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**Franz Winterhalter**

*A Portrait of Adelina Patti as Rosina in Rossini's opera 'Il Barbiere di Siviglia', 1863*

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FRANZ WINTERHALTER

Menzenschwand 1805 – 1873 Frankfurt am Main

*A Portrait of Adelina Patti as Rosina in Rossini's opera 'Il Barbiere di Siviglia', 1863*

Oil on canvas

110.0 x 78 cm.

43 1/4 x 30 3/4 in.

Signed and dated lower left: *F Winterhalter / 1863*.

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## Provenance

Believed to have been commissioned by Napoleon III and given to Adelina Patti (1843-1919);

Baron Gustaf Olof Rudolph Cederström, her third husband;  
Thence by family descent.

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Franz Xaver Winterhalter's portrait of Adelina Patti was painted in 1863, at the moment of the soprano's meteoric rise to international fame. That year, Parisian audiences at the Théâtre Italien were captivated by the nineteen-year-old singer's performance as Rosina in *The Barber of Seville*, a success so extraordinary that Emperor Napoleon III commissioned the present portrait. The painting was presented to Patti together with a diamond and ruby brooch, a gesture that acknowledged the young soprano's emergence as one of the great cultural figures of the age.

Distinct from the grand dynastic portraits with which Winterhalter's name is most closely associated, the present work possesses a striking intimacy and immediacy. Patti is depicted not as an established prima donna, but at the threshold of her ascendancy: youthful, poised, and already fully conscious of the charisma that enthralled audiences across Europe. The portrait captures not merely a likeness, but the construction of the Patti legend itself.

Winterhalter would later portray Patti again in a more formal composition showing the singer in evening dress, now at Harewood House. The present portrait, however, remains exceptional within the artist's oeuvre for its comparative informality and psychological freshness.

Franz Xaver Winterhalter was the pre-eminent court portraitist of nineteenth-century Europe. Patronised by courts across France, Britain, Austria, Belgium, and Russia, he became instrumental in shaping the visual identity of European monarchy during a period of profound political and social transformation. Queen Victoria alone commissioned more than 130 works from the artist. Though later critics occasionally dismissed his portraits as overly flattering, such assessments underestimate Winterhalter's achievement. His works did not simply record power and status; they constructed their visual language. The modern image of Victorian Britain and the Second French Empire remains inseparable from Winterhalter's elegant and highly sophisticated portraiture. Upon his death, Queen Victoria described the loss as "terrible, quite irreparable", adding that "his works will rank with Van Dyck."

Born in Madrid in 1843, Adelina Patti achieved international celebrity with remarkable speed following her debut at New York's Academy of Music in 1859. Celebrated as the "Queen of Song", Patti dominated the operatic stage for more than half a century and became one of the most famous performers of the nineteenth century. Her renown extended far beyond the world of music: she commanded unprecedented fees, travelled with armed protection for the jewels she wore on stage,

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and amassed a fortune sufficient to acquire a château in South Wales. By the 1880s she was reportedly earning \$5,000 per recital, among the highest fees ever commanded by a singer at the time. Gioachino Rossini so admired her interpretation of Rosina that he revised passages of the role to suit her voice.

The present portrait preserves Patti at the outset of this extraordinary career: a young artist whose authority and celebrity were already recognised at the highest levels of European society.

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