

# BLO

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## BOSTONLYRICOPERA

2011/2012 35th ANNIVERSARY SEASON

### WHO? WHAT? WHERE? WHEN? (A little background)

- Premiere: February 20, 1816 at the Teatro Argentina, Rome.
- U.S. Premiere: May 3, 1819 at the Park Theater, NYC.
- The libretto was by Cesare Sterbini after the 1775 play by Beaumarchais.
- The opera was originally performed under the title *ALMAVIVA OSSIA L'INUTILE PERCAUZIONE* ("Almaviva or the Useless Precaution") to distinguish it from the then very popular *BARBER of SEVILLE* (1787) by Giovanni Paisiello
- Under pressure from the theater, Rossini is said to have prepared the score in no more than three weeks. The overture was adapted from two earlier operas—both serious work. He was paid less than a third of the fee given to the famous tenor Manuel Garcia engaged as Almaviva.
- The first performance was by all reports (including Rossini's) a fiasco. Stories abound (amusing but as usual in these cases somewhat suspect). A string broke as Almaviva tuned his guitar on stage; Basilio tripped as he made his entrance and he sang his aria while attempting to cope with a bleeding nose; a cat appeared meowing plaintively which was echoed by the derisive audience. The second night was a great success and so the opera was set on its course as perhaps the most famous, well-loved and performed comic buffa opera ever written.
- The opera has had distinguished admirers ever since:
  - “Above all, write nothing but BARBERS”  
**Beethoven** to the 30 year old Rossini
  - “The greatest comic opera ever written”  
**Giuseppe Verdi**
  - “Last night I saw Rossini's BARBER for the third time in as many weeks. My taste must be totally depraved because I find this Figaro of Rossini a hundred times more preferable to Mozart's”  
**G W Friedrich Hegel**  
*(and if anyone might truly appreciate light comic opera it would certainly be Hegel)*
- In 1830 Rossini sang the role of Figaro in a performance of *BARBER* given at a gala for the King of Naples in Paris. An audience member commented “His voice was not powerful but true ... 'Factotum' indeed! ... Rossini seemed so happy singing it, one might say he was creating his work anew as he performed it.”
- In that same year, the thirty eight year old composer at the peak of his success and popularity, stopped writing operas. He lived until 1868.