

La Gazza Ladra (The Thieving Magpie) Overture
– Gioacchino Rossini

Born February 29, 1792, in Pesaro, Italy

Died November 13, 1868, in Paris, France

This work was first performed on May 31, 1817, at Teatro alla Scala in Milan.

Gioacchino Rossini's reputation as a composer centers largely on the long string of successful operas he composed in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. No other composer approached his fame, and then, at the ripe old age of 33, he retired to the Italian countryside. During his retirement, he composed several short songs and instrumental works, some of which were published under the amusing title "The Sins of My Old Age," but never again did he compose for the opera.

During Rossini's operatic years, he was recognized as an especially fine craftsman of operatic scenes, but today's audiences are perhaps more familiar with the overtures. These musical gems, so popular and of lasting charm, were often dashed off immediately before the premiere of the opera. Rossini claimed to prefer this method of composing overtures, as the element of necessity provided a very useful spontaneous creativity.

Rossini's overture to his highly successful melodramatic opera *La Gazza Ladra* was composed on May 31, 1817, the day of the premiere. This procrastination provoked the theater owner to lock the composer in an upstairs room of the opera house, directing a group of burly stagehands guarding the door to keep him incarcerated until he finished the overture for the evening's premiere. As Rossini completed each page, it was dropped to the copyist waiting outside the window. If the composer did not continue churning out pages, the guards were instructed to drop Rossini out the window instead.