

THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

(Le nozze di Figaro)



Music by W. A. Mozart
Text by Lorenzo da Ponte
Premiered in Vienna, May 1, 1786
Based on the play by Pierre Beaumarchais

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CAST AND CHARACTERS



Figaro [FEE-gah-roh]: Jason Hardy, bass-baritone
A barber who is a servant to the Count and engaged to Susanna.



Susanna [soo-ZAHN-nah]: Anya Matanovic, soprano
The Countess' witty and beautiful maid.



Count Almaviva [all-mah-VEE-vah]: Jeff Mattsey, baritone
Employer of Figaro and Susanna who has feelings for Susanna.



Countess Almaviva: Melody Moore, soprano
The Count's wife. Still in love with him, she knows he wants to cheat on her.



Cherubino [kehr-oo-BEEN-oh]: Emily Lorini, mezzo-soprano*
The Count's young page. A flirtatious boy, in love with both Barbarina and The Countess.
*This is a **trouser role**, meaning a woman is playing the role of a boy.



Dr. Bartolo [BAR-toh-loh]: Michael Gallup, bass
Once the Countess' guardian, a Seville doctor who holds a grudge against Figaro.



Marcellina [mar-cheh-EE-nah]: Melissa Parks, mezzo-soprano
The housekeeper for Bartolo. Figaro owes her money.



Don Basilio [bah-ZEEL-yoh]: Jim Doing, tenor
The music master who constantly intervenes and spreads gossip.



Barbarina [bar-bah-REE-nah]: Emily Birsin, soprano
The cute daughter of Antonio who is in love with Cherubino.



Antonio [ahn-TOH-nyoh]: Justin Smith, bass
The Count's tipsy gardener, Barbarina's father, and Susanna's uncle.

FIGARO, IN SHORT

The servants Figaro and Susanna are set to be married, but their employer, Count Almaviva, has an interest in Susanna and may disrupt the proceedings. The Count's wife, Countess Almaviva, learns of her husband's wandering eyes, and with the help of Susanna, Figaro, and the page Cherubino, she plots to set him straight. Meanwhile, the Countess's former guardian Dr. Bartolo and his housekeeper Marcellina enter the picture. Marcellina says Figaro owes her money, and that if he doesn't pay, Figaro must marry *her*. Things don't look good for little Cherubino either, as the Count begins to suspect him of having an affair with the Countess. Mozart and DaPonte create a world of chaos in this classic comedy, keeping us wondering, how will it all end?

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Mozart's music came to define the **Classical period** of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Characteristics of the Classical style include generally light and clear textures, with melodies moving above chordal accompaniment (this is known as **homophony**). Short, distinct phrases, frequent changes of mood, and variety among keys, melodies, rhythms, and dynamics are also typical of the Classical style that Mozart practiced. His operas also feature variation between **arias** (songs), **ensembles**, and **recitative** (partly spoken, partly sung dialogue). The following are some of the important musical moments in *The Marriage of Figaro*:

The Overture

This famed operatic overture and concert hall favorite, begins with a brief conspiratorial melody that quickly segues into a joyous romp. Rapid, bubbly and filled with a joie de vie, the overture melodically conveys the flavor and fervor of the story to come. Yet, while the music portrays frantic farce, comedic interludes and romantic asides, underneath them is sound that portends this will be a very human comedy about a crazy day with both sunny and serious sides.



Act I, 1: “Cinque, dieci, venti” (Five, ten, twenty)

In a short, delightful duet, Figaro is taking measurements to fit a bed in their room. Susanna, however, attempts to get Figaro's attention to herself, if not the hat she has created. In a typical male manner, he absent-mindedly offers her compliments while he paces the room, continuing his measurements.

ex. 

Act I, 3: “Se vuol ballare, Signor Contino” (If, my dear Count, you feel like dancing)

Alone but now angry about the Count's interest in Susanna, Figaro, in a cavatina* set forth in measured declarations, concocts his own battle-plan to best the boss. He exits, declaiming melodically, “All your plots I'll overthrow.” This piece contains the oft-quoted line, “If, my dear Count you feel like dancing, it is I who'll call the tune.” This thought is the one that made the royals nervous: A servant plotting against his master was unheard of and quite unacceptable! (*Cavatina: short simple song that lacks the fire and drama of an aria.)

ex. 

Act I, 4: “La Vendetta” (Revenge)

In an aria, Bartolo in his best courtroom declamatory style, outlines his approach to vengeance: through some dubious but diligent, legal research he'll find an obstacle and—Figaro will lose the day!

ex. 

Act I, 9: “Non piu andrai” (No more)

In this well-known aria, Figaro offers fatherly-counsel to Cherubino after he is cast-off to the army. The piece has a spritely military beat throughout that Figaro usually plays to the hilt. Cherubino is suddenly going to have a very severe change in life style. No longer perfumed boudoirs etc. but military campaigns with their cannons, mud and marching. The lad is sent off with the final line, —Cherubino, on to victory, on to military glory!!! All exit the scene in great mock military precision.

FIGARO. *f* *(a Cherubino.)*
(zu Cherubino.)

Non pùaradrai far-fal-lo-ne a-ma-ri-so, not-to e-gior-no d'in-tor-no gi-
Nun ver-giss lei-ses Flehn, sü-sses Ko-sen, und das Flat-tern von Ro-sen zu

ex.

Act II, 10: “Porgi amor” (O love, give me some remedy!)

In a sad but well-known cavatina, the Countess laments her loss of the Count’s love. It ends on her prayer for love to be given back or let her die!

Per-gia-mar
Hör mein Flehn,

qualche ri-sto-ro al mio duo-lo, a miei so-spir!
o Gott der Lie-be, hab Er-hur-men mit mei-ner Noth!

ex.

Act II, 11: “Voi che sapete” (You ladies who know what love is)

In this wonderful, languidly lyrical and well-known piece, Cherubino outlines his confusion about love. He ends his ruminations with a question to the ladies, —Is love what I have in my heart?

Voi, che sa-pe-te che cosa è a-mor,
Euch, hol-de Frau-en, die Lieb ihr kennt,

ex.

Act II, 14: “Aprite, presto aprite!” (Open, quickly open!)

In a spritely duet, Susanna gets Cherubino out of his hiding place. The vocal line is quiet, staccato, and full of breathy patter. Cherubino decides the only way to protect the Countess is to jump from the window into the garden below. He does!

Fu-ci-de se-ri-tro-ra.
Der Tod wird Sie er-ei-len.

(Affacciandosi alla finestra.)
(Nähert sich dem Fenster.)

giò-ra.
weilen.

Feg-giamo un pò qui fuo-ri,
Lass mich doch einmal se-hen,

ex.

Act II, Finale

An 18th century finale was less a finish than a spot for the singers to show off and the composer to create a melodious mélange, the plot be damned! Summarizing the previous played plot and/or reprising popular pieces already performed is a modern conceit, not a Mozartian one. In this melodious 18th century “wrap-up” of the Act, Mozart and da Ponte are at their most creative. There is some recitative, but most of the music is in ensemble form with various numbers of participants. Lengthy, but quite lovely and frequently lively!

Act III, 17: “Vedro, mentr’io sospiro” (Shall I live to see?)

In his musically angry declaration, the Count cruelly recounts all his concerns with class. He resents those less royal than he, delightedly and deliberately discomforting him. That is not nice! His feelings are not free to be flagrantly flung and flummoxed by fellows (and their female friends) from the lower-lived levels of his lordly lands. His revenge on these rogues will give him reams of riotous rejoicing.

ex. 

Act III, 19: “Dove Sono?” (Where?)

This entrance aria of the Countess is probably one of the loveliest in the operatic repertoire. In the piece she expresses great sorrow for the failure of their marriage and the Count’s infidelity. She also expresses regret that his behavior has forced her to seek help from Susanna, a person of the lower class. (That class thing again!). Despite all that, she retains hope of changing his ungrateful heart.

ex. 

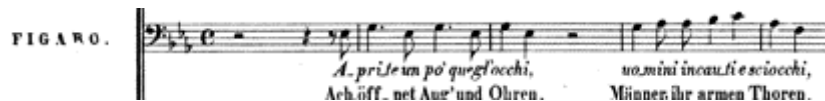
Act III, 20: “Canzonetta sull’aria” (A little tune on the breeze)

In an exceptionally lyrical duet, the Countess dictates a note for Susanna to write to the Count. The girl echoes the dictation lines. The message appropriately promises romance for the evening.

ex. 

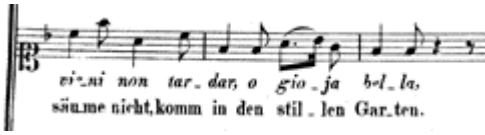
Act IV, 26: “Aprite un po’ quegli occhi” (Open your eyes for a moment)

In this very angry aria, Figaro riles against women in the worst way. He ends his diatribe by declaring, “Open your eyes for a moment.”

ex. 

Act IV, “Deh vieni” (Come here)

Knowing Figaro is nearby and can hear her, Susanna sings a lovely aria to love and the beauty of nature in the garden. Despite her disguise, Figaro knows it is his wife warbling. Susanna knows Figaro thinks she will have a canoodling encounter with the Count and, that her song of love is being sent to the master. However, Susanna is a clever double agent and dedicates the musical message to her mixed-up man, not the callous Count.

ex.  Musical notation for Susanna's aria "Deh vieni". The notation is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The lyrics are: *vi-ni non tar-dar, o gio-ja bel-la,* / *sü-ame nicht, komm in den stil-len Gar-ten.*

Act IV, Finale

All is resolved in the Finale, with the entire ensemble converging as all secrets are revealed and peace is mended. Figaro sings “Tutto e tranquillo e placid,” or “everything is peaceful.”

ex.  Musical notation for Figaro's line in the Act IV Finale. The notation is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The lyrics are: *Tut-to è tranquillo e pla-ci-do,* / *Fort sind sie, es ist stil-le nun.*

(adapted from Des Moines Metro Opera: “The Operaphobic’s Guide to Enjoying The Marriage of Figaro” / J.P Cooney and Sondra S. Cooney)

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756 – 1791)



Probably the greatest genius in Western musical history, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria, Jan. 27, 1756, the son of Leopold Mozart and his wife, Anna Maria Pertl. Leopold was a successful composer, violinist and assistant concertmaster at the Salzburg court.

Wolfgang began composing minuets at the age of 5 and symphonies at 9. When he was 6, he and his older sister, Maria Anna (who was nicknamed "Nannerl"), performed a series of concerts to Europe's courts and major cities. Both children played the keyboard, but Wolfgang became a violin virtuoso as well.

In 1762 the Mozart children played at court in Vienna; the Empress Maria Theresa and her husband, Emperor Francis I, received them. From 1763 - 66, the Mozart children displayed their talents to audiences in Germany, Paris, at court in Versailles, and London (where Wolfgang wrote his first symphonies and began a friendship with Johann Christian Bach, whose became a great musical influence on Wolfgang). In Paris, the young Mozart published his first works, four sonatas for clavier with accompanying violin (1764).



In 1768 he composed his first opera, *La Finta Semplice*, which had its premiere in Salzburg. In 1769-70, Leopold and Wolfgang undertook a tour through Italy. This first Italian trip culminated in a new opera, *Mitridate, re di Ponto*, composed for Milan. In two further Italian journeys he wrote two more operas for Milan, *Ascanio in Alba* (1771) and *Lucio Silla* (1772).

In 1772, Archbishop von Schrattenbach died, to be succeeded by Hieronymus von Colloredo. The latter, at first sympathetic to the Mozarts, later became irritated by Wolfgang's prolonged absences and stubborn ways. In 1772, von Colloredo retained Wolfgang as concertmaster at a token salary. In this capacity Mozart composed a large number of sacred and secular works. Wishing to secure a better position outside Salzburg, he obtained permission to undertake another journey in 1777. With his mother he traveled to France, where he composed the Paris Symphony (1778) but he was unable to find a permanent position. His mother died in Paris.

When he returned to Salzburg he was given the position of court organist (1779) and produced a splendid series of church works, including the famous Coronation Mass. He was commissioned to compose a new opera for Munich, *Idomeneo* (1781), that proved he was a consummate master of opera seria. Summoned by von Colloredo to Vienna in 1781 he was dismissed after a series of arguments.

Mozart's career in Vienna began promisingly, and he was soon commissioned to write *The Abduction from the Seraglio* (1782). His concerts were a great success, and the emperor, Joseph II, encouraged him, later engaging him as court composer. In 1782 the now-popular Mozart married Constanze Weber from Germany, much to his father's dismay. The young pair

visited Salzburg in 1783; there, the Kyrie and Gloria of Mozart's great Mass in C Minor, composed in Vienna and never finished, were performed. Mozart's greatest success was *Le Nozze di Figaro* (The Marriage of Figaro) (1786), composed for the Vienna Opera. The great piano concertos and the string quartets dedicated to his "dear friend" Josef Haydn were also composed during this period.



Mozart's fame began to disappear after Figaro. The nobility and court grew increasingly nervous about his revolutionary ideas as seen in Figaro. He sank into debt and was assisted by a brother Freemason, Michael Puchberg (Mozart had joined the Masons in 1784 and remained an outspoken member until his death). His greatest operatic success after Figaro was *Don Giovanni* (1787), composed for Prague, where Mozart's art was especially appreciated. This was followed in 1790 by *Così fan tutte*, the third and final libretto provided by the Italian poet Lorenzo Da Ponte; and in 1791 by *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute), produced by a suburban theater in Vienna. During this period of financial strain, Mozart composed his last three symphonies (E flat, G minor, and the Jupiter in C) in less than 7 weeks (summer 1788). These had been preceded by a great series of string quintets, including the two in C and in G minor (1787).

In 1791, Mozart was commissioned to write a requiem (unfinished). He was at the time quite ill--he had never known very good health--and imagined that the work was for himself, which it proved to be. His death, on Dec. 5, 1791, which gave rise to false rumors of poisoning, is thought to have resulted from rheumatic fever, a disease which he had suffered from repeatedly through his life. After a cheap funeral at Saint Stephen's Cathedral, he was buried in an unmarked grave at the cemetery of Saint Marx, a Viennese suburb. Much has been made of this, but at that time such burial was legally required for all Viennese except those of noble or aristocratic birth.

Mozart excelled in every form in which he composed. His contemporaries found the restless ambivalence and complicated emotional content of his music difficult to understand. Accustomed to the light, superficial style of rococo music, his aristocratic audiences could not accept the music's complexity and depth. Yet, with Josef Haydn, Mozart perfected the grand forms of symphony, opera, string quartet, and concerto that marked the classical period in music. In his operas Mozart's uncanny psychological insight is unique in musical history. His music informed the work of the later Haydn and of the next generation of composers, most notably Beethoven. The brilliance of his work continued until the end, although darker themes of poignancy and isolation grew more marked in his last years, and his compositions continue to exert a particular fascination for musicians and music lovers.

(Arizona Opera)

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The second half of the 18th century was a time of great political and intellectual upheaval. It was the Age of Enlightenment, when the first encyclopedias were published, new planets were discovered, and academies formed to advance science and philosophy. From this period stemmed ideas about democracy and self governance that would fuel revolutions in the American colonies and France, and that are traceable in the characters of Figaro and Susanna.

1756 – **Mozart is born.** France and Austria sign the **Treaty of Versailles** forming a military alliance. The previous year, the **French and Indian War** began in America, and Samuel Johnson published the **Dictionary of the English Language**.

1760 – **George III** becomes the King of England. **Catherine the Great** becomes ruler of Russia.

1762 – Mozart performs at the Imperial court in Vienna at age 6. Rousseau publishes **The Social Contract**, putting forth the theory of popular sovereignty, or direct rule by the people.

1765 – **Joseph II** becomes Holy Roman Emperor and Archduke of Austria. He is considered an “enlightened monarch,” and later commissions Mozart.

1770 – **King Louis XVI** of France marries **Marie Antoinette**.

1775 – The **American Revolution** begins.

1776 – **Declaration of Independence** is signed.

1783 – **Paris Peace Treaty** ends the American Revolution.

1784 – **Pierre Beaumarchais’s** play *Le Mariage de Figaro* premieres in Paris. In an already volatile political climate, it creates a stir by portraying witty servants plotting against their master.

1786 – Mozart’s operatic version of **The Marriage of Figaro** premieres in Vienna.

1787 – **United States Constitution** is signed. **Herschel** discovers the planet Uranus.

1788 – The British begin sending convicts to recently discovered **Australia**.

1789 – **George Washington** is elected first president of the United States. The **French Revolution** begins.

1791 – Thomas Paine publishes the **Rights of Man**, arguing that political revolution is necessary when a government does not protect the natural rights of the people. **Mozart dies.**

ONLINE RESOURCES

Full Score:

<http://www.dlib.indiana.edu/variations/scores/abw8806/large/index.html>

Full Libretto with English translation:

<http://www.aria-database.com/translations/figaro.txt>

The Mozart Project (Biography, Works, Articles):

<http://www.mozartproject.org/>

Mozart's Letters (Articles):

<http://madisonopera.blogspot.com/2009/01/real-mozart.html>

<http://madisonopera.blogspot.com/2009/02/real-mozart-part-2.html>

"After Mozart's Death, an Endless Coda" (Article):

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/25/arts/music/25death.html>

Where Mozart composed "The Marriage of Figaro" (Video):

<http://www.your-friend.info/vienna/sightseeing.html#Figaro-House>

Overture – English Baroque Soloists (Video):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKU94kxv-o>

"Cinque, Dieci, Venti" – Anna Netrebko and Ildebrando D'Arcangelo (Video):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6A0Uj3fnkps>

"Se vuol ballare" – Bryn Terfel (Video):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MdXqtQ1vJQ>

"Voi che sapete" – Frederica von Stade (Video):

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7y3_SZqNi4

"Dove sono" – Kiri Te Kanawa (Video):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BTWBieDvZb8>

"Sull'aria" – Renee Fleming and Cecilia Bartoli (Video):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLtqZewjwgA>

The Marriage of Figaro – Full performance, Metropolitan Opera, 1985 (Video Playlist):

http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=3BAB77289B0C9B7F