

Gioachino Rossini

On February 29, 1792 Gioachino Rossini was born into a musical family who lived on the coast of Italy. His father was a horn player and his mother, a singer. His parents taught him about music, and by age six he was playing the triangle in his father's band. Before long he was also singing, playing the piano and horn.



At age fifteen Rossini started taking cello and music composition lessons. His teachers were terribly strict, which made him even more independent and creative despite them. He fell in love with the music of the famous German composers Haydn and Mozart, and his interest earned him the nickname "The Little German."

Rossini is best known for composing operas (which were very popular during his day), and was famous for his equal skill at writing tragedies as well as entertaining comedies. Two of his most famous operas are "The Barber of Seville" and "Othello."

Opera is an art form that began in Rossini's home country: Italy. Unlike a play, all of the words are sung, and most of the action on stage is shown through the music. Italian opera is particularly beautiful, decorative and elegant.

Another of Rossini's operas; "William Tell," became very popular at its first premiere. Although it is a great opera, today it is most known for its overture (the introduction), and is rarely heard in its entirety (the uncut version is over 4 hours long!).



The overture to "William Tell" has four parts: Prelude - a slow passage with low voiced instruments such as cello and bass; Storm - a dynamic section played by full orchestra; "Call to the Dairy Cows" - which features the English Horn; and Finale - the high energy "Cavalry Charge" announced by the trumpets.

The theme of the Finale has become Rossini's most admired and well-known work. It has been featured in cell phone rings, TV shows and commercials, "Looney Tunes" cartoons and cowboy films.



During his life, Rossini wrote more than thirty operas, and he wrote them all very quickly; sometimes even waiting until the last minute, and finishing them the day before opening night! In his spare time he wrote extra opera overtures, and then put the music in his cookie jar in his kitchen. When he began writing a new opera, he would pull out an overture at random and attach it to the work.

Besides music, Rossini's greatest gift was his gregarious personality; he loved life, and enjoyed being with people. He often hosted parties for other artists where he loved to cook and tell jokes. Rossini was born on a leap-year day, and on February 29, 1868 he decided to celebrate his 19th Birthday (there had only been 19 leap years since his birth!). He was a very superstitious man, and ironically he died on Friday, November 13 of that same year.

Composer Quick Facts
Life Dates: 1792-1868
Country: Italy
Era: Romantic

Lesson Plan for Overture to *William Tell* by Gioacchino Rossini

Standards Addressed:

Standard 3: Responding to and Analyzing Works of Art

Performance Indicators:

Students will:

- Through listening, analyze and evaluate performances, improvisations and compositions by identifying and comparing them with similar works. (3a)
- Use appropriate terms to reflect a working knowledge of the musical elements. (3b)
- Demonstrate a basic awareness of the technical skills musicians must develop to produce an aesthetically acceptable performance. (3c)

Objective:

- To prepare the students for the RPO Intermediate Concert
- To create an awareness of how music creates a setting in a story or legend
- To identify the instrumentation, dynamics and tempi used to create various settings for a musical story
- To perform rhythmic patterns from listening selections by reading and clapping the notation.

Materials:

- Picture and information on the composer
- Recordings of musical examples

Listening Repertoire:

- “William Tell Overture” by Rossini
- “Light Cavalry Overture” by von Suppe
- “Imperial March” from “The Empire Strikes Back” by John Williams
- “March” from “Raiders of the Lost Ark” by John Williams

Prior Knowledge:

- Students will be familiar with the characteristic sound of each musical instrument and the instrument families.
- Students will be familiar with the terms tempo, dynamics and timbre.
- Students will have prior knowledge of the form of music “opera” and the function of an overture in an opera.
- The students will have knowledge of note and rest values including eighths and sixteenths in $\frac{2}{4}$ and $\frac{6}{8}$ time.

Procedures:

- Play a recording of “Imperial March” from “The Empire Strikes Back” by John Williams. Have the students use their imagination to create the setting for a story. Ask the students to describe how the instruments are used in creating the setting. Does the rhythmic pattern suggest anything? (Marching into danger, mystery, suspense, etc.) What instruments are creating the rhythmic figure?

- Play the recording of “March” from “Raiders of the Lost Ark” by John Williams. Ask the students to describe the setting for this music, listing the instruments used in the rhythmic pattern and well as the tempo.
- Play the recording of the Overture to *William Tell* by Rossini. Review the function of an overture in an opera. Begin with the rhythmic brass figure. (Lone Ranger Theme). Ask the student to describe the setting for this music. What does the rhythmic figure make you think of? (galloping horses) Tell the students about the Lone Ranger and the theme music.

Lesson Extensions: (Optional)

- Play the recording of “Light Cavalry Overture” by von Suppe. Begin about 2:10 minutes into the recording. What kind of setting does this music suggest? (galloping horses) What instruments are playing the melody? (trumpets) To what family do they belong? (brass)
- Copy the rhythmic patterns below onto the chalkboard.



- Do not identify the examples for the students. Are these patterns the same? How are they different? (time signature). Review note values and counting for the $\frac{2}{4}$ example. Do the same for the $\frac{6}{8}$ example. Ask the students to clap the rhythmic figures. Ask the students to identify the examples. (“William Tell” and “Light Cavalry”). Play the recordings again if necessary to help the students to recognize the patterns. Follow the patterns with the recording. Does the choice of instrumentation make a difference in creating a setting for a story?

Indicators of success:

- Students are able to use their imaginations to visualize a setting or scene in the music created by various musical instruments
- Students are able to identify the instruments used to create the setting using proper musical vocabulary
- Students use proper musical vocabulary to describe the techniques used by the instruments to create the setting – dynamics, tempo, timbre, etc.
- Students exhibit proper concert etiquette and appreciation while attending the Rochester Philharmonic concert.

 **Link Up!**
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Tell
