**COMIC INTERMEZZO**

*INTERMEZZI* are comic 2-act interludes sung between the 3 acts of an opera seria

Intermezzi originate from the Renaissance *INTERMEDIO*, the musical numbers sung between acts of a spoken theatrical play
COMIC INTERMEZZO

In their original form
an INTERMEZZO was composed for
an OPERA SERIA
and was thematically related to the main opera.
COMIC INTERMEZZO
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Pergolesi’s two-act *La Serva Padrona*, was performed between the three acts of his opera seria, *Il Prigionier Superbo* in 1733.
COMIC INTERMEZZO

The traditions of *Commedia dell’Arte*, Italian improvised comic theater, serve as models for character types and plots in the intermezzo 1725-1750 “Golden Age” of Intermezzo
COMMEDIA dell’ARTE

ARLECCHINO

Probably the most famous of Commedia characters, Arlecchino is a good-hearted and well-intentioned buffoon. He can be crafty and clever, but is never malicious.
COLOMBINA is a clever female servant with a keen and active wit and able to hold her own in every situation and emerge triumphant from the most complicated intrigues. A country girl, she takes a frank attitude towards men and sex.
PANTALONE The Old Man, often a rich miser, though he pretends to poverty. He suspects everyone of trying to dupe him (he is usually right) even as he plans his own schemes.
CAPITANO is a swaggering braggart soldier, usually foreign (and sometimes pretending to be of noble blood). Capitano boasts of great prowess at both love and war, but is in reality an abject failure at both.
COMIC INTERMEZZO

Giovanni Battista PERGOLESI (1710-1736)

 Writes intermezzo
La Serva Padrona
in 1733
COMIC INTERMEZZO

LA SERVA PADRONA
[The Maid Mistress]

“Intermezzo Buffo in Due Atti” (1733)

Libretto by G. A. Federico
Music by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi
COMIC INTERMEZZO

LA SERVA PADRONA

Plot of servant girl who tricks her employer into agreeing to marry her.
COMIC INTERMEZZO

An old *Commedia* plot

There are 3 characters—

**UBERTO**: bass
**SERPINA**: soprano
**VESPONE**: a mute mimed role

Based on *Commedia* character types
COMIC INTERMEZZO

The performers in intermezzi tended to be “ACTOR-SINGERS” rather than just “singers,” and the orchestra tends to play along with the singer’s melody line.
La Serva is almost immediately done independently of its opera seria
In 1746 and 1752 performed in Paris: sets off Guerre des Bouffons [War of the Comedians), a pamphlet war in over the values of French and Italian opera
COMIC INTERMEZZO

Small orchestra, small cast
(usually only three or so characters)

No overture—no need for one
The surrounding opera seria
already has an overture
COMIC INTERMEZZO

Uses of the BASS VOICE for male protagonists

NO CASTRATI
COMIC INTERMEZZO

While *opere serie* tend to be very serious and promote social stability ("the king is good," etc.)
The themes of *intermezzi* tend to be **SOCially SUBVERSive**
("people in power are stupid")

The subject matter is *bourgeois* rather than *aristocratic*
COMIC INTERMEZZO

SECCO RECITATIVE
and short DA CAPO ARIAS

Unlike opera seria,
singers address the audience
to get their collusion
COMIC INTERMEZZO

Texts usually set **SYLLABICALLY** rather than melismatically, as in opera seria

Much **TEXT REPETITION**—but not as in opera seria—For **comic effect**:

“Sì, sì!” “No, no!” “Sì, sì!” “No, no!”
COMIC INTERMEZZO

Each act culminates with a Duet or Ensemble.
Musically, intermezzi were in the newer and lighter-textured **STYLE GALANT** rather than the dense Baroque style of opera seria.
COMIC INTERMEZZO

The *STYLE GALANT*

[Gallant Style]

A New Musical Style

that emerges in the 1720s
STYLE GALLANT

THIN TEXTURES

Melody and accompaniment,
Contrasts with the contrapuntal density
of late Baroque style.

Accompaniment figures are usually of
“ALBERTI BASS”
developed around 1730s.
STYLE GALLANT

SLOW HARMONIC MOVEMENT

Contrasts with
the fast harmonic movement
of late Baroque style
STYLE GALLANT

Emphasis on **MAJOR MODE** keys, rather than minor.

Melodies feature

- feminine cadences
- triplets figures
- sighing motives
The **EMPFINDSAMER STIL**  
[Sensitive Style]  
is a German offshoot in the 1740s  
of the *Style Galant*
COMIC INTERMEZZO

Uberto: Accompanied Recitative and Da Capo Aria:

“Ah, quanto mi sta male…
Son imbrogliato io già”