

ABOUT THE MUSIC:

The Style of **BEL CANTO**

La Cenerentola is a prime example of the early 19th century operatic style known as "bel canto", which in Italian means beautiful song or singing. Its most famous composers, together with Rossini, include Gaetano Donizetti and Vincenzo Bellini.

Bel Canto is Characterized by:

- a pure, clear vocal sound with an emphasis on smooth and even delivery
- precise control of the singer's voice in terms of pitch, dynamics, enunciation, and transition from each note to the next
- vocal agility displayed in runs, trills, cadenzas, and other ornaments (collectively known as coloratura)
- a straightforward, simple orchestration that directs the focus on the vocal line

The bel canto style is rooted in the tradition of Italian opera to showcase the human voice. Singers were expected to embellish their music and improvise ornamentation beyond what was set down in the score.

By the time Rossini wrote *La Cenerentola*, more of these vocal feats would be notated by the composer than had been the case in earlier decades. But singers would still add their own flourishes and personal touches.

What makes these passages especially notable is the composer's dual purpose, transcending the conventions of the form. Rossini creates breathtaking sounds, but they always carry specific information about characters' moods and relationships.

Bel canto
is Italian for
"beautiful singing"
and originated in the
late 16th century.



Photo by Brett Croomer/Houston Grand Opera.