Rossini described the “four pleasures” of life, “eating, loving, singing and digesting,” as “the four acts of the comic opera known as life.” While his name does not appear in the title of our opening concert this season, Rossini’s joyous music and his recognition of life’s pleasures is perfect to welcome our return to the concert hall after an 18-month silence.

Had Rossini chosen a path other than music, he might have been remembered as one of the greatest “gastronomes” of his time. But today, he is recognized among the great opera composers. His 40-plus operas, all composed before he reached the age of 37, propelled him to fame in his lifetime, and keep his name alive in concert programs around the world. Amazingly, the bulk of his operas were written in the span of just ten years. Had Rossini chosen a path other than music, he might have been remembered as one of the greatest “gastronomes” of his time. But today, he is recognized among the great opera composers. His 40-plus operas, all composed before he reached the age of 37, propelled him to fame in his lifetime, and keep his name alive in concert programs around the world.1 Amazingly, the bulk of his operas were written in the span of just ten years.8

Gioachino Rossini was born in Pesaro, Italy, on February 29, 1792, a leap year.9 His father, Giovanni, was an impoverished trumpeter who played in various bands and orchestras but made his living as a meat inspector.9 His mother, Anna Guidarini, was a talented soprano.10 It is no surprise that Rossini, who spent his entire childhood in theaters, became fascinated with music and opera. When his mother was compelled to retire, due to a throat ailment, the family settled in Bologna.10 Although he was known as a “lazy” student, he was precisely the opposite when it came to music. Rossini began Bologna’s Philharmonic School at age 14, and by the age of 15, the young Rossini had learned violin, horn and harpsichord and was already earning money by singing in public.11

Rossini sang the “castrati” roles (performed by male singers with high voices), but as his voice changed, he was no longer in demand. At that point, Rossini turned to accompaniment and composing.12 The “lazy” student went on to compose more than 40 operas, focusing on the style of opera buffa, or comic opera, which was then in fashion.11 The popularity of his operas helped to spread Rossini’s fame to Venice. His opera Tancredi (composed in 1813, the same year that he composed L’Italiana in Algeri), was an instant success, and its captivating melody, “Di tanti palpiti,” was whistled all over town.12 Rossini was just 21 years old. This aria, sung by Marilyn Horne, may be heard at the link below: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KWS7Zd8GJ4

Rossini’s fame quickly spread to Naples, where the reigning impresario, Domenico Barbaia (a former coffeehouse waiter) had amassed a fortune by gambling and ran the two great theatres in Naples.13 Barbaia traveled to Bologna to meet with Rossini. His offer of a contract to produce two operas a year was exceedingly generous,14 and Rossini immediately accepted.

It didn’t take long for Rossini to fall madly in love with Barbaia’s favorite, a Spanish singer named Isabella Colbran, who was eight years his senior.15 The success of the opera that he wrote for Colbran, Elisabetta, regina d’Inghilterra, (Elizabeth, Queen of England) prompted an invitation from Rome for the 1816 Carnival season, and it didn’t take long before Rossini and Colbran were married.16 Rossini was just 24 and his latest opera, The Barber of Seville, which he wrote in less than three weeks, was a wild success.16 It was quickly followed by La Cenerentola (Cinderella) written in 1817, another smash hit.17
Rossini travelled to Paris, arriving in November of 1823. He was welcomed enthusiastically, and Paris opened its arms to the now wealthy young composer.\textsuperscript{xvii} Rossini’s final opera, \textit{Guillaume Tell} (William Tell) was written in 1829, the first of five operas that Rossini had been contracted to compose for the Paris Opéra.\textsuperscript{xviii} Following the French Revolution of 1830, the new government set aside his contract and, at the ripe old age of 37, Rossini decided he was done writing for theater.\textsuperscript{xix} While he never wrote another opera, he did continue to compose other music.

In 1830, while in Paris, Rossini met Olympe Pélissier, a French artists’ model and courtesan.\textsuperscript{xx} They began a long affair in Paris, while Rossini’s wife, Colbran, remained in Italy.\textsuperscript{xxi} In 1847, after Colbran’s death in 1845, Rossini married Olympe.\textsuperscript{xviii} They became the ultimate celebrity couple and lived for varying periods in Bologna, Milan, and Florence. In 1855, they moved back to Paris, their last and longest home.\textsuperscript{xxii} Wagner visited him in 1860,\textsuperscript{xxiv} and other guests included Franz Liszt, Giuseppe Verdi, Niccolò Paganini, Alexandre Dumas fils and Eugène Delacroix.\textsuperscript{xxv}

Always a gourmand, Rossini loved fine food and good wine. Rossini joked that as a child, he worked as an altar boy just so he could drink the sacramental wine that remained after mass.\textsuperscript{xxvi} During his time in Paris, Rossini became close friends with Marie-Antoine Carême, a Parisian celebrity chef who was the founder of haute cuisine.\textsuperscript{xxvii} Rossini met Carême at the Parisian villa owned by the banker, Baron James Mayer de Rothschild.\textsuperscript{xxviii} Legend has it that in exchange for the gift of game pâté that Carême sent to Rossini while he was in Bologna, Rossini composed a short aria for him.\textsuperscript{xxix}

Carême is also credited with creating the most famous dish that bears the composer’s name, Tournedos Rossini. The dish consists of filet mignons, pan-fried in butter, then served on a crouton and topped with a hot pan-fried slice of foie gras, garnished with slices of black truffle and a Madeira demi-glace sauce.\textsuperscript{xxx} For any who would like to recreate the specialty, the recipe appears at the end of this article.

It is said that the name of this dish comes from the story of its preparation. Rossini had wanted the dish prepared at his table at Paris’ Café Anglais. As he worked, Carême objected to the maestro’s constant interference, to which the composer retorted, “Et alors, tournez le dos” (so, turn your back).\textsuperscript{xxi}

As a leap year baby (born on February 29), Rossini celebrated his “19th” actual birthday on February 29, 1868, before he died on November 13, 1868, at his villa in Passy. He was originally buried at Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris, but his body is no longer there. On May 1, 1887, his wife, Olympe, had his remains exhumed and sent by train to Florence.\textsuperscript{xxxi} The funeral procession took three hours to cross the city from the train station to the basilica of Santa Croce, where a choir of 300 greeted him with “The Prayer” from his \textit{Mosè in Egitto}.\textsuperscript{xxxii} Upon her husband’s death, Olympe also used some of the fortune she inherited to establish a conservatory of music in Pesaro, Italy (his birthplace), as well as a home for retired opera singers in Paris.\textsuperscript{xxvi}

A witty conversationalist, one Rossini story deserves mention. As the story goes, a friend lost a bet to Rossini and owed him several truffle-stuffed turkeys, one of Rossini’s favorite dishes. The friend tried to renge on the bet, claiming that there were “no good truffles” to be had that season. “No, no,” Rossini responded, “That’s a lie put out by turkeys who don’t want to be stuffed.”\textsuperscript{xxxvii}

\begin{quote}
“Give me the laundry list and I will set it to music!”
\end{quote}
~ Rossini

\begin{quote}
“Nothing primes inspiration more than necessity.”
\end{quote}
~ Gioachino Rossini
Interested in more from Rossini?

Known for his operas, perhaps one of the all-time favorite Rossini operas is *The Barber of Seville*. Here is a full performance of the opera by the Boston University Opera Institute: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8K0xQOMHuU

For opera lovers, here is a 1981 version of *La Cenerentola*, featuring Frederica Van Stade as Angelina, directed by Claudio Abbado: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXZn1j_484U

If you have a desire to investigate more recipes inspired by Rossini, try one of these:
https://www.sfcv.org/articles/feature/top-10-alla-rossini-recipes

Did you know how often the music of Rossini appears in cartoons? Enjoy!

Bugs Bunny at the Symphony features *The Barber of Seville*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYBce9GsZg

This Loony Tunes cartoon features *The William Tell Overture*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTWBkv5zl-g

To see another fun animation, watch Line Rider and *The William Tell Overture*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpR8SA6vmFs

WONDERING HOW THE MUSIC WILL SOUND?

Try HSO’S LISTENING GUIDE, with links to the pieces you’ll hear on our concert stage – and more!

Watch a performance of Rossini’s *William Tell Overture*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7uPuXoDHSM4 with Leonard Bernstein conducting the New York Philharmonic

Hear Brazilian composer, Clarice Assad, our composer and guest artist, describe her composition, *É Gol!*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMnX6z2xixw

Want to hear more from Assad? Here’s her deeper explanation of her composition along with some listening clips: https://clariceassad.com/e-gol/

Hear Beethoven’s 7th Symphony, performed for BBC’s Proms (2012) and conducted by Daniel Barenboim: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahvrHrPGi1k
Want the best recordings of the pieces you’ll experience on the concert program? **Coleman Casey**, HSO’s dear friend, Director Emeritus and beloved in-house audiophile, offers his recording recommendations of selections featured in our upcoming Masterworks Concert.

Rossini’s memorable **William Tell Overture** gets a sparkling and energetic reading from Maestro Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on a classic all-Rossini overtures disc (RCA).

Beethoven’s magnificent **Symphony #7** has been recorded by every great conductor and orchestra, but two favorites are the recordings featuring Vladimir Ashkenazy with the Philharmonia (DECCA Eloquence) and Carlos Kleiber with the Vienna Philharmonic (DG).

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**RECIPE FOR TOURNEDOS ROSSINI:**

**Ingredients (for four persons):**

- Four 150g tournedos of fillet steak, each 3 cm thick
- Four slices of bread
- 150g of butter
- A glass of Madeira
- A spoonful of flour
- A glass of stock
- One decilitre (one tenth of a litre) of demi-glace sauce
- Four round shapes of foie gras, floured and sautéed in butter
- Four slices of thick-cut Norcia truffle
- Salt & Pepper.

Tie the tournedos so that they keep their shape in cooking. Cut the slices of bread to the same size as the tournedos and brown them lightly in a little butter in a pan. Place the tournedos on the butter and cook over a high flame on both sides for about three minutes.

Add salt and pepper, remove from the pan and place on a warm serving dish or keep them warm in a bain-marie. In a separate pot, boil the stock. Blend the last piece of butter with the flour and put the mixture into the sauce; then dilute it with the boiling stock, pour in the Madeira and mix it with the cooking sauce. Add the demi-glace and cook over a low flame, stirring continuously until the sauce thickens.

Place the tournedos on the bread and decorate with round slices of foie gras (which should be slightly smaller than the tournedos and which have been braised in the same pan on a very hot flame for fifteen seconds each side). Cut twelve discs of truffle and place three on each of the tournedos.

Pour the sauce over the tournedos, add the rest of the chopped truffles and serve immediately.
References

i  https://parkersymphony.org/interesting-trivia-and-facts-about-rossini
ii  Ibid
iii  https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gioachino-Rossini
iv  https://www.theflorentine.net/2020/03/02/gioacchino-rossini-gourmet-connoisseur/
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