

# **Bad Boys**

## **Villains, Drunkards and Charlatans in Opera**



*Art Axelrod*



## **The Opera Guild of Rochester**

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## Villains, Drunkards and Charlatans

### ◆ The Villain:

- Is a force of Evil in the plot
- Is explicitly opposed to the Hero's or Heroine's goals, welfare and life
- Has a relatively un-nuanced morality
  - ◆ He either knows he's bad, is totally selfishly amoral or is a fanatic
- Is generally sung by a low voice: Baritone or Bass
  - ◆ With some notable exceptions
- May express (in the negative) the composers sense of morality.

### ◆ True Villains are relatively rare in the Operatic Canon

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## Villains, Drunkards and Charlatans

### ◆ Drunkards:

- Not usually bad people – may be the Hero at times
- Ordinarily don't drive the plot
  - ◆ With exceptions
- Character studies
  - ◆ May be comic, poignant or even tragic
- Theatrical color
- Often, a scene of comic relief
- Often get really good arias!

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## Villains, Drunkards and Charlatans

### ◆ Charlatans:

- The "Snake-oil Salesman"
- Unlike villains, amoral but not intrinsically evil
- Frequently comic characters
- May drive the plot by inducing a principal to do something reckless
- Character studies or just theatrical color
- May be comic relief
- Often get really good arias!

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## Our Selections this Evening

1. Two Devils:  
Mefistopheles from Gounod's *Faust* and Boito's *Mefistofele*.
2. Two Human Villains:  
Scarpia from *Tosca* and Iago from *Otello*
3. Alberich from Wagner's *Ring of the Niebelung*  
If Evil were to triumph . . .
4. Dr. Dulcamara from Donzetti's *L'elisir d'amore*  
The consummate snake-oil salesman
5. Don Basilio from Rossini's *Barber of Seville*  
He might be evil if he weren't so inept . . .

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## Our Selections this Evening

7. Falstaff  
Verdi's *Falstaff* on the futility of Honor
8. The Drunken Poet  
Hoffman from Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffman*
9. The Drunken Old Soldier  
Varlaam from Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*
10. Drunken Sailors  
From Wagner's *Flying Dutchman*
11. The Wages of Sin  
Mozart's evil *Don Giovanni* meets his fate!

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## Two Devils - 1

### **"Mephistopheles' Serenade" from Gounod's *Faust***

Bryn Terfel (b), Mephistopheles  
2010

Orchestra of the Royal Opera House,  
Antonio Pappano, cond.

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# Faust

Charles Gounod (1828-1893)

Libretto by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré

First Performance, 1859, Paris

Adaption of the Faust legend by Goethe  
and adapted by Gounod and his  
librettists.

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## "Mephistopheles' Serenade"

Gounod's *Faust*

Faust has seduced and abandoned  
Marguerite and is overcome by guilt.  
Outside her window, Mephistopheles  
ironically sings a serenade, sarcastically  
warning girls not to give in to their  
lovers until she "has the ring on her  
finger".

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## Two Devils - 2

**"Son io il spirito che nega "**  
**from Boito's *Mefistofele***

Samuel Ramey (b), *Mefistofele*  
2000

Orchestra of the San Francisco Opera,  
Maurizio Arena, cond.

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## Mefistofele

Arrigo Boito (1842-1918)

Libretto by the composer

First Performance, 1859, Paris

Adaption of the Faust legend as  
presented by Goethe

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**"Son io il spirito che nega "**

from Boito's *Mefistofele*

In Act I, Mephistopheles introduces himself to the aged Faust. He says, "I am the spirit that denies" and explains that he seeks to end God's Creation and return the Universe to Chaos.

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**Two Human Villains - 1**

**"Tre sbirri, una carrozza..."**

**from Puccini's *Tosca***

Sherril Milnes (br), Scarpia

1976

New Philharmonia Orchestra,  
Bruno Bartoletti, cond.

Movie Version directed by Gianfranco De Bosio

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# Tosca

Giacomo Puccini (1858 – 1924)

Libretto by the Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica, based on play, *La Tosca* by Victorien Sardou (1887)

First Performance, 1900, Rome

A painter, Mario Cavaradossi, and an opera singer, Floria Tosca, battle the evil police chief, Scarpia, during the Austrian occupation of Rome

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“Tre sbirri, una carrozza...”  
from Puccini’s *Tosca*

Set in the cathedral prior to performance of a  
*Te Deum*:

After planting seeds of jealousy into Tosca,  
Scarpia sends three agents to follow her,  
hoping to discover where Cavaradossi is  
hiding an escaped patriot.

He acknowledges that he’s just as eager to  
seduce Tosca as he is to capture the escapee.

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Two Human Villains - 2  
Iago - The Definition of Evil  
**"Credo in un Dio Crudel"**  
**Iago's Aria From Verdi's *Otello***  
James Morris (br), Iago  
1996  
Metropolitan Opera Orchestra,  
James Levine, cond.

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## Otello

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Libretto by Arrigo Boito after Shakespeare

First Performance, 1887, Milan

Verdi's treatment of the tragedy *Othello*  
by Shakespeare.

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"Credo in un Dio Crudel"  
Verdi's *Otello*

In *Otello*, Verdi is fairly true to Shakespeare's story, but this monologue does not appear in Shakespeare.

Iago justifies his evil by describing how he was created by a cruel God who created evil.

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If Evil Were to Triumph...

"Auf wonnigen Höhen" from  
Wagner's *Das Rheingold*

James Morris (b), Wotan; Ekkehard Wlaschina  
(b), Alberich; Siegfried Jerusalem (t), Loge  
1990

Orchestra of Metropolitan Opera,  
James Levine, cond.

Stage Production by Otto Schenk

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# Das Rheingold

Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Libretto by the Composer

First Performance, 1862, Vienna

The prologue to Wagner's epic *Ring of the Nibelung*, a 4 part cycle.

The evil Nibelung, Alberich, has stolen the Rhinegold. The Gods, led by Wotan, need to get it for themselves.

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## "Auf wonnigen Höhen"

Wagner's *Rheingold*

Alberich has stolen the Rhinegold, and by renouncing love, has managed to forge it into a Ring of Power.

Wotan, assisted by Loge, descend into Nibelheim to try to get the Ring away from Alberich.

Wotan asks, "Down here in this gloom, of what use to you is this vast wealth and power?"

Here is Alberich's chilling response.

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## The Snake-Oil Salesman

**“Udite, udite, o rustici” from  
Donizetti’s *L’Elisir d’Amore***

Ildebrando D’Arcangelo (b), Dr.  
Dulcamara

2005

Orchestra and Chorus of the Vienna State  
Opera, Alfred Eschwé, cond.

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## L’Elisir d’Amore

Gaetano Donizetti (1797 – 1848)

Libretto by Felice Romani

First Performance, 1832, Milan

A poor, simple young man in an Italian village is in love with a wealthy young woman of the village. A charlatan “doctor” comes through the village selling his “elixirs”. A comedy with a happy ending ensues.

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"Udite, udite, o rustici"  
from *L'Elisir d'Amore*

In a rural Italian village, the travelling  
charlatan, "Doctor" Dulcamara, offers  
the townspeople his miraculous "elixir"  
(which is only red wine).

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## The Value of Slander

**"La calunnia è un venticello" from  
Rossini's *Barber of Seville***

Robert Lloyd (b)

1988

Radio Symphony Orchestra Stuttgart,  
Gabriele Ferro, cond.

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# The Barber of Seville

Gioacchino Rossini (1792 – 1868)

Libretto by Cesare Sterbini after the play  
by Beaumarchais (1775)

First Performance, 1816, Rome

Dr. Bartolo wants to marry his lovely  
ward, Rosina, who is in love with  
handsome, young Count Almaviva.

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## “La calunnia è un venticello”

The Barber of Seville

Dr. Bartolo wants to get rid of his pesky  
young rival. His unprincipled adviser,  
Don Basilio, suggests that a campaign  
of slander would be just the thing.

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## Falstaff on the Futility of Honor

### **“L'onore! Ladri!” from Verdi's *Falstaff***

Paul Plishka (bbr)  
1993

Orchestra of the Metropolitan Opera,  
James Levine, cond.

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## Falstaff

Giuseppe Verdi (1813 – 1901)

Libretto by Arrigo Boito, after  
Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor*  
and *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2* (1597/8)

First Performance, 1893, La Scala, Milan

Based on Shakespeare, Falstaff, the  
unprincipled old knight tries to seduce  
two women but gets his just deserts.

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## "L'onore! Ladri!"

Verdi's *Falstaff*

Sir John Falstaff, the disreputable old knight, hatches a scheme to get money by seducing two wives of wealthy merchants of the town. He tries to recruit his two equally disreputable cronies, but they demur, claiming it would be dishonorable.

Here is Falstaff's catechism on honor!

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## The Drunken Poet

**"Il était une fois à la cour  
d'Eisenach!"** from Offenbach's  
*Tales of Hoffman*

Plácido Domingo (t)  
1981

Orchestra and Chorus of Royal Opera  
House, Georges Prêtre, cond.

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# Tales of Hoffman

Jacques Offenbach (1819 - 1880)

Libretto by Jules Barbier based on a play by Barbier and Michel Carré, based on several tales of ETA Hoffman

First Performance, 1881, Paris

A surreal telling of the amorous tragedies of the poet, Hoffman.

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## The Story of Kleinzach:

“Il était une fois à la cour d'Eisenach!”  
from *Tales of Hofmann*

The poet, Hofmann, wounded by yet another failed love affair, arrives at the tavern, already drunk. His equally drunken companions urge him to sing a song.

He obliges with a rowdy song about a deformed dwarf named Kleinzach.

But when he notices a portrait of his latest love, he turns it personal, finally asserting that he, himself, is as pitiable as Kleinzach.

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## A Drunken Old Soldier

### **"The Siege of Kazan" from Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov***

Arthur Eizen (b), Varlaam  
1987

Orchestra of The Bolshoi Opera,  
Alexander Lazarev, cond.

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## Boris Godunov

Modest Mussorgsky (1839 – 1881)

Libretto by the Composer after Pushkin

First Performance, 1874, St. Petersburg

The mental breakdown of Tsar Boris and  
the rise of the Pretender to the throne,  
Grigori, the false Dmitri.

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## "The Siege of Kazan"

Boris Godunov

Our anti-hero protagonist, the novice monk, Grigori, has escaped from the monastery and is trying to get out of Russia. He pauses at an inn on the Lithuanian border.

He meets two other escaped monks, Varlaam and Pimen. Varlaam, drunk, sings a raucous song about his army experiences, when the Russian Army under Ivan the Terrible besieged the Tatar city of Kazan.

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## Drunken Sailors

**"Steuermann, lass die Wacht!" from  
Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman***

Jorma Silvast, Steersman (t)  
1989

Orchestra and Chorus of the Savonlinna Opera  
Festival, Finland, Leif Segerstam, cond.

Film version filmed at Olavinlinna Castle, Finland

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# The Flying Dutchman

Richard Wagner (1813 – 1883)

Libretto by the Composer

First Performance, 1843, Dresden

Based on old North European folk legend,  
a sea captain has been doomed to sail  
the seas forever until he is redeemed  
by the love of a faithful woman.

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## “Steuermann, lass die Wacht!”

The Flying Dutchman

A town on the coast of Norway: After battling a  
violent storm, a ship has made its home port.

The sailors celebrate their homecoming with  
food and drink. They invite their Steersman  
to come join them,

However, their ship is berthed next to the  
ghostly doomed ship, *The Flying Dutchman*.

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## The Wages of Sin . . .

### **“Don Giovanni, a cenar teco m’invitasti” from Mozart’s *Don Giovanni***

Bryn Terfel, Don Giovanni (br); Sergei  
Koptchak, Commendatore (b); Ferruccio  
Furlanetto, Leporello (br)  
1989

Orchestra and Chorus of the Metropolitan  
Opera, James Levine, cond.

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## Don Giovanni

WA Mozart (1756 – 1791)

Libretto by the Lorenzo da Ponte after  
*The Seducer of Seville and the Stone  
Guest* by Tirso de Molina (1630)

First Performance, 1787, Prague

Mozart and da Ponte’s treatment of the  
Spanish morality tale of the rake and  
lecher, Don Juan.

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## The Stone Guest - Background

Mozart's *Don Giovanni*

Before the curtain opens:

The lecherous Don Giovanni, abetted by his reluctant servant, Leporello, makes a career of seducing and sometimes even raping women. He had attempted to rape Donna Anna and when her aging father, The Commendatore, came to her defense, the Don killed him.

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## The Stone Guest – Opera's Climax

Mozart's *Don Giovanni*

The Don and Leporello pass by a stone Statue of the Commendatore. The Don is amused (and Leporello terrified) when the Statue speaks to the Don. The Don invites the Statue to dinner.

The following evening, the Statue arrives at the Don's house. The Statue entreats the Don to repent. The Don refuses, and is dragged down to Hell!

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Thank You



And Good Night!

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