

Overture to *La cenerentola* (Cinderella) (1817)
Gioachino Rossini (1792 – 1868)

To many people the name of Rossini means only two operas: “The Barber of Seville” and “William Tell.” This is unfortunate, for Rossini wrote 38 operas and several do not deserve the obscurity into which they have fallen. At the age of 37 when he wrote “William Tell,” he was at the height of his fame and his creative powers; he was also undoubtedly the most celebrated and most widely performed opera composer in the world. Although he lived for a further 39 years, Rossini wrote no more operas after “William Tell.” Reasons advanced for this include indolence, finances, bitterness, and jealousy. His indolence was well-known; he frequently recycled his own music and sometimes passed off a complete overture from an earlier, unsuccessful opera as a “new” overture for a new opera; yet, how can one describe as indolent a man who frequently wrote four or five operas a year? Finances can hardly have been a problem – he was wealthy and could well afford to retire. Certainly, Rossini was bitter over the failure of “William Tell.” Did this bitterness result in creative atrophy? Was he zealous over Meyerbeer’s rising fame? This is improbable when Rossini was at the height of his powers and Meyerbeer was just becoming known. Rossini could hardly have felt threatened by this still young and relatively unknown composer. Several other reasons have been suggested periodically, but none is fully convincing – perhaps we shall never know the truth of the matter.

“La cenerentola” was Rossini’s nineteenth opera. The libretto, by Jacopo Ferretti, was based on the Cinderella fairytale by Charles Perrault. In Rossini’s version, the magical elements have been dispensed with. The fairy godmother becomes Alidoro, a practical philosopher who is employed by the Prince. Alidoro disguises himself as a beggar and goes to the house where Cinderella and her two stepsisters live. He receives help from the kindly Cinderella after being rudely treated by the two stepsisters. In return, he contrives to have the Prince marry Cinderella, despite the efforts of the stepsisters’ father to have the Prince marry one of them.

The overture is recycled from “La gazzetta,” an unsuccessful earlier opera, and as is common with Rossini’s overtures, no themes from the opera are quoted. The overture, of great beauty and notable proportions, has rich, exciting rhythms and incisive themes. Completely classical in style, it is scored for a modest-sized orchestra with only one trombone. A broad, majestic introduction leads abruptly into an *Allegro vivace* which, with

sparkling spontaneity, reveals Rossini's true genius. There are two typical *crescendi*, the second of which brings the overture to a brilliant conclusion.
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