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MUSIC GUIDE

# FROM POLYPHONY TO OPERA

ITALIAN CREATORS  
OF EUROPEAN MUSIC

*Państwowa Szkoła Muzyczna*  

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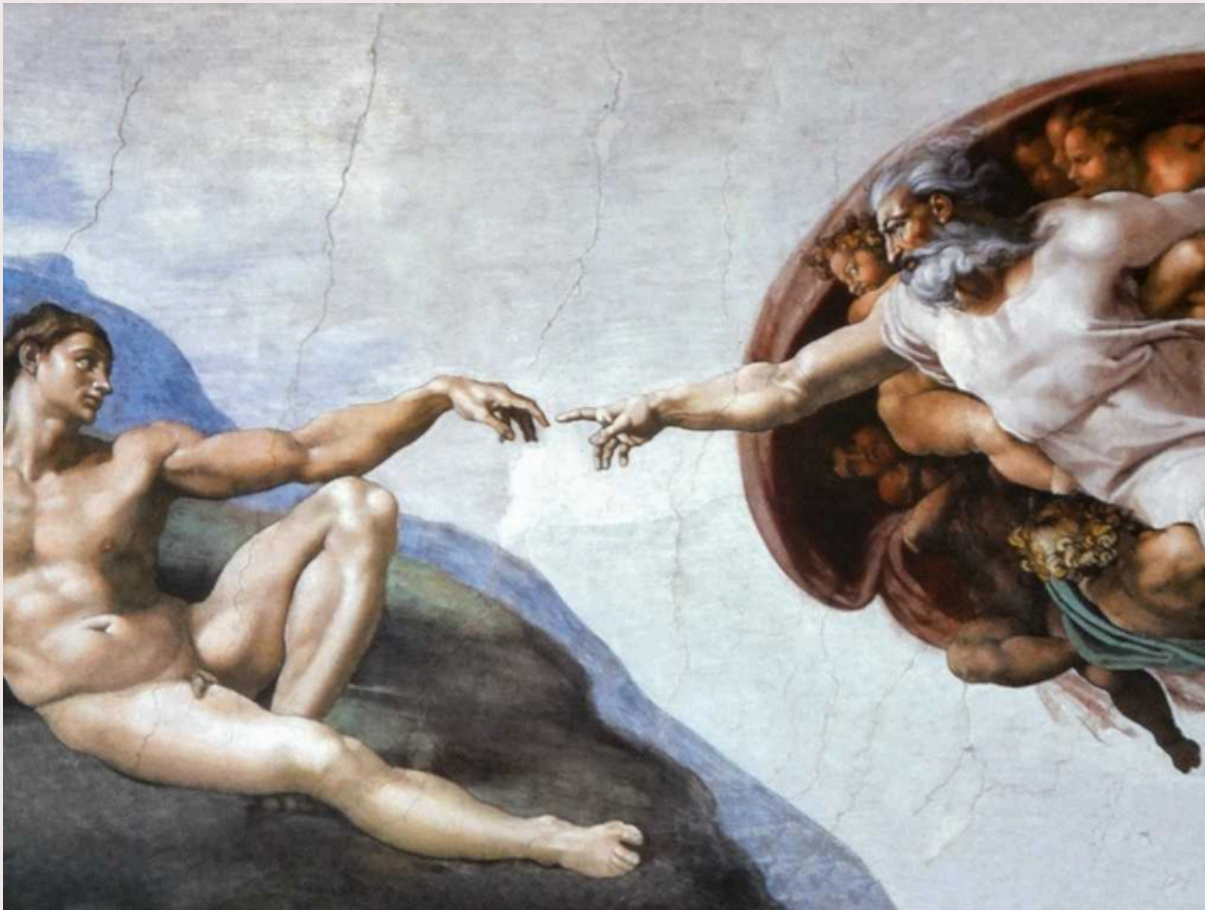
*im. Fryderyka Chopina*  

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*w Sochaczewie*  

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# FROM POLYPHONY TO OPERA



- RENAISSANCE

A musical guide to Italian  
composers of European music

# GIOVANNI PIERLUIGI DA PALESTRINA

## Master of polifonia

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (c. 1525–1594) was one of the most outstanding composers of the Renaissance. His sacred music, marked by perfect harmony and clarity, became a model for future generations of composers. Palestrina was renowned for his ability to combine multiple voices in a way that preserved the clarity of the liturgical text.

## The mystery of Renaissance voices

Historical context: The Renaissance in Italy was a time of flourishing art and science. In music, polyphony dominated—a technique of combining multiple independent melodies into a harmonious whole. Palestrina worked in Rome, where his masses and motets were performed in the most important churches. His style, known as the “Palestrina style,” became the standard of church music for centuries.



# GIOVANNI PIERLUIGI DA PALESTRINA

## Giovanni's work Missa Nigra Sum

Missa Nigra sum ("Mass I am black") is a masterpiece by Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525–1594), the Italian master of Renaissance sacred polyphony. This composition, published in 1590, is a parody mass based on the motet *Nigra sum, sed formosa* ("I am black, but beautiful"), whose text comes from the Song of Songs (1:5).

Palestrina masterfully weaves the motifs of the motet into the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei, creating a clear and mystical harmony. The work symbolizes the spiritual transformation of the soul, combining the contrast between the "darkness" of sin and the "beauty" of grace, and remains a model of Counter-Reformation liturgical music.



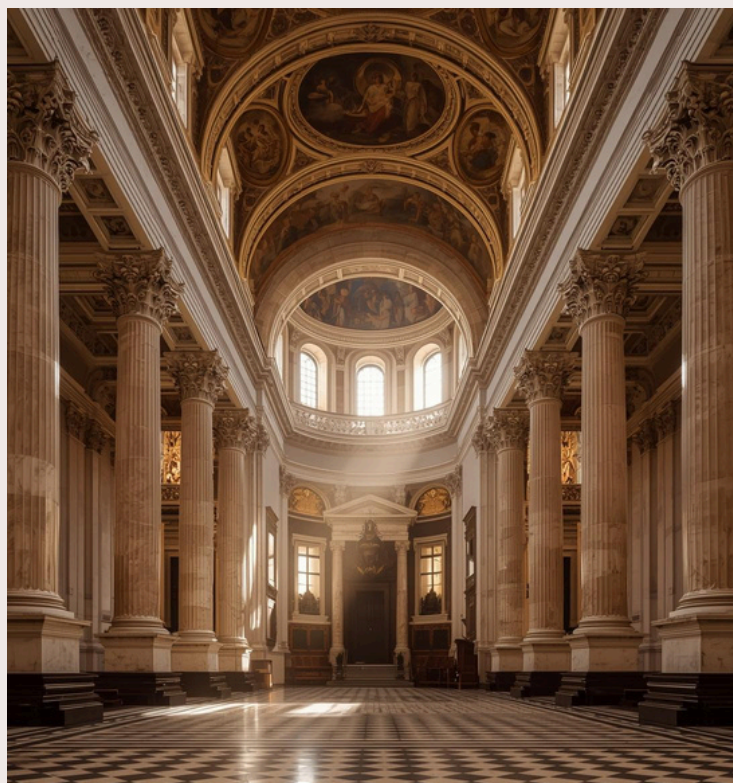
# GIOVANNI PIERLUIGI DA PALESTRINA

## Composer Profile

The most important creator of polyphonic music in the Renaissance, and possibly the greatest composer of sacred music in all of history.

His life was very modest and devoid of major events. He lived in Rome throughout his entire life, where he worked as an organist and choir director in churches. He never traveled far, did not seek fame, nor did he pursue patronage at royal courts.

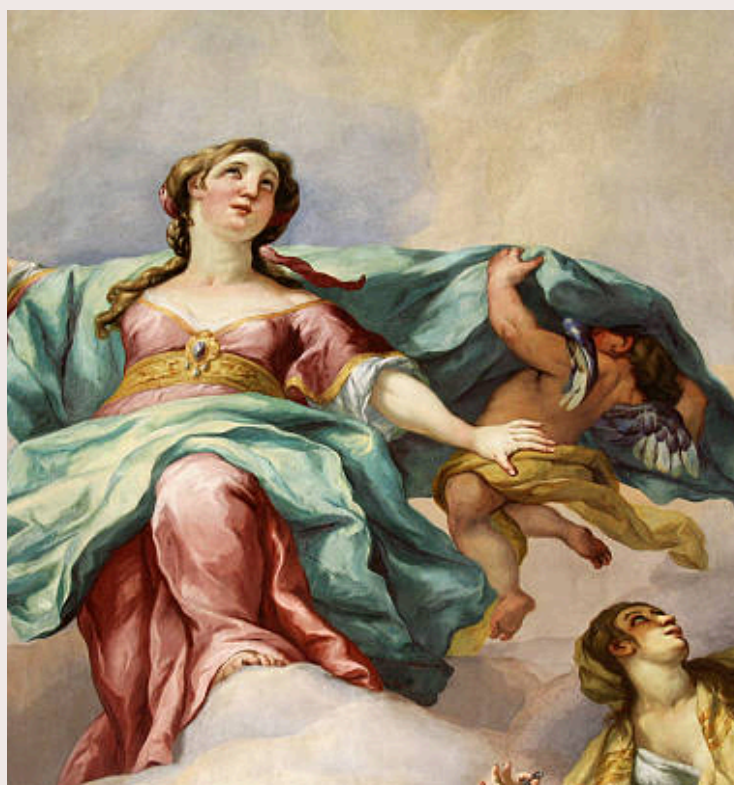
He is best known for one of the most famous stories in music history. During the Council of Trent, the Church authorities considered banning polyphonic music in the liturgy, claiming it was too complex and distracted from prayer. Palestrina composed the *Missa Papae Marcelli* (Pope Marcellus Mass) to demonstrate that polyphonic music could be beautiful, clear, and devout—and he succeeded. Although this story was somewhat embellished by later biographers, its essence remains true: he saved polyphonic music for the Church.



# MUSIC AS A TOOL OF HARMONY AND ORDER

## Audible mathematics.

In the Renaissance, music was regarded as an exact science that reflected the divine order governing the universe. It was not merely a form of entertainment. People drew knowledge from ancient traditions and the teachings of Boethius. They believed that the harmony of sounds was based on mathematical proportions. These same proportions governed the movement of the planets—*musica mundana*—and the structure of the human being—*musica humana*. As a result, instrumental music became a tool that allowed the human soul to be tuned to the cosmic order. It restored inner peace and balance between body and mind through contact with mathematics that could be heard.



# THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN SHAPING EUROPE'S MUSICAL CULTURE.

## Audible mathematics.

The Church had a tremendous influence on European music during the Renaissance. It was the main patron of the arts and the primary place of employment for musicians. Thanks to this, composers were able to create and develop their skills. Sacred music was the most important at the time, and forms such as the Mass and the motet were truly beautiful.

The Church also supported musical education in schools attached to cathedrals and monasteries, where music theory was taught. This contributed to the standardization of musical notation and the development of polyphony. The Church strongly shaped both the sound of music and its function, believing that music should express religious and spiritual feelings.

Reforms such as those introduced by the Council of Trent changed liturgical music. Texts now had to be clearly understood, and overly complex compositions were to be avoided. Despite these limitations, Renaissance sacred music remained of very high quality and became the foundation for the further development of European music. It also influenced secular composition and helped shape the aesthetic of the era.



## Excercise:

Try to count how many voices are singing in this piece.



# THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION



# BAROQUE - MUSIC THAT STARTED TELLING A STORY



ANTONIO VIVALDI

# ANTONIO VIVALDI BAROQUE

## Music that began to tell stories

Antonio Vivaldi known as the “Red priest” because of his hair color, was one of the most important composers of the Baroque era. He was born in Venice in 1678 and spent most of his life connected with this city. His music is characterized by extraordinary energy, virtuosity, and an innovative approach to the concerto form. Vivaldi composed over 500 concerts including the famous “The Four Seasons”.



## Context of the era

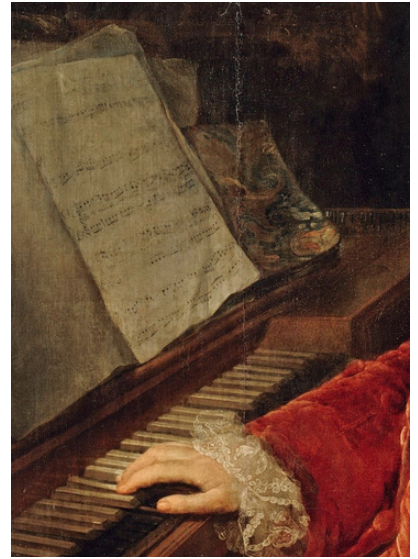
The Baroque period in Venice was a time of intense development of instrumental music. The city became a European center of innovation, especially in the solo concerto and virtuosity. The Venetian Baroque style was characterized by richness of sound, dynamic contrasts, and the prominent role of the violin



# The Development of the Instrumental Concerto

## The Birth of the Solo Concerto

Venice and especially the work of Antonio Vivaldi played a key role in shaping the form of the solo concerto (concerto solistico). Vivaldi established the model of the three-movement concerto (fast–slow–fast), which became the standard during the Baroque era.



## Vivaldi's influence

## Concert Style

Venetian music focused on the contrast between a small group of soloists or a single soloist (concertino) and the full orchestra (tutti). This contrast was further developed both in the concerto grosso form and in the solo concerto.

- While working at Ospedale della Pi eta (an orphanage for girls), he wrote hundreds of concertos, mainly for violin but also for cello, flute, and oboe. These works stood out for their innovative technique and rich melodic invention.



# VENETIAN VIRTUOSITY

## **Violin as a solo instrument**

The Venetian violin school, led by Antonio Vivaldi greatly advanced violin technique. It made use of fast passages, wide leaps, playing in high positions, and a variety of articulation effects.

## **Evolution of instruments**

Along with the development of virtuosity, the construction of string instruments was improved. This allowed for a brighter and more projecting sound, perfectly suited to the acoustics of Venetian churches and palaces.

## **Virtuosos from the Ospedale:**

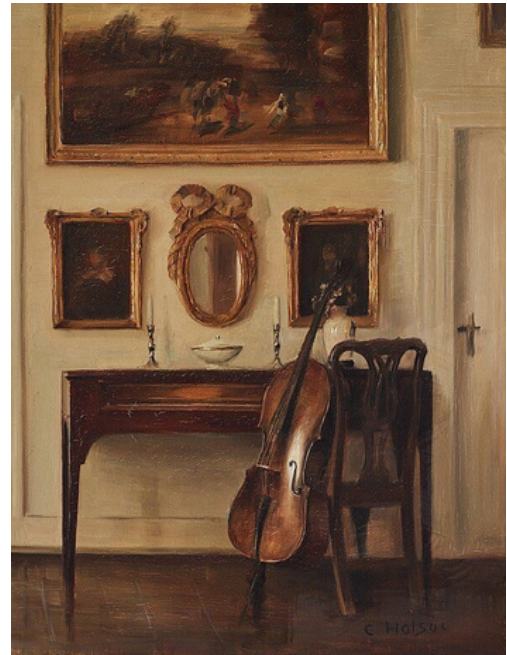
Venetian conservatories (Ospedali Grandi), especially Ospedale de pi eta, educated talented female musicians who became virtuosos. They performed demanding concerto parts, which were often written specifically for them.



# HOW DID MUSIC BEGIN TO IMITATE NATURE AND EMOTIONS?

## Landscape Inspiration

For centuries, nature has inspired musicians to create works that reflect the rhythms and melodies of their surroundings. Classical music often uses seasonal motifs or weather phenomena to transport the listener to a specific place.



## Imitating and evoking emotions

Listening to music stimulates the production of dopamine, which is responsible for feelings of pleasure that influence our well-being. Music helps regulate mood, and listening to sad songs allows us to express our feelings.



# MUSICAL LIFE IN VENICE



## Musical life in Venice

Musical life in Venice during the Baroque period (17th–18th centuries) was incredibly vibrant and diverse, and had a significant impact on the development of European music. Venice was then known as the "city of music," where the art of sound accompanied daily work, religious celebrations, and the exuberant carnivals.

## Church Music Center

St. Mark's Basilica was the heart of Venetian sacred music. The so-called Venetian polychoral style (Venetian school) developed there, characterized by the use of several choirs and ensembles of instruments positioned throughout the church, creating an effect of echo, conversation, and spaciousness. Claudio Monteverdi, one of the most important composers of the era, served as its Kapellmeister.



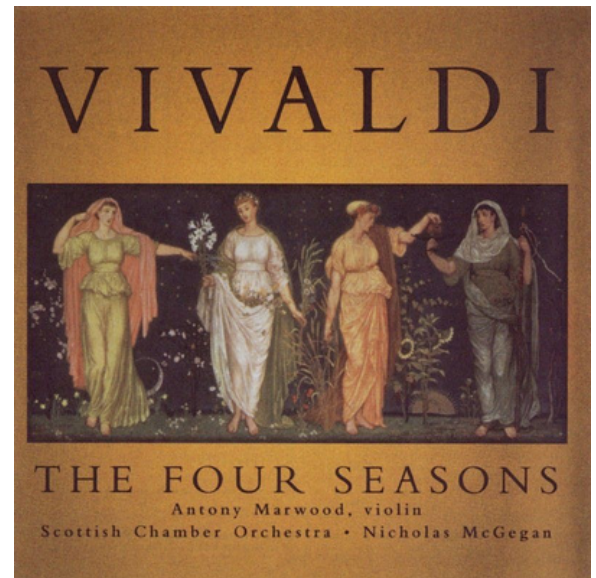
## Carnival music and street life

Music could be heard everywhere in Venice —on the streets, in the canals, and during the famous carnivals. It was primarily pop music that put listeners in a blissful mood.

# THE ORIGIN OF THE VIOLIN CONCERTO

## Violin Concerto

This musical genre developed in the Baroque period. The violin concerto is a musical form for solo violin and orchestra. It developed from a Baroque dialogue between soloist and ensemble.



WHICH FRAGMENT DEPICTS A STORM?

Fragment 1

Fragment 2

Both  
fragments



THANK YOU FOR YOUR  
ATTENTION



# GIOACHINO ANTONIO ROSSINI



CLASSICISM

# WHO WAS GIOACHINO ANTONIO ROSSINI?

Gioachino Rossini was one of the most outstanding opera composers of the 19th century. He was born on February 29th, 1792, in Italy, and died on November 13th, 1868, in Paris. He mainly composed comic operas, which gained enormous popularity throughout Europe.

A master of the bel canto style. He also wrote (especially in his later period) religious works (Stabat Mater), chamber music, and songs.



# ROSSINI'S COMPOSITIONS

He composed 39 operas, the most popular of which is *The Barber of Seville* (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*). Other well-known works include *William Tell*, *Cinderella*, and *The Italian Girl in Algiers*. A master of the *bel canto* style, renowned for melody, lively tempo, and comedy.

In the 19th century, opera flourished, becoming one of the most important genres of dramatic music in Europe, gaining popularity among both the aristocracy and the general public.



# OPERA THAT CONQUERED EUROPE

Rossini's music is a 19th-century adrenaline rush that charges forward and doesn't allow boredom. His secret weapon is the famous crescendo. All of this is driven by pure ease and humor – instead of dull dramas, there are instruments arguing with each other and singers throwing out words at the speed of a machine gun.

Gioachino Rossini's operas conquered Europe thanks to their melodiousness and humor. They attracted audiences with dynamic action and vocal displays. They very quickly reached the stages of many opera houses.



# MARIA CALLAS - DISTINGUISHED OPERA SINGER

Callas was a distinguished opera singer who performed music with extraordinary technique and emotion. Her singing was distinguished by beautiful coloratura and intense expression, which gave Rossini's operas greater depth and drama. An exhibition dedicated to Maria Callas is located in Venice, where you can see her costumes and memorabilia from her career.



She performed on the most important stages of the world:

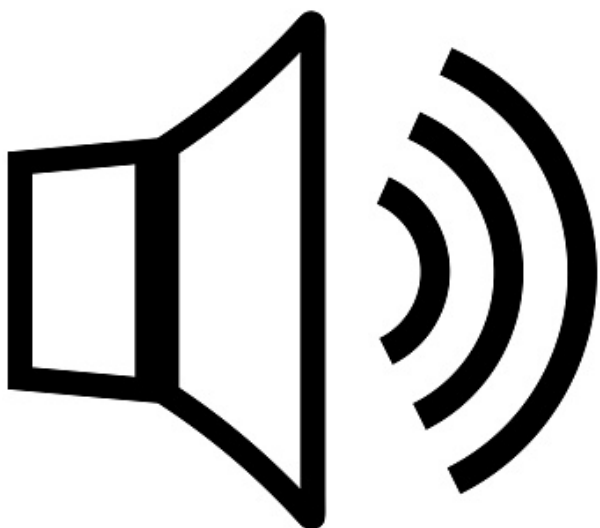
- IN MILANO
- IN LONDON
- IN NEW YORK
- IN PARIS

# TASK FOR THE RECIPIENT:

COUNT HOW MANY TIMES THE SAME MUSICAL MOTIF IS REPEATED BEFORE THE ORCHESTRA STARTS PLAYING LOUDER?

LISTEN TO THE FRAGMENT

CHECK



# THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!



# GIUSEPPE VERDI

# OPERA



# ROMANTICISM

The voice of the people on the opera stage – Verdi's music and the history of Italy

# VERDI'S MUSIC

## Characteristics of Verdi's works

Verdi's works were emotional and stirring, and could be appreciated even by ordinary people. As a result, his works were known to everyone, not just the elite.

The *Messa de Requiem – Dies Irae* in G minor was particularly moving; it was Verdi's most famous and dramatic piece. The entire work is a requiem mass for choir, soloists and orchestra. It was composed in 1874.



This extraordinary composition has gone down in history and is still performed today in many prestigious concert halls. The Requiem Mass is regarded as a masterpiece of the oratorio tradition

# THE HISTORY OF ITALY ITALY IN THE 19TH CENTURY AND THE UNIFICATION MOVEMENT

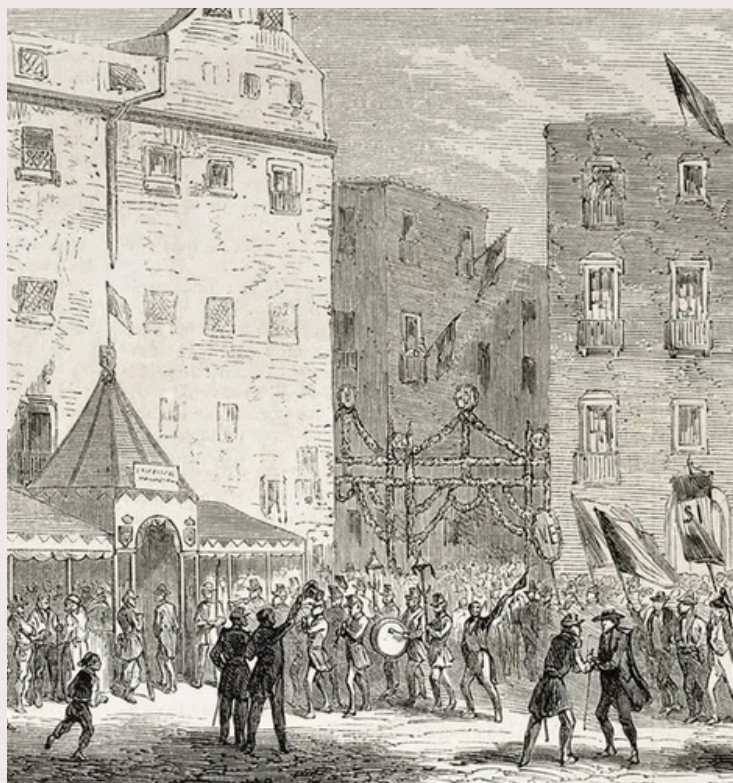
## Italy's History

In the 19th century, Italy was divided and under the control of foreign powers. People wanted to speak out about freedom and unification, but they were unable to do so. That is why music and art became the voice of the people, who were fighting for peace and their rights.

## The unification of Italy

Historical context: The unification of Italy began in 1859.

It was completed in 1870 when Rome was captured and declared the capital of the newly formed Kingdom of Italy



# THE MEANING OF OPERA

## Opera as the voice of society

Opera music became the voice of the people, as it allowed them to express themselves and their beliefs.

The chorus 'Va, pensiero', or the Chorus of the Slaves from Act III of Giuseppe Verdi's opera Nabucco, became a particular symbol of the desire for freedom and unity. The piece they perform expresses the longing of Jewish exiles for their lost homeland. Italians identified this piece with their own longing for freedom

and unity. As a result, the piece became the unofficial anthem of their feelings and aspirations. This work united the nation in hope and anticipation of the longed-for changes.

During the Romantic period, opera became a medium for conveying patriotic ideas and expressing a desire for freedom.



# GIUSEPPE VERDI SHORT BIOGRAPHY

## Verdi's life and works

Giuseppe Verdi was born on 12 October 1813. He is regarded as one of the most outstanding opera composers in the history of music.

He came from the village of Le Roncole near Busseto in the then Duchy of Parma and Piacenza. As a child, Verdi took music lessons from the local organist, and when he turned 18, he tried, unfortunately without success, to gain admission to the conservatoire in Milan. Thanks to the support of Antonio Barezzi, Giuseppe Verdi established contacts at La Scala and studied under Vincenzo Lavigna. After returning to Busseto (1836), he worked as a teacher and married Margherita Barezzi. Following his wife's death, he completed the opera *Un giorno di regno* (1840). The breakthrough came in 1842 with the previously mentioned opera *Nabucco*, which brought him fame. Verdi's other famous operas include *Rigoletto* (1851), *La Traviata* (1853) and *Aida* (1871).

Verdi died in 1901 in Milan. In accordance with his wishes, he was buried in a private ceremony without witnesses or music. A month later, a ceremonial transfer of the composer's body to the crypt of the Casa di Riposo took place. The ceremony was accompanied by a choir of over eight hundred people, who performed 'Va, pensiero' from the opera *Nabucco*.





# THANK YOU FOR WATCHING





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im. Fryderyka Chopina  
w Sochaczewie*

# WHY DOES ROSSINI'S MUSIC SEEM TO CONSTANTLY ACCELERATE?

ANSWER: 9

ROSSINI OFTEN REPEATED SHORT  
MOTIFS AND GRADUALLY  
INCREASED THE DYNAMICS. THIS  
EFFECT IS CALLED THE ROSSINI  
CRESCENDO.

## RETURN



[Back](#)

Venice – this is where important opera premieres took place



[Back](#)

Milan – in this city, the opera house was a symbol of the struggle for freedom



[Back](#)



**Rome**  
- The new capital  
of Italy