Don Juan in Modern Times by Jill Leahy

Don Juan (1926) is a Warner Brothers film. It was the first feature-length film with synchronized sound effects and musical soundtrack, with no spoken dialogue. Premiered in New York City on August 6, 1926, starring John Barrymore as the hand-kissing womanizer. It has the most kisses in film history, with Barrymore kissing 191 different women in the film.

Don Juan DeMarco is a 1995 American romantic comedy-drama film starring Johnny Depp as John Arnold DeMarco, a man who believes he's Don Juan, the greatest lover in the world. Wearing a cape and mask, he approaches and romances women until he gets into trouble with the police, who send him for psychiatric treatment with Marlon Brando's character, Dr. Jack Micker, to cure him of his apparent delusion. During the psychiatric sessions, Don Juan DeMarco has an unexpectedly inspirational effect on the psychiatric staff. Even Dr. Micker himself seems to fall under the spell of the legend and the doctor works to rekindle the romance in his stale marriage with Faye Dunaway.

Io, Don Giovanni is a 2009 movie based on the life of Italian librettist Lorenzo da Ponte, who collaborated with Mozart on Don Giovanni.

Did you know that . . .

Don Giovanni was widely sung in Germany as a Singspiel during Mozart’s lifetime, becoming, after Die Entführung aus dem Serail, the Mozart opera most performed at that time.

Mozart was dissatisfied with the scream given by Zerlina when Don Giovanni was making improper advances to her in Act 1, Scene 6. So, during the rehearsal for the scene, Mozart sneaked up behind her and, at the right moment, gave her a hard pinch! Zerlina gave a more realistic scream and Mozart said he was finally satisfied.

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Pittsburgh Opera

Mozart Re-imagines the Don Juan Legend by Jill Leahy

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756—1791)

Set design for Donna Anna's chamber by Philippe Chaperon (1823—1906)
Théâtre Lyrique on 8 May 1866
Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France

Following the wildly successful production of Le nozze di Figaro in 1786 in Vienna, Mozart was asked to compose an opera for Prague. Some scholars think he was asked to expand on the one-act opera, Don Giovanni Tenorio, or The Stone Guest, originally composed by Giuseppe Gazzaniga with a libretto by Giovanni Bertati. Mozart turned once again to Lorenzo da Ponte to collaborate on this commission, and together they agreed on creating a production that incorporated both humor and drama in the story. Most accounts concur that da Ponte and the doctor works to rekindle the romance in his stale marriage with Faye Dunaway.

There are many stories describing what was happening in Mozart’s life at the time he was composing this opera, but most assert that he worked on the Overture right up to the night before its first performance. Written as a dramma giocoso in two acts, Don Giovanni premiered at the Prague Italian opera at the Teatro di Praga on October 29, 1787 and was conducted by Mozart himself. First performed under its full title, Il Dissoluto Punito ossia il Don Giovanni Dramma giocoso (Translation: The Rake Punished, or Don Juan), it is now generally known as Don Giovanni. And, according to one author (Henry Simon), Gioacchino Rossini, Charles Gounod, and Richard Wagner all considered Don Giovanni to be the greatest opera ever written.

The legend of Don Juan has been told in plays, ballets, operas, literature (with a famous poem by Lord Byron), and even a musical tone poem by the German composer Richard Strauss. But today, Operabase lists Mozart’s Don Giovanni as the 10th most popular opera in the world based on frequency of performances worldwide.

http://operabase.com/top.cgi?lang=en&
Characters of the Opera

**Don Giovanni**
- **Don Giovanni**
  - *doh-n JOH-VAH-nee*
  - bass-baritone
  - A young nobleman and great seducer of women, he kills the angry Commendatore after seducing his daughter, Donna Anna.

**Leporello**
- **Leporello**
  - *leh-POR-eh-loh*
  - bass
  - Don Giovanni’s unfaithful servant, who must keep watch during Don’s conquests. Leporello warns Donna Elvira of Giovanni’s sketchy ways.

**Donna Anna**
- **Donna Anna**
  - *DOH-nah NAH-nah*
  - soprano
  - The Commendatore’s daughter, who seeks revenge for her father’s murder.

**Donna Elvira**
- **Donna Elvira**
  - *DOH-nah EL-vee-rah*
  - soprano
  - A noblewoman from Burgos, previously seduced by Don Giovanni, only to be abandoned by him three days later.

**Don Ottavio**
- **Don Ottavio**
  - *dohn oh-TAH-vye-oh*
  - tenor
  - Adoring fiancé of Donna Anna, he voices his rage. Leporello tries to seduce her before her wedding.

**Zerlina**
- **Zerlina**
  - *zeh-REE-ah*
  - soprano
  - A peasant betrothed to Masetto. Don Giovanni tries to seduce her before her wedding.

**Commemdatore**
- **Commemdatore**
  - *kah-mehn-deh-TOH-reh*
  - bass
  - Father of Donna Anna who fights Don Giovanni out of anger for seducing his daughter. Don Giovanni kills him.

**Masetto**
- **Masetto**
  - *mah-ZEH-toh*
  - bass
  - A peasant betrothed to Zerlina.

**Musicians**
- **Musicians**
  - **Peasants**
  - **Attendants**
  - **Maskers**
  - **Villagers**
  - **Ladies**
  - **Servants**
  - **Officers of Justice**
  - **Chorus of Demons**

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**Don Giovanni Synopsis**

**Time**—the mid-seventeenth century  
**Place**—Seville, Spain

**ACT I.** Spain, 1600s. At night, outside the Commendatore’s palace, Leporello grumbles about his duties (“Notte e giorno faticar”) as servant to Don Giovanni, a dissolute nobleman. Soon the masked Don appears, pursued by Donna Anna, the Commendatore’s daughter, whom he has tried to seduce. When the Commendatore himself answers Anna’s cries, he is killed in a duel by Giovanni, who escapes. Anna now returns with her fiancé, Don Ottavio. Finding her father dead, she makes Ottavio swear vengeance on the assassin (“Ma quai mal s’offre, o dei!”)

At dawn, Giovanni flirts with a high-strung traveler outside a tavern. She turns out to be Donna Elvira, a woman he once seduced in Burgos, who is on his trail. Giovanni escapes while Leporello distracts Elvira by reciting his master’s long catalog of conquests (“Madamina, il catalogo e questo”). Peasants arrive, celebrating the nuptials of their friends Zerlina and Masetto. When Giovanni joins in, he pursues the bride, angering the groom, who is removed by Leporello. Alone with Zerlina, the Don applies his charm (“La ci darem la mano”), but Elvira interrupts and protectively whisks the girl away. When Elvira returns to denounce him as a seducer (“Non ti fido, o misera”), Giovanni is stymied further while greeting Anna, now in mourning, and Ottavio. Declaring Elvira mad, he leads her off. Anna, having recognized his voice, realizes Giovanni was her attacker.

Dressing for the wedding feast he has planned for the peasants, Giovanni exuberantly downs champagne (“Finch’han dal vino”). Outside the palace, Zerlina begs Masetto to forgive her apparent infidelity (“Presto, presto, pri’ch’ei venga”). Masetto hides when the Don appears, emerging from the shadows as Giovanni couriers Zerlina (“Riposate, vezzose ragazzette”). The three enter the palace together (“Venite pur avant!”). Elvira, Anna, and Ottavio are invited to the feast by Leporello.

During the festivities, Leporello entices Masetto into the dance as Giovanni draws Zerlina out of the room. When the group of men who have put him on the spot, Giovanni tries to blame Leporello, but no one is convinced. Elvira (“Ecco il birbo che t’ha offesa”), Anna, and Ottavio unmask and confront Giovanni, who barely escapes Ottavio’s drawn sword.

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**ACT II.** (“Sola, sola, in buio loco”) Under Elvira’s balcony, Leporello exchanges cloves with Giovanni to woo the lady in his master’s stead. Leporello leads Elvira off, leaving the Don free to serenade Elvira’s maid. When Masetto passes with a band of armed peasants bent on punishing Giovanni, the disguised rake gives them false directions, then beats up Masetto. Zerlina arrives and tenderly consoles her betrothed.

In a passageway, Elvira and Leporello are surprised by Anna, Ottavio, Zerlina (“Mille torbidi pensieri”), and Masetto, who, mistaking servant for master, threaten Leporello. Frightened, he unmaskses and escapes. When Anna departs, Ottavio affirms his confidence in their love. Elvira, frustrated at her second betrayal by the Don, voices her rage. Leporello catches up with his master in a cemetery, where a voice warns Giovanni of his doom. This is the statue of the Commendatore, which the Don proposes Leporello invite to dinner (“O statua gentilissima”). When the servant reluctantly stammers an invitation, the statue accepts.

In her home, Anna, still in mourning, puts off Ottavio’s offer of marriage until her father is avenged. Don Giovanni is serving his Goose’s Dinner (“Già la mensa è preparata”) when Elvira rushes in, begging the Don, whom she still loves, to reform (“L’ultima prova dell’amor mio”). But, he waves her out contemptuously. At the door, she screams announce the Commendatore’s statue. Giovanni boldly refuses warnings to repent, even in the face of death (“Don Giovanni, a cenar teco”). Flames engulf his house, and the sinner is dragged to hell.

Among the castle ruins, the others plan their future and recite the moral: such is the fate of a wrongdoer.

by John W. Freeman, courtesy of Opera News

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**A Prolific Composer**

Born on January 27, 1756, in Salzburg, Austria, his full given names were Johann Chrysostom Wolfgang Theophili. Today, most people know him as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, with Amadeus being the Latin version of the Greek Theophili.

His life story is told often, and with each telling facts and fiction are intertwined. [See Amadeus, a 1984 period drama film directed by Miloš Forman and written by Peter Shaffer] Nevertheless, he remains one of the most well-known and beloved composers of classical music. There’s no question he was a child prodigy with exceptional musical ability. His father, Leopold, ensured that he traveled to the major musical cities and venues where he could be introduced to many important people of his day, with the intention that Mozart would acquire wealthy patrons who would generously reward his talents.

Most Mozart biographers agree that he excelled in virtually every genre and type of musical composition. He composed over 600 works and, during his final years in Vienna, he created many of his best-known symphonies, concertos, and operas. He would probably be considered a multi-tasker in today’s jargon, because he often had several projects going at the same time. While he had success during his life, political circumstances (the Austro-Turkish war) affected the aristocracy’s ability to pay musicians, forcing Mozart to travel outside Vienna for work. And even though his fortunes improved in 1791, his health unfortunately took a bad turn while he was anxiously trying to finish a commissioned work, the Requiem Mass in D minor. Mozart died at the age of 35 on December 5, 1791. The Requiem was later finished by his student Franz Xaver Süssmayr.

What a story lived Lorenzo da Ponte led! Friends with Casanova, Salieri, Mozart. A priest, a poet, a philanderer, and the first professor of Italian literature at Columbia College (now Columbia University).

In 1749, Emmanuele Conegliano was born in a Jewish ghetto near Venice. When he was 14, his widowed father remarried a Catholic, which required other writing, he left a legacy of 28 librettos written for 11 composers.

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*The Librettist of Venice* by Jill Leathly

Mozart playing Don Juan for the first time in Vienna

Lorenzo da Ponte (1749—1838)

Don Giovanni (1787)

Le nozze di Figaro (1786), Don Giovanni (1787), and Così fan tutte (1790).