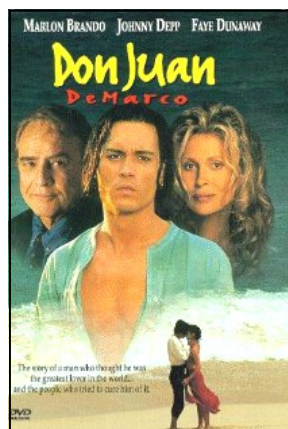


Don Juan in Modern Times

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 Mickler, 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. Mickler 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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Don Giovanni

Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart • Libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte

PITTSBURGH OPERA E D U C A T I O N

Study Guide to the Opera



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



Mozart Re-imagines the Don Juan Legend

by Jill Leahy

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 improved Bertati's libretto and drew on other plays, most probably Molière's *Dom Juan*. About half the libretto, between the Act 1 quartet and the graveyard scene, is from the original work by Giovanni Bertati.

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&>

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 qual mai 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 è 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 ("**Là ci darem la mano**"), but Elvira interrupts and protectively whisks the girl away. When Elvira returns to denounce him as a seducer ("**Non ti fidar, 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, pria ch'ei venga**"). Masetto hides when the Don appears, emerging from the shadows as Giovanni corners Zerlina ("**Riposate, vezzose ragazze!**"). The three enter the palace together ("**Venite pur avanti**"). 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 girl's cries for help 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.

Intermission

ACT II. ("**Sola, sola, in buio loco**") Under Elvira's balcony, Leporello exchanges cloaks 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 unmask 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. Leporello is serving Giovanni'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, her 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*



Don Juan and the statue of the Commander, Alexandre-Évariste Fragonard, circa 1830-1835.

Characters of the Opera

Don Giovanni

[dohn 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

[leh-poh-REHL-loh] *bass*
Don Giovanni's unhappy servant, who must keep watch during the Don's conquests. Leporello warns Donna Elvira of Giovanni's sketchy ways.

Donna Anna

[DOH-nah AH-nah] *soprano*
The Commendatore's daughter, who seeks revenge for her father's murder.

Donna Elvira

[DOH-nah ell-VEE-rah] *soprano*
A noblewoman from Burgos, previously seduced by Don Giovanni, only to be abandoned by him three days later.

Don Ottavio

[dohn oh-TAH-vee-oh] *tenor*
Adoring fiancé of Donna Anna, he seeks to avenge the Commendatore's murder.

Zerlina

[tser-LEE-nah] *soprano*
A peasant betrothed to Masetto. Don Giovanni tries to seduce her before her wedding.

Commendatore

[koh-mehn-dah-TOR-eh] *bass*
Father of Donna Anna who fights Don Giovanni out of anger for seducing his daughter. Don Giovanni kills him.

Masetto

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

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

A Prolific Composer

by Jill Leahy

Born on January 27, 1756 in Salzburg, Austria, his full given names were Johannes Chrysostomos Wolfgang Theophilus. Today, most call him Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, with Amadeus being the Latin version of the Greek Theophilus.



Mozart playing Don Juan for the first time in Vienna

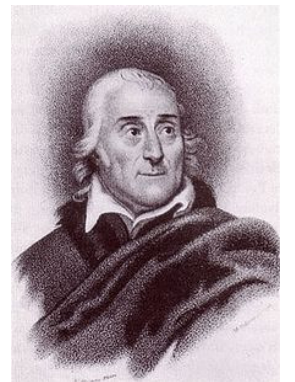
His life story is told often, and with each telling facts and fiction are intertwined. [See *Amadeus*, a 1984 period drama film directed by Miloš Forman and written by Peter Shaffer.] Nevertheless, he remains one of the most well-known and beloved composers of classical music. There's no question he 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.

The Librettist of Venice

by Jill Leahy

What a storied life 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).



Lorenzo da Ponte (1749—1838)

In 1749, Emmanuele Conegliano was born in a Jewish ghetto near Venice. When he was 14, his widowed father remarried a Catholic, which required the family to convert. As was the custom, Emmanuele adopted the name of the Bishop who baptized him—Lorenzo da Ponte. As a young man, he discovered the beauty of poetry and books; he trained for the priesthood and for teaching. He was ordained, but soon found himself in trouble because of his liberal political views and his affairs with married women. For 15 years, he lived in exile in Venice. Eventually, he made his way to Vienna and met composers Antonio Salieri and Mozart, with whom he collaborated on *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786), *Don Giovanni* (1787), and *Così fan tutte* (1790).

After Mozart's death, Lorenzo da Ponte moved to Paris and then to London. There, he worked on operas with other composers, including Cimarosa. After declaring bankruptcy, da Ponte left London for America to elude creditors. In New York he opened a bookstore and gave Italian language and literature lessons to private students. In addition to his other writing, he left a legacy of 28 librettos written for 11 composers.