

“La calunnia” (What is slander?) *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, or *The Useless Precaution*, Act I, music by Gioachino Rossini, libretto by Cesare Sterbini, 1816, based on Beaumarchais’s comedy, *Le barbier de Séville*.

Synopsis

Basilio, friend of Dr. Bartolo, is advising the older man on how to ruin the reputation of the Count, whom Bartolo considers a potential rival for Rosina, his ward. Bartolo plans to marry Rosina himself, particularly since she will inherit a substantial fortune when she comes of age. Basilio offers this solution as a means of thwarting the Count’s plans.

BASILIO

La calunnia è un venticello
un’auretta assai gentile;
che insensibile, sottile,
leggermente, dolcemente
incomincia a sussurrar.
Piano, piano, terra, terra,
sotto voce sibillando,
va scorrendo, va ronzando
nelle orrechie della gente,
s’introduce desgramente,
*e la teste ed I cervelli,
fa stordire, e fa gonfiar.*

What is slander? A little puff of air,
just a zephyr quite soft and gentle,
which, invisible and subtle,
light as feathers, very sweetly
starts to whisper through the trees.
Softly, softly, here and yonder,
very quietly it whistles,
first it’s gliding, then it’s sliding
into everybody’s hearing,
oh, so slyly penetrating
*heads and brains, it’s irritating--
stunned and swelled like swarms of bees.*

Dalla bocca fuori uscendo
lo schiamazzo va rescendo;
prende forza a poco a poco,
scorre già di loco in loco
sembra il tuono, la tempesta,
che nel sen della foresta.
Va fischiando, brontolando,
e ti fa d’orror gelar.
Allà fin trabocca e scoppia,
si propaga, si raddoppia,
e produce un esplosione
come un colpo di cannone,
*un tremuoto, un temporale,
un tumulto generale,
che fa l’aria rimbombar.*
*E il meschino, calunniato
avvilto, calpestato,
sotto il pubblico flagello,
per gran sorte va a crepar.*
(*=repeat)

From the mouth, it comes out prouder,
and the racket grows still louder,
bit by bit, it grows yet stronger,
in each place, it carries longer,
soon it thunders like a tempest,
coming from primeval forest.
Now it hisses, mutters, grumbling,
making all in horror freeze.
When at last, amid the rubble,
it will spread out and redouble,
an explosion loudly roaring
like a cannon shell that’s soaring,
*it’s an earthquake or a cyclone
shaking everything with fury,
with a force you can’t appease.*
*And the wretch who has been tainted,
with great suffering is acquainted,
’neath the public lash he shudders,
as his shameful fate he sees.*

--From “An Afternoon of Opera,” a *Young Artists* recital sponsored by Cowell College, UCSC, and Santa Cruz Opera Society, Inc (SCOSI), featuring Robert Tate, tenor, & Monte Pederson, bass-baritone, artists of San Francisco Opera. ©1983