

Hammer Song Rossini

Arrangement Helen Woods

Grading

Challenging

About this song

The 'Hammer Song' is the final song at the end of the first act of *The Barber of Seville* (1816), the most famous opera by the Italian composer Gioachino Rossini. In the scene, police arrive at Doctor Bartolo's house to arrest Count Almaviva, who is disguised as 'Lindoro' – but they release him when he reveals his true identity.

All of the opera's characters are on stage, and everyone is confused about why 'Lindoro' has been let go. The atmosphere is very tense, as Doctor Bartolo is angry and Almaviva wants to save Rosina (Doctor Bartolo's adopted daughter). The 'Hammer Song' expresses everyone's emotions as they feel like they are going crazy!

Vocal range

Overall 13th F to D



- ♪ Spoken rhythm – no specific vocal range required
- ♪ Voice 1 9th C4 to D5
- ♪ Voice 2 6th B3 to G4
- ♪ Soprano solo 7th B4 to A5

Vocal format

4 Parts (3 melodic, 1 rhythmic):

- ♪ Spoken rhythm
- ♪ Voice 1
- ♪ Voice 2
- ♪ Soprano solo

Themes/subjects

- ♪ Opera
- ♪ Patter song
- ♪ Noise/Commotion
- ♪ Dizziness/Confusion

Musical elements and characteristics

- ♪ Upbeat, punchy **tempo**
- ♪ Voice percussion
- ♪ Use of **staccato** (short, detached notes)
- ♪ **Sotto voce** ('under the voice', a low volume)



Glossary

Accompaniment The music of the instruments which play along with the singers.

Ensemble Two or more people singing or playing an instrument at the same time.

Libretto The text used in an opera or other long vocal work.

Opera buffa Italian for 'comic opera'.

Staccato An Italian word meaning short, detached notes.

Coloratura An Italian word meaning 'colouring'. It indicates the elaborate ornamentation of a melody, often with lots of notes sung very quickly.

Tempo Speed.

Aria A song for solo voice in an opera.

Serenade A love song, or the act of singing this song to someone.

Descant A high part sung over the top of a main melody.

Hammer Song

Note from arranger Helen Woods

'I play the drums from the Javanese gamelan. Each separate drum sound has a name so you can speak the sounds. For example, 'Tac tacdhung dah... dah dhung... dah dhung...'. I used this idea as inspiration for the spoken rhythm in the 'Hammer Song', to sound machine-like but using sounds that you might find in drumming!

What words do the machines around you speak? You could use my words or maybe create your own words to repeat in a pattern.'

Patter songs

The 'Hammer Song' is one of Rossini's 'patter songs': a fast song with tongue-twisting, rhyming lyrics. Patter songs often appear in **opera buffa** – another example from *The Barber of Seville* is Figaro's famous **aria**, 'Largo al factotum' ('Make way for the factotum'). One of the most well-known patter songs is 'I Am the Very Model of the Modern Major General' from Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance* – see if you can keep saying this

sentence faster and faster! You can also hear patter songs in Disney films such as *Mary Poppins* ('Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious') and *Moana* (Maui's rap in 'You're Welcome'). Rossini's speedy, speech-like patter songs could even be compared to tracks by modern-day rappers!

Challenges of singing Rossini

- ♪ Good breath control is needed for the long, fast phrases.
- ♪ Good diction (pronunciation) is required so audiences can hear the words clearly, especially during faster passages.
- ♪ Vocal flexibility is required for **coloratura** singing. Rossini created 'Gorgheggi e solfeggi', a set of exercises to help improve the agility of the voice.
- ♪ Staggered breathing is useful when you are singing in a group, singing fast and/or have a lot of words to sing. The aim of staggered breathing is to create a seamless (unbroken) line which makes the audience think that none of the singers are actually



taking a breath! Check with the person next to you where you are both going to breathe while singing the 'Hammer Song';

make sure to choose different words – you must not breathe at the same time!

Hammer Song

Warm-ups and exercises from *The Barber of Seville*

- ♪ Warm up the face: massage your face; clean your teeth with your tongue; pretend to chew toffee; lip trills; rolled 'r's; blow raspberries.
- ♪ Repeat 'la' on the same note. Try it slowly at first, then speed up. Make sure the note stays the same and the jaw is relaxed - it shouldn't be moving up and down too much!
- ♪ Tongue twister from Figaro's *aria*, 'Largo al factotum': 'I'm there, Figaro here, Figaro there, Figaro here, Figaro there, Figaro up, Figaro down, Figaro up, Figaro down! I am the busiest, I am the busiest, cleverest man in all of the town, all of the town, all of the town, all of the town, all of the town!'
- ♪ Tongue twister from the 'Hammer Song': 'What a clamour, what a clamour, yammer, yammer, like a hammer it is beating on the brain! (x2). Really focus on the consonants with this exercise!

Recommended CànSing exercises

- ♪ Breathing Exercise 3 (Diction)
- ♪ Diction Exercise 1 (Tongue Twister)
- ♪ Diction Exercise 2 (Short Tongue Twister)
- ♪ Vocal Exercise 2 (Fiddle diddle fee)
- ♪ Beat Boxing Exercises 1, 2 & 3

Learning the song

- ♪ Build the song up slowly, section by section (A1, A2, B, A3, C and D), one step at a time:
- ♪ Speak the words slowly
- ♪ Speak the words in the rhythm
- ♪ Sing the words to the melody (in rhythm)
- ♪ If this is difficult, sing the melody to a 'dah' sound in rhythm without the words. Then insert the words afterwards.
- ♪ Practice at learning speed until confident, then try the full speed challenge.
- ♪ Move onto the next section.

Digital Screen

- ♪ The screen has two speeds: a 'learning track' for practice, and a 'full speed challenge' for when you feel ready!
- ♪ You can navigate around the different sections using the markers at the bottom of the screen.
- ♪ You can also choose if you want to hear the full track (with or

without **descant**), or individual vocal parts.

- ♪ There are two sets of light bars to help you follow the notes: one for Voice 1 (orange), and one for Voice 2 (purple). Voice 2 joins in at Section C2 (see the 'Song Structure' table on the next page).
- ♪ We have also provided ukulele sheet music so that you can play along with the song!



Hammer Song

Structure of the piece

Section	Characters	Voice parts	Bar Numbers (from score)
A1 and A2	All	Spoken rhythm	3 – 20
		Voice 1	5 – 20
B	All	Spoken rhythm Voice 1	21 – 26
A3	All	Spoken rhythm Voice 1	27 – 34
Repeat from the beginning			
C1	Berta, Rosina, Count, Figaro	Voice 1	36 – first beat of 43
C2	Berta, Rosina, Count, Figaro. Bartolo, Basilio	Voice 1	Second beat of 43 – first beat of 51
		Voice 2	Fourth beat of 43 – first beat of 51
C3	Berta, Rosina, Count, Figaro. Bartolo, Basilio. Chorus (Men: Tenors and Basses)	Soprano Solo Voice 1 Voice 2	Second beat of 51 – first beat of 59
D1 (repeat as D2)	Berta, Rosina, Count, Figaro. Bartolo, Basilio. Chorus (Men: Tenors and Basses)	Soprano Solo Voice 1 Voice 2	Second beat of 59 – 81
		Spoken rhythm	59 – 81



Reflection and musicianship: example questions

- ♪ What is the mood of this song? How does it make you feel?
For example, 'this song makes me feel dizzy and hurried'.
- ♪ Why do you feel that way? What influences your answer?
For example: the tempo (speed), the text, the accompaniment (instruments), etc.
- ♪ How many and what type of beats are there in a bar? **4 crotchet beats.**
- ♪ What key is the piece in? **C Major**

Hammer Song

The Barber of Seville Synopsis

Act One

Rosina lives with her guardian, Dr Bartolo in Seville, Spain. Outside Dr Bartolo's house, musicians are serenading Rosina. Among them is Count Almaviva, disguised as Lindoro. He likes Rosina and wants to find out if she likes him too.

Figaro arrives and sings his very famous **aria**, 'Largo al factotum'. Almaviva asks for his help to meet Rosina. Figaro tells Almaviva that Rosina is kept locked away, as Bartolo hopes to marry her to get her money. He tells Almaviva to disguise himself as a soldier to get into Dr Bartolo's house.

Lindoro's voice has captured Rosina's heart. Figaro encourages Rosina to write a letter to 'Lindoro', promising to deliver it.

Almaviva manages to get into the house in disguise. He slips Rosina a letter, but Bartolo is suspicious of 'Lindoro' and starts arguing with him. The police come to

investigate, and arrest Almaviva, but he tells the officer his real name and is released.

Act Two

Later that day, Almaviva re-enters the house disguised as Don Alonso, a music teacher, to give Rosina a singing lesson. She and 'Lindoro' plan to run away together, but Bartolo overhears their plan.

Bartolo tricks Rosina, by telling her that 'Lindoro' is working for Almaviva, who wants to marry her for money. She is heartbroken and agrees to marry Bartolo. Figaro and Almaviva sneak in to the house and Rosina is angry at first, but Almaviva reveals his true identity. He and Rosina get married and Bartolo is forced to acknowledge that he has been outsmarted and joins in the celebrations.

Fun facts

♪ Rossini learned to play the viola so quickly that by the age of nine he was playing in the orchestra pit alongside his father!

♪ *The Barber of Seville* play, by Beaumarchais, was banned from being performed the day before its premiere.

♪ Rossini was only 23 when he wrote *The Barber of Seville*.

♪ The opera *The Barber of Seville* (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) was originally written in Italian. The Italian title for the 'Hammer Song' is 'Mi par d'esser con la testa', meaning 'I'm in over my head'.

♪ Several little accidents happened onstage during the first performance: a guitar string broke during the first scene; Basilio tripped over a trap door and made his nose bleed; and during the finale, a cat walked onstage, was shoed off, then reappeared the other side and jumped into the hands of Bartolo!

♪ The first time the opera was performed, the audience hissed and jeered because they didn't like it – but it soon became a success.

♪ Returning to Naples after the first performances, Rossini told his mother, 'I wrote to you how my opera was booed, now I can write that on the second evening and all the following performances, they cheered this work of mine with an indescribable fanaticism for which I came out five, six times to receive applause of a totally new kind and that made me cry with pleasure'.

♪ *The Barber of Seville* was the first opera that WNO Conductor Laureate Carlo Rizzi conducted with the company in 1991.

Credits

English translation by George Mead © Casa Ricordi, Milan (Universal Music Publishing Group).

Welsh translation by Sioned Harries, originally written for Opra Cymru's production of *The Barber of Seville*.

Photographs by Johan Persson.