

ABOUT THE COMPOSER GIOACHINO ROSSINI

(FEBRUARY 29, 1792 – NOVEMBER 13, 1868)

EARLY YEARS

The composer of *La Cenerentola* was born in Pesaro, Italy, on February 29, 1792 (a leap year). For a time, his parents earned a living traveling from one small opera house to another—his mother as a singer and his father as a horn player in the orchestra. Gioachino was occasionally left behind with his grandmother and his aunt in Pesaro. He had only a little education in reading, writing, grammar and arithmetic. Much of the time he ran wild.

When Gioachino was 12, his parents ended their travels and settled in Bologna. As a boy he studied music with a talented priest. He also began to play the violin and viola and to compose sonatas and other pieces. Because of his beautiful singing voice, he was often invited to sing in churches in Bologna, and he was soon able to earn extra money playing harpsichord for opera companies in and around Bologna.

At 14, he began more formal music studies at the Conservatory. At the end of his first year, he was chosen to write a cantata that was performed in public. Unfortunately, he had to leave the Conservatory after four years in order to earn money for his family. All his life he was to regret the fact that he did not receive more musical training.

SUCCESS

Rossini's first paid composition was a one-act comic opera for a theatre in Venice. *La cambiale di matrimonio* (*The Marriage Contract*), written in less than a week, earned him one hundred dollars—an enormous sum for the 19-year-old Gioachino! The opera was a success, and he kept writing. His first major success came in 1812 with *The Touchtone*, which used musical pieces from his earlier opera. This comic opera was performed over 50 times in its first season alone. As a result of its success, he was paid to write three more operas for Venice. Speed was one of Rossini's most notable characteristics as a composer he had written five operas in that one year! Rossini's first serious opera, *Tancredi* (its overture borrowed from *The Touchtone*) opened in Venice in 1813, and became popular throughout Italy, Europe, and North and South America. With his comic opera *L'italiana in Algeri*, (*The Italian Girl in Algiers*), the 21-year-old Rossini became the hit of Venice. *Imperatore Aureliano a Palmyra* (*Emperor Aurelian in Palmyra*), and *Il turco in Italia* (*The Turk in Italy*) followed.

Rossini gave his name to many recipes, including a very famous dish called *Tournedos Rossini*. Great chefs dedicated dishes to him, such as Poached Eggs alia Rossini, Chicken alia Rossini, and Filet of Sole alia Rossini. A dessert dedicated to *Guillaume Tell* (*William Tell*) was a tart served on the opera's 1829 Paris opening night. Of course, it was an apple tart decorated with an apple pierced by a sugar arrow alongside a sugar crossbow. Active in social and cultural affairs, Rossini remained in his later years as a Viennese newspaper had earlier described him as highly accomplished, of agreeable manner and pleasant appearance, full of wit and fun, cheerful, obliges, courteous, and most accessible. He is much in society, and charms everyone by his simple unassuming style.

A GREAT LOSS

After a final illness, Rossini died in his summer home in Passy, outside Paris, in 1868. He was buried in Paris at a magnificent funeral attended by many admirers and dignitaries. Later, at the request of the Italian government, his body was moved to the Church of Santa Croce in Florence. After providing for his wife, he left most of his wealth to start a conservatory of music at Pesaro, his birthplace in Italy.



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ABOUT THE LIBRETTIST

JACOPO FERRETTI

(JULY 16, 1784 – MARCH 7, 1852)

Jacopo Ferretti was an Italian librettist and poet. A classical education and knowledge of modern languages contributed to his facility for improvising verses, and this won him a reputation at the Arcadian Academy. In the same year he began his work in opera, producing anonymous libretti and revisions of libretti for the Teatro Valle. His first signed libretto was *Baldovino* (Zingarelli, 1811) an early product of his long association with the Teatro Argentina. Ferretti wrote over 50 opera libretti and 11 sacred dramas. He collaborated perceptively and intelligently with many of the leading composers of his time including Donizetti, Graziolo, P.C. Guglielmi, Mercadante, Pacini, the brother Ricci, and Zingarelli. His most successful and enduring work was *La Cenerentola* (Rome, 1817).

Expert in the patterns of opera buffa tradition, Ferretti put them across ironically, without sentimentality, and endowed them with lively social comment translated into a colorful theatrical realism. The language was enlivened by a natural freshness of imagery and the concrete and rhythmic use of the word in term of pure sound. It was thus eminently suitable for Rossini's rhythmic élan or Donizetti's alternation of the comic and the sentimental. Ferretti sometimes introduced verses of higher literacy pretensions into his work, echoing popular poems by Felice Romani or passages from Manzoni and Pindemonte. His lecture *Sulla storia della poesia melodrammatica romana* (1834) was edited by Alberto Cametti (Pesaro 1896) .

Source: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music & Musicians*



La Cenerentola
premiered on
January 25, 1817,
at the **Teatro Valle**
in **Rome**



Photo by Brett Croomer/Houston Grand Opera.

TIMELINE

THE WORLD IN ROSSINI'S TIME

History is much more than just a class we have to take in school. Everyone has a personal history that is affected by the time in which he or she lives. For example, great changes were occurring in the world during Rossini's time. Look over the timeline. How might these changes have affected the people of Rossini's time? The questions will help guide you.



ACTIVITY

Make Your Own Timeline!

Draw a vertical line on a piece of paper. Write your birth year at the top and the current year at the bottom. Then, write or draw five important world events that have happened during your lifetime.

Answer these questions:

- How have the world events during your lifetime affected the way you live?
- How have the events affected the lives of others?
- How do world events affect your life differently than they affected the lives of your parents? Your