Wolfgang Amadé Mozart (1756–1791)

Wolfgang Amadé Mozart – The Compleat Mozart (Neal Zaslaw)

Theater Music

Background and overview

Mozart was a man of the theater. At almost every moment in his career he was either searching for a good libretto to set, seeking a commission to write an opera, actually composing an opera, or rehearsing a production. He went to hear plays, operas, and ballets whenever opportunities presented themselves. He knew that the greatest prestige and money and best performing forces that his society could offer were to be found in the opera houses supported by almost every large and small European city and court. The urgency with which he pursued opera can be sensed almost palpably in many of his letters. “I have looked through at least a hundred libretti and more, but I have hardly found a single one with which I am satisfied”, he wrote to his father in desperation in May 1783.

Mozart’s operatic apprenticeship began in London in 1764–65, where his father took him to the opera and set him to composing arias to texts drawn from famous librettos by Pietro Metastasio. Throughout his life, Mozart continued to compose isolated arias and operatic scenes, as concert arias for singers he favored, as insertion arias for other composer’s operas, and as trial pieces of one kind or another.

As for operas themselves, Mozart wrote in the three genres cultivated in Italy and central Europe: serious, all-sung Italian opera (*opera seria*); comic, all-sung Italian opera (*opera buffa*); and *Singspiel*, which was German-language operetta with spoken dialogue liberally spiced by arias, ensembles, dances, and the like. If one includes those works that Mozart did not complete (but for which he composed large amounts of viable music) as well as serenatas (*opera seria* texts intended to be performed in concert rather than staged), the production of his short career is astonishing in this genre alone (see lists below).

Mozart’s dramatic gifts have long been celebrated: he not only had a genius for beautiful melody and catchy rhythms, an ability to capture the feel and meaning of words and phrases, and an intense sense of dramatic timing, but he seems also to have been an intuitive psychologist who could “paint” in tones for his listeners the personalities, emotions, and situations of his characters in ways that make them come to life. The characters who people Mozart’s operas come from distant times and places, inhabiting strange and quaint landscapes, but as soon as the music starts, we think that we know them, that they resemble our friends and neighbors, and even ourselves.

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Opera seria

Apollo et Hyacinthus
Mitridate, rè di Ponto
Ascanio in Alba
Il sogno di Scipione
Lucio Silla
Il rè pastore
Idomeneo , rè di Creta
La clemenza di Tito

Opera buffa

La finta semplice
La finta giardiniera
L’oca del Cairo
Lo sposo deluso
Le nozze di Figaro
Don Giovanni
Così fan tutte

Singspiel

Bastien und Bastienne
Zaide
Die Entführung aus dem Serail
Der Schauspieldirektor
Die Zauberflöte

Operas and singspiels

K. 38 Apollo et Hyacinthus

Origin: Salzburg, before May 1767

Author: Rufinus Widl?

Following his success abroad Mozart was invited to demonstrate his abilities in his hometown of Salzburg. *Apollo et Hyacinthus* (Apollo and Hyacinth) was commissioned by the town's university, an institution with which the composer's father Leopold was already on the best of terms. Many of his pupils attended the university high school, where the theater played an important part in the school's activities. The young Mozart had first come into contact with the University theater on September 1 and 3, 1761, when as a five-year-old boy he had appeared as an extra in performances of the Latin school drama *Sigismundus Hungariae Rex* with words by Jakob Anton Wimmer and music by Johann Ernst Eberlin. As a rule school performances were given at the end of the academic year, although the term time itself was by no means unusual.

In 1767 the University arranged for its fourth-year high-school students or "syntaxians" to present a performance "ex voto". (Details of the promise or vow are not known.) The author of the piece was probably Rufinus Widl, a Dominican monk from the monastery of Seeon in Bavaria. Widl wrote the Latin tragedy *Clementia Croesi* for a performance planned for the summer term, interpolating a musical *intermedio* in between the acts of the spoken drama. The task of setting the *intermedio* to music was entrusted to Widl's fellow citizen, the eleven-year-old Wolfgang Mozart, who – it will be remembered – never enrolled at a school or university in his whole life.

Preparations for the performances are known to have been taken in hand by at least April 29, 1767. On May 1 mass was held in the University Church, the platform in the Great Hall being unusable because of the elaborate sets. Stage rehearsals were held on May 10, 11, and 12. The school records for May 13 report, "Wednesday. After the midday meal the syntaxians' play was performed in keeping with our promise; written by their excellent teacher and admirably presented by his pupils, it afforded the liveliest pleasure. I congratulate their excellent teacher on his great acclaim. Moreover, the music by Herr Wolfgang Mozart, an eleven-year-old boy, met with general approbation; in the evening he gave us excellent proof of his musical skills on the keyboard". The performance was a great success, but, apart from this single amateur airing, the work was not heard again during Mozart's lifetime.

Mozart later reused an abbreviated form of the duet, "Natus cadit, atque Deus" (No. 8), in his F major Symphony, K. 43 (see p. 167).

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The Greek legend as told by Ovid relates that Zephyr and Apollo both loved a youth, Hyacinth, who, however, cared only for Apollo. When out of jealousy Zephyr killed Hyacinth, Apollo gave Hyacinth immortality by turning his blood into the flower that bears his name. This overtly homosexual story was altered for performance by the students of Salzburg University. In the libretto for K. 38 Hyacinth and Zephyr are friends, and both Zephyr and Apollo love Hyacinth's sister Melia. This rivalry is the basis for the action.

Neal Zaslaw

K. 51 Lafinta semplice (K^6 46a)

Origin: Vienna, between April and July 1768

Author: Marco Coltellini, after Carlo Goldoni

Mozart's second stay in Vienna from September 11, 1767, to January 5, 1769, was principally intended to provide him with an opportunity to write an opera for the Imperial and Royal capital of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy. In a letter dated January 30 to February 3, 1768, and addressed to his landlord in Salzburg, Johann Lorenz Hagenauer, Leopold revealed that Wolfgang was to write an opera for Vienna: "and what sort of an uproar do you suppose has secretly arisen among the composers? – what? – today it is a (Christoph Willibald) Gluck and tomorrow a boy of twelve who is seen sitting at a keyboard and conducting his opera – yes, in spite of all their grudging envy! I have even won over Gluck to our side, so that, although he is not altogether whole-hearted, he dare not show what he really thinks, since our patrons are his too, and in order to secure ourselves with regard to the *acteurs*, who generally cause the composer the greatest annoyance, I have taken up the matter with them myself, and one of them has given me all the suggestions himself. But to tell the truth, the initial idea of getting Wolfgangerl to write an opera came from the Emperor himself, since he twice asked Wolfgangerl if he would like to compose an opera and conduct it himself."

On June 29, however, we find Leopold writing to Hagenauer that "envy has broken forth on every side", and on July 30, he wrote to say that all of Vienna's composers, with Gluck at their head, had left no stone unturned in their efforts "to hinder the progress of this opera. The singers were incited and the orchestra stirred up against us, everything was done to prevent the performances of this opera from going ahead. ... In the meantime it was being put about by certain persons that the music was not worth a rap, while others were saying that the music did not fit the words or the meter, since the boy did not understand the Italian language sufficiently well".

The hope that *La finta semplice* (The Pretend Simpleton) would finally be performed in Vienna in August proved unfounded, and so, when Leopold was granted an audience with Joseph II on September 21, he handed the emperor a *species facti* or letter of complaint. Above all he complained of intrigues against Wolfgang, and expressed his regret that, in spite of a positive response on the part of the court and various influential individuals, the opera was not to be staged after all.

Two arguments may be adduced in support of the claim that a performance of *La finta semplice* took place in Salzburg in 1769: firstly, the libretto was published in the city in 1769; and, secondly, Mozart's manuscript score contains alterations dating from that year. The singers named in the Salzburg libretto were members of the prince-archbishop's ensemble. There is no direct evidence of any performance material from Salzburg, but that it once existed is clear from passages in letters by Leopold Mozart (December 17, 1769) and Mozart's sister, Nannerl Berchtold von Sonnenburg (March 23, 1800).

It is not known for certain who selected the libretto of *La finta semplice* for Mozart. The text is based on Carlo Goldoni's dramma giocoso, La finta semplice, first performed during the 1764 carnival in the Teatro Giustiniani di S. Moisè in Venice with music by Salvatore Perillo. When Mozart composed *La finta semplice* in 1768, he had yet to set foot on Italian soil, which makes it all the more astonishing that the twelve-year-old Austrian had such an excellent grasp of the Italian language, and that he was able to do justice to that supreme law of *opera buffa* – textual intelligibility.

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K. 50 Bastien und Bastienne (K^6 46b)

Origin: Salzburg? 1767? and Vienna, 1768

Author: Friedrich Wilhelm Weiskern, Johann Heinrich Friedrich Müller, and Johann Andreas Schachtner, after Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Charles Simon Favart and Marie-Justine-Benoîte Favart, together with Harny de Guerville

In its choice of subject Mozart's *Bastien und Bastienne* is closely bound up with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's operetta *Le Devin du village* (The Village Soothsayer), first performed in Fontainebleau on October 18, 1752. Rousseau's piece was one of the great operatic successes of the Paris Académie Royale de Musique (better known as the Paris Opéra) during the second half of the eighteenth century and first third of the nineteenth century. After *Le Devin du village* had been performed thirty-three times at the Académie Royale de Musique, the Comédiens Italiens Ordinaires du Roi (more commonly known as the Comédie Italienne) presented a parody of Rousseau's piece under the title *Les Amours de Bastien et Bastienne* (The Loves of Bastien and Bastienne). The authors of the parody were Charles Simon Favart and Marie-Justine-Benoîte Favart, together with Harny de Guerville. The version by Favart and de Guerville is an adaptation in which members of the country's rural population appear in a realistic setting, speaking and singing in their dialects.

Les Amours de Bastien et Bastienne was a piece known to Viennese audiences. It was performed in Laxenburg on June 16, 1755 and in Vienna on July 5, 1755. Count Giacomo Durazzo, who had come to Vienna in 1749 as Genoese ambassador to the city following a stay in Paris and was appointed *directeur des spectacles* in 1754, ordered the parody to be performed at the Vienna Burgtheater. His period as director coincided with the appointment there of the actor, translator, and topographer Friedrich Wilhelm Weiskern, and it was presumably on Durazzo's instructions that Weiskern translated *Les Amours de Bastien et Bastienne* in 1764. As Weiskern indicates in his note to the translation, three of the numbers (11, 12, and 13) are by the actor Johann Heinrich Friedrich Müller, whom Durazzo engaged in 1763.

The theory advanced in many biographies of Mozart that *Bastien und Bastienne* was written for the garden theater of the Viennese magnetist and physician Dr. Anton Mesmer is untenable. Mesmer's theater, an open-air stage hewn out of beech hedges, had not been completed by 1768. Or might it perhaps have been the case that, because of the lateness of the season, the performance in October 1768 took place in what Mozart's widow's second husband Georg Nikolaus Nissen called Mesmer's "summer-house", that is, in the rooms of Mesmer's country house? Nissen speaks of a "society theater", in other words an amateur company, not a garden theater or open-air stage. Or was Bastien und Bastienne not performed in Vienna at all at that time? Contemporary sources leave us in the dark on all of these questions. But analysis of Leopold Mozart's "List of Everything that this Twelve-Year-Old Boy has Composed Since his Seventh Year" from September 1768 makes it clear that this little operetta originated in Vienna in 1768.

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K. 87 Mitridate, rè di Ponto (K^6 74a)

Origin: Bologna and Milan, September to December 1770

Author: Vittorio Amadeo Cigna-Santi, after Jean Racine and Giuseppe Parini

On March 12, 1770 – during Mozart's first visit to Italy from December 13, 1769, to March 28, 1771 – the fourteen-year-old composer received a *scrittura* or operatic commission from Count Carlo di Firmian, Governor General of the Austrian province of Lombardy and nephew of the former Salzburg prince-archbishop, inviting him to write an opera to open the season at Milan's Regio Ducal Teatro. The fee was fixed at 100 gold florins plus free board during his stay in the Lombard capital.

Mozart did not learn what subject he would be setting to music until July 27. This was the day on which he was handed the libretto to *Mitridate, rè di Ponto* (Mithridates, King of Pontus), an existing text that was the work of one of the members of Turin's Accademia dei Trasformatori, Vittorio Amadeo Cigna-Santi. The theme was already an acknowledged success in the literary and musical world. The Italian operatic stage in particular favored themes from Roman history. Mithridates VI Eupator, a tyrannical ruler from pre-Christian Asia Minor who inflicted three wars on the Roman Empire, provided a popular subject with which to glorify the Imperium Romanum. Cigna-Santi's version had already been set by Abbate Quirino Gasparini in 1767 for the Teatro Regio in Turin before Mozart was entrusted with it in 1770.

Mozart was allowed only five months to write his first opera for Italy, so there was no time to be lost if the lengthy score was to be delivered to the performers on time, and the singers needs had to be met above all else. Mozart certainly had problems with his singers while he was working on *Mitridate*. The final distribution of the roles was not known until October. No other opera by Mozart has so many different versions, sketches, fragments, and variants of the individual numbers. The singer entrusted with the role of Aspasia did not trust the maestro but planned instead to create a brilliant impression by interpolating arias from Gasparini's *Mitridate*. Not until she set eyes on Mozart's score and saw the pieces he had written specially for her did she admit to being "beside herself for joy".

Meanwhile, intrigues were being plotted behind the young composer's back: ten days before the first performance it was being suggested that such a young boy – and a German to wit – could not possibly write an Italian opera, since, although regarded as a great virtuoso, he allegedly lacked the "*chiaro ed oscuro* [light and shade] that is necessary in the theater". Mozart taught his would-be critics a lesson: following the orchestral rehearsal in Milan's Sala di Ridotto all disparaging gossip was silenced, and the first performance was a sensational success. Leopold Mozart wrote to his wife in Salzburg on December 29, "God be praised, the first performance of the opera took place on the 26th to general acclaim: and two things which have never before happened in Milan occurred, namely, that (contrary to the usual custom of a first night) an aria by the prima donna was repeated, although normally at a first performance the audience never calls out 'f[u]ora' (Author!), and secondly, after almost all the arias, with the exception of a mere handful *delle ultime Parti* [in the last act], there was the most tremendous applause and cries of 'Viva il Maestro, viva il Maestrino' after the aria concerned".

Mitridate, rè di Ponto is a number opera. It contains twenty-five separate numbers, not including the Overture. The entire opera, moreover, boasts only a single duet (No. 18) and one chorus (No. 25), which is in fact a quintet performed by the soloists at the end of the work.

Opera seria involves a stylistic unity that precludes the possibility of experimentation. Music, words, costumes, sets, gestures, stage, and auditorium are subject to the stylistic principles of all Baroque art. The fourteen-year-old Mozart entered no new compositional territory with *Mitridate, rè di Ponto*, but he accomplished the task brilliantly. Without denying convention or destroying the generic type, he made himself familiar with the genre of *opera seria*, and delivered the goods as requested. Without the need to experiment, Mozart scored an immediate success in the international opera world and in a large opera house of European caliber.

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K. 111 Ascanio in Alba

Origin: Milan, late August to September 1771

Author: Giuseppe Parini

On March 18, 1771, Leopold wrote from Verona to inform his wife (who had remained behind in Salzburg) that he had received a letter from Milan which had arrived the previous day and which had announced that a further missive was on its way to him from Vienna; this second letter, however, would not reach him until after his return to Salzburg from Italy. According to Leopold, it "will not only fill you with amazement, but will bring our son imperishable honor". The letter in question contained a commission from the Empress Maria Theresa for a *serenata teatrale* to be written for the politically important wedding between the seventeen-year-old Archduke Ferdinand of Austria and Princess Maria Beatrice Ricciarda of Modena, of the House of Este. On July 19, 1771, Leopold wrote to Count Gian Luca Pallavicini, who had been in the service of Austria since 1731 and a field marshal since 1754, informing the latter that he and his son Wolfgang were expected in Milan at the beginning of September in order to comply with the conditions of the commission. The oldest of Maria Theresa's *maîtres de musique*, Johann Adolf Hasse, was to compose the festival opera, while her youngest composer was to write the serenata.

The libretto arrived in Milan on Thursday, August 30. As early as September 13 Leopold was able to report back to Salzburg that "With God's help Wolfgang will have completely finished the serenata in twelve days' time, though really it is more of an *azione teatrale* in two parts". The Archduke Ferdinand, Governor and Captain General of Lombardy by profession, arrived in Milan on October 15, and the wedding took place the same day in the city's cathedral. The formal ceremonies began on the 16th with Hasse's final stage work *Il Ruggiero, ovvero L'eroica gratitudine* (Ruggiero, or Heroic Gratitude) to words by Pietro Metastasio, while Mozart's *Ascanio in Alba* was premiered on the 17th in Milan's Regio Ducal Teatro.

Wolfgang's *festa teatrale* was destined to enjoy a considerable success. Further performances were planned for October 19, 24, 27, and 28. Hasse is said to have described Mozart's success to the Abbate Giovanni Maria Ortes, a musical friend and writer, in terms that show a complete want of jealousy: "This boy will mean that we are all forgotten." Even if his words are apocryphal, they may indicate the general enthusiasm that was felt for the young composer. The newlywed couple attended the performance on the 24th and honored Mozart with cries of "bravissimo maestro", while Count Pallavicini sent a letter of congratulation from Bologna. In addition to a respectable fee, the composer received a watch studded with diamonds.

The libretto was the work of Abbate Giuseppe Parini, orator at the University of Milan, resident poet at the Milan Court Theater, and a writer of satires; it was intended, as it were, to congratulate the married couple, to wish them well, and to pay them homage on stage. As an allegory, it paid homage to Maria Theresa in the figure of Venus, while her son Ferdinand is not difficult to recognize in the figure of Ascanio.

Mozart himself regarded *Ascanio in Alba* as immensely attractive and special. After all, the composer had not yet had the opportunity in any of his previous stage works to write a grandiose pastoral play with choral and ballet sections, and with arias of a predominantly pastoral character. The strong preference for the chorus may well be a concession to Viennese tradition. Certainly the combination of singing and dancing was far from everyday practice for Milanese audiences. *Ascanio in Alba* should not be regarded as merely an occasional composition in Mozart's dramatic oeuvre, since the *festa teatrale* reveals Mozart's development as a man of the theater.

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K. 126 Il sogno di Scipione

Origin: Salzburg, probably between April and August 1771

Author: Pietro Metastasio

The names of two of Salzburg's prince-archbishops, Count Sigismund von Schrattenbach and Count Hieronymus Colloredo, are closely bound up with the *azione teatrale, Il sogno di Scipione* (Scipio's Dream). When Mozart returned to Salzburg from his second Italian expedition on December 15, 1771, Schrattenbach was already dying. Philological investigations have revealed that the composer had originally intended *Il sogno di Scipione* to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Schrattenbach's ordination, which was due to fall on January 10, 1772. The prince-archbishop's sudden death on December 16, 1771 prevented the *azione teatrale* from being performed at court. Mozart revised the work for the installation of Schrattenbach's successor, Hieronymus Colloredo, on April 29, 1772, and altered the dedication from "Sigismondo" to "Girolamo" (Hieronymus).

The libretto by Pietro Metastasio had been written in 1735 for the birthday celebrations of Emperor Karl VI. It consists of one act comprising twelve numbers. The text presents the allegorical story of the Roman general Scipio, who in a dream chose the goddess Costanza (constancy) over Fortuna (luck) as a guide in mortal life.

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K. 135 Lucio Silla

Origin: Salzburg and Milan, autumn 1771

Author: Giovanni de Gamerra

Following the successful first performance of Mozart's *Mitridate, rè di Ponto*, the *associati* (sponsors) of Milan's Regio Ducal Teatro decided on March 4, 1771, to commission a second opera from the young Salzburg composer, this time for the 1772–73 carnival season.

The text of *Lucio Silla*, the last of Mozart's operas written for Italy, is by Giovanni de Gamerra. Mozart had already begun work on the recitatives in Salzburg in October 1772, but he was later obliged to change these passages, and in some cases to rewrite them completely, after Gamerra had sent his libretto to the imperial and royal court poet Pietro Metastasio in Vienna. Metastasio improved and altered Gamerra's text, and added an entirely new scene in the second act.

Lucius Cornelius Sulla – the classical pronunciation of the name was later changed to Sülla and then to Sylla, or Silla in Italian – is an enigmatic and somewhat shady character from pre-Christian Roman history. In 83 B.C., after numerous victories over enemies both outside and inside the Empire, Sulla had himself elected dictator for life and invested with unlimited power. He was utterly vindictive in dealing with his enemies, and a sense of humanity was totally alien to him. Then, in 79 B.C. he renounced his dictatorship, and restored to the common people the right to elect its consuls. Indeed, he did not even apply for the office of consul, but wandered round the marketplace like any ordinary citizen. He offered to requite all who called him to account.

Accompanied by his father, Mozart set off for Milan on October 24, arriving in the Lombardy capital about midday on November 4. The premiere of *Lucio Silla* took place on the second day after Christmas.

Leopold gives an account of the premiere in a letter to his wife of January 2, 1773, which reads in part: "The opera passed off successfully, although on the first evening a number of very annoying incidents took place. The first such incident was that the opera, which generally starts one hour after the bells have rung for vespers, started three hours late on this occasion, in other words, about 8 o'clock by German time, and it did not end until 2 in the morning. The singers are always very nervous the first evening at having to perform before such a distinguished audience. But the terrified singers, together with the orchestra and the whole of the audience, many of them standing, had to wait impatiently in the heat for three hours for the opera to begin. Secondly, the tenor has never acted on

such a distinguished stage before. In her first aria (No. 4), the prima donna Anna de Amicis should expect him to show her a gesture of anger, but he performed this angry gesture in such an exaggerated way that it looked as though he was about to box her ears and knock off her nose with his fist, which made the audience laugh. She did not sing well for the rest of the evening, because she was also jealous that the *primo uomo* [leading man, Venanzio Rauzzini] was applauded by the archduchess the moment he came on stage. This was a typical trick of the kind that castratos play, since he had arranged for the archduchess to be told that, such was his fear, he would be unable to sing, his intention being to ensure that the court would encourage and applaud him. In order to console her, Signora de Amicis was summoned to court at around noon the next day, and she had an audience with Their Royal Highnesses which lasted for a whole hour; only then did the opera begin to go well."

The Milanese audience appears to have liked Mozart's opera. On January 23 Leopold wrote to tell his wife that *Lucio Silla* had now been given twenty-six times: "The theater is astonishingly full every day."

Mozart appears not to have given his complete approval to Gamerra's libretto, since he came closer to the essential drama of the theme than the poet had done, and expressed more, in terms of his music, than the text demanded. Mozart's view of music and drama in *Lucio Silla* has been described by Mozart's biographers Theodore de Wyzewa and Georges Saint-Foix as a "grande crise romantique". But attempts have also been made to attribute the work to a *Sturm und Drang* phase in the composer's output. What is striking about *Lucio Silla* are the subjective moods that reflect the darker sides of the individual's emotional life, and the full-scale vocal numbers that are given to secondary characters, both of which diverge from *opera seria* practice and give greater emphasis to the protagonists.

Lucia Silla is the first of Mozart's operas in which the composer devoted his particular attention to the *recitativo accompagnato* and (as far as we know) the last in which the overture was written before the rest of the work. In comparison to his first Italian opera, *Mitridate*, the orchestration in *Lucio Silla* is much more ambitious. Events on stage are accompanied and interpreted instrumentally, as it were. Many numbers give the impression of being symphonic compositions with obbligato vocal accompaniment. Mozart also created a ballet for *Lucio Silla*, which was entitled *Le gelosie del Serraglio* (Jealousy in the Harem) (K. 135a), and choreographed by the great dancer Jean-Georges Noverre, with whom Mozart would work again in Paris in 1778. Unfortunately, the completed version of Mozart's ballet music is lost, and only sketches survive.

With *Lucio Silla* Mozart bade farewell not only to Italy but also to his youth. In completing his commission, he broke the chain of convention. It is difficult to understand how Mozart's music could have entranced the Milanese public while eliciting no further commission for an opera from him. How much he himself wanted such a commission is clear from a letter that he wrote from Mannheim on February 4, 1778, in which he begged his father, "Please do your utmost to arrange for us (Wolfgang and Aloysia Weber) to come to Italy. You know my greatest desire is to write operas".

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K. 196 La finta giardiniera

Origin: begun Salzburg, September 1774

Author: Giuseppe Petrosellini? after Raniero de Calzabigi; revised by Marco Coltellini; German version by Johann Franz Joseph Stierle

A three-act *dramma giocoso* by Pasquale Anfossi, *La finta giardiniera* (The Pretended Gardener) was first performed at Rome's Teatro delle Dame on December 26(?), 1773. The libretto was probably

by the prolific Roman poet Giuseppe Petrosellini and based on a text by Raniero de Calzabigi. With few exceptions – cuts in the recitatives in the second and third acts and the suppression of two arias in the third act – Mozart set the Roman libretto as it stood.

Who obtained the Munich commission for Mozart in the summer or fall of 1774? The editor of the Mozart family's correspondence, Joseph Heinz Eibl, assumes that it was the Bishop of Chiemsee, Count Ferdinand Christoph Waldburg-Zeil, who for many years was in charge of the affairs of the Salzburg archbishopric. He was a lifelong patron of Mozart's. The Bavarian Mozart scholar Robert Münster, on the other hand, argues that Mozart received the *scrittura* from Count Joseph Anton Seeau, the Elector Maximilian III Joseph's Controller of Opera. The two views are not mutually exclusive. It is entirely possible that Count Waldburg-Zeil suggested that the young Salzburg composer should write the new opera; the definitive commission would have come from the appropriate authority, in other words, from the theater intendant Count Seeau himself.

Wolfgang and his father Leopold set off for Munich on December 6, 1774, with parts of the opera – principally the recitatives – already included in their luggage. On December 14 Leopold was able to venture the opinion that the opera would be rehearsed before Christmas and that the first performance would take place on December 29. On the 28th, however, we learn that "It has been postponed until the 5th of January 1775 so that the singers can learn their parts properly and, once they have the music in their heads, act with greater confidence, so that the opera is not ruined in consequence". However, the first performance of *La finta giardiniera* did not take place as planned on January 5. We learn from Leopold's letter to his wife of January 5, "Wolfg.'s opera is not to be performed until the 13th".

Mozart was heavily and decisively involved in the rehearsals for *La finta giardiniera*, although he did not conduct the performances. The Munich orchestra contained about twenty-three musicians and is said to have been in some disarray. Exact details concerning the east of Mozart's opera are not known.

Mozart himself gives us a graphic account of the premiere of *La finta giardiniera* in a letter to his mother dated January 14, 1775: "Thank God! My opera was performed yesterday, the 13th; and it turned out so well that it is impossible for me to describe the noise to Mamma. In the first place, the theater was packed to the rafters, so that a good many people were turned away. After every aria there was the most frightening noise with clapping and shouts of 'Viva Maestro'."

A second performance of *La finta giardiniera* took place on February 2, not in the Salvatortheater on this occasion but in the Sala di Ridotto. Leopold reported on the performance in a letter to his wife: "Wolfg.'s opera has been performed again, but it had to be cut because the soprano was ill. I could write a good deal about this woman: she was dreadful." It is not known what cuts were involved, since the performing material in question has not survived. The third and final performance of *La finta giardiniera* took place on March 2 in Munich, when the audience included the Elector Maximilian III Joseph.

Mozart revised the Italian text of *La finta giardiniera* in the fall and winter of 1779–80. It was translated into German, probably by the buffo bass Johann Franz Joseph Stierle, a member of Johann Böhm's traveling company. Mozart made various cuts, especially to parts of the second and third acts. Böhm's company was in Augsburg between March 28 and May 19, 1780, and it was probably here that they performed the German version of *La finta giardiniera* under the title *Die verstellte Gärtnerin* (The Disguised Gardener). Other performances known to have taken place during Mozart's lifetime include German-language productions in Frankfurt and Mainz, both in 1789.

The text that Mozart set marks a new departure in the development of *opera buffa*. It includes *parti serie* and *parti buffe*, both of which demand their own individual characterization. What Mozart

has set is basically a *drame bourgeois* in the mold of Denis Diderot, a genre which was intended to offer the spectator a world of feelings both solemn and not-so-solemn. By drawing upon these two emotional spheres, the composer enriched the genre of *opera buffa* both instrumentally and formally, so that it was no longer subject to a single unified scheme. In consequence the way was open for Mozart to write an opera of immense diversity.

La finta giardiniera did not find a place for itself in the eighteenth-century *buffa* repertory. In Munich it was shelved after only three performances. And in Paris, which Mozart visited from March to September 1778, there was no attempt to stage the work at all, although contemporary *opere buffe* were regularly seen here. In contrast to Anfossi's work, which was performed throughout Europe, *La finta giardiniera* remained a passing attraction. It has been left to present-day productions to reveal Mozart's inventiveness and imaginative power and to recognize the psychological and dramatic depth of his handling of the subject.

Rudolf Angermüller

K. 208 Il rè pastore

Origin: Salzburg, spring 1775

Author: adapted from Pietro Metastasio

Pietro Metastasio, poet to the Imperial Court in Vienna, completed his libretto to *Il rè pastore* (The Shepherd King) on April 18, 1751. The first performance took place on October 27, 1751, before the Viennese court at Schönbrunn. The music was by Giuseppe Bonno, who was later to become kapellmeister to the Viennese court. What is arguably the poet's finest lyric work had already been set to music by a series of famous contemporary composers before Mozart turned his hand to it in 1775. The list of the earlier composers includes Agricola, Sarti, Hasse, Uttini, Gluck, Galuppi, Lampugnani, Jommelli, and Guglielmi.

Mozart received a new commission for an opera immediately after his return to Salzburg from Munich at the beginning of March 1775. Two dramatic works were to be prepared for a visit that the Archduke Maximilian Franz, the youngest son of the Empress Maria Theresa and future Elector of Cologne, was to pay to the town on the Salzach. The archduke left Vienna on his way to Italy on April 20 and the following day arrived in Salzburg, where he stayed at the prince-archbishop's palace. A serenata for five voices, *Gli orti esperidi*, with words by Metastasio and music by the Neapolitan court kapellmeister in Salzburg, Domenico Fischietti, was performed on April 22, and on the 23rd Mozart's serenata *Il rè pastore* was heard for the first time. It is striking that both works were written for five voices and that both were settings of texts by Metastasio. Are we to imagine that a musical competition was held here between the court kapellmeister and the second concertmeister, as Mozart was at this time in Salzburg?

Metastasio's three-act libretto was compressed into two acts for Salzburg. The most striking feature of the music is the detailed instrumental writing. The overture, written in a single movement, passes straight into the first scene, as was customary in any school drama. The dramaturgy of *Il rè pastore* rests essentially upon the contrast between recitative and aria. That Mozart himself thought highly of *Il rè pastore* emerges from the fact that in October 1777 he sent the work to his "good and true friend" Josef Myslivecek, and that he performed the Overture (converted into a three-movement symphony, K. 208 + 102) at an *accademia* (concert) at the Mannheim home of the composer Christian Cannabich on February 13, 1778.

Rudolf Angermüller

K. 344 Zaide (K^6 336b)

Origin: Salzburg, 1779–80

Author: Johann Andreas Schachtner, after Franz Josef Sebastiani

In 1779 Mozart, just returned from an abortive trip to Mannheim, Munich, and Paris in search of a kapellmeister's post, was unhappily installed as a rank-and-file court musician at Salzburg. He and his father had observed a new trend: patrons and intellectuals were striving to create German-language musical theater as a nationalistic response to Italian opera. In Salzburg and other small, German-speaking courts visiting theatrical troupes were (for lack of a native repertory) mounting translated Italian comic operas and French operettas transformed into *Singspiels*, while in Vienna and Mannheim original works were being commissioned.

The Mozarts perceived this as an opportunity to advance Wolfgang's career. They acquired a copy of a libretto entitled *Ein musikalisches Singspiel, gennant: Das Serail. Oder: Die unvermuthete Zusammenkunft in der Sclaverey zwischen Vater, Tochter und Sohn* (A Musical Drama Called: The Seraglio, or The Unexpected Reunion of Father, Daughter and Son in Slavery) which, set to music by one (Johann) Joseph Friebert, had been performed in Wels (between Salzburg and Linz) in 1777, but published only in 1779. Plays and operas on "Turkish" (that is, Moslem) subjects were all the rage. This one must have appealed to the Mozarts for they gave it to their close friend, the court trumpeter Johann Andreas Schachtner, who had helped them before with German librettos, and he used it as the basis of a new libretto for Mozart to set.

Mozart was hard at work on this Singspiel when a major commission came for an *opera seria* for Munich – *Idomeneo*, the first of his great operas. So the Singspiel was put aside, even though by then he had completed fifteen numbers constituting perhaps three-quarters of the music. After the triumph of *Idomeneo*, Mozart was ordered to Vienna by the archbishop of Salzburg. There he broke with the archbishop, with Salzburg, and with his father, settling permanently in the imperial capital. Soon thereafter, when he needed a Singspiel for Joseph II's new German Theater, Mozart took out *Zaide* again, but something – most likely the libretto, although the "melodramas" of Nos. 2 and 9 were in an experimental style that Mozart soon abandoned – displeased him. (Perhaps hoping to avoid offending Schachtner, he wrote to his father cryptically, and not too credibly, that the work was "too serious" for the Viennese.) So he put aside this glorious music forever, commissioning another libretto on the same subject: *The Abduction from the Seraglio*.

What remains of the earlier project is a shapely torso, lacking a title, an overture, the spoken dialogue, and an ending. For a title either *Zaide*, as in the first edition of 1838, or *Das Serail*, after the Wels libretto, will serve. Mozart was only twenty-three to twenty-four years old when he composed *Zaide*, but he was already a master, with numerous successful operas, symphonies, concertos, masses, serenades, and chamber-music works to his credit. Everywhere in this work foreshadowings of *The Abduction* and *The Magic Flute* can be heard, bearing witness to one of the most gifted dramatic composers in the history of Western music awaiting his main chance.

Neal Zaslaw

K. 366 Idomeneo, rè di Creta

Origin: Salzburg and Munich, autumn 1780 to January 1781

Author: Gianbattista Varesco, after A. Danchet

At some point during the course of 1780 Mozart received a commission to compose an opera for the 1780-81 carnival season in Munich. Whoever suggested Mozart's name is not known. It is generally assumed that Christian Cannabich, music director at the Mannheim Court and a friend of

Mozart's, and Anton Raaff, Court singer and first interpreter of the role of Idomeneo, prevailed up on Countess Josepha von Paumgarten to intercede on Mozart's behalf with the Elector Karl Theodor. The latter would have instructed Count Joseph Anton Seeau, Intendant or Controller of Operatic and Dramatic Performances at the Electoral Court, to convey the *scrittura* to Mozart.

Nor do we know who chose Gianbattista Varesco as librettist, although it was presumably Mozart himself. Varesco was baptized in Trent on November 25, 1735, and from 1753 to 1756 he attended the Jesuit College in the town and took minor orders. In 1766 he obtained an appointment with the Salzburg prince-archbishop Count Sigismund von Schrattenbach. Varesco, in addition to being a priest, was also a musician. His salary was 100 gulden per annum – Mozart earned 150 – in return for which Varesco was expected to "make himself available in the Court Chapel".

During the course of 1780 the Munich Court conveyed to Varesco a detailed plan for producing a libretto, *Idomeneo, rè di Creta* (Idomeneus, King of Crete), in return for which he was to be paid the sum of 90 gulden. The text of *Idomeneo* was then translated into German by the Salzburg Court trumpeter, Johann Andreas Schachtner, who was a friend of Mozart and who received 45 gulden for his pains. What Mozart himself received for the work we do not know, but we can assume that it was in the region of 200 gulden, a sum which Wolfgang considered too little. For a "payment such as this one cannot leave one's score behind", his father Leopold commented mockingly. Certainly Mozart did not relinquish his autograph score to the Munich Court, but kept it safe in Vienna.

Mozart left Salzburg on November 5, 1780, and made his way via Wasserburg am Inn to Munich to prepare for the premiere there of *Idomeneo*. When he arrived in the Bavarian capital at around one o'clock on the afternoon of the 6th, the score was far from being sufficiently complete for rehearsals to begin at once. A glance at the correspondence relating to *Idomeneo*, most of which is now preserved in the Library of the Mozarteum in Salzburg, reveals that the composer was involved in a constant round of revisions, alterations, rewriting, and rehearsals. The opera was not ready musically until January 18, 1781, and the premiere took place on the 29th. Almost no contemporary reports have survived describing the premiere of Idomeneo.

An amateur performance of *Idomeneo* was given in the private mansion of Prince Johann Adam Auersperg in Vienna on March 13, 1786, a performance for which Mozart made extensive revisions to his score and wrote two new numbers, a duet for soprano and tenor, "Spiegarti non poss'io", K. 489, and a *scena* and rondo for soprano and violin solo, "Non più, tutto ascoltai ... Non temer, amato bene", K. 490.

Idomeneo occupies a key position in Mozart's oeuvre and is a turning point in his operatic career. In it he bursts asunder the bonds of conventional *opera seria* and invests the genre with individual features, combining Baroque and newer "subjective" stylistic elements, making *opera seria* and its stereotyped characters less rigid, and creating a scenically representative work of artistic freedom and boldness which embraces both dramatic and lyric extremes of expression. The musical vocabulary that is deployed here reveals Italian, French, and German elements, and demonstrates the cosmopolitanism of the twenty-five-year-old composer who had assimilated and synthesized all the various European stylistic characteristics.

The work is conceived for singers trained in the Italian tradition, its basic structure being formed by recitative and aria: the former frequently loses its *secco* character and passes over in to the more permissive area of *recitativo accompagnato*, while the arias are predominantly binary in form, seeking to intensify the musical expression and using Italianate melody and coloratura writing to depict psychological processes that reflect the emotional state of the individual character concerned. The tradition of French *tragédie lyrique* that Mozart was able to study in Paris in 1778 is revealed not only

by his handling of the chorus, by the scenes involving priests, by the oracular pronouncement, and by the orchestral recitatives, but also by his introduction of marches and processions and by the elaborately structured ballet music both within the work and at the end of the drama. It is to the Electoral Ballet Company that we owe the individual choreographic features of the work and the great closing orchestral suite, K. 367, which is an integral part of the opera (see the note under Ballet and Incidental Music on p. 71). In writing *Idomeneo*, Mozart was not concerned to portray the rationalism of Gluckian characters but rather to create subjective individuals, each with his or her own emotional life and depth of sensitive expression. The chorus – both dynamic and theatrical – functions as a body of extras, as a catalyst in the action, and as a distant choir, but is always bound up with the plot, and has lost its static, decorative aspect.

Idomeneo impresses with its rich and brilliant orchestral fabric. No restrictions were imposed on the composer in Munich in writing for the orchestra, for, unlike in Salzburg, he was dealing with a top-flight international orchestra recently transferred to Munich from Mannheim, creating a sensual tonal impression, accompanying and emphasizing the vocal writing, and devising picturesque details. Thus we find – for the first time in any Mozart opera – a provision for clarinets, while he also writes for four horns, and introduces trombones for the oracular pronouncement and a piccolo for the storm.

Varesco's verbose libretto borrows from French libretti of the time as well as from Pietro Metastasio. The reduction in the number of characters to five is entirely in the spirit of Metastasio. Varesco has worked his humanist and Jesuit background into the piece, and also introduced elements of classical antiquity and medieval Christianity, elements which Mozart himself was at pains to digest intellectually.

Idomeneo is one of the works that was misunderstood by musicologists and theater directors throughout the nineteenth century and even as recently as the end of the Second World War. It was subjected to numerous revisions, and not until the 1970s did it begin to enter public consciousness in its original form.

Rudolf Angermüller

K. 384 Die Entführung aus dem Serail

Origin: Vienna, July 30, 1781 to the end of May 1782

Author: (Johann) Gottlieb Stephanie the younger, after Christoph Friedrich Bretzner

Operatic composition brought in the best financial return, and Mozart probably counted on the success of *Idomeneo* to bring him more such work. Vienna, long a stronghold of Italian opera, now had a German opera company at the Burgtheater, established at Emperor Joseph II's command. Mozart made the acquaintance of Gottlieb Stephanie, a playwright and producer at the Burgtheater, who, though widely regarded in Vienna as a shady character, was friendly and helpful to the young composer. That unfinished Turkish *Singspiel* of two years earlier (see the note for *Zaide*) was not polished enough for Vienna and lacked a comic element that Mozart felt it needed, but Stephanie promised Mozart a new and better libretto.

This was delivered at the end of July 1781, to Mozart's delight. *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (The Abduction from the Seraglio) was anything but original, and its source in an earlier libretto, by Christoph Friedrich Bretzner, was openly acknowledged. Plots about Europeans held captive by Turkish pashas are found throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century, in fact; less than a hundred years after the Ottoman Turks had been with difficulty repulsed from the gates of Vienna, they had become the stuff of popular entertainment, regarded as exotic and amusing rather than

menacing. Sometimes, as in Stephanie's tale, the Turks are presented as superior to Europeans in humanity and magnanimity.

Mozart began composing the music immediately, for there was hope of performances during a projected fall visit by the Grand Duke of Russia. As was the practice of the time, libretto and music were written with consideration for the skills of specific performers. Thus, additional arias were supplied for the role of Osmin, which was to be sung by Karl Ludwig Fischer, who, as Mozart wrote to his father, "certainly has an excellent bass voice. We must take advantage of it, particularly as he has the whole Viennese public on his side". Fischer had a range from a rock-bottom low C to a baritonal high A and could negotiate rapid scales and passagework with the agility of a coloratura soprano.

The role of Osmin was not the only one that benefited from Mozart's genius and the skill of the singers at his disposal. The German opera company also performed Italian works in German translation. For this repertoire, the singers needed full, rich voices, able to encompass the florid Italian technique. Mozart took advantage of these superior singers in writing his opera. Although his music for the plebeian characters in *The Abduction* resembles that of the traditional Singspiel, with regular rhythms, symmetrical phrases, simple forms, and unadorned melodies, he made the patricians speak the musical language of serious Italian opera. (For some reason, the part of the Pasha Selim, originally planned for a singer, ended up as merely a speaking role.)

The first performance of *The Abduction* took place on July 16, 1782. Mozart's letter to his father the next day has unfortunately been lost, but later comments indicate that the premiere was a success. *The Abduction* remained popular, and was probably Mozart's greatest stage success during his lifetime, both in Vienna and elsewhere.

An early biography reports the Emperor's comment when he heard the work: "Very many notes, my dear Mozart!" Later criticism has conceded a grain of truth to the imperial observation; glorious as Mozart's music is, there is sometimes more of it than is good for the forward motion of the plot. The libretto is no masterpiece of proportion; it concentrates too much of Osmin near the beginning, too much of the heroine, Constanze, in the middle of the second act.

Still, even if Mozart overcomposed, and even if he failed to blend the disparate German, Italian, and French musical styles into a convincing whole, he nonetheless gave the German opera a new stature, a new potential for dealing with grander and profounder emotions than the Singspiel had previously known. Beyond that, in the figure of Osmin he created a new and vivid vocal and dramatic type, the German *basso buffo*, who would figure prominently in German opera right up to Richard Strauss's character Baron Ochs in *Der Rosenkavalier* of the twentieth century.

David Hamilton

K. 422 L'oca del Cairo

Origin: Salzburg, summer 1783, and Vienna, winter 1783–84

Author: Gianbattista Vareseo

Mozart wrote to his father from Vienna on December 21, 1782, to inform Leopold that the Court Theater Intendant Count Franz Xaver Wolf Orsini-Rosenberg had invited him to write an Italian opera. Mozart wanted a good libretto: "I've looked through at least 100 libretti – probably more", he wrote to his father on May 7, 1783, "but I've hardly found a single one that I could be satisfied with. ... We've a certain Abbot da Ponte here as poet. He has a tremendous amount to do at present, revising pieces for the theater, and – *per obligo* – he has to write an entirely new libretto for Salieri".

Since Abbé Lorenzo da Ponte was working for Salieri, Mozart turned once again to his *Idomeneo* librettist, Gianbattista Varesco, with whom he had already experienced considerable difficulties in 1780-81. His reason for turning to Varesco again was presumably because the latter delivered the goods on time, and because the composer wanted to strike while the iron was still hot by following up *The Abduction from the Seraglio* with a successful *opera buffa*. On May 21, 1783, he asked his father to "keep on" reminding Varesco: "the comic element must be uppermost in importance, for I know the taste of the Viennese". Perhaps Mozart worked on the libretto with Varesco during his visit to Salzburg from the end of July to October 27, 1783. If so, the composition of *L'oca del Cairo* (The Goose of Cairo) may have been begun during this period.

On December 6, 1783, we find Wolfgang writing to his father: "Only three more arias to go, and I'll have finished the first act of my opera. The *buffa* aria ['Siano pronte alle gran nozze'], the quartet ['S'oggi, oh Dei'], and the finale ['Su via, putti, presto'] are cause for the greatest satisfaction, and I'm actually looking forward to them [that is, hearing them performed]. And so I'd be sorry if I'd written such music in vain. ... I have to say that my only reason for not objecting to this whole goose story was because two people with more insight and judgment than myself could not find anything to object to in it; I mean you and Varesco."

Mozart, then, found fault in Varesco's text and demanded changes to the words and plot. He finally abandoned *L'oca del Cairo* on February 10, 1784: "I've no thought of giving it at present. I've things to write at present that are bringing in money right now, but which won't do so later. The opera will always bring in money; and besides, the more time you take, the better the result. Herr Varesco's verse smacks too much of haste! – I hope that he'll realize this himself in time; – that's why I want to see the opera as a whole (tell him just to jot his ideas down on paper) – only then can we raise fundamental objections; – but for God's sake let's not be hasty! – If you were to hear what, for my own part, I have already written, you'd agree with me that it doesn't deserve to be spoilt! – And it's so easy to do! – and happens so often. The music I've completed is lying on my desk, and sleeping soundly. Among all the operas that may be performed before mine is finished, no one will think up a single idea like mine, I'll bet!"

Rudolf Angermüller

K. 430 Lo sposo deluso (K⁶ 424a)

Origin: Salzburg? and Vienna, second half of 1783

Author: unknown, after Giuseppe Petrosellini

At carnival 1780 the extraordinarily successful and prolific Italian opera composer Domenico Cimarosa (1749-1801) had the premiere of a new comic opera in the Teatro Valle in Rome. This work, entitled *Le donne rivali* (The Rival Women), must have enjoyed some success, because other productions followed in Florence and Venice (autumn 1780), Siena (1782), Montecchio (1783), and in a revised version called *Le due rivali* (The Two Rivals) in St. Petersburg (1789), Moscow (1790–91), Monza (1791), and Ferrara (1801).

In the spring of 1783 a new Italian opera troupe was established in Vienna, which enjoyed great success. Mozart wrote to his father in May 1783 that he had read through more than a hundred Italian librettos looking for a suitable one to compose for the new troupe. A copy of Cimarosa's score, or probably just of the libretto, came into Mozart's hands at about that time. He must have liked this libretto (probably by Giuseppe Petrosellini), for he commissioned someone to make a new version with the title *Lo sposo deluso, ossia La rivalità di tre donne per un solo amante* (The Deluded Bridegroom, or The Rivalry of Three Women over One Lover). Setting to work, Mozart first decided on casting, assigning roles to the leading Viennese singers: Francesco Benucci (later Mozart's Figaro),

Ann Selina (Nancy) Storace (later his Susanna), Stefano Mandini (later the Count), Catarina Cavalieri (earlier Constanze), Therese Teyber (earlier Blondchen), and Francesco Bussani (later Don Basilio). Then he started to compose in earnest (probably in the winter of 1783–84), first sketching at least two numbers and then drafting full scores of the overture, an opening quartet based on the overture, an aria for Bussani, another for Storace, and a *terzetto*, all from the first act. Only in the last item did he fill in all of the orchestration, although the other four numbers are complete in concept. Then, for unknown reasons, Mozart put the work aside, perhaps on learning that the opera commission for that season was not to be his, perhaps out of some dissatisfaction with the libretto.

After Mozart's death, one of his pupils or some other member of his circle completed the orchestration of the overture and quartet for Mozart's widow Constanze, who, in a benefit concert given on her behalf in Prague on November 15, 1797, performed the overture, quartet, and *terzetto*, singing in the latter two. (In a letter written three years later, Constanze wrote that the *terzetto* had enjoyed great success.) In the twentieth century the orchestration of the two arias has also been completed and all five numbers have been performed.

Neal Zaslaw

K. 486 Der Schauspieldirektor

Origin: Vienna, January 18 to February 3, 1786

Author: (Johann) Gottlieb Stephanie the younger

According to Mozart's own entry in his thematic catalogue, *Der Schauspieldirektor* (The Impresario) is "a comedy with music, consisting of an overture, two arias, a trio and vaudeville". The lackluster comedy for which this music was written was a topical satire that quickly lost its currency. Thus Mozart's portion of the work survives as a collection of five pieces in a vaguely dramatic context but without a true libretto – a freestanding and miraculously verdant vine for which the original arbor has long since rotted away.

The occasion for *The Impresario* was a state visit to Vienna, in 1786, by a duke and archduchess who were joint governors-general of the Austrian Netherlands. In their honor Emperor Joseph II planned a "pleasure festival" in the Orangery at his palace in nearby Schönbrunn, which would show off both his German and Italian opera troupes. The Italian work was assigned to the celebrated composer Antonio Salieri and his frequent librettist Giovanni Battista Casti; the German, to Mozart and the veteran Viennese actor-manager Gottlieb Stephanie, Jr., who had collaborated four years earlier on *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. At this time Mozart was hard at work on *The Marriage of Figaro* and probably did not welcome the interruption, but he was scarcely in a position to refuse a commission for an imperial entertainment. He received the text on January 18, 1786. Working quickly, but with no lack of care or inspiration, he finished scoring it a little more than two weeks later, on February 3. The work was premiered at Schönbrunn on February 7, then repeated in three public performances in Vienna later in the month.

Stephanie based his play on the hoary plot of an impresario's backstage tribulations as he struggles to assemble a company and mount a new season. Except for the overture, Mozart's segment comes late in the script, when the impresario turns to the musical elements of his venture and auditions two jealous sopranos. (The more sentimental one was sung by Aloysia Weber Lange, Mozart's first love, whose sister Constanze he had eventually married.) A well-meaning tenor tries to pacify the feuding sopranos, and finally all three are joined by a *buffo* actor-singer for a moralizing vaudeville (in musical parlance, a song with verses sung by different characters in turn).

No sooner had the appeal of Stephanie's local theatrical references faded than efforts to salvage the musical numbers began – attempts have persisted to this day. A line of authors from Goethe to Peter Ustinov have tried to reinvent dramatic underpinnings for Mozart's work, either by drastically revamping Stephanie or by substituting a different comedy altogether. One popular mid-nineteenth-century version was *Mozart and Schikaneder*, by German actor-writer Louis Schneider, which made the composer and his real-life contemporaries characters in the play. None of these adaptations has proved entirely satisfactory for the general repertoire.

The music, meanwhile, brilliantly holds its own. When he composed it, the thirty-year-old Mozart was arriving at the peak of his creative powers, with the Piano Concerto No. 22 and the six quartets dedicated to Haydn just behind him, *Figaro* on the drawing board, and the "Prague" Symphony just ahead. However fleeting its occasion and insubstantial its text, *The Impresario* – with its rich lyricism, penetrating psychology, and consummate craftsmanship – could not help partaking of some of the timeless quality of these more ambitious achievements.

Christopher Porterfield

K. 492 Le nozze di Figaro

Origin: Vienna, October 1785 to April 29, 1786

Author: Lorenzo da Ponte

Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732–99), son of a watchmaker, was one of the eighteenth century's more colorful picaresque figures. He was willing to try his hand at anything: he taught harp to the daughters of Louis XV, speculated in grandiose business schemes, spent several years entangled in one of the age's most complex and scandalous lawsuits, acted as a secret agent for France during an exile in England, published the first complete edition of Voltaire's works, ran guns for the American Revolutionaries in 1776, and founded the French Society of Dramatic Authors. He also wrote plays. Some of them were conventional bourgeois dramas, but two of his comedies attained immortality, both in their own right and in the form of operas that stand at the center of the international repertory.

The first of these comedies, *Le barbier de Séville* (The Barber of Seville), produced in Paris in 1775, ingeniously blends the tradition of Molière and the comedy of intrigue with figures from the classical Italian commedia dell'arte. The youthful lover (Count Almaviva) and the miserly old man (Doctor Bartolo) contend for the hand of the beautiful Rosina, and Figaro (the barber of the title), by wit and stratagem, helps the count to win the prize. Set to music by Giovanni Paisiello in 1782, *The Barber* quickly swept the operatic world, though it was eventually superseded by Gioachino Rossini's version, which came along in 1816.

In 1778, tempting the customary fate of sequels, Beaumarchais wrote *The Marriage of Figaro*. Daringly, he made an even more unconventional play, not only revealing that the Almavivas lived something less than happily ever after, but pitting Figaro and his fiancée, Susanna, in a battle of wits against their "superior" the count – a battle that, in the play, they win. The play's implied criticism of the existing social order was enough to ensure it a rocky road in pre-Revolutionary France, and not until 1784 did the censorship allow a public performance, thanks in part to pressure from the aristocrats who had seen and been delighted by a private production. The result was one of the greatest successes of the French theater.

The sensation of Paris was soon the talk of Europe, for printed copies and translations spread quickly. Early in 1785, a Viennese theatrical troupe led by Emanuel Schikaneder (later to be the librettist of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*) put into rehearsal a German version, but the production,

announced for February 3, was forbidden by the imperial censor, though he allowed the play to be published. Mozart had been looking for a satisfactory subject for a comic opera since 1782, and now, despite the ban, Beaumarchais's comedy struck him as highly promising.

We know few details about the creation of *Le nozze di Figaro* (The Marriage of Figaro), compared to others of Mozart's operas. Our nearest firsthand source is the famous and entertaining memoirs of Lorenzo da Ponte, the cosmopolitan poet and adventurer from Venice who had already agreed to write a libretto for Mozart.

The first we hear about the new piece in the Mozart family correspondence is a letter from father Leopold to sister Nannerl on November 3, 1785, complaining that he gets no news of his son except by second hand; a journalist has mentioned something about a new opera. On November 11, he reports, "At last I have received a letter of twelve lines from your brother, dated November 2. He begs to be forgiven, as he is up to his eyes in work at his opera *The Marriage of Figaro* ...".

During these months his son was playing and composing at a furious rate, According to da Ponte, "As fast as I wrote the words, Mozart set them to music. In six weeks everything was in order". If that is true, the six weeks must have come roughly between October 16, 1785, when Mozart finished the great Quartet in G minor for piano and strings (K. 478), and the beginning of December, for the only other works attributable to that time are two operatic ensembles, 479 and 480.

What ensued between composition and first performance is equally vague. The approval of the censors must have taken time, even though da Ponte had toned down the more inflammatory parts of the play. There were doubtless intrigues, such as have always swirled about opera houses and courts, but their nature can now be only dimly discerned through the mists of history. Apparently the Abbé Casti (da Ponte's chief rival), Antonio Salieri (Mozart's chief rival), and the opera manager Count Orsini-Rosenberg himself were involved in trying to prevent the production of *Figaro*.

After a postponement, it premiered at the court theater on May 1, 1786. Mozart conducted from the keyboard. The first night was a considerable, if not a total, success, and enthusiasm grew at the repetitions. So many encores were demanded at the third performance that the Emperor ordered a ban against the repetition of ensemble pieces, to keep the performances from running all night.

A Prague production in December was so great a triumph that Mozart visited the city in January 1787 and conducted a performance himself. To his friend Baron Nicolaus Josef von Jacquin he wrote, "Here they talk about nothing but *Figaro*. Nothing is played, sung or whistled but *Figaro*. No opera is drawing like *Figaro*. Nothing, nothing but *Figaro*". Furthermore; the Prague company commissioned him to write a new opera, which would become *Don Giovanni*, also to a da Ponte libretto.

After Prague, *Figaro* traveled widely. For a Vienna revival in August 1789, Mozart made some revisions, primarily to accommodate a new Susanna, Francesca Adriana Gabrielli, known as Il Ferrarese, who may have been da Ponte's mistress but was evidently not as fine a musician, as charming an actress, or as warm a friend of the composer as Nancy Storace. In any event, the arias Mozart wrote for her – "Un moto di gioia" (K. 579) to replace "Venite inginocchiatevi" in the second act, and "Al desio di chi t'adora" (K. 577) to replace "Deh vieni, non tardar" in the last act – have never been accepted into the standard performing text of the opera (as were, for example, the new arias Mozart composed for the Vienna production of *Don Giovanni*).

The temptation to ascribe perfection to *Figaro* is great, and has not always been resisted. Much of it is, indeed, close to perfection. Although divided into four acts, *Figaro* moves in two substantial sweeps, climaxing in the elaborate finales of Acts II and IV, with effective but lesser curtains for Acts I and III. There is a falling-off of inspiration only at the start of the fourth act, where an excess of

comings and goings is required to accommodate a string of arias – two of them, for minor characters, are not from Mozart's top drawer and are often omitted. But this brief descent from Olympus serves only to remind us that the level of the rest is so extraordinarily high.

David Hamilton

K. 527 Don Giovanni

Origin: begun in Vienna, March 1787?; completed in Prague, October 28, 1787

Author: Lorenzo da Ponte

Il dissoluto punito, o sia il Don Giovanni (The Punished Dissolute, or Don Juan) was the second operatic collaboration of Mozart and his librettist Lorenzo da Ponte, who, some fifteen months earlier, had had a great success with their *Le nozze di Figaro*. Their third and last opera together was to be *Così fan tutte*. This triumvirate of masterworks has earned them their current reputation as one of the world's greatest opera-writing teams, rivaled only by Giuseppe Verdi-Arrigo Boito and Richard Strauss-Hugo Hofmannsthal.

Da Ponte and Mozart were first introduced in Vienna in 1783 by Mozart's landlord, Baron Karl Abraham Wetzlar von Plankenstern, and so on afterward Mozart wrote his father that da Ponte had promised to write him a libretto, after completing one for Antonio Salieri, court composer in Vienna. "But who knows whether he will be able to keep his word – or will want to? For, as you are aware, these Italian gentlemen are very civil to your face. Enough, we know them! If he is in league with Salieri, I shall never get anything out of him. But indeed I should dearly love to show what I can do in an Italian opera!"

As it turned out, Mozart got little or nothing from da Ponte for three years. But the triumphant premiere of *Figaro* in Vienna on May 1, 1786, proved that da Ponte had been worth waiting for. The opera was such a raging success at its second production in Prague that Pasquale Bondini, the impresario of the Prague opera, commissioned Mozart to write another opera for the 1787 season. Da Ponte proposed the story of Don Juan and the stone guest.

Da Ponte was born in Ceneda near Venice in 1749 as Emmanuele Conegliano; he was of Jewish stock, but, in 1763, his widowed father turned Christian, and had himself and his three sons baptized by the Bishop of Ceneda. They all assumed the Bishop's surname, da Ponte; Emmanuele was also given his Christian name, Lorenzo.

Da Ponte wrote opera librettos for many other composers besides Mozart. But he was constantly in hot water due to his taste for intrigue of every sort, and after the death of his protector, Emperor Joseph II, he made a precipitous exit from Vienna in 1791, shortly before Mozart's death. After some travels he wound up in New York; there he masterminded the American premiere of *Don Giovanni*, published his racy but unreliable *Memoirs*, and died in 1838, at the age of 89, honored as the founder of Italian Studies at Columbia University.

The legend of Don Giovanni was already old, not to say hackneyed, in 1787. The first dramatic version of the Don Juan story (Giovanni is the Italian and Juan the Spanish equivalent of John) was written by a monk, Gabriel Tellez (1571–1648), who called himself Tirso de Molina and entitled his verse play *El burlador de Sevilla* (The Playboy of Seville); published in 1630, this version of the legend includes much of the content assembled for Mozart's opera by da Ponte. In Italy the story became a favorite theme with the strolling extempore comedians known as the *commedia dell'arte*; Molière, much influenced in his plays by the *commedia dell'arte*, subtitled his own prose version of 1665 *Le Festin de pierre*. His Don Juan is a stiff, cold cynic, has an epigram forever on his lips, and

lacks the gaiety and irrepressible bravery that render Tirso de Molina's hero attractive as well as deplorable.

Da Ponte kept both plays on his desk while writing his *Don Giovanni*, and borrowed some of Molière's lines. He also referred to Carlo Goldoni's *Don Giovanni Tenorio* (1736), another sophisticated reshaping of the subject as treated by *commedia dell'arte* troupes. Operatic versions of the legend were rife in Italy during the 1770s and 1780s, and da Ponte was fired in particular by the most successful of them; the music was by Giovanni Gazzaniga, the libretto the work of Giovanni Bertati, a personal and professional *bête noire* of da Ponte's.

Knowing that he could expand Bertati's one-act libretto into two acts with the aid of Tirso, Molière, and Goldoni, da Ponte set to work. Those authors would help him to provide new action for the scenes between Elvira's exit after the quartet "Non ti fidar" and the Cemetery Scene. (Some commentators have complained that the dramatic action remains static throughout that long stretch of new writing, simply duplicating what went before or follows afterward, but da Ponte's filling-in enhances the characterization of the *dramatis personae* and prepares all the more purposefully for the opera's final scenes.)

Mozart's new opera had been commissioned to celebrate the marriage of the Emperor's niece, Archduchess Maria Theresa, with Prince Anton Clemens of Saxony (eventually Emperor Franz II). It was to be another comic opera that should appeal as much to Prague as had *Le nozze di Figaro*; it also had to be suitable for the royal couple, and could not strain the resources of Bondini's available repertory company of three sopranos, a tenor, and three basses.

The first performance was planned for October 14, 1787. Mozart returned to Vienna with the commission on about February 12. As da Ponte completed each scene, or handful of scenes, he passed it on to his composer. His memoirs say he finished the libretto after sixty-three days, perhaps by early May.

Mozart would be expected to send completed portions of the score to Prague in early September for study by the performers. Fortunately Mozart had met most of the *Don Giovanni* cast when he visited Prague to hear them sing *Le nozze di Figaro*. The manuscript score, now in the library of the Paris Conservatoire, shows which numbers were composed in Vienna and which in Prague. He did not send in advance the passages involving the chorus, because he was not sure what choristers would be available; nor was he certain of the stage wind band that he wanted for Don Giovanni's supper, so he left till later all of the second act finale. Mozart also left the composition of the opera's overture, as was his custom, until he had finished all the rest of the music.

During the rehearsals, the Don Giovanni, Luigi Bassi, complained that his part included no major aria; Mozart could have protested that there were already two splendid ones, the brilliant "Fin ch'han dal vino" and the conspiratorial "Metà di voi", which exploited Bassi's admired gift for mimicry. The singer's dissatisfaction encourages belief in a contemporary description of Bassi as "very handsome and very stupid". Nevertheless Mozart added Don Giovanni's serenade "Deh, vieni alla finestra" (and put mandolinists forever in his debt); unlike the other two arias, it would show off Bassi's capacity for honeyed, amorous singing.

Mozart and his wife arrived in Prague on October 4; ten days were evidently considered time enough to learn, rehearse, and mount a difficult full-length new opera. Mozart, however, found that few arrangements had been made for preparation of the work, and that the singers were lazy and the stage staff slow to learn their duties. Three days of each week, moreover, were unavailable for rehearsal because there were opera performances on those nights. Mozart had five days, not ten, in which to prepare *Don Giovanni* for its premiere. This proved impossible, given the opera's many

ensembles, unfamiliar music, and elaborate stage action. The premiere was postponed by ten days, and, by the Emperor's command, *Le nozze di Figaro* was substituted for the royal nuptial, Mozart himself conducting.

A few days later one of the singers became indisposed and the first performance was again set back, to October 29. Mozart composed the overture on the night of October 27–28, just in time to have the orchestral parts copied before the final dress rehearsal that day. At the first performance, Mozart, who conducted, was cheered each time he entered or left the orchestra pit; newspaper reports were adulatory, and subsequent performances frequent. Mozart and da Ponte had, indeed, trumped the success of *Figaro* in Prague.

The reports followed the Mozarts back to Vienna. Soon after Mozart's return in mid-November the Emperor appointed him court chamber composer, succeeding Christoph Willibald Gluck, and ordered a production of *Don Giovanni* at the Burgtheater. It took place on May 7, 1788, and required a significant quantity of musical revision, including the composition of Elvira's great recitative and aria "In quali eccessi .... Mi tradì quell' alma ingrate" (K. 540c). Francesco Morella, the Vienna Don Ottavio, was not up to the taxing, florid "Il mio Tesoro", so "Dalla sua pace" (K. 540a) was inserted into the middle of the first act, suavely lyrical rather than would-be-heroic. Both arias are first-rate and most modern Don Ottavios sing them both. A legend that, in this Vienna production, the opera ended with Giovanni's descent to hell, omitting the final sextet, depended on an annotated libretto of the time; it has since been proved unauthentic, though it encouraged nineteenth century performers to do likewise in the interests of a more "dignified" *Don Giovanni*.

The Vienna production of the opera lapsed from the repertoire after fifteen performances and was not revived until after Mozart's death. But even during his remaining four years of life it was widely and successfully produced in Germany, Austria, and Bohemia, even when disparaged as excessively sophisticated and noisy. With the arrival of nineteenth-century Romanticism, *Don Giovanni* was hailed as a great precursor of Ludwig van Beethoven, Carl Maria von Weber, Heinrich August Marschner, and grand opera in general.

The present century has seen a reexamination of the finest classical qualities of *Don Giovanni*, and of its psychological detail. Thanks to the magnificence, charm, and subtlety – indeed the effective ambivalence – of Mozart's music, *Don Giovanni* has survived many and diverse interpretations and will surely triumph over others yet to come.

W.M.

K. 588 Così fan tutte

Origin: completed in Vienna, January 1790

Author: Lorenzo da Ponte

Any composer who could present to the operatic world, in successive years, two masterpieces such as *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* should never again have a moment's worry about making a living or finding employment worthy of his gifts. Or so one might suppose, if artistic merit and worldly rewards went hand in hand. In fact Mozart, who composed *Figaro* in 1786 and *Don Giovanni* in 1787, went for the next two years without another operatic commission, or indeed without a major commission of any kind. At the age of thirty-three, his career seemed becalmed and his financial fortunes slid into disaster.

Emperor Joseph II had appointed Mozart court chamber composer in 1787, but the post carried a meager salary and required him to write nothing more than occasional minuets, waltzes, and country dances for court balls. The fickle Viennese aristocrats, who could not get enough new Mozart piano

concertos just a few years earlier, now showed scant interest in the subscriptions he circulated for his concerts. Moreover, jealous rivals such as the composer Antonio Salieri proved far more adept than he at political maneuvering.

Fending off creditors, Mozart moved his family from one lodging to another. During the summer of 1789 a pregnant Constanze fell ill and had to be sent to Baden, a health resort a few miles south of Vienna – a burdensome expense. As he had done so many times before, Mozart abjectly begged a loan from (Johann) Michael Puchberg, a wealthy businessman and fellow Mason. "Oh God", he wrote all too typically to Puchberg on July 12, "I am in a situation that I would not wish on my most wicked enemy; and if you, my best of friends and brothers, forsake me, I am *unhappily* and *innocently* lost with my poor sick wife and my child".

Six weeks after this letter was written, however, deliverance seemed at hand. *Figaro* was revived in Vienna, with enough success to prompt the Emperor to call for a new comic opera by Mozart. The librettist was once again to be Mozart's collaborator on *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*: that busy, clever Italian émigré and intriguer, Lorenzo da Ponte.

Thus was the way prepared for *Così fan tutte* (All Women Behave Like This), the third of the four great operas of Mozart's maturity (the last, *The Magic Flute*, would follow in 1791, only a few months before his death.) Among the most astonishing things about this astounding work are the harried circumstances under which it was written and the distracted and anxious emotions from which its sublimely genial music flowed.

The first two Mozart-da Ponte efforts, *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, had been based on popular plays or librettos. For *Così*, da Ponte invented his own plot (granting that invention was a highly relative concept in the 1700s). The story goes that the Emperor himself proposed the central situation, drawing it from current Viennese gossip about two gallants who disguised themselves in order to test the constancy of their sweethearts. But a strikingly similar tale had been told four years earlier in Giovanni Battista Casti's libretto for *La Grotta di Trifonio*, composed by none other than Salieri; and the general idea has ample precedent in other opere *buffe* and in stage works going back to the *commedia dell'arte* and into antiquity.

The libretto and score took shape over four months, beginning in September 1789. Mozart could give his full attention to the project, since he had few other assignments. His only other compositions from this period are some concert arias, two big sets of dances (K. 585 and 586), and the great clarinet quintet, K. 581, completed on September 29.

Da Ponte's libretto is a marvel of witty, concise, and symmetrical dramatic construction – a standing rebuttal to those who believe that all opera librettos are fustian and second-rate stagecraft. Ever the classicist, da Ponte observed the unities as he had in *Don Giovanni*, laying out the action so that it could be construed, at least symbolically, as taking place within twenty-four hours (the first scene is set in the morning and subsequent scenes are set at later hours of the day, leading to the finale at night). He used only six characters and they fall neatly into three pairs: the two young officers, the two sisters whom they so sentimentally adore, and a final pair consisting of the sisters' maid and the officers' older friend, the worldly bachelor who sets the plot in motion.

The libretto proceeds by symmetrically playing the characters off against one another, subdividing and recombining them in gratifying formations, with plenty of high-spirited, if artificial, comedy along the way. It was only natural that Mozart should reflect this intricate deployment of the characters in his music, and so *Così*, among all his works, is preeminently an opera of ensembles. There are six duets, five trios, a quartet, two quintets, and a sextet, plus two finales that are positive gallimaufries of vocal combinations.

By late December 1789 the work was ready for its first singers' rehearsal, which was held at Mozart's apartment on New Year's Eve, presumably accompanied by the composer at the piano. To this rehearsal Mozart invited two special guests, his benefactor Michael Puchberg and his revered colleague Joseph Haydn – a sign that he took some pride in his score. The production was to be presented at Vienna's Burgtheater by the resident Italian opera company, the same troupe that had just revived *Figaro* and had given the Vienna version of *Don Giovanni*. Mozart knew in advance who his singers would be and tailored the parts to their voices.

In January 1790 the rehearsals moved into the theater. The premiere took place on January 26, probably with Mozart conducting from the keyboard. There were four more performances in January and February; then, after the period of public mourning following the death of Emperor Joseph II, *Così* was performed five more times in the summer.

In the years after Mozart's death, *Così* fell into a curious limbo. The libretto, with its mockery of lovers' sighs and protestations and its exposure of the sisters' fickleness capped by Don Alfonso's motto of "Così fan tutte", came to strike later generations as far less amusing than Mozart's contemporaries found it.

The present age is inclined to grant the work more psychological seriousness, without losing sight of its special iridescence. There, in the music, all the conflicting strains of mockery and tenderness, of sincerity and inconstancy, are fully reconciled. Delicious in its parody, ravishing in its lyricism, *Così* holds laughter and sympathy in a perfect equilibrium that, in critic Joseph Kerman's phrase, celebrates "the mystery of feeling itself".

Christopher Porterfield

K. 620 Die Zauberflöte

Origin: Vienna, begun spring 1791; completed September 28, 1791

Author: Emanuel Schikaneder

Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute) was Mozart's first full-scale German opera since *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, composed nearly ten years earlier, in 1782. He did collaborate once more with Gottlieb Stephanie, the librettist of *The Abduction*, on a one-act comedy, *The Impresario*, for an imperial festivity in 1786. But opportunities to perform vernacular opera for the general public were severely curtailed when the Burgtheater – which had been devoted exclusively to the German repertoire since 1776 – went back to Italian opera in 1788. Mozart himself became an "Italian" composer again between 1786 and 1790 when he collaborated with the librettist Lorenzo da Ponte on the masterpieces *Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Così fan tutte*.

Early in 1790, the liberal emperor Joseph II died. His brother and successor, the reactionary Leopold II, cared little for Mozart's music, which dimmed the composer's chance of ever obtaining a well-paying imperial appointment. By this time, he badly needed a steady income. Though playing, teaching, and composing as much as possible, he still could not make ends meet; his wife Constanze was not well, and there was a five-year-old child, with another to come in July 1791. During 1789 and 1790, Mozart borrowed more than 1,000 florins from Michael Puchberg, a Viennese business man and music lover, who was also a member of the Masonic lodge to which the composer belonged. (To gauge the scale of this debt, consider that it was more than double the annual salary that Mozart's late father earned as assistant musical director in Salzburg.)

Mozart had become a Freemason at the end of 1784. Though this secret fraternal society had been banned by Empress Maria Theresa in 1764, her son Joseph II tolerated it because it counted many distinguished and intellectual citizens among its members. Another Viennese Freemason was the actor

and impresario Emanuel Schikaneder, director of the Theater auf der Wieden. This suburban house, with a thousand seats, played not only classical drama but also works of the Singspiel variety – that is, German opera with spoken dialogue – including a genre known as *Zauberoper* (magic opera) that was enormously popular with less sophisticated audiences because of its spectacular scenic effects. Presumably in early 1789, Schikaneder proposed that Mozart write the music for such a *Zauberoper*, based on a pseudo-Oriental fairy tale, "Lulu, or the Magic Flute" by A. J. Liebeskind.

Mozart had many other obligations in the last year of his life, including commissions to compose a Requiem Mass and an Italian opera. The opera, *La clemenza di Tito*, was designed for the festivities surrounding the coronation in Prague of the Emperor Leopold as King of Bohemia, and Mozart had to travel to Prague to see it through production. He returned to Vienna in time to finish *The Magic Flute* for its premiere on September 30, 1791. The composer conducted, and Schikaneder took the role of the bird catcher Papageno, which he had tailor-made to show off his gifts as a comic actor. Mozart's sister-in-law, Josefa Weber Hofer, sang the dazzling coloratura role of the Queen of the Night. Though coolly received by the critics, the new work immediately captivated the public; by November 6 there had been twenty-four performances. Mozart was enormously proud of his new opera. He loved to attend performances and listen to the audience's reactions; he invited Haydn, Salieri, and other musical connoisseurs to enjoy the opera with him and must have regretted that his father – who had always encouraged him to write more popular and accessible music – had not lived long enough to hear *The Magic Flute* and witness his triumph.

The triumph came none too soon. Late in November Mozart became seriously ill, and he died on December 5; it is said that during his final delirium he followed in imagination that evening's performance of his last opera.

The Magic Flute soon came to occupy a special place in the repertoire, reserved for works that combine the utmost simplicity and directness with the greatest profundity and seriousness of purpose. It was a fortunate moment in the history of music, for the languages of art music and folk melody had then much in common; it was possible to be learned and popular at the same time. Much more successfully than in *The Abduction*, Mozart made the Italian style of the Queen of the Night's arias and the Singspiel idiom of Papageno's songs appear to belong to the same musical language. Indeed, he wrote a duet (No. 7) in which an Italianate soprano and a singing actor with a restricted vocal range (Schikaneder) were perfectly at ease together. As for Sarastro's music, the British playwright and devout Mozartean George Bernard Shaw said his two arias were the only music yet written fit for the mouth of God.

Much has been made of the role of Freemasonry in *The Magic Flute*. There is little doubt that its Masonic authors made the brotherhood of Sarastro's temple a representation of their order. Sarastro himself is an allegorical depiction of one of their number and the Queen of the Night represents Empress Maria Theresa, who sternly opposed the humanitarian and liberal ideals of the Masonic order. Masonic symbols are spread throughout the libretto, scenery, and music (the prevalence of the sacred number three – three introductory chords, three boys, three ladies, even the opera's central key of E flat, which is written with three flats – is but one example). These details need not concern the modern listener unduly, however. The opera's overt message of tolerance and human brotherhood is surely the substance of what Mozart, as man and as Mason, wanted to communicate.

David Hamilton

K. 621 La clemenza di Tito

Origin: begun in Vienna, mid-July? 1791; completed in Prague, September 5, 1791

Author: Caterino Mazzolà, after Pietro Metastasio

The Roman Emperor Titus Flavius Sabinus Vespasianus is a rather dubious character from first-century Roman history. His father, Vespasian, had doubts about Titus's suitability as his successor: his son was fond of oriental harem life, he maintained a household of eunuchs and dancers, and he had a Jewish mistress, Bernice. He was seen as a latter-day Nero. These apprehensions were not fulfilled, however. On his father's death he assumed the rule of state and showed self-discipline, clemency, and liberality. During his reign Pompeii and Herculaneum were destroyed when Vesuvius erupted on August 24, 79 A.D., and a major fire and pestilence broke out in Rome in 80 A.D. He offered generous support to all who had suffered, and financed a rebuilding program from his own purse. He showered gifts on the populace, paying for festivities and gladiatorial games. He became popular through his proverbial clemency.

The basic text of Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito* (The Clemency of Titus) is by the imperial court poet Pietro Metastasio and dates from 1734. It was first set by Antonio Caldara and performed on November 4, 1734, in the presence of their "augustissimi sovrani" at the large Vienna Court Theater. It is very much the ideal court opera, the opera of enlightened absolutism. This libretto was set at least forty-five times between 1734 and 1839.

Metastasio's text was revised for Mozart by the Saxon court poet Caterino Mazzolà, who made various changes, and turned the piece into a *vera opera* by the following artistic means: he cut the text by about a third and removed virtually the whole of Metastasio's second act, since it contained a subplot irrelevant to the main action. Mazzolà tightened up the action, gave the protagonists distinctive characters, and skillfully arranged the order of their appearance. He created two great finales (as was usual at the time), both of which aim at being impressive and spectacular.

La clemenza di Tito was commissioned by the Bohemian Estates to mark the coronation celebrations of Leopold II as king of Bohemia. The theme was tailored to suit the new ruler's qualities: during his twenty-five-year rule of Tuscany, Leopold had created a model state of European enlightenment. He concluded the war with Turkey on August 4, 1791, by signing the Peace of Sistova, and was given the honorary title of "Il Rè Pastore". In speeches and epigrams on Leopold's death there are repeated allusions to the figure of Titus, who had become the symbol of supranational Austrian culture in the eighteenth century.

The contract requiring an effective festival opera to be written for these celebrations was concluded on July 8, 1791, between the theater manager Domenico Guardasoni and the Bohemian Estates. It emerges from the contract that the Estates were chiefly concerned to engage famous singers – the composer was a matter indifference to them – and to ensure a magnificent spectacle. It appears to have been Guardasoni alone who chose Mozart. Mozart did not hear of the definitive cast in Prague until the middle of August, which means that, although Mozart had already been working on the opera for about five weeks, he wrote the greater part of it in the remaining three weeks.

The gala premiere of *La clemenza di Tito* began at seven o'clock on September 6, 1791, attended exclusively by the highest social circles. In the *Krönungsjournal* für Prag we read:

> FESTIVITIES OF THE ESTATES.
>
> On the 6th, being coronation day, and in order to celebrate this day for His Majesty, the Estates gave a newly composed opera, the text of which, though based upon Metastasio's Italian, had been adapted by Herr Mazzolà, the theater poet in Dresden. The composition is by the famous Mozart, and does him honor, although he did not have much time to write it and was moreover, afflicted by an illness during which he had to complete the final part of it.
>
> The Estates had spared no expense in performing the same, they had sent their entrepreneur to Italy: from where the latter had brought back with him a prima donna and a leading male singer. The title of the opera itself was *La clemenza di Tito*. Admission was free, and many tickets had been distributed. The house was

> filled with a large number of people, but one can imagine that on such an occasion the demand for tickets is so great that they finally ran out, so that many local and foreign visitors, including persons of high degree, were turned away, since they had not come ... with tickets.

Later performances before a local, middle-class audience proved a success for the opera. "All the pieces were applauded", Mozart wrote to his wife in Baden on October 7, 1791.

Mazzolà and Mozart extended *opera seria* to the very limits of its possibilities, and in their ensemble technique are already some distance removed from the prototype of the genre. In his music, too, Mozart has eliminated the ballast of the traditional *opera seria*. The sweeping ritornellos have disappeared, the forms have become more concise, the arias are limited to shortened da capos, and the instrumentation is as transparent as in his symphonic works. Mazzolà and Mozart have overcome the limitations of the Metastasian libretto and created a new form of libretto which give the music more scope.

In the eighteenth century, an *opera seria* was a regular part of coronation celebrations, an element in the arsenal of events that added luster to celebrations in princely houses. It gave the coronation the same outward glamour as official celebratory poems. A decorative element of immense power and colorfulness is one of the essential aspects of *opera seria* and suitable as such for a coronation. The overture is, so to speak, attuned to this mood of high festivity. Mozart brought nuance and shade to *opera seria*. Gluck and his reform opera may have been his model, but the Salzburg composer wrote "more" music, refusing to sacrifice it to the drama.

Rudolf Angermüller

Ballets and incidental music

K^3 Anh 207 Sketches for the Ballet in Ascanio in Alba? (K^6 Anh C 27.06)

Origin: Milan? late 1771

Choreographer: Jean Georges Noverre

These nine untitled pieces are preserved in piano score and are playable on the keyboard. They each consist of sixteen to thirty-two measures of music in simple binary form; thus, they appear to form a suite of dances. The pieces may have originated as ballet music for the opera *Ascanio in Alba*.

William Cowdery

K^3 299b Ballet, Les petits riens (K^1 Anh 10)

Origin: Paris, May to June 1778

Choreographer: Jean Georges Noverre

Mozart and the great ballet master and theoretician Jean Georges Noverre (1727–1810) were old friends; they had collaborated in Milan in 1772 on the ballet music (*Le gelosie del Serraglio*, K^6 135a [K^2 Anh 109]) for Mozart's opera *Lucia Silla*, which unfortunately survives only as an incomplete draft. In 1778 the young composer often dined with Noverre in Paris, and hoped to obtain through his influence a commission to write a big opera in the French style. The opera never came about, but Mozart did create a ballet for Noverre, though he was not actually paid for it. On the ninth of July, 1778, Mozart gives his father the sad news of his mother's death; he goes on a little later, "about Noverre's ballet I only wrote that he might produce a new one – well, he only needed half a ballet and I wrote the music for it – that is to say, 6 pieces in it would be by others, they consist of a lot of rotten old French airs, the Symphony and Contredanse, 12 pieces in all would be by me. This ballet has already been done 4 times with great applause – but I shall write nothing more now unless I know in advance what I am to get for it – for this was written only to do Noverre a friendly service".

The first performance took place at the Paris Opéra at the conclusion of Niccolò Piccinni's *Le finte gemelle* on June 11. Mozart's name appeared nowhere. The next day the *Journal de Paris* described the contents of the ballet: "It consists of three scenes forming separate and almost detached episodes. The first is purely Anacreontic: it shows Cupid ensnared and put into a cage, a most agreeable choreography. In it Mlle. Guimard and M. Vestris the Younger employ all the grace and skill the subject allows. The second is a game of blind-man's-bluff; M. d'Auberval, whose talent so pleases the public, plays the principal part here. The third is a mischievous prank of Cupid's, who introduces a shepherdess disguised as a shepherd to two other shepherdesses."

The music thereupon disappeared for a century. The copy which came to light in 1872 contains an overture and twenty pieces. The ballet as it is usually played is grouped by key into three parts, not necessarily corresponding to the three scenes danced in 1778.

Erik Smith

K. 300 Gavotte in B flat major

Origin: Paris, May or June 1778

An unusual amount of mystery pervades the music composed by Mozart during his 1778 visit to Paris. It seems likely that his Gavotte was intended by Mozart for the Ballet *Les petits riens* and then laid aside for some unknown reason.

Erik Smith

K. 345 Incidental Music for Thamos, König in Ägypten (K^6 336a)

Origin: (2 choruses) Vienna, 1773; (final version) Salzburg, 1776-79?

Author: Baron Tobias Philipp von Gebler

Mozart was an avid fan of the theater, both musical and non-musical, and his letters are laced with lively reports of the many performances he attended. He was, then, undoubtedly pleased when in 1773 the celebrated playwright Baron Tobias Philipp von Gebler, asked him to provide the incidental music for his five-act heroic drama *Thamos, König in Ägypten* (Thamos, King of Egypt), for performances at Vienna's Kärntnerthor Theater in April 1774. Gebler had been displeased with the music written by his original collaborator, Johann Tobias Sattler.

Judging from the surviving autographs, it may be said with certainty that two choruses by Mozart (one for Act I and one for Act IV) were performed at that time. The orchestral numbers were most likely written for a later performance, on January 3, 1776, in Mozart's native Salzburg. The music heard in Vienna in April 1774 was probably a mixture of Mozart's and Sattler's.

The years 1779 and 1780 found Mozart, after unsuccessful travels about Europe in search of a lucrative post, back home in Salzburg serving as court organist to the archbishop. His drudgery was somewhat brightened by the Salzburg seasons of the theatrical troupe directed by Johann Heinrich Böhm, an old Mozart family friend. During its 1779 visit, Mozart revised and expanded the two *Thamos* choruses of 1773, perhaps composed some of its orchestral numbers, and definitely supplied a new choral finale with text by another family friend, Johann Andreas Schachtner. In orchestrating *Thamos*, Mozart pulled out all the stops, using a luxurious orchestral complement.

Thamos proved to be the only incidental theater music Mozart would ever write, and its life span in that form was brief. In a letter to his father written in Vienna on February 15, 1783, Mozart lamented, "I am extremely sorry that I shall not be able to use the music of *Thamos*, but this piece, which failed to please here, is now among the rejected works which are no longer performed. For the sake of the music alone it might possibly be given again, but that is not likely. Certainly it is a pity!"

Mozart allowed Böhm to recycle some of the *Thamos* music in a more popular play, *Lanassa*, by Karl Martin Plümicke. In this incarnation the music did circulate about Germany; Mozart had occasion to attend one of these performances, in September 1790, while in Frankfurt for the emperor's coronation. The *Thamos* choruses also turn up from time to time in church, fitted out with sacred texts.

Thamos represents one of Mozart's first musical brushes with Freemasonry, a movement which was to become increasingly important in both his personal and professional life. At the time of its composition, Mozart could not have fully understood all of the arcane allegory in *Thamos*, for he was not initiated until 1784, but the music he wrote for it clearly demonstrates that the ideas struck him deeply.

Thamos points squarely in the direction of that greatest of Mozart's Masonic works, *Die Zauberflöte*. The trio of C minor chords in the Entr'acte, No. 2, the majestic, hymn-like choruses, the Egyptian setting, the High Priest's Sarastro-like incantation in the final chorus, and the highly fraught juxtapositions of dark and light all give tantalizing previews of the greatness to come.

Cori Ellison

K. 367 Ballet for Idomeneo

Origin: Munich, December 1780 to January 1781

Choreographer: Jean-Pierre Le Grand

The composition and production of *Idomeneo* was one of Mozart's happiest times, yet he wrote on December 19, 1780, "One cannot but be happy to be finally freed of such a great, laborious task ... " and then on December 30, "Afterwards I shall have the honor of writing a *divertissement* for the opera, for there is to be no separate ballet". On January 18, he wrote, "'Till now I've been kept busy with those cursed dances – *Laus Deo* – I have survived it all". The premiere took place on January 29, 1781 in the Elector's new opera house, later to be called the Residenztheater. The ballet-master was Monsieur Jean-Pierre Le Grand. The dances were almost certainly connected with the subject matter of the opera. The theme of the opening Chaconne was taken straight from the Chaconne in Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide*. It and the Pas Seul are joined together to form an immense and powerful work, perhaps Mozart's longest instrumental movement. It is also quite varied in its moods, the chief of which is, however, brilliance and pomp. In the score the names of the dancers are indicated though not the nature of the action of the dances. Thus, the entire corps dances at each recurrence of the Chaconne's rondo theme and in the concluding Più allegro; each intervening episode is a "Pas seul de Mad. Falgera", a "Pas de deux de Mad. Hartig et Mr. Antoine", etc. Monsieur Le Grand kept the best and longest spot for himself. The Passepied and Passacaille are finely orchestrated, while the Gavotte is an evergreen melody that occurred to Mozart again when he wrote the Finale of the piano concerto, K. 503, in 1786.

Erik Smith