

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

*INTERMEZZI* are comic 2-act interludes  
sung between  
the 3 acts of an opera seria

Intermezzi originate from  
the Renaissance *INTERMEDIO*,  
the musical numbers sung between acts  
of a spoken theatrical play

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

In their original form  
an **INTERMEZZO** was composed for  
an **OPERA SERIA**  
and was thematically related to  
the main opera.

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

<i><b>Il Prigioner Superbo</b></i>				
Act I	Intermezzo I	Act II	Intermezzo II	Act III
<i><b>La Serva Padrona</b></i>				

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

Pergolesi's two-act *La Serva Padrona*,  
was performed between  
the three acts of his opera seria,  
*Il Prigioner Superbo*  
in 1733.

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

The traditions of *Commedia dell'Arte*,  
Italian improvised comic theater,  
serve as models for **character types** and **plots**  
in the intermezzo

1725-1750

“**Golden Age**” of Intermezzo

# COMMEDIA dell'ARTE



## ARLECCHINO

Probably the most famous of *Commedia* characters, Arlecchino is a good-hearted and well-intentioned buffoon. He can be crafty and clever, but is never malicious.

# COMMEDIA dell'ARTE



**COLOMBINA** is a clever female servant with a keen and active wit and able to hold her own in every situation and emerge triumphant from the most complicated intrigues. A country girl, she takes a frank attitude towards men and sex.

# COMMEDIA dell'ARTE



**PANTALONE** The Old Man, often a rich miser, though he pretends to poverty. He suspects everyone of trying to dupe him (he is usually right) even as he plans his own schemes.

# COMMEDIA dell' ARTE



**CAPITANO** is a swaggering braggart soldier, usually foreign (and sometimes pretending to be of noble blood). Capitano boasts of great prowess at both love and war, but is in reality an abject failure at both.

# COMIC INTERMEZZO



Giovanni Battista  
**PERGOLESI** (1710-1736)

Writes intermezzo  
*La Serva Padrona*  
in 1733

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

## *LA SERVA PADRONA*

[The Maid Mistress]

“Intermezzo Buffo in Due Atti” (1733)

Libretto by G. A. Federico

Music by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

## *LA SERVA PADRONA*

Plot of servant girl who tricks her employer  
into agreeing to marry her.

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

An old *Commedia* plot

There are 3 characters —

**UBERTO**: bass

**SERPINA**: soprano

**VESPONE**: a mute mimed role

Based on *Commedia* character types

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

The performers in intermezzi tended to be  
“**ACTOR-SINGERS**”  
rather than just “singers,”  
and the orchestra tends to play along  
with the singer’s melody line.

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

*La Serva* is almost immediately done independently of its opera seria

In 1746 and 1752 performed in Paris: sets off *Guerre des Bouffons* [War of the Comedians), a pamphlet war in over the values of French and Italian opera

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

Small orchestra, small cast  
(usually only three or so characters)

**No overture**—no need for one  
The surrounding opera seria  
already has an overture

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

Uses of the **BASS VOICE**  
for male protagonists

**NO CASTRATI**

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

While *opere serie* tend to be very serious and promote social stability (“the king is good,” etc.)

The themes of *intermezzi* tend to be **SOCIALLY SUBVERSIVE** (“people in power are stupid”)

The subject matter is **bourgeois** rather than **aristocratic**

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

SECCO RECITATIVE  
and short DA CAPO ARIAS

Unlike opera seria,  
singers address the audience  
to get their collusion

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

Texts usually set **SYLLABICALLY**  
rather than melismatically,  
as in opera seria

Much **TEXT REPETITION**  
—but not as in opera seria—

For **comic effect**:

“Sì, sì!” “No, no!” “Sì, sì!” “No, no!”

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

Each act culminates with a

DUET

or

ENSEMBLE

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

Musically, intermezzi were in  
the newer and lighter-textured  
**STYLE GALANT**  
rather than the  
dense Baroque style of opera seria.

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

The *STYLE GALANT*  
[Gallant Style]

A New Musical Style  
that emerges in the 1720s

# STYLE GALLANT

## THIN TEXTURES

Melody and accompaniment,

Contrasts with the contrapuntal density  
of late Baroque style.

Accompaniment figures are usually of

“ALBERTI BASS”

developed around 1730s.

# STYLE GALLANT

## SLOW HARMONIC MOVEMENT

Contrasts with  
the fast harmonic movement  
of late Baroque style

# STYLE GALLANT

Emphasis on **MAJOR MODE** keys,  
rather than minor.

Melodies feature  
**feminine cadences**  
**triplets figures**  
**sighing motives**

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

The *EMPFINDSAMER STIL*

[Sensitive Style]

is a German offshoot in the 1740s  
of the *Style Galant*

# COMIC INTERMEZZO

Uberto: Accompanied Recitative  
and Da Capo Aria:

“Ah, quanto mi sta male...  
Son imbrogliato io già”