



**ACCESS OPERA  
EDUCATOR GUIDE**

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

**DON GIOVANNI**



The Met  
ropolitan  
Opera

# DON GIOVANNI

## THE WORK

An opera in two acts,  
sung in Italian

Music by Wolfgang  
Amadeus Mozart

Libretto by  
Lorenzo Da Ponte

Based on the story of  
Don Juan

First performed October  
29, 1787, at the National  
Theater, Prague

## PRODUCTION

Ivo van Hove  
Production

Jan Versweyveld  
Set and Lighting Designer

An D’Huys  
Costume Designer

Christopher Ash  
Projection Designer

Sara Erde  
Choreographer

A co-production of the Metropolitan  
Opera and Opéra National de Paris

Production a gift of Rolex

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Comedy or tragedy? Farcical satire or cautionary morality play? Dapper playboy or lecherous rake? From the moment its somber opening chords ring through the auditorium, both *Don Giovanni* and its titular antihero embrace and embody duality and contradiction. The story of a fateful encounter between a swashbuckling libertine and a stony dinner guest, the myth of Don Juan, the “trickster of Seville,” has delighted and scandalized audiences since the 17th century. Some playwrights have used his exploits for biting social commentary, others for low-brow humor. And for Ivo van Hove, the director of the Met’s new production of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, it is a chance to explore humanity’s darkest desires and deeds.

Yet even with the story’s unsettling moral ambivalence, the opera’s excellence has never been in doubt. “On October 29, my opera *Don Giovanni* was performed to thunderous applause,” Mozart wrote in 1787, a week after the work’s premiere. Since then, *Don Giovanni* has come to enjoy pride of place in popular culture. The second collaboration between Mozart and librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte, *Don Giovanni* offers directors a chance to flex their creative muscles just as it allows singers to show off their virtuosity and acting chops. For van Hove, the most compelling aspect of the story is its unflinching interrogation of one person’s evil pursuits: “Confronting the character’s violence—and the power structures that enable him—is the whole journey of the opera.” In van Hove’s retelling, the title character’s overwhelming magnetism impels us to confront the work’s ambiguities head-on—just as Don Giovanni faces his own fate.

This guide is intended to help your students appreciate *Don Giovanni* as a product of its time and the social upheavals of the age of the Enlightenment. By studying Mozart’s musical invention through a selection of arias from the opera, students will discover some of the elements that make *Don Giovanni* not only a product of its age but also an enduring masterwork of the operatic canon. The information on the following pages is designed to provide context, deepen background knowledge, and enrich the overall experience of attending a final dress rehearsal at the Metropolitan Opera.



The Metropolitan Opera is a vibrant home for the most creative and talented singers, conductors, composers, musicians, stage directors, designers, visual artists, choreographers, and dancers from around the world. Founded in 1883, the Met first opened on Broadway and 39th Street in a lavish opera house built by a group of wealthy businessmen who wanted their own theater.

Almost from the beginning, it was clear that the limited stage facilities of the opera house on 39th Street could not meet the Met's technical needs. But it was not until the Met joined with other New York institutions in forming Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts that a new home became possible. The new Metropolitan Opera House, which opened at Lincoln Center in September 1966, was equipped with the finest technical facilities of the day.

Each season, the Met stages more than 200 opera performances in New York, and more than 800,000 people attend the performances in the opera house during the season. In addition, the Met is a leader in new media distribution initiatives, harnessing state-of-the-art technology to bring performances from the Met's iconic stage to millions of people worldwide.

This guide includes a variety of materials on Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.

### **The Source, The Story, and Who's Who in *Don Giovanni***

**A Timeline:** The historical context of the opera's story and composition

**A Closer Look:** A brief article highlighting an important aspect of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*

**Guided Listening:** A series of musical excerpts with questions and a roadmap to possible student responses

**Ten Essential Musical Terms:** Musical terminology that will help students analyze and describe Mozart's work

**Student Critique:** A performance activity highlighting specific aspects of this production and topics for a wrap-up discussion following students' attendance

**Further Resources:** Recommendations for additional study, both online and in print

This guide is intended to cultivate students' interest in *Don Giovanni*, whether or not they have any prior acquaintance with opera or the performing arts. It includes activities for students with a wide range of musical backgrounds and will encourage them to think about opera—and the performing arts as a whole—as a medium of both entertainment and creative expression.

In particular, this guide offers in-depth introductions to:

- The character of Don Giovanni as a literary trope
- The opera's ambiguous placement between comic and serious
- Mozart's use of music to create entertaining and memorable characters
- Creative choices made by the artists of the Metropolitan Opera for this production
- The opera as a unified work of art, involving the efforts of composer, librettist, and Met artists

## SUMMARY

*Don Giovanni* tells the story of a gentleman—Don Giovanni—and his never-ending quest to seduce as many women as he can. The opera begins with a masked Don Giovanni making a narrow escape from a noble lady, Donna Anna, as she struggles with him. Her father, the Commendatore, comes to her aid and challenges Giovanni to a duel, but Giovanni prevails, killing the Commendatore and escaping with his servant, Leporello. Donna Anna and her fiancé, Don Ottavio, realizing who her attacker was, join forces with Donna Elvira, another of Giovanni’s victims, to bring him to justice. In the meantime, Giovanni and Leporello happen upon the wedding party of two peasants, Zerlina and Masetto. Giovanni fixes his eye on Zerlina and conspires to entertain her alone that evening during a ball at his house. When Giovanni later tries to seduce Zerlina, her friends come to her aid. While Giovanni tries to pin the blame on Leporello, Anna, Ottavio, and Elvira reveal themselves as masked guests, and everyone recognizes Giovanni as a scoundrel.

Don Giovanni next attempts to seduce Elvira’s maid through an elaborate ruse involving switching clothes with Leporello and a feigned romance with Elvira. After several cases of mistaken identity, Giovanni and Leporello meet up again in a graveyard. Giovanni notices the tomb of the Commendatore and tauntingly invites the dead man’s statue to his palace for dinner. Later that evening, Giovanni is enjoying supper when the “stone guest” arrives. It gives Giovanni one last chance to repent, but he refuses. The statue then drags Giovanni down to hell. The opera ends with Leporello, Anna, Ottavio, Elvira, Zerlina, and Masetto reflecting on their futures now that Giovanni has been brought to justice.

## THE SOURCE: THE STORY OF DON JUAN

In the late 18th century, the literary character of Don Juan was well known across Europe. A swashbuckling antihero with an extraordinary weakness for women, he had been featured in numerous plays and

operas since first gracing the stage in 1630 in the Spanish playwright Tirso de Molina’s *El Burlador de Sevilla y Convidado de Piedra* (*The Trickster of Seville and The Stone Guest*).

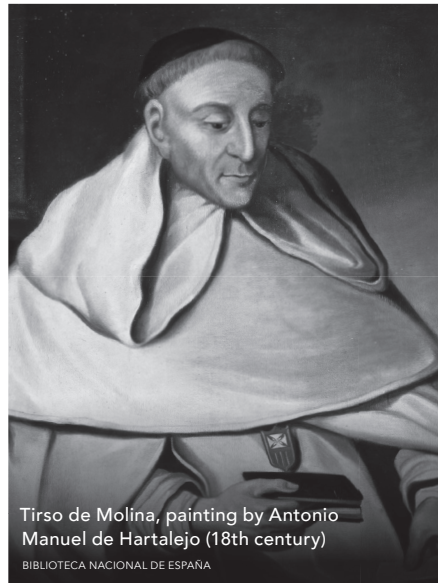
The essential storyline of the popular legend was as follows: The gentleman (and unrepentant womanizer) Don Juan kills a nobleman after attempting to rape his daughter (or sister). In a moment of remarkable hubris, Don Juan invites the nobleman’s funerary statue to dinner. The statue accepts, shows up for the dinner date, and promptly drags Don Juan down to hell. Beyond this rough outline, however, the story proved remarkably pliable. The French playwright



Molière’s 1665 *Don Juan, or The Feast of Stone*, for instance, was a mordant satire on 17th-century hypocrisy, poking equal fun at the lecherous nobleman and his superstitious yet worldly manservant (who responds to the Don’s damnation by lamenting his lost wages). Mozart and Da Ponte found in the story a productive tension between comedy and tragedy. And at the same time that Mozart and Da Ponte

were working on their opera, the San Moisè theater in Venice was featuring a version of *Don Giovanni* that treated its source material mockingly, with characters remarking that the story was so hackneyed that it was fit for use only at country fairs.

Yet it is Mozart and Da Ponte's version that has become a paradigmatic shorthand for both the Don Juan myth and the genre of opera itself. Since its 1787 premiere, authors including E.T.A. Hoffmann, George Bernard Shaw, and Anthony Burgess have directly referenced the opera in their writing, as have philosophers such as Søren Kierkegaard and Albert Camus. Composers Franz Liszt and Frédéric Chopin both wrote solo piano works inspired by Mozart's music, and *Don Giovanni*, like many of Mozart's operas, makes appearances in popular culture, including two film soundtracks, *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* and *Amadeus*.



## SYNOPSIS

**ACT I:** *Seville, Spain.* Don Giovanni's servant Leporello keeps watch outside the Commendatore's palace. He grumbles that he'd like to be the nobleman someday, free from worries and the obligations of work, rather than always being to be subject to Giovanni's whims. Suddenly, the Commendatore's daughter, Donna Anna, comes running out of the building. She is struggling with Giovanni (who is wearing a mask): She has found him hiding in her room, and, certain that he wanted to rape her, she demands to know his identity. Alerted by his daughter's cries, the elderly Commendatore appears. He challenges the masked stranger to a duel and is killed. Giovanni and Leporello escape. Anna asks her fiancé, Don Ottavio, to avenge her father's death.

The following morning, Giovanni has a new conquest in mind: a beautiful woman who is traveling alone. The tables are soon turned, however, when it turns out that the "mystery" woman is looking for him, and she is furious. Seduced and then abandoned by Giovanni in another city, Donna Elvira is now desperate to either marry him or make him pay for his betrayal. Giovanni slips away, leaving Leporello to distract Elvira. Leporello explains to her that she is neither the first nor the last woman to fall victim to Giovanni's disingenuous charms, and he shows her a catalog with the names of 2,065 other women Giovanni has seduced. Hurt and disgusted, Elvira flees.

Once again left to wander through the streets of Seville, Giovanni and Leporello stumble upon a wedding party. Two young peasants, Zerlina and Masetto, are celebrating their nuptials with a group of friends. Giovanni offers to provide a grand feast and tells Leporello to escort the groom, Masetto, to his palace. Masetto balks at first, but he eventually complies—unwittingly leaving Giovanni alone to flirt with Zerlina. Giovanni tells the young woman that she is destined for a better life than that of a peasant and promises to marry her. Just as he is on the verge of successfully seducing her, Elvira appears, denouncing Giovanni and leading Zerlina away to safety.

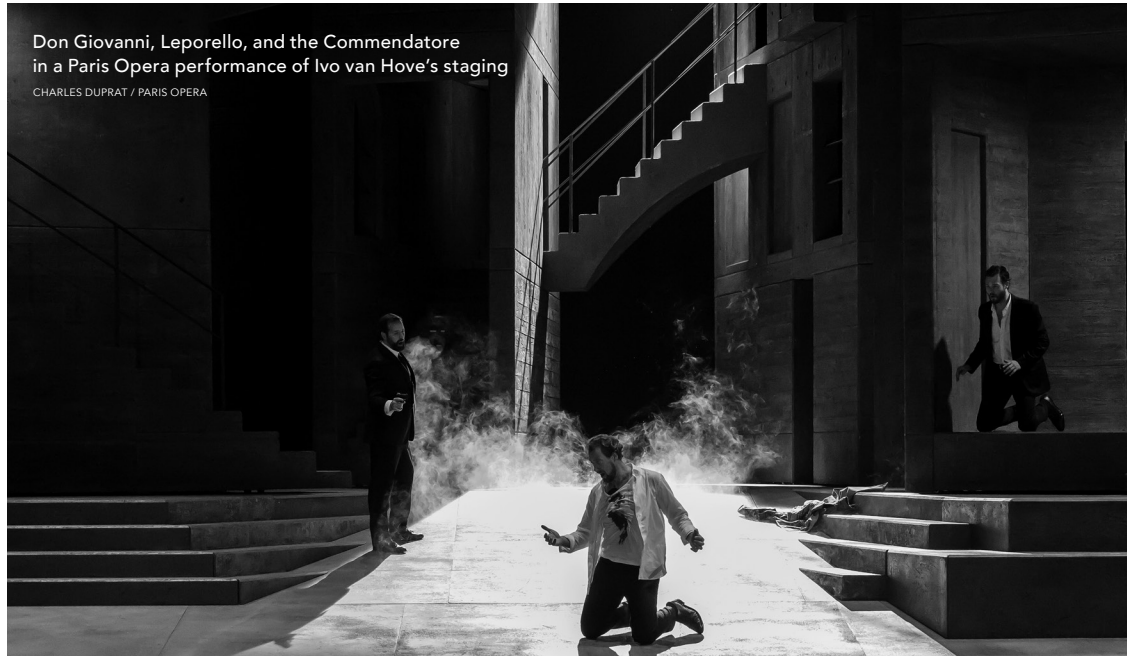


The ballroom scene in a Paris Opera performance of Ivo van Hove's staging

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Don Giovanni, Leporello, and the Commendatore  
in a Paris Opera performance of Ivo van Hove's staging

CHARLES DUPRAT / PARIS OPERA



Anna and Ottavio appear and wave down Giovanni. Recognizing him only as a nobleman (and not as the masked intruder from the night before), they ask for his help in finding the man who attacked Anna and killed her father. Elvira returns and once again denounces Giovanni, who in turn tries to convince Anna and Ottavio that Elvira is deranged. As soon as Giovanni leaves, Anna realizes that she has recognized his voice: It was the voice of the man in her bedroom, and Giovanni is her father's murderer. She again asks Ottavio to avenge her father's death.

Leporello tells Giovanni that he took Masetto to the palace, only to be met at the door by Zerlina and the angry Elvira. Using all his cunning, Leporello managed to lock Elvira out of the palace and Zerlina in, and Giovanni looks forward to an evening of dancing and drinking in the company of the beautiful young peasant. Masetto comes to Giovanni's palace to find Zerlina, who asks his forgiveness for having fallen for Giovanni's charms. Masetto hides as Giovanni appears and resumes his flirtatious talk with Zerlina. When Giovanni spots the groom, he scolds him for leaving his bride alone, then escorts them both back to the party.

Elvira, Anna, and Ottavio arrive wearing masks. Prompted by Giovanni, Leporello invites them in, unaware of their identity. In the ballroom, Leporello distracts Masetto as Giovanni yet again attempts to seduce Zerlina. Once her desperate cries are heard, Giovanni tries to pin the seduction on Leporello, but Elvira, Anna, and Ottavio take off their masks and confront him at last.

**ACT II:** Leporello tries to convince Don Giovanni to abandon his pursuit of women, but Giovanni insists that he needs them more than air or food. Now he has his eye on Elvira's maid. To avoid detection, he convinces Leporello to switch clothes with him. Giovanni then calls out to Elvira through her window. When she comes down to the street, Leporello (disguised as Giovanni) leads her off for a walk, leaving the real Giovanni (now disguised as Leporello) free to serenade the maid. His song is interrupted by Masetto, who leads a posse in search of his bride's seducer. Still pretending to be Leporello, Giovanni sends the men



## VOICE TYPES

Since the early 19th century, singing voices have usually been classified in six basic types, three male and three female, according to their range:

**SOPRANO** the highest voice type, normally possessed only by women and boys

**MEZZO-SOPRANO** the voice type lying below the soprano and above the contralto; the term comes from the Italian word "mezzo," meaning "middle"

**CONTRALTO** the lowest female voice type, also called "alto"

**TENOR** the highest standard voice type in adult males

**BARITONE** the voice type lying below the tenor and above the bass

**BASS** the lowest voice type

off in various directions, then beats up Masetto and hurries off. Zerlina finds her bruised bridegroom and, apologizing for the pain she has caused, promises that she loves only him.

Leporello is still with Elvira. She is baffled by his insistence that they stay in the shadows, but she is sure that this time his proclamations of love are genuine. Leporello attempts to slip away just as Anna and Ottavio appear, only to be surprised by the arrival of Zerlina and Masetto. All four believe him to be Giovanni and are ready to punish him, but Elvira defends him. Fearing for his life, Leporello reveals his true identity, which causes Zerlina to accuse him of beating up Masetto, while Elvira charges him with deceit. Leporello is finally able to escape. Ottavio proclaims his resolve to take revenge on Giovanni. Elvira is torn between a yearning for retribution and her renewed love.

Giovanni and Leporello find each other hiding in a graveyard. As Giovanni laughs over his adventures of the day, a strange voice scolds him: It comes from the marble statue at the Commendatore's tomb. Laughing at Leporello's fear, Giovanni forces his terrified servant to invite the statue to his palace for dinner. The statue accepts.

Ottavio, meanwhile, is satisfied with the idea that Giovanni will soon be brought to justice. But Anna, who is still mourning her father, can't share his sense of resolution. Ottavio accuses her of not loving him. Indeed, she does, Anna replies, but he must be patient until time can heal her wounds.

Giovanni is enjoying dinner at his palace. Elvira enters and makes a last, desperate attempt to convince Giovanni to change his life and make amends. He laughs at her. Exasperated, she leaves. Moments later, she is heard screaming in terror. Giovanni sends Leporello to investigate. A fearful knocking at the palace door reveals that the statue has come to dinner. The marble Commendatore demands that Giovanni repent, but Giovanni refuses: He will bow to no man, alive or dead. As Leporello watches in horror, the earth cracks open and devils drag Giovanni down to hell. Elvira, Anna, Ottavio, Zerlina, Masetto, and Leporello contemplate their future and the fate of an immoral man.

## WHO'S WHO IN *DON GIOVANNI*

CHARACTER	PRONUNCIATION	VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
<b>Don Giovanni</b> A nobleman and notorious womanizer	don joe-VAHN-nee	baritone	Don Giovanni's actions are guided by two primary beliefs: First, the only worthwhile purpose in life is the pursuit of pleasure; and second, no matter how many people he hurts, his misdeeds will never catch up to him. But when he messes with forces beyond his control, Don Giovanni must finally face the consequences of his actions.
<b>Leporello</b> Don Giovanni's servant	leh-poh-REL-loh	bass-baritone	Caught between his duty to serve Don Giovanni and his own sense of morality, the clever servant Leporello provides both comic relief and common-sense commentary throughout the opera.
<b>Donna Anna</b> A noblewoman from Seville	DON-nah AHN-nah	soprano	After Don Giovanni tries to assault her and kills her father, Anna is hell-bent on revenge.
<b>The Commendatore</b> An elderly nobleman, Donna Anna's father	com-men-dah-TOR-eh	bass	In the opera's opening scene, the Commendatore rushes to the aid of his daughter, Anna—only to be struck down by Giovanni's sword. Yet his pursuit of justice will extend even beyond the grave.
<b>Donna Elvira</b> A noblewoman from another city	DON-nah el-VEE-rah	mezzo-soprano	One of Don Giovanni's former lovers, Elvira is torn between wanting to be reunited with him and wanting to see him brought to justice.
<b>Don Ottavio</b> A nobleman, Donna Anna's fiancé	don oh-TAH-vee-oh	tenor	The good-hearted Don Ottavio is engaged to Donna Anna and eager to marry her, but he understands that revenge (both for her father and for herself) is her highest priority.
<b>Zerlina</b> A peasant woman	tsehr-LEE-nah	soprano	Although she already is engaged, the flirtatious young Zerlina falls prey to Don Giovanni's advances. When Elvira intervenes, Zerlina realizes that Giovanni is a predator who must be stopped.
<b>Masetto</b> A peasant, Zerlina's fiancé	mah-ZET-toh	bass-baritone	Masetto is a kind-hearted young man who wants only to marry Zerlina, but his low social status makes him an easy target for Don Giovanni's casual cruelty.

THE CREATION OF *DON GIOVANNI*

- 1630** Tirso de Molina publishes *El Burlador de Sevilla y Convidado de Piedra*. It is one of the earliest incarnations of the Don Juan myth, which will appear throughout the 17th and 18th centuries in various literary and operatic guises under titles including *Don Juan*, *Don Giovanni*, *Il Dissoluto Punito* (*The Villain Punished*), and *Il Convitato di Pietra* (*The Stone Guest*).
- 1756** Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is born on January 27 in Salzburg, a small city in western Austria. His father Leopold is a violinist at the court of the local archbishop. Of the seven children born to Leopold and Anna Maria Mozart, Wolfgang and his older sister Marianne (born in 1751 and affectionately called “Nannerl”) are the only two that survive past infancy.
- 1759** Little Wolfgang’s astonishing musical abilities are clear from a young age. He begins playing harpsichord at age three. At four, he composes a harpsichord concerto that is declared “unplayably difficult” by his father’s musician friends—until the child sits down at the harpsichord and plays it. And at age six he begins to teach himself violin.
- 1762–73** Leopold is eager to share his child’s miraculous (and highly profitable) talent with the rest of the world. In January 1762, he sets off with his not-quite-six-year-old child for the first of numerous international concert tours. On these journeys, little Wolfgang will meet and play for the most important leaders of Europe, winning them over with his stupendous musical gifts and natural charm. (It is said that, at age seven, he even proposes marriage to the child Marie Antoinette.) These musical tours also allow Mozart to meet Europe’s most important musicians. He composes his first symphony at age nine and his first opera at twelve.
- 1773** After years of travel, Mozart and his family once again settle in Salzburg, where the young composer is given a job at the court of the newly elected Archbishop Hieronymus Colloredo. Yet Mozart is never satisfied with the position: Colloredo is a domineering and difficult man, and Mozart, used to the great capitals of Europe, finds Salzburg provincial, and his wages are meager. He will continue looking for employment elsewhere, with minimal success.
- 1781** Mozart is fired by Colloredo—“with,” he writes to his father, “a swift kick in the backside.” He moves to Vienna, one of the most important musical centers of the day, and quickly becomes known as the city’s finest keyboard player.

This same year, the poet and ex-priest Lorenzo Da Ponte moves to Vienna, having been banished from Venice because of his liberal politics and illicit involvement with several married women. In Vienna, he attracts the notice of Emperor Joseph II, who appoints Da Ponte as the poet to the court theater. His libretti for Mozart, Antonio Salieri, and Vicente Martín y Soler stand as landmark achievements of Italian opera buffa in Vienna.

**1786** *Le Nozze di Figaro*, the first of Mozart’s collaborations with Da Ponte, premieres on May 1. Following a very successful run of *Figaro* performances in Prague, Pasquale Bondini, the Italian impresario of the city’s National Theater, commissions Mozart to compose a new opera based on the Don Juan story.

**1787** Giuseppe Gazzaniga’s opera *Don Giovanni*, based on a libretto by Giovanni Bertati, premieres on February 5 in Venice. The work is modeled as a play-within-a-play, in which a traveling opera company decides to revive the old Don Juan story, even though the players complain that the plot is stale and overused. Da Ponte, aware of Bertati’s text, will draw on this predecessor when crafting his own *Don Giovanni* later this year, although he notably fails to mention his debt to Bertati when writing his memoirs.

Mozart begins composing the music for Da Ponte’s libretto over the summer, and their *Don Giovanni* premieres at Prague’s National Theater on October 29, with Mozart himself conducting the first four performances.

**1788** *Don Giovanni* opens in Vienna on May 7. For this production, Mozart added several new pieces to suit the vocal abilities of his singers. Two of those musical numbers—the arias “Dalla sua pace” (for Don Ottavio) and “Mi tradì quell’alma ingrata” (for Donna Elvira)—remain in the version of the opera most frequently performed today.

**1791** On December 5, only a few weeks after the triumphant premiere of his opera *Die Zauberflöte*, Mozart dies in Vienna. He leaves his wife with enormous debts and is buried in an unmarked grave in the St. Marx Cemetery, located outside the city walls.

**1805** Lorenzo Da Ponte immigrates to America, where he will found the department of Italian literature at Columbia University and build the first theater dedicated entirely to opera in the United States.



## THE DIVINE DRAMEDY

*Don Giovanni,*  
*ossia il dissoluto punito:*  
*Dramma giocoso*

So reads the title page of Mozart and Da Ponte's famed opera. What comes before the colon is easy enough to parse: *Don Giovanni, or the Villain Punished*. But what about that pesky designation of genre, "dramma giocoso"? In the most literal terms, "dramma giocoso" means simply "humorous drama" (or, to use a modern portmanteau, a "dramedy"), and indeed, the opera is by turns horrifying and hilarious. Yet to read this work as simply partly funny, partly serious, is to miss a fascinating history of genre, style, and the potentially subversive power of opera as an art form.

In the 18th century, Italian opera was divided quite neatly into two genres: opera seria and opera buffa. The translations are simply "serious opera" and "comic opera," respectively, yet far more went into distinguishing these genres than simply the relative comic value of their plots. Opera seria was the older genre of the two; its characters were gods, mythological heroes, and the august figures of ancient Greece and Rome, and its narrative style tended towards the static, with a succession of solo arias and recitatives and very few ensembles or choruses.

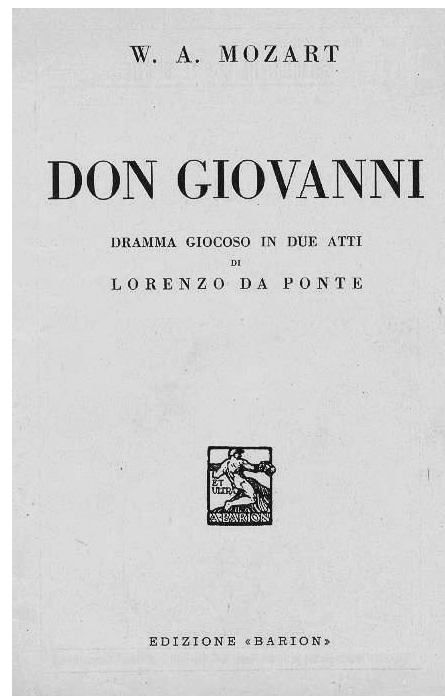
Opera buffa, on the other hand, centered figures from the middle and lower classes of society. Drawing on naturalistic plots that eschewed the divine interventions common in opera seria, opera buffa explored

(and exploited) humanity's foibles. Complex musical ensembles contributed to the humor of the plot, as did mistaken identities, the vagaries of love, and—most notably—clever servants outwitting their blustering noble counterparts. (For a fantastic example of opera buffa in action, check out the Act II finale of Mozart and Da Ponte's *Le Nozze di Figaro*.)

For much of the 18th century, these two genres were as distinct as the social classes that they depicted. Yet by the 1780s, revolutionary ideas were beginning to shake the very bedrock of this highly stratified European society. (A decade before, a group of rag-tag colonies in North America had even founded a country on the "self-evident" principle of equality for all.) So, what might we glean from this "dramma giocoso" if we think about it from the perspective of class?

For starters, there is nothing noble about the nobleman Don Giovanni. Utterly devoid of noblesse oblige, he is in every respect the antithesis of the wise, beneficent rulers of opera seria, such as the benevolent emperor in Mozart's

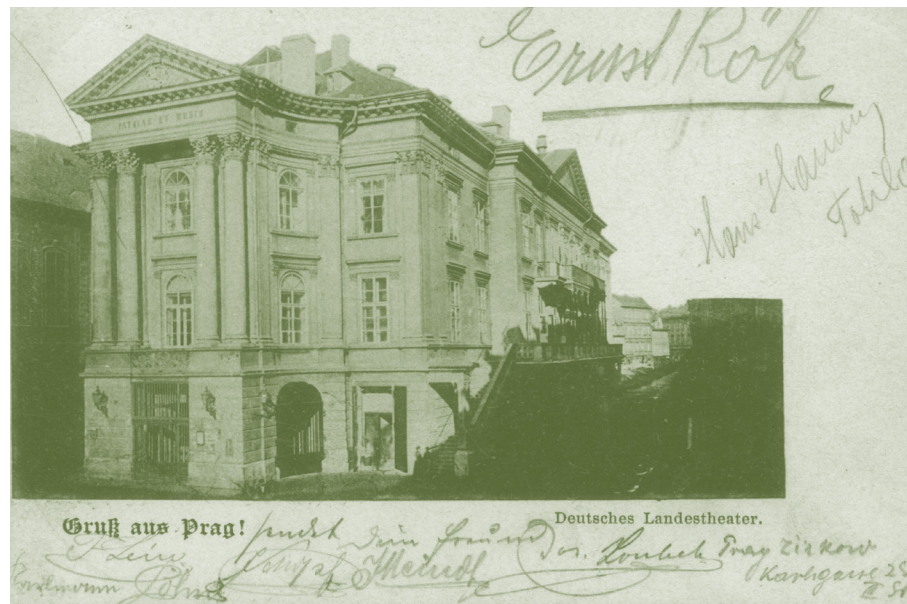
*La Clemenza di Tito*. Moreover, there are no mitigating circumstances to help us view his behavior in a more favorable light. Whereas opera seria characters (like the hero in Antonio Vivaldi's *Orlando Furioso*)



could be granted a temporary period of madness to explain certain unsavory deeds, Don Giovanni is a rational actor, forcing us to scrutinize his actions and judge him guilty.

Compare this figure to the servant Leporello. Although the comic servant character had existed since ancient Greek drama, Leporello is no mere fool or buffoon. Being a servant to the daredevil Don, Leporello has adopted a cynical practicality. He knows that the Don's behavior is reprehensible, and he resents a social system that forces him to enable Don Giovanni's toxicity. From the very first moments of the opera, Leporello is already imagining a different world order: He is sick of working "day and night," and he'd like to occasionally be the gentleman himself. And he is by far the smartest character in the opera. Hiding under a table when the Commendatore comes to call may be funny, but it's also a more intelligent response than Giovanni's devil-may-care hubris.

The genre-bending nature of this "dramma giocoso" thus goes beyond merely merging opera buffa and opera seria. Instead, Mozart and Da Ponte actively subverted stereotypes of social class and operatic structure, creating a work of art that deftly reflected the revolutionary ideals of its age.



### IN PREPARATION

Teachers can access recordings for these Guided Listening Activities at [metopera.org/aogiovanmusic](http://metopera.org/aogiovanmusic).

The Guided Listening Activities are designed to introduce students to a selection of memorable moments from the opera. They include information on what is happening dramatically, a description of the musical style, and a roadmap of musical features to listen for. Guided Listening Activities can be used by students and teachers of varying levels of musical experience.

### Overture

As is customary in most operas, *Don Giovanni* opens with an “overture,” an instrumental work that is performed before the start of the dramatic action. In his opera overtures, Mozart often incorporated subtle musical foreshadowing of the music to come, and *Don Giovanni* includes one of the most striking examples in his operatic output. The overture begins with forceful, foreboding chords in the dark key of D minor—a chilling gesture that will return late in the opera, coinciding with a monumentally (one might even say statuesquely) striking dramatic development. The eerie tone that Mozart sets in the opening of the overture, however, soon gives way to a much more rapid and lighthearted section, demonstrating that even in Don Giovanni’s world of attempted seduction and violence, comic diversion is never very far away.

### WHAT TO LISTEN FOR:

- The difference between the serious, portentous opening and the rest of the overture
- How Mozart sets the stage musically for the action to come

- (00:00) Following two crashing, forceful chords, the orchestra proceeds with a quiet and halting passage with dotted figures. The eerie atmosphere continues, soon developing into running minor-mode scales. The tempo is quite slow, the feeling one of grim foreboding.
- (01:27) After the end of the slow introduction, the key shifts to the major mode with a sudden change in tempo. The constantly running, rapid accompaniment contributes to a feeling of active energy.
- (02:07) The second main theme of this section begins, an accented figure in unison strings, which is soon interrupted by a more delicate gesture in the violins.
- (03:08) The first and second themes are combined in a development section that shifts freely from key to key. The addition of the development section makes this overture more structurally complex than many others of the time.
- (03:48) The first theme returns in the home key, marking the beginning of the “recapitulation” section.
- (04:21) This closing section rounds out the overture, bringing the action to a satisfactory close. At the very end of the piece, the key suddenly shifts, which prepares the way for the opening song of the opera to follow.

### “Madamina, il catalogo è questo”

Donna Elvira has just appeared on the scene, simultaneously lamenting her betrayal by Don Giovanni and pursuing him for vengeance and/or reconciliation. Without initially knowing who she is, Giovanni’s interest is piqued by this hapless but attractive woman, and he approaches her. They simultaneously recognize one another, and Giovanni is forced into the awkward situation of being accosted by a woman he had previously abandoned. He makes a hasty exit, and Leporello is left to explain to Elvira that she is neither the first nor the last woman to suffer such treatment from Giovanni. He sings his famous “Catalog Aria” in which he enumerates the many, many women who have fallen to Giovanni’s charms.

#### WHAT TO LISTEN FOR:

- Leporello’s comical and repetitive style of declaiming the text
- The relatively simple melodic shape of Leporello’s music

- (00:00) In a brief introductory section, Leporello explains that he has kept a record of all the women that Don Giovanni has loved and invites Donna Elvira to review the list with him.
- (00:23) Leporello launches into his catalogue of Don Giovanni’s conquests: in Italy, 640; in Germany, 231; but in Spain, “mille e tre,” 1,003. His music can hardly be called melodic because of its extremely limited range and repetition—an apt representation of the habitual nature of Giovanni’s dalliances.
- (01:51) Leporello’s speech is rapid-fire and his melody repetitious as he lists the ranks of women Giovanni has seduced: peasant girls, maidservants, city girls, countesses, baronesses, princesses.
- (02:01) As Leporello describes Giovanni’s techniques of seduction, his style shifts, taking the form of a courtly dance.



“Box Lobby Loungers,” Thomas Rowlandson British after Henry Wigstead British (1811, hand-colored etching)

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*Andante*

*Tutti f*

*Andante*

*Tutti ff*

### **“Or sai chi l'onore”**

At a masked ball at Giovanni’s house, Donna Anna has just recognized her host as the man who killed her father. She relates the harrowing tale of the previous night’s attack to Don Ottavio, and summoning a great force of will, professes her determination to avenge her father’s death. “Or sai chi l'onore” is Anna’s lofty statement of determination: She exposes Giovanni as a villain and implores Ottavio to join her in her quest for vengeance.

#### **WHAT TO LISTEN FOR:**

- Anna’s heroic musical style
- The restless orchestral accompaniment
- The wide range and held notes of the vocal line

(00:00) Against a rapid accompaniment in the strings, Donna Anna channels her rage into heroic-sounding pronouncements that she consecutively restates at higher pitches.

(00:25) She drives her point home, “Vendetta ti chego” (“I ask you for vengeance”), producing her highest and most extended notes thus far.

(00:43) Anna shifts to the minor mode as she recalls the wound in her father’s breast and the ground covered with his blood. The orchestral accompaniment pulsates in the background.

(01:06) The aria closes with Anna insistently repeating her call for vengeance.

### **“L’ultima prova dell’amor mio”**

In the finale to Act II, Giovanni is enjoying dinner at his house, having earlier provoked Leporello into inviting the statue at the Commendatore’s tomb to join him. Giovanni is in typical boisterous spirits when Elvira bursts in and implores him to change his ways. As is typical in “ensemble finales,” this extended passage includes sudden, dramatic shifts and several changes of tempo and key. The voices sing both individually and together, and at the dramatic high point of the opera, a new character appears on stage.

#### **WHAT TO LISTEN FOR:**

- The shifts in tempo, key, and meter over the course of the excerpt
- The constant increase in dramatic tension
- The sudden intrusion of music from the opening of the overture

- (00:00) As Elvira bursts into Giovanni’s supper, the orchestra highlights the interruption with brusque figures. Elvira’s music is repetitive and brisk; stylistically, she seems rather unhinged. She speaks of a final test of her love driven by her pity for Giovanni. Don Giovanni and Leporello respond with confusion.
- (00:26) Giovanni mocks Elvira’s serious demeanor, and the three characters begin singing at once, each commenting on the situation. The musical tension begins rising as Elvira issues her warnings and Giovanni ignores them, instead proclaiming his love of women and wine.
- (02:11) The orchestra ratchets up the tension with running figures as Elvira tries to leave, and she screams in fright at what she sees there. Leporello responds similarly.
- (02:42) The meter, tempo, and key shift again, now in Allegro duple time in the closely related key of F major. Leporello’s music is breathless as he relates with dread that there is a man of stone at the door. The orchestra punctuates the knocking at the door with loud figures. Giovanni responds with derision and goes to open the door himself.
- (03:31) With another forceful shift of key and tempo, the orchestra intones the portentous D minor chords from the very beginning of the opera. The statue of the Commendatore enters and calls, “Don Giovanni! a cenar teco m’invitasti e son venuto!” (“You invited me to dinner, and I have come!”). The music of the following passage directly quotes the slow introduction of the overture.
- (04:05) With continuing menace, the statue goes on to remark that he has no need of earthly food; his aim in coming to Don Giovanni’s house is more serious. His vocal line moves slowly against agitated scales in the orchestra. It is some of the most ominous music in Mozart’s entire output.

**COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND DON GIOVANNI****CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1**

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1d**

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

**ENCOURAGING STUDENT RESPONSE IN ATTENDING THE FINAL DRESS REHEARSAL**

Watching and listening to a performance is a unique experience that takes students beyond the printed page to an immersion in images, sound, interpretation, technology, drama, skill, and craft. This performance activity will help students analyze different aspects of the experience, engage critically with the performance, and express their views in a respectful and supported environment.

The enclosed performance activity is called “Opera Review: *Don Giovanni*.” The reproducible handout for this activity, available at the back of this guide, will invite students to think of themselves as opera critics, taking notes on what they see and hear during the performance and critiquing each singer and scene on a five-star scale. Students should bring this activity sheet to the final dress rehearsal and fill it out during intermission and/or after the final curtain. When they return to class, students can use their “Opera Review” sheets as they review and discuss their experience.

**DISCUSSION**

Students will enjoy starting the class with an open discussion of the final dress rehearsal. What did they like? What didn’t they? Did anything surprise them? What would they like to see or hear again? What would they have done differently?

When Mozart composed *Don Giovanni*, he designated it an opera buffa, or “comic opera.” But in Lorenzo Da Ponte’s libretto, the work was subtitled *dramma giocoso*, a “jolly or playful drama.” Although in Mozart’s time these terms were used interchangeably, *dramma giocoso* originally indicated a work that mixed character types from serious opera with the servants, peasants, elderly buffoons, and other figures more typical of opera buffa. In *Don Giovanni*, the text and music contain both comic and serious elements, running the gamut from slapstick to high terror. Encourage students to discuss their spontaneous reactions to *Don Giovanni*. Is it a comedy or a drama? Some of the questions you might want them to reflect on could include:

- What are the essential aspects of comedy? Of drama?
- What type of character is Don Giovanni? Is he primarily a comic character or a serious one?
- Does *Don Giovanni* have a happy ending? Why or why not?
- What do you make of the final scene, after Don Giovanni has descended into hell?
- What does the opera’s musical style tell you? Do you feel that the music draws you to think of the opera as primarily a work of comedy or drama?

Students may also find it interesting to brainstorm other works that similarly combine elements of comedy and pathos. Can they think of a movie or television series as a point of comparison? Contemporary culture is full of characters functioning as antiheroes. Discuss points of similarity between Don Giovanni and other anti-heroic characters. What motivates them? What is likeable about them, and what is repellent? What are the techniques that artists use to sway your opinion? How does Mozart's music make students feel about Don Giovanni? Is there a difference between the way his own arias express his character and what the music others sing about him tells us?

As a culminating activity, have students discuss how Mozart's *Don Giovanni* would need to change for it to be more of a straight comedy. How would it need to change if it were more strictly a drama or tragedy?

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. In fact, the question of how to categorize Mozart's *Don Giovanni* has been a topic of critical debate for more than two centuries.



"Don Juan and the Commander's Statue"  
(Last Scene of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*),  
Alexandre Evariste Fragonard  
(ca.1825–30)

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### IN PRINT

Cairns, David. *Mozart and His Operas*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.  
An engaging and accessible biography of Mozart using his operas as a guide through his developing musical style.

Rushton, Julian. *W.A. Mozart: Don Giovanni*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.  
A detailed and scholarly investigation of *Don Giovanni*, including sections on the genesis of Mozart's work, its literary sources and Da Ponte's handling of plot, and in-depth musical analysis.

Will, Richard. "*Don Giovanni*" *Captured: Performance, Media, Myth*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022.

This book traces the entire history of the opera's recorded performance, revealing an increased effort to highlight the violence and predatoriness of the libertine central character. For supplemental audio and visual examples, please visit [press.uchicago.edu/sites/will/index.html](https://press.uchicago.edu/sites/will/index.html).

### ONLINE

Metropolitan Opera *HD Live in Schools* Educator Guide: *Don Giovanni*  
[metopera.org/giovannguide](https://metopera.org/giovannguide)

Additional classroom activities and contextual information about the creation of *Don Giovanni* from the Metropolitan Opera.

Royal Opera House, "What makes *Don Giovanni* an iconic opera"  
[youtube.com/watch?v=NFOuVrt6nM4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFOuVrt6nM4)

The conductor and artists behind the Royal Opera House's 2014 production of *Don Giovanni* discuss their interpretations of Mozart's characters.

"Don Giovanni with Deidre Bird." Metropolitan Opera Guild Podcast. February 11, 2019.  
<https://on.soundcloud.com/b2js2>

On this episode of the Metropolitan Opera Guild Podcast, researcher and music librarian Deidre Bird takes a look at the music and history of Mozart's famous rake.

### *Aria*

A song for solo voice accompanied by orchestra, arias typically appear during a pause in the dramatic action when a character is reflecting on their emotions. Traditionally, opera seria used arias and recitative almost exclusively, while ensemble musical numbers were the exclusive purview of opera buffa, but by the end of the 18th century, composers such as Mozart could draw on both arias and ensemble scenes for operas in either genre.

### *Dramma giocoso*

Literally “comic drama,” or, to use today’s term, “dramedy.” A term for a genre of opera, falling somewhere between opera seria and opera buffa, that mixed the noble characters of the former with the peasants common to the latter. Although the term was used frequently in the later 18th century, today it is most closely associated with *Don Giovanni*.

### *Duet*

A musical scene between two characters, duets are one of several types of “ensembles,” or sung scenes featuring more than one character. Although *Don Giovanni*’s most famous duet is “Là ci darem la mano,” the opera features numerous duets, including “Fuggi, crudele, fuggi!” (Donna Anna and Don Ottavio) and “O statua gentilissima” (Don Giovanni and Leporello, with the statue of the Commendatore standing silently in the background).

### *Opera buffa*

Literally “comic opera,” a genre that appeared in the early 18th century and featured lower-class characters in lead roles. While some of these characters were silly or ridiculous, others (like Leporello) were profoundly clever, and much of the opera’s comedy came from watching the peasants and servants outwit their noble counterparts.

### *Opera seria*

Literally “serious opera,” a genre that reaches back to the earliest days of opera in the early 17th century. The topics for opera seria were typically drawn from Classical mythology or history, and the characters were almost exclusively gods and nobility.

### *Recitative*

A term derived from an Italian verb meaning “to recite,” recitative refers to a type of singing that imitates the accents and inflections of natural speech. Composers often employ recitative for passages of text that involve quick dialogue and the advancement of plot, since the style allows singers to move rapidly through a large amount of text. Traditionally, opera seria utilized recitative passages between arias, while opera buffa used spoken text, but by the end of the 18th century, recitative was being used in both genres, including in all three of Mozart’s operas with Lorenzo Da Ponte.

### *Lament Bass Line*

A descending stepwise bass line that fills in the gap between the tonic and the dominant (a perfect fourth below). The bass can move diatonically (as it does in the Commendatore’s arrival in the scene of *Don Giovanni*’s damnation) or chromatically (as it does in “Dido’s Lament,” from Henry Purcell’s 1689 opera *Dido and Aeneas*). Significantly, each of the bass notes in the “lament bass” is individually harmonized, creating a smooth downward pull. Composers frequently use the lament bass as all or part of a “ground bass,” a constantly repeating bass line above which composers write melodic variations, as Purcell does in “Dido’s Lament.” By contrast, Mozart uses the lament bass for the Commendatore only once, as if suggesting that the stone statue has no interest in wasting his time lamenting when *Don Giovanni*’s comeuppance is nigh.



### *Serenade*

A simple song of greeting, usually performed outside. Initially, “serenade” referred to a song sung in the evening or night, while songs sung in the morning were called “aubades.” But by the time Mozart composed *Don Giovanni*, the term could apply to a song sung at any time of day. In fact, another famous operatic serenade, “Ecco ridente in cielo” from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, takes place at dawn, as Count Almaviva admires the newly risen sun and wonders when he will see his beloved’s shining face.

### *Tonic and Dominant*

In tonal music, different notes in each key have different “weight.” The first, and weightiest, note of the scale is called the tonic. The fifth note of the scale—called the dominant—is the next in this hierarchy. In D minor, the most prominent key in *Don Giovanni*, D is the tonic, and A is the dominant. Note that “tonic” and “dominant” can also refer to the triads built on these notes.

### *Tritone*

Nicknamed “the devil’s interval,” the tritone is the most dissonant of all intervals. As its name suggests, the tritone outlines three whole steps (e.g., we can find the C–F# tritone by counting the three whole steps above C: C–D, D–E, and E–F#). A highly unstable interval, the tritone must (in tonal music) always resolve to a more grounded sonority (usually a third or a sixth); for instance, its presence in the dominant V7 or vii° chords helps “push” the dominant back to the tonic. Interestingly, the tritone is also highly ambiguous. It is the only “symmetrical” interval in the whole scale: No matter which direction it goes, it preserves its structure of six half steps. For example, if you perform interval acrobatics and flip C–F# into F#–C, it still contains six half steps and remains a tritone. This means that composers can strategically use it to transition to unexpected harmonic spaces, even while following the rules of “proper” counterpoint.

## *Don Giovanni*

Performance date:

Reviewed by:

Have you ever wanted to be a music and theater critic? Now's your chance!

As you watch *Don Giovanni*, use the space below to keep track of your thoughts and opinions. What did you like about the performance? What didn't you like? If you were in charge, what might you have done differently? Think carefully about the action, music, and stage design, and rate each of the star singers. Then, after the opera, share your opinions with your friends, classmates, and anyone else who wants to learn more about the opera and this performance at the Met!

THE PERFORMANCE, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN / STAGING
Leporello would like to be a nobleman. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Donna Anna tries to expose her attacker. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Don Giovanni kills the Commendatore in a duel. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Don Giovanni meets Donna Elvira. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Leporello lists Giovanni's conquests. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Giovanni sweet-talks Zerlina. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆



THE PERFORMANCE, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN / STAGING
Donna Anna recognizes Giovanni. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Donna Anna tries to expose her attacker. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Leporello and Giovanni trade identities. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Don Giovanni and Leporello have a surprising encounter in a graveyard. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
An unexpected guest shows up to dine. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆