Stories of Favorite Operas

CLYDE ROBERT BULLA

STORIES *of* FAVORITE OPERAS


GOUNOD
VERDI
WAGNER
MOZART

Stories of Favorite Operas

by CLYDE ROBERT BULLA
illustrated by Robert Galster

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To EUGENE,
who looks forward, along with me,
to each new opera season

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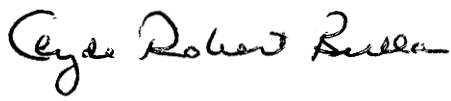
INTRODUCTORY NOTE

OPERA STORIES come from many places and many periods in history. Some are ancient legends; some are tales of the Middle Ages; others are from modern novels, short stories, and plays. Each has been rewritten and reshaped for the operatic stage. The story in its operatic form is called a libretto, an Italian word meaning "little book."

Sometimes a composer wrote his own librettos. More often they were written by others. Composers and librettists wrote for audiences of their own time and place. If popular taste ran to sentiment, operas of the day were sentimental. If audiences favored humor or violence or gloomy, complicated plots, those tastes were reflected in the operas of the period.

Among the operas we hear today are some of the world's great stories. Among them, too, are plots that seem overdone and old-fashioned to us now. Because of their music they are kept alive. Because of their music we can still find in them excitement and beauty and meaning.



THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

In 1784 the French playwright Beaumarchais produced his play *The Marriage of Figaro* in Paris. It carried on the story he had begun in an earlier comedy, *The Barber of Seville.*

In the summer of 1785 the new play was suggested to Wolfgang Mozart as the subject of an opera. At that time the composer was living in Vienna, and his *Marriage of Figaro* was first performed there on May 1, 1786.

The time of the story is the late eighteenth century. The scene is the castle of the Count and Countess Almaviva near Seville.

As the curtain rises, Figaro, the count's servant, is measuring the floor of a room. He is soon to marry Susanna, the countess' pretty young maid, and this room is to be theirs. Count Almaviva has given them a bed as a wedding present, and Figaro is measuring to find the best place for it.

Susanna is trying on a hat in front of the mirror. She is not impressed by the count's generosity. She does not trust him, and she complains that he has been showing her far too much attention.

The countess rings for her, and she hurries away.

Figaro thinks over what Susanna has said. He considers himself more than a match for his master. He says to himself, "If the count wants to dance, I'll play the tune!"

He leaves, and Doctor Bartolo enters with his elderly housekeeper, Marcellina. The doctor was once the countess' guardian, and he hoped to marry her until Figaro interfered. Ever since he has waited to even the score with Figaro. Now his chance has come.

Marcellina is in love with Figaro. She has lent him money which he cannot repay. Because of this, she is trying to force him into marrying her. Doctor Bartolo is helping her. Before he leaves, he promises to do everything in his power to see that his old housekeeper marries Figaro.

Marcellina is still there when Susanna returns. They exchange insults, and the old woman flounces out.

Cherubino, the count's page, enters. He is a romantic boy, in love with every pretty face he sees. Just now he is in love with the countess.

He tells Susanna of his present trouble. The count found him alone with Barbarina, the gardener's daughter. "He was in a fury," says Cherubino. "He is going to send me away unless the countess can get me pardoned."

Susanna has a ribbon belonging to the countess. Cherubino seizes it and refuses to give it back, but in exchange for it he sings Susanna a song he has written about the pleasure and pain of love.

The count approaches. Cherubino is afraid of him and hides behind a chair.

Susanna tries to send the count away, but he insists on talking to her. "Meet me in the garden this evening," he says.

Before she can answer, they hear the voice of Basilio, the

music master, who comes often to the castle. He is outside, looking for the count.

The count does not want to be found talking with Susanna. He steps behind the chair which was Cherubino's hiding place. The boy manages to keep out of his master's sight. He scrambles around the chair and sits in it, and Susanna hastily covers him with a dress.

The music master enters and asks for the count.

"What should I know about the count?" says Susanna coldly. "Go away."

But Basilio lingers, repeating the latest gossip. Some of it has to do with Cherubino.

"That song he was singing," he says. "Was it for you or the countess? You should see how he looks at her when he waits on her at the table. If the count should ever notice—"

The count is so jealous and indignant that he cannot restrain himself. He comes forward and orders Basilio to find that scoundrel Cherubino and drive him out of the castle.

"Poor boy," says Susanna. "Forgive him."

"Forgive him?" says the count. "I know more about him than you do." Yesterday, he says, the page was hiding in the room of Barbarina, the gardener's daughter. "I gently lifted the table cloth, and there he was," says the count. He shows them how it happened by lifting the dress from the chair.

To his amazement, he again uncovers Cherubino!

Basilio is gleeful. Susanna is ready to faint. The count threatens to send for Figaro so that he can witness the girl's unfaithfulness.

"Send for him," says Susanna defiantly. "I've nothing to hide." She explains that Cherubino came to tell her the count was angry with him. The boy only wanted her to ask the countess to speak a word in his favor. "When you came in,"

she says, "we were both confused, and he hid behind the chair."

"Then he heard every word I said to you!" says the count.

"I tried my best not to hear," says Cherubino.

A group of peasants enters, followed by Figaro. The peasants sing in praise of the count, and Figaro asks him to place the wedding veil on Susanna's head.

The count is secretly trying to delay the wedding. He answers that he will perform the ceremony at a more suitable time.

Cherubino has taken no part in the rejoicing.

"Poor boy," says Susanna. "He is unhappy because he has been dismissed from the castle."

Cherubino asks the count's forgiveness.

"You don't deserve it," says the count, "but you shall be pardoned. I'll do still more. There is a vacant place in my regiment. I give it to you, and you shall leave at once for the army."

Figaro bids Cherubino good-by and tells him he will find the army far different from the carefree life he has known.

The scene of Act II is the countess' room. The countess is alone, sadly reflecting that the count no longer loves her. She knows of his attentions to Susanna.

Susanna enters. Figaro follows and tells the countess not to be anxious. He can always be depended on for an idea, and he unfolds his latest one. He has just sent Basilio to the count with an anonymous letter. The letter informs the count that the countess is going to meet a man in the garden tonight.

"Oh, heavens!" cries the countess. "How could you, when the count is so jealous!"

"So much the better," says Figaro. "Then he may realize his game is one that others can play. He will spend the day

worrying about you. In the meantime, Susanna and I will be married, and he will be too busy to interfere."

He has still another idea for keeping the count occupied. He tells Susanna, "Let him know that you will meet him in the garden this evening."

Susanna answers that she has no intention of meeting the count in the garden.

"No, we'll have Cherubino dressed as a woman and send him to keep your appointment," says Figaro. Then the countess will arrive and catch the count. After that he will be obliged to grant her anything she wishes!

He leaves, delighted with the complications he is piling up.

Cherubino enters. Susanna locks the door, and she and the countess dress him as a woman. While Susanna is in an alcove, looking for some ribbon, the count knocks. "Why is the door locked?" he shouts.

Cherubino runs into the dressing room and hides.

The countess unlocks the door for the count. She explains that she locked it only because she was trying on a dress. "There was no one here but Susanna. She has gone to her own room."

"Something certainly seems to have disturbed you," he says, and he shows her a letter. It is the anonymous letter written by Figaro.

There is a noise in the dressing room.

"There's someone in there," says the count.

"It's Susanna," says the countess.

"You told me she had gone to her own room," says the count.

"Either her room or mine," says the countess. "I didn't notice."

While the count shouts for Susanna to come out of the dressing room, the frightened girl is peeping out of the alcove in the back.

The count loses patience. Since his wife will not unlock the dressing-room door, he will have it forced.

He wants no scandal in front of the servants, so he decides to force the lock himself. He goes to find the tools he will need. He takes the countess with him so that she cannot release whoever is in the dressing room, and he locks the outside door behind them.

Susanna leaves the alcove. She tells Cherubino to come out and be quick.

The boy unlocks the dressing-room door and comes out. He looks desperately about. The only escape is through the window. It is a long drop to the ground, but he jumps.

Susanna takes his place in the dressing room. The count and countess return. He is sure everything is just as he left it. He gives the countess her choice of opening the dressing room door or standing by while he forces the lock.

The countess confesses. Susanna is not in the dressing room, she says. It is only poor little Cherubino.

"Must I find that imp everywhere I go!" cries the count.

He opens the door. Both he and the countess are astonished at the sight of Susanna.

"There's trickery here!" he exclaims. He searches in the dressing room, still expecting to find Cherubino.

While he is out of hearing, Susanna tells the countess that the boy has escaped.

The bewildered count comes out. "Then Cherubino is not here?" he says.

"I told you that only to tease you," says the countess.

The count brings up the matter of the anonymous letter.

Susanna and the countess tell him it was only some of Figaro's foolishness.

Figaro comes in to announce that it is time for him and Susanna to go to the church for their wedding.

The count still hopes to delay the wedding. Playing for time, he confronts Figaro with the anonymous letter.

At first Figaro denies that he knows anything about it. Susanna and the countess make him understand that they have given away the secret. They try to make it appear as nothing more than a harmless joke, and at last he admits his part in it.

He and Susanna and the countess appeal to the count not to delay the marriage any longer.

But there is another delay. Antonio, the gardener, enters, complaining about the people who throw things out the windows into his flower beds. Today is the worst yet—someone has thrown out a man.

The count asks, "This man—where is he?"

"He ran away," says Antonio.

Again the count is suspicious.

"You must help us," Susanna whispers to Figaro. "It was Cherubino."

"What a fuss over nothing!" Figaro says to the count. "If you want to know who jumped out the window, it was I!"

The count does not believe him. Neither does the gardener. The man who jumped was hardly half the size of Figaro, he says. He suspects it was Cherubino.

"Cherubino left today for Seville," says Figaro.

"If you jumped out the window," says the count, "tell me why."

"I was in there waiting for Susanna, when I heard your voice," says Figaro. "You sounded so angry, I thought you

knew I had written the anonymous letter. I was afraid, so I jumped out the window."

"Then this paper I picked up must be yours," says the gardener.

The count seizes the paper. It is Cherubino's army commission.

He gazes at Figaro and waits for an explanation.

"The boy left his commission with me before he went away," says Figaro.

"What for?" asks the count.

"I was going to have it sealed for him," answers Figaro.

The count sees that, through some oversight, the commission has *not* been sealed. In exasperation, he tears up the paper.

Figaro is congratulating himself on his cleverness, when a new complication arises.

Basilio, Doctor Bartolo, and Marcellina arrive. The two men are representing the old woman, who demands her legal rights. Figaro has borrowed from her on condition that he would marry her if he could not repay the money.

Figaro is trapped. Susanna and the countess are thrown into confusion. Marcellina and her two advisers call for justice, and the count is pleased at the turn of affairs.

Act III takes place in a hall in the castle. The count is there, wracking his brain over the strange happenings of the day. He wonders who jumped out the window—was it really Figaro? And did Cherubino really go to Seville?—he has sent Basilio to find out.

While his back is turned, the countess brings Susanna into the hall, then slips away. Susanna speaks to the count. He asks her again to meet him in the garden. This time she pretends to agree.

Figaro comes into the hall and takes Susanna away.

The count watches them go. In a burst of resentment, he

asks himself why he should give up Susanna to this low-born servant.

"I am master," he declares, "and he shall laugh at me and defy me no longer!"

Marcellina, Doctor Bartolo, and Figaro come in. Curzio, a lawyer, is with them.

Curzio reports what the court has decided. Figaro must either pay Marcellina or marry her.

She has lent him so much money that paying her seems out of the question. But Figaro flatly refuses to marry the old woman. "I am of noble birth," he says, "and therefore I cannot marry without my parents' consent."

The count is contemptuous. "Who are your parents and where are they?" he asks.

Figaro does not know. He was stolen from his parents when he was a baby. The robbers who carried him away found him dressed in jewels and fine linen. This is proof enough of his high station. Besides, he has a curious mark on his arm that might some day identify him.

Marcellina has been listening intently. She asks in great excitement, "A mark in the shape of a spatula?"

"How did you know?" asks Figaro.

"It is he!" she cries. Figaro is her own son, and Doctor Bartolo is his father.

Susanna enters, bringing the money she has raised to pay Figaro's debt.

"You are too late," the lawyer tells her. "The case is settled."

Susanna sees Marcellina in Figaro's arms. "He's false to me!" she cries, and she boxes Figaro's ears.

But once she understands the situation, she rejoices along with Figaro and his new-found parents. The count, leaving with the lawyer, mutters darkly that their joy will not last long.

CASTS OF CHARACTERS

The Marriage of Figaro
by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

CAST

Figaro ..... *Baritone*
Susanna ..... *Soprano*
Doctor Bartolo ..... *Bass*
Marcellina ..... *Mezzo-soprano*
Cherubino ..... *Soprano*
Count Almaviva ..... *Baritone*
Don Basilio ..... *Tenor*
Countess Almaviva ..... *Soprano*
Antonio ..... *Bass*
Don Curzio ..... *Tenor*
Barbarina ..... *Soprano*

Don Giovanni
by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

CAST

Leporello ..... *Bass*
Don Giovanni ..... *Baritone or bass*
Donna Anna ..... *Soprano*
The Commandant ..... *Bass*
Don Ottavio ..... *Tenor*
Donna Elvira ..... *Soprano*
Zerlina ..... *Soprano*
Masetto ..... *Baritone or bass*

The Magic Flute
by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

CAST

Tamino ..... *Tenor*
Three ladies ..... *Sopranos and contralto*
Papageno ..... *Baritone*
Queen of the Night ..... *Soprano*
Monostatos ..... *Tenor*
Pamina ..... *Soprano*
Three spirits ..... *Sopranos and contralto*
A priest ..... *Bass*
Two priests ..... *Tenor and baritone*
Sarastro ..... *Bass*
Papagena ..... *Soprano*

The Barber of Seville
by Gioacchino Rossini

CAST

Count Almaviva ..... *Tenor*
Fiorello ..... *Bass*
Figaro ..... *Baritone*
Rosina ..... *Soprano*
Doctor Bartolo ..... *Bass*
Don Basilio ..... *Bass*
Berta ..... *Mezzo-soprano*
Ambrogio ..... *Bass*

Lucia di Lammermoor
by Gaetano Donizetti

CAST

Normanno ..... *Tenor*
Enrico Ashton ..... *Baritone*
Raimondo Bidebent ..... *Bass*
Lucia ..... *Soprano*
Alisa ..... *Mezzo-soprano*
Edgardo ..... *Tenor*
Arturo Bucklaw ..... *Tenor*

Tannhauser
by Richard Wagner

CAST

Tannhauser ..... *Tenor*
Venus ..... *Soprano*
A shepherd ..... *Soprano*
The landgrave ..... *Bass*

Wolfram	Minstrel knights	..... *Baritone*
Walther		..... *Tenor*
Biterolf		..... *Bass*
Heinrich		..... *Tenor*
Reinmar		..... *Bass*

Elisabeth ..... *Soprano*

Der Rosenkavalier

by Richard Strauss

CAST

Princess von Werdenberg ..... *Soprano*
Octavian ..... *Mezzo-soprano*
Baron Ochs ..... *Bass*
A lawyer ..... *Bass*
A milliner ..... *Soprano*
An animal vendor ..... *Tenor*
A scholar
A hairdresser and his assistant
A flute player
A cook
A mother
Her three daughters ..... *Sopranos and contralto*
A singer ..... *Tenor*
Valzacchi ..... *Tenor*
Annina ..... *Contralto*
Faninal ..... *Baritone*
Sophie Faninal ..... *Soprano*
Marianne ..... *Soprano*
An innkeeper ..... *Tenor*
A policeman ..... *Bass*
Four children
Leopold, Baron Ochs' servant
A little black boy

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART was born in Salzburg, Austria, on January 27, 1756. At the age of four he was a skilled pianist and had already begun to compose, and when he was six he began a series of concert tours that brought him fame throughout most of Europe. When he was a young man he settled in Vienna, where he composed most of his important works. He died there on December 5, 1791.

GIAOCCHINO ROSSINI was born in Pesaro, Italy, on February 29, 1792. He studied music at the Bologna Conservatory, and he lived and worked in Italy, Austria, France, and England. After 1829 he composed no more operas. He died in Passy, near Paris, on November 13, 1868.

GAETANO DONIZETTI was born in Bergamo, Italy, on November 29, 1797. As a young man, he served in the army; and, while stationed in Venice, he composed his first operas. Most of his life he lived and worked in Italy. He died in Bergamo on April 8, 1848.

RICHARD WAGNER was born in Leipzig, Germany, on May 22, 1813. In his early twenties he conducted for German opera companies and composed his first operas. From 1839 to 1842 he lived in London and Paris. In 1842 he returned to Germany and continued composing and conducting. He fled Germany in 1849 to avoid arrest for his part in an unsuccessful revolt against the government. During most of his exile he lived in Switzerland. In 1860 he was allowed to return to Germany.

Opera belongs to everyone, and its appeal knows no age limit. Clyde Robert Bulla presents twenty-three stories on which his favorite musical dramas are based. They are all so lively and vivid that the reader has the sense of being there as the stories unfold.

The composers presented cover the field well, from Mozart through Rossini, Gounod to Puccini, and Richard Strauss. A brief introduction to each opera gives its origin and tells about its first performance. Biographical notes about each composer are included at the end.

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