

Conversation starters

A few trivia tidbits in case you get stuck for a topic in the queue to the bathroom.

- Mozart and Da Ponte lived across the street from each other in Prague while composing Don Giovanni, and could be heard yelling back and forth as they worked their craft.
- It's said that an elderly Casanova actually advised on the libretto — and was in the audience when it opened.
- Mozart supposedly wrote the overture the night before the opera premièred, while his wife plied him with drinks to keep him awake.
- Mozart called his opera a *dramma giocoso* — a “playful drama”, so there is both comedy and tragedy at play.

About Opera Australia

Opera Australia is the nation's premier opera company and one of its most significant cultural institutions. Its ambition is to place an Australian stamp on the sharing of great stories through music and song, while developing and nurturing new generations of Australian talent on and off the stage.

2026 marks the 70th birthday of Opera Australia. The company was born when a band of idealists — including butchers, pharmacists and newsagents — gave up their day jobs to celebrate the 1956 Mozart bicentenary with a season of four of his operas.

Based in Sydney at The Opera Centre and with offices and rehearsal facilities in the Melbourne Arts Precinct, the company collaborates with opera companies and arts organisations across Australia. It also co-produces work with some of the world's most renowned opera houses and producers of musical theatre.

OPERA AUSTRALIA

CHEAT SHEET:

Don Giovanni



**Saturday
8 August, 7.30pm**

Everything you
need to know
about Mozart's
hit opera.

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OPERA CONFERENCE



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Who was the composer?



A posthumous portrait of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1819) by Barbara Krafft. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART.

How do you know you're listening to Mozart?

He wrote stunning melodies, often with lots and lots of notes.

When Mozart lived in Salzburg, the emperor is said to have remarked of his music: *"Too beautiful for our ears, my dear Mozart, and vastly too many notes!"*

To which Mozart supposedly replied, *"Just as many as are necessary, your majesty!"*

Mozart sought out stories for the music he already wished to write, believing "in an opera the poetry must at all costs be the obedient daughter of the music".

What happens in the story?

It is the last day of Don Giovanni's life, but he doesn't know that.

For the libertine, it's just another day of pleasure-seeking: breaking into a bedroom, killing a victim's father and seducing a bride on her wedding day.

But despite his impressive track record, Don Giovanni's luck is beginning to run out.

Donna Anna has sworn vengeance.

The scorned Donna Elvira is in pursuit.

Masetto wants his bride back.

And Don Giovanni has just heard a voice from beyond the grave, warning of his impending punishment.

But Don Giovanni has no fear. Half mocking, half earnest, he invites the graven statue of the man he's just killed to dinner.

Will he come?

Who are the main characters?

Don Giovanni — a nobleman living for pleasure

Leperello — his manservant, who both detests and envies his master for his success

Donna Elvira — the scorned lover

Donna Anna, the Commendatore & Don Ottavio — a victim, her father and her fiancé

Zerlina — a peasant girl who catches Don Giovanni's eye on her wedding day

Masetto — her fiancé

What's the big hit?

'The Catalogue aria', in which Leperello lists all of his master's conquests:

"My lady, this is the list of the beauties my master has loved..."

Something to listen out for

- The first note of the overture is a clanging D Minor chord — as the gates of hell judder open, announcing Giovanni's impending doom. But before long, the music bounces into D Major and at once we see the two threads that make Don Giovanni such a masterpiece — Mozart and Da Ponte have given us an opera that has laugh-out-loud moments of comedy in a story of violence, tragedy and darkness.
- Listen out during Leperello's amusing 'Catalogue Aria' — as the servant describes "majestic" (read: larger) women, he sings long, broad notes. When he sings of petite ladies, the notes are short and snappy.

