

~ *Don Giovanni* ~

Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
 Libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte

Based on the legends of Don Juan by
 Tirso de Molina

Quite the Individual...

While this is a famous Italian opera, the play was originally written by Spanish author Tirso de Molina under the title *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de Piedra* (*The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest*) in 1630. Molina's is the earliest complete version of this story despite tales of this fictional character orally passed around Europe for many years prior. The character of Don Juan has come to personify someone who lacks a strong moral center or sense of responsibility, known as a **libertine**. These are characteristics of a philosophy called **Individualism**, which became associated with debauchery. What makes Mozart's setting so brilliant is his *musical* characterization of Don Juan and the other characters he and Lorenzo da Ponte developed. For instance, Don Giovanni has no showstopping aria in this opera, which certainly would have made a real "Don Juan" type quite upset!



Il dissoluto punito, ossia il Don Giovanni
The Libertine Punished, or namely Don Giovanni
 A dramma giocoso in 2 Acts

This "drama with jokes" term was preferred by Mozart himself despite the subject matter

First performed at the National Theatre (Estates Theatre) in Prague, Czechoslovakia
 October 29, 1787



Mozart's operas were quite popular in Prague, where Don Giovanni debuted. *Le Nozze di Figaro* enjoyed great success there with people singing its tunes on the streets. The city demanded a new work on *Figaro's* success; thus, *Giovanni* was commissioned. Like *Figaro* and many operas of the time, *Don Giovanni* is an opera about the importance of morality. After Don Giovanni dies, the surviving characters sing an ensemble number "educating" the audience about what happens to immoral people. This formula was enforced by Italian *impresarios*, or producers, to leave the audiences happy. *Don Giovanni* is considered Mozart's greatest opera due to his depiction of all seven major characters' struggles with morality in the drama.

FUN FACT! Savannah VOICE Festival's Executive and Artistic Directors, Maria Zouves and Sherrill Milnes, recently directed this opera at the very theatre in which it premiered!

The Creators



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Musical genius and prolific composer of the classical era who wrote more than musical 600 works: Among them being operas, symphonies, chamber and choral music in a period of 35 years. **What are some other famous works by Mozart?**

Lorenzo Da Ponte (1749-1838)

Italian, later American opera librettist and poet. He wrote the libretti for 28 operas for 11 composers, including three of Mozart's greatest operas, *Don Giovanni*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and *Così fan tutte*.



The Characters

Don Giovanni (Don Juan) – baritone

Leporello (His servant) – bass-baritone

Commendatore (A knight commander) – bass

Donna Anna (Commendatore's daughter) – soprano

Don Ottavio (Donna Anna's fiancé) – tenor

Donna Elvira (a noble lady abandoned by Don Giovanni) – soprano

Masetto (a peasant) - bass

Zerlina (Masetto's fiancé) – soprano



Chorus of peasants, servants, musicians, dancers, and demons

Summary of the Opera

Don Giovanni lives only for pleasure. After a supposed assault of Donna Anna, a masked Don Giovanni challenges her father to a duel and subsequently kills him. She and her fiancé, Don Ottavio swear revenge. He then encounters Donna Elvira, a former lover. Elvira accuses him of deceiving her, but Don Giovanni hurries away, leaving his servant, Leporello to respond to her accusations. Leporello reads a long list of his master's lovers from his famous "catalogue."

After his altercation with Elvira, Don Giovanni comes across the wedding of Zerlina and Masetto. Don Giovanni cannot pass up the opportunity and quickly angers Masetto, leaving Zerlina to him to seduce. They eventually make up, and now Masetto and Zerlina are after Don Giovanni.



He organizes a party, but danger looms as Donna Anna, Don Ottavio, and Donna Elvira have recognized Don Giovanni and confront him at his party. Amidst the liveliness of the party, he along with Leporello, escape once again.

Not only has Don Giovanni escaped from his pursuers, but he has made Leporello take his place and wear his costume, thus exposing him to the wrath of his enemies. Elvira, who is still in love with Don Giovanni, prays for divine intervention, while Anna begs her fiancé, Don Ottavio, to allow

her some time before their marriage so she can mourn her father.

During a banquet organized in his home, Don Giovanni indulges in a large banquet, which he denies to Leporello. There is knock at the door, and it is the statue of the Commendatore, which Don Giovanni dared invite to dinner after their encounter in the graveyard several hours earlier. The stone-like figure seizes him with his icy hand and pressures him to abandon his villainous ways, but Don Giovanni refuses. The statue sinks into the ground, dragging Don Giovanni down into the fires of the underworld with him. The opera culminates with the surviving members warning the audiences of the dangers of immorality.

FUN FACT! While poor and low in class, the maids or peasant women in Mozart's operas are often the characters who are the trickiest. Zerlina dupes the men of *Don Giovanni* several times!

The Anatomy of an Opera

What's important to remember about opera is that the music drives the story. The orchestra, voice, costumes, and sets combine to create magic! The following terms can help understand how we make that magic:

Aria – A song for a single character and orchestra.

Chorus – A group of people collectively commenting on the action taking place onstage.

Overture – A purely orchestral piece at the beginning of an opera, which will often musically introduce the audience to the story.

Recitative – Pitches and rhythms ordered in such a way that allows the singer to adopt a more speechlike pattern.

Score – Music that has been notated in a specific order of pitches and rhythms – like a blueprint for musicians.

Don Giovanni in Popular Culture

Don Giovanni seems to escape and eventually appear in many places throughout Seville. Like the character, this opera appears in many other aspects of culture! Let's look at some...

Ludwig van Beethoven quoted Leporello's opening lines of the opera ("Notte giorno faticar") in his own piano piece *Diabelli Variations* (1823).



The final scene is shown in two movies...



1) Oscar award winner, *Amadeus* (1984) – Shown as Mozart mourns the death of his father.

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2) *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011) – Shown during a scene at the Paris Opera House.

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Can you think of some other times when you've seen opera in movies, cartoons, or television shows? List them below!



SVF launches its inaugural "Virtually Live" season which will take place daily at **5:30 and 6:00pm EST** from **May 4-10**, offering live mini-concerts, lectures and informative events through live-streaming.

A link will be provided on our homepage each to go on Facebook Live each day. No Facebook account is necessary for you to enjoy!

Relax in the comfort of your own home in your pajamas if you want!

See the full schedule, including a session on *Don Giovanni* here:

<https://savannahvoicefestival.org/virtually-live-series-schedule/>

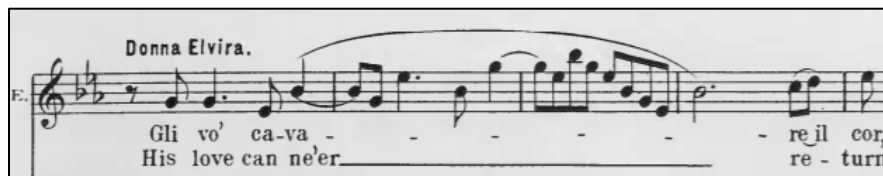
♪ Music of the People ♪

Here are some musical moments to pay attention to as you listen to *Don Giovanni*. On top of everything else, most say that Mozart was the greatest opera stage director, too – How? Everything you need to know is right there in the music! Here are some examples...

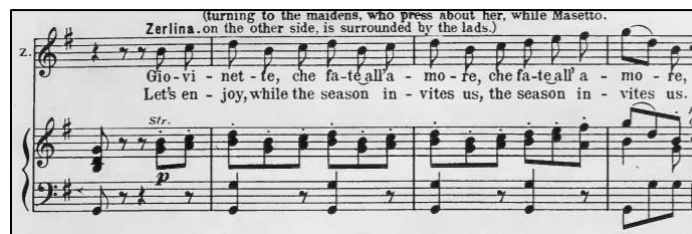
The Overture is written in the key of **D minor** and represents the “Stone Guest” – A very ominous key.



Donna Elvira is a noble woman, so her entrance music is written in long, *legato* (smooth) phrases, like the one below.



Zerlina is a peasant woman, so her marriage music is happy, bouncy, and simple like the sample below...



...Unless she's singing with a nobleman like Don Giovanni, and her music phrases are more like Donna Elvira's.



What's amazing is that Don Giovanni is singing in a time signature (6/8) most commonly associated with the lower class while Zerlina sings a beautiful soaring melody.

What could this mean for their characters?

MAKE YOUR OWN OPERA

***Don Giovanni* is derived from one of the most famous characters of all time. Surely there are some you think would make good operas. Choose one and write your own!**

Which story (new or old) would you write an opera about?

Who would be some of the main characters?

What would be the title of the main character's big aria (the solo in an opera)?

Write some of the lyrics below:

Now sing it, act it, and seek out other stories that make great operas!

DON GIOVANNI WORD FIND

C U S R J Y E S C O Q Z Z V U
W L I A E T T H H X V Z H Z Y
A H R U N C O I U J N G P J O
L J J O Y R I F L O T A G E L
O Q P Q U L A T U I K H F A K
M A J S R E P D A E B W S L U
D L V T D P J E H T U O I E Y
I N N A V O I G A I I B N R Z
E T N B K R I S B S E V V U E
U V R X W E X P Y R A S E T R
G Q A A E L E V T C L N V R L
A O D R Z L X I A Q I D T E I
R V O T K O N U U N M S L V N
P C H E X E M A S E T T O O A
S A R I A H S I H V G L Z B Z

**ARIA
CHORUS
DAPONTE
GIOVANNI
LEGATO
LEPORELLO
LIBERTINE
MASETTO**

**MOZART
NOBILITY
OVERTURE
PEASANT
PRAGUE
RECITATIVE
SCORE
ZERLINA**



Sherrill Milnes as
Don Giovanni in a 1979
Seattle Opera production,
with **Carol Webber** as
Zerlina.