leporello takes shelter under the table, while Don Giovanni confronts the grim apparition. After refusing the statue's recommendations to repent, he is dragged down to Hell. To the assembled company, who have come to arrest the Don, Leporello recounts his master's death. A final ensemble rejoices in serenity regained.

# Who's Who

**DON GIOVANNI** [joe-VAHN-NEE] is a nobleman who will stop at nothing—lying, cheating, and even rape and murder—to add to his list of female conquests.

Peter Mattei, baritone  
(Piteå, Sweden)



**LEPORELLO** is Don Giovanni's servant. He dislikes getting dragged into his master's amoral escapades and wishes he could find a better employer.

Bryn Terfel, bass-baritone  
(Pant Glas, Wales)



**THE COMMENDATORE** [co-men-dah-TORE-ay] an elderly nobleman, is Donna Anna's father. He is killed trying to defend his daughter from being raped by Don Giovanni.

Kwangchul Youn, bass  
(Chungju, South Korea)



**ZERLINA** [zair-LEE-nah] is a peasant girl engaged to Masetto. She becomes the object of Don Giovanni's unwelcome attentions.

Anna Prohaska, soprano  
(Vienna, Austria)



**DONNA ANNA** is the daughter of the Commendatore. After her father is killed by Don Giovanni, she becomes bent on vengeance.

Anna Netrebko, soprano  
(Krasnodar, Russia)



**MASETTO**, a peasant, is Zerlina's fiancé. He is furious that he is powerless to stop Don Giovanni, a nobleman, from having his way with Zerlina.

Štefan Kocán, bass  
(Tmava, Slovakia)



**DON OTTAVIO** [oh-TAHV-yo], Donna Anna's fiancé, swears to help avenge the death of the Commendatore. At the same time, he urges Donna Anna to hasten their marriage.

Giuseppe Filianoti, tenor  
(Reggio Calabria, Italy)



## CONDUCTOR

Daniel Barenboim, conductor (Buenos Aires, Argentina)



**DONNA ELVIRA** [el-VEE-ra] is a noblewoman who was seduced and abandoned by Don Giovanni. She has followed him to Seville to expose his crimes. But she still loves him, and tries vainly to get him to reform.

Barbara Frittoli, soprano  
(Milan, Italy)



This performance of *Don Giovanni* marks conductor Daniel Barenboim's debut as Music Director of the Teatro alla Scala. On his website, he reflects on the opera.

[www.danielbarenboim.com/index.php?id=34](http://www.danielbarenboim.com/index.php?id=34)

# Operatic Expression

Music is the emotional heart of an opera. It has the ability to freeze time, allowing characters to express heightened feelings such as joy, anger, love, horror, confusion, and so forth. Relative to their length, many arias, duets, ensembles, and choruses don't have a lot of text. A few sentences get across the general idea; the music fills in the rest. Often, the words and music are repeated, giving the singer a chance to show off and the audience a chance to hear the melodies a second (or third) time. For example, in Donna Anna's aria, "Non mi dir," it takes her about five minutes to say this:

*Don't tell me, my beloved, that I am cruel to you.  
You know very well how much I've loved you,  
You know my faith!  
Calm your torment if you don't want me to die of grief.  
Perhaps, one day, heaven will again feel merciful toward me!*

In *Don Giovanni* and some other operas, there's also a type of musical expression that sounds more like speaking than singing. The "talky" style is called recitative (reh-sit-uh-TEEV). The function of recitative is to move the story forward, conveying information the audience needs to know in order to understand what's going on. The orchestra doesn't play any melodic material—just some simple chords to punctuate what's being said. Unlike arias and ensembles, recitative does not have repeated lines.

There are two types of recitative: *secco* (dry) and *accompagnato* (accompanied). In a *secco* recitative, the only accompanying instrument is—usually—a harpsichord or piano. The *accompagnato* recitative uses the full orchestra to support the singer. With more instrumental colors at its disposal, the *accompagnato* recitative is more song-like and more expressive than the *secco*.

The very first operas, dating from around 1600, were written almost exclusively in recitative. At that time, it was the words that mattered most; music was used subordinately to heighten the dramatic effect of the text. Even after music became the most important element in opera, recitative continued to be employed well through the mid-nineteenth century, until composer Richard Wagner came along with his "through-composed" operas, in which all parts of the music are seamlessly woven together without a break. Old-fashioned recitative did not die out completely, though, and still makes an occasional appearance in opera and music theater.

If you look at the score of *Don Giovanni*, you'll see that it's written in discrete sections, each one numbered and labeled: "overture," "aria," "recitative," "duet," "chorus," and so forth. (For this reason, operas of this type are known as "number" operas.) During the performance, it's easy to recognize where each section stops and starts; there's a clear break.



**Leave me to my dinner!  
And join me if you like.**

## What'd They Say?

The HD broadcast of *Don Giovanni* is sung in Italian. You can follow the words in English with subtitles, a running translation that appears at the bottom of the screen.

Why are they singing in Italian if the story is set in Spain, the composer is Austrian, the opera had its first performances in Prague, and we're watching it in the United States? It's because in Mozart's day, the fashion was for Italian opera; in fact, the company that premiered *Don Giovanni* was the Prague Italian Opera. Mozart wrote most of his operas in Italian (the most notable exception being *The Magic Flute*). The libretti (texts) for his three best-known Italian operas were all written by Lorenzo da Ponte, a Jewish-born Italian who ended up living in New York.

Before the introduction of supertitles, it was not uncommon for operas to be translated into the language of the audience. If you look hard enough, you can find historical recordings of *Don Giovanni* sung in German, English, Hungarian, French, or even Swedish!

# The Composer



**“We cannot despair about mankind knowing that Mozart was a man.”**

—Albert Einstein

**“It is hard to think of another composer who so perfectly marries form and passion.”**

—Leonard Bernstein

**“In my dreams of heaven, I always see the great Masters gathered in a huge hall in which they all reside. Only Mozart has his own suite.”**

—Victor Borge

**WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART**, was born in Salzburg, Austria on January 27, 1756. One of history’s most celebrated child prodigies, he pulled off incredible feats; at age four, he was able to learn an entire piece of music in half an hour. At five he played the clavier like a virtuoso, at six he began composing, and at eight he wrote his first symphonies. Between the ages of seven and 15, Mozart spent half his time on tour with his father, Leopold, a violinist and composer. Leopold showed off his son’s amazing musical abilities at the royal courts of Europe, to great musicians, and to the public. During these tours, Mozart heard and absorbed various European musical styles, which influenced his own music.

Hoping to secure a job as a composer, Mozart went on a tour of Europe with his mother in 1777. While in Paris, his mother died quite suddenly. Mozart returned to Salzburg in 1779 and became court organist to the Archbishop. He was fired from this job in 1781. He moved to Vienna and the following year—against his father’s wishes—married Constanze Weber. He and Constanze had six children, only two of whom survived. Things began to look bright for the young composer. He became popular at the court of Emperor Joseph II, where he wrote much of his greatest music.

It was also in Vienna that Mozart met librettist Lorenzo da Ponte, who provided the text for *Le Nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*). The opera premiered in 1786 to an enthusiastic reception. Their next collaboration, *Don Giovanni*, had a successful premiere in Prague in October of 1787, though it was not so well received when a slightly different version was performed in Vienna the following year.

Despite these successes, Mozart (who was terrible at managing his finances) found it difficult to make a living. He had become Court Composer to the Emperor, but was not well paid for his work. His financial troubles grew worse as Constanze fell ill. By 1790 he was writing letters to friends, begging for money for himself and his family.

He was also by this time seriously ill. In 1791, his final year, he wrote two of his greatest works: the opera *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*) and the Requiem Mass, left unfinished at his death. The composer was just beginning to become financially stable when he died on December 5, 1791, at the age of 36. His funeral was attended by a few friends but not by Constanze, who was ill and grief-stricken. He died penniless. According to the Viennese custom of the time, was buried in a mass grave, the exact location of which remains unknown to this day.

Mozart is probably the only composer in history to have written masterworks in virtually every musical genre of his age. He created operas, songs, symphonies, concertos, church music, chamber music (music for small groups of instruments), and music for solo instruments. Of his operas, the most famous are *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786), *Don Giovanni* (1787), and *The Magic Flute* (1791).



**“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.”**

—Mozart

**LORENZO DA PONTE**, Mozart’s greatest collaborator, lived a life as colorful and dramatic as some of his opera plots. Born Emmanuele Conegliano on March 10, 1749, he was the son of a Jewish tanner living near Venice. In 1763 his family converted to Christianity, and he adopted the name of the presiding bishop, Lorenzo da Ponte. Upon the bishop’s death, da Ponte was forced into the priesthood in order to continue his seminary education. Six months later, he escaped to Venice.

Da Ponte’s Venetian adventures included friendship with the notorious lover Casanova (rumored to have contributed to the libretto of *Don Giovanni*), the writing of seditious verse, and scandalous escapades of a sexual nature. In 1779, he was banished from Venice for 15 years.

He went to Vienna, where he was appointed Poet to the Imperial Theaters under the patronage of Emperor Joseph II. He wrote opera libretti in French, German, Spanish, and Italian, and met the composer Mozart. Their celebrated collaboration yielded *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786), *Don Giovanni* (1787), and *Così fan tutte* (1790).

Da Ponte made many enemies in Vienna. Upon the death of the emperor, he found himself reviled by his colleagues and banished from the city. He went to Trieste, where he married the young and beautiful daughter of a wealthy merchant. The couple moved to London, where da Ponte failed at one job after another and was constantly in debt. In 1805, he fled his creditors. His destination this time was the United States, where he was to spend the last 33 years of his life.

The illustrious man of letters began his career in America running a grocery store in Elizabeth, N.J. In New York, he had a succession of failed business ventures, among them a boarding school, a bookstore, and a distillery. A chance encounter with Clement Clarke Moore (author of “A Visit from St. Nicholas”) led to a lively discussion of Italian literature and, eventually, to da Ponte’s becoming the first professor of Italian at Columbia College—in fact, the first in America. (Unbeknownst to the college, he was also the first Jew on their faculty.) Italian studies proved not to be popular, however, and da Ponte once again found himself unemployed. He opened an Italian bookstore, from which he supplied Columbia’s library and the Library of Congress with most of their early holdings in Italian.

Da Ponte’s other great cultural contribution to his adopted country was to introduce opera. When the celebrated tenor Manuel García brought an Italian troupe to New York in 1825, da Ponte persuaded him to add *Don Giovanni* to the schedule, marking the American premiere of the opera. Da Ponte later helped launch in New York the nation’s first purpose-built opera house. Of course, it was a failure.

Da Ponte became a naturalized U.S. citizen at the age of 79. He died on August 17, 1838 in New York. The enormous funeral ceremony took place in New York’s old St. Patrick’s Cathedral. Like his former collaborator Mozart, he was buried in an unmarked grave.

## Voices in Don Giovanni

Donna Anna .....	soprano
Donna Elvira .....	soprano
Zerlina .....	soprano
Don Ottavio .....	tenor
Masetto .....	baritone
Don Giovanni .....	bass-baritone or bass
Leporello .....	bass-baritone or bass
The Commendatore` .....	bass

Opera is a form of theater in which the performers sing all or most of the words. Though it may seem odd at first, opera's distinctive style of musical expression creates an extra level of meaning and emotion. If you're not used to listening to operatic voices, you may at first find it strange or even unpleasant. Chances are, however, that if you keep listening, you'll eventually be hooked.

Singing opera is a skill that requires many years of special training. An opera singer has to learn the special vocal techniques that make it possible to be heard in a large concert hall, with a large orchestra playing (and no microphone!)

Opera voices are divided into different categories, depending on whether it is a woman's or a man's voice, and how high or low it is. The types of opera voices are listed in order from highest to lowest:

- **SOPRANO** - the highest female voice
- **MEZZO-SOPRANO** - the middle-range female voice ("mezzo" means "middle.")
- **CONTRALTO** - the lowest female voice
- **TENOR** - the highest male voice
- **BARITONE** - the middle-range male voice
- **BASS BARITONE** - the range between baritone and bass
- **BASS** (pronounced "bass") - the lowest male voice

In an opera, the composer tries to match the sound of the voice to the character. For that reason, you'll usually find the soprano playing parts such as a young woman or a princess, while the mezzo-soprano might be her mother or even a witch. The hero is usually a tenor, while the bad guy almost always has one of the lower men's voices—a baritone or a bass.

## Good Vibrations

The human voice is an instrument that creates sound through vibration—just like a violin or drum. Our "instrument" consists of vocal folds (sometimes called vocal cords), two small membranes that are stretched horizontally across the larynx, or voicebox. When we talk or sing, air passes over the vocal folds, causing them to vibrate, which produces the sound. It's easy to feel the vibration: just place your fingers lightly on your throat and say, "Aaaaah!"

Breathing is the most important part of singing correctly—especially in opera, where the ability to sing long, uninterrupted phrases is highly prized. Opera singers work extensively to master proper breathing. In learning a new role, they carefully study the score to decide where in the music they will take each breath.

One thing that gives opera singing its distinctive sound is the use of vibrato, which can add expression and nuance to both vocal and instrumental performance. The effect uses a small and steady change of

pitch to create a pulsating or 'vibrating' sound. (You can actually see a violinist or cellist creating a vibrato by wiggling the left hand against the neck of the instrument while bowing the strings with the right hand.) For an opera singer, part of preparing for a role is deciding how much vibrato to use and where to use it. They may even choose to vary

the amount of vibrato they use on a single note!

