

Toledo Opera
presents



THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART FEBRUARY 10 & 12, 2017 VALENTINE HART

STUDY GUIDE

LOVE
MARRIAGE
HEARTBREAK

2016 – 2017 Season

STUDENT NIGHT AT
THE OPERA

WEDNESDAY,
FEBRUARY 8, 2017

7 PM

THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2017 AT 7:30PM
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2017 AT 2PM

STUDENT NIGHT PERFORMANCE: WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2017 AT 7PM
Conducted by James Meena | Directed by Garnett Bruce | Valentine Theatre



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SETTING

Seville, Spain – 18th Century

Three years after *The Barber of Seville*, we witness “a crazy day” in the Almaviva household. Figaro intends to marry Susanna; however, Dr. Bartolo is seeking revenge against his adversary for having thwarted his own marriage to Rosina, who is now the Countess. Meanwhile, the Count is now trying to obtain the favors of Figaro’s bride-to-be, constantly delaying the wedding plans to assert his “Master’s rights” of enjoying the first night with any newly married woman in his service.

CHARACTERS

Count Almaviva (baritone), a Spanish nobleman

Countess Almaviva (soprano), his wife

Figaro (baritone), valet to the Count

Susanna (soprano), chambermaid to the Countess

Cherubino (mezzo soprano), the Count’s pageboy

Bartolo (bass), a doctor from Seville

Marcellina (soprano), housekeeper to Bartolo

Don Basilio (tenor), a music master

Don Curzio (tenor), a judge

Antonio (bass), gardener to the Count

Barbarina (soprano), Antonio’s daughter

THE ACTION

Acts I & II

Figaro is measuring where the bridal bed will fit in their new quarters even though Susanna is bothered by the room’s proximity to the Count’s chambers. Once Figaro is alerted to the threat, he vows to outwit his master. Dr. Bartolo and Marcellina appear to present the case that Figaro had agreed to marry Marcellina if he didn’t repay a debt he owes her. But the legal matter only lightly masks Dr. Bartolo’s vendetta against Figaro. The page

boy Cherubino needs Susanna’s help as the Count found Cherubino flirting with the gardener’s daughter, Barbarina, and has threatened to banish him from the estate – so he pleads with Susanna to have the Countess intervene with the Count on his behalf. Cherubino reveals his affection for the Countess just as the Count enters, forcing the boy to hide. As the Count tries to seduce Susanna, the music master Don Basilio interrupts, forcing the Count to hide as well. Susanna feigns

illness to get the men to leave, to no avail. When Cherubino is discovered, the Count assumes scandal. Only the arrival of Figaro and the rest of the servants prevents the boy from being harmed. The wedding is delayed until the afternoon, and Cherubino is ordered immediately to begin training with the regiment in Seville.



As the Countess laments her husband’s infidelity, Figaro has a plan to humiliate the Count and force a reconciliation with the Countess. Susanna and the Countess secretly hope to keep Cherubino another day by disguising him as a peasant girl, but the Count interrupts their charade, forcing the boy to hide in the Countess’ boudoir. The Count (who has just heard malicious gossip about his wife) is

suspicious, even as the Countess maintains it is merely Susanna trying on her wedding gown. He threatens to expose his wife’s adultery and demands access to the culprit. When the Countess refuses, he escorts her to find tools to break down the door, locking both Susanna and Cherubino in the bedroom. Cherubino sees no other escape than leaping out the window while Susanna takes his place in the boudoir. When the Count returns to find out who is hiding, he is as surprised as the Countess when Susanna walks out. Figaro bursts in announcing everyone is ready for the wedding, but now the Count interrogates his valet about the adulterous gossip. Everything seems to be cleared up when Antonio, the gardener, storms in furious that “men are now being tossed out windows” destroying his gardens below. The Count’s jealousy





Wedding postponed, AGAIN!

renewed, Figaro takes the blame – and when Cherubino’s commission to the army is revealed to have fallen out in the escapade, the women alert Figaro it has been neither signed nor sealed properly. The Count is only too happy to now accept Marcellina’s petition and postpones the wedding once again so the case against Figaro may be heard.

Acts III & IV

The Count tries to sort out his confusion when Susanna appears and teases him by arranging a secret meeting with him after the wedding. She hopes her “willingness” to give the Count what he wants will sway the judgement about Marcellina’s claim. As part of Figaro’s plan, the Countess will keep the rendezvous, disguised as Susanna. The Count smells fraud and vows to ruin Figaro’s happiness, assuring his own. Don Curzio presides over the hearing between Marcellina and Figaro. Dr. Bartolo successfully argues that without full and immediate payment of the debt, Figaro must marry Marcellina. Figaro counters he is actually of noble birth and cannot marry without his parents’ consent – though he has never known who they are. Just in case, the Countess has lent Susanna the necessary payment for Figaro’s debt; however, Susanna is stunned by what she sees when she enters the proceedings. Alone, the Countess renews her courage to regain her marriage, her happiness, and her husband. With Susanna’s help, she drafts a love note, sealed with a pin, that confirms Susanna’s rendezvous that night. The servant girls arrive to pay tribute to the bride-to-be, with an additional familiar face amongst them: Cherubino. However, Antonio reveals the



Disguised Assignations

pageboy to the Count, but now Barbarina deftly deflects the Count’s wrath, reminding everyone of his overtures to her. The Wedding March begins, and Figaro’s wish comes true.



Wedding happens, FINALLY!

Susanna’s note to the Count came with an instruction: return the pin as a sign he accepts the invitation. The Count has entrusted this task to Barbarina who has just lost it. But, Figaro and Marcellina find a solution – only now Figaro suspects his wife will indeed have a rendezvous with the Count (because he was not part of the note-writing scenario). Marcellina knows better and warns Susanna. Dr. Bartolo and Don Basilio try to console Figaro, to no avail. He rants about the foolishness of men who actually trust women, himself now included in that cuckolded community. The ladies arrive to set the trap for the Count. Susanna has a moment to celebrate the beauty of the evening and the vivid anticipation of her wedding night. As she and the Countess switch places (unnoticed by Figaro), Cherubino arrives and decides to flirt with the woman he assumes is Susanna. The Count tries to prove his dedication to Susanna (the Countess in disguise), bestowing a ring on her. Hearing Figaro nearby, the rendezvous is delayed. Now, Susanna (disguised as the Countess) catches the jealous Figaro in the garden. She never suspects he sees through her disguise, so when he makes lewd overtures, she berates him, weeping. Only then does Figaro confess. But, because the disguise is so convincing, Figaro continues to seduce the (false) Countess. The Count summons his household to witness his wife’s faithless betrayal. He soon becomes aware of a number of eavesdroppers in the Garden: Cherubino,



What about this pin?



A Happy Ending for All!

Barbarina, Marcellina, and his deceitful wife. Only once the actual Countess appears is the true deceit clear. Begging his wife’s forgiveness, the Count and Countess are reconciled. Figaro and Susanna encourage everyone to celebrate their wedding, and more, their love.

-- Garnett Bruce

HISTORICAL AND LITERARY BACKGROUND

During the 1780s, the French playwright Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais wrote three plays about a charming rascal named Figaro, an intelligent and enterprising barber who constantly outwitted his aristocratic employers. When Beaumarchais wrote this witty series of plays, the beginnings of revolution were stirring in France. The rigid class system was a focus of discontent. Though set in Spain rather than France, Beaumarchais' plays about Figaro were frowned upon by government censors because their hero was a somewhat rebellious servant who was far cleverer than his noble master. The *Marriage of Figaro* underwent censorship six times before Beaumarchais could have it performed publicly. King Louis XVI remarked that it was "detestable and unplayable," but artists and intellectuals could see its wit and charm. Another controversial factor was Beaumarchais' portrayal of women as the mental and moral superiors of men. The lovely and intelligent Countess in *The Marriage of Figaro* eventually outsmarts her husband, who is a philandering scoundrel.

Beaumarchais is best known for his plays about Figaro, but he had additional accomplishments in his life that make him as amazing and varied a character as any of those in his plays. He was an excellent musician, a watch-maker, a secret agent for the French government, an architect, an inventor, and an arms dealer, among other professions. He was the harp instructor to the daughters of King Louis XV and maintained a private fleet that helped supply the American rebels in the War of Independence. Beaumarchais was not unlike his famous creation, Figaro, and it is felt that he drew upon his own experiences to produce this wonderful character.

Beaumarchais' *Marriage of Figaro* is remembered today as an important milestone in the run-up to the French Revolution. It is the opera by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and his brilliant librettist, Lorenzo da Ponte, that has enshrined *The Marriage of Figaro* as the masterpiece even more exciting, humorous, and true to life than Beaumarchais' original play. Stage director David Farrar once remarked that *Figaro* is sometimes likened to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, revealing the highest and lowest elements of human behavior, its characters emerging from adversity and deception variously wiser and enlightened.

Mozart met the adventurous Da Ponte at the Viennese court where he became a successful writer of poems and opera librettos for a variety of composers, including Mozart. When collaborating with Mozart on *Figaro*, Da Ponte wisely toned down the political passages of the play and, instead, focused on the human elements of the story. The main theme of the opera became love and forgiveness, rather than revolution. The characters became more sympathetic and realistic; some of the aristocrats turned out to be charming and kind, others bumbling and stupid. The same was true of the servants. To complement Da Ponte's words, Mozart wrote music that characterized Figaro and his friends to perfection. For example, the Countess sings two arias that not only express her inner thoughts, but, because of their formal structure and musical style, give her an importance that she lacks in the play.

At its premiere in 1786, *The Marriage of Figaro* was highly successful. Unfortunately, the Austrian emperor was ill at ease with the story's liberal overtones. Rival composers encouraged criticism of the work. There were a total of 9 performances in Vienna. Its performance in Prague proved to be more pivotal, leading to the commission of *Don Giovanni*.

The truly great success of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* did not begin until long after the composer's death when his work became more fully appreciated. Today, *Figaro* is considered by many to be the most perfect of Mozart's operas. The fineness of his musical characterizations and the ingenuity of the ensembles confirm his talent as a musical dramatist. He is considered one of the world's greatest musical geniuses not just because of his operas but because he was the master of all musical forms including opera, symphony, concerto, chamber music, solo vocal and instrumental music and choral works, creating some of the most glorious music known to man. Though he lived barely thirty-six years and his adult life was filled with frustration and poverty, he left the world a legacy that still astounds, excites and fulfills the senses.

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MEET THE COMPOSER



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 – 1791)

Many modern-day critics, scholars, and composers have revered Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart as the greatest composer of all time; he has been regarded as the composer of composers. Born on January 27, 1756, in Salzburg (in present-day Austria), his family called him “Wolfgang” or more affectionately, “Wolfgangerl.” As a grown man, he would sign himself “Wolfgang Amadé Mozart” or just “Mozart.” Not much is known of Mozart’s very early life. His father, Leopold Mozart, was one of Europe’s leading violin teachers. Recognizing Wolfgang’s special abilities, Leopold began to devote extra effort to his education, emphasizing musical instruction. When Leopold realized that his son could play the piano at such an early age, he quit his job entirely to ensure that Mozart would have the best musical education possible. As his teacher, Leopold became a loving, if exacting, taskmaster. Sometime later, he would describe to a correspondent how from a very early age Wolfgang had learned to wear the “iron shirt” of discipline. Mozart’s father had financial interests in his son’s fame and young Wolfgang was soon touring as a child prodigy all over Europe. From age six he was exhibited to the most famous courts of Europe, learned musicians, and the public. This groundwork ensured that Mozart would be

well known by the time he began creating his own musical compositions.

Wolfgang’s achievements came in rapid succession. For example, at age three he learned a minuet and trio within a half hour, and he mastered his first musical composition within only thirty minutes as well. By the age of four, he was perfecting ballads for neighbors and friends. By the age of 11, he had written his first true opera, *Apollo et Hyacinthus* (*Apollo and Hyacinth*), and at 14 his opera *Mitridate, rè di Ponto* (*Mithridates, King of Pontus*) was performed in Milan.

Upon returning to Salzburg after a long sojourn abroad in 1773, Mozart was employed as a court composer by the ruler of Salzburg. His low salary in that position and the limited demand for operas (which he longed to compose) led him to resign in 1777 and begin traveling again, accompanied by his mother this time. He sought positions in Augsburg, Mannheim, Paris and Munich, but had no luck. The low point of the trip came in Paris, when Mozart’s mother Anna Maria took ill and died in 1778. In 1779 he returned home to Salzburg and took up a better position as a court organist and concertmaster.

In 1781 Mozart travelled to Vienna at the behest of his employer, the Archbishop Colloredo, Prince 14 of Salzburg. He was offended by his reception there, and as a result had a falling out with the Archbishop. Mozart decided to stay in Vienna and make his living as a freelance performer and composer. This was a highly unusual step for a musician to take at the time. At the beginning, it paid off. His fame and fortune grew by leaps and bounds after the great success of his opera, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*), which premiered on July 16, 1782 at the Burgtheater in Vienna. That same year Mozart was married to Constanze Weber, a singer. The couple had six children together, but only two survived past infancy.

Despite the favorable reception for *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, Mozart spent most of the next four years composing concertos, mainly for piano. This was a period of financial success, and the Mozarts spent lavishly. In 1784, Mozart became a Freemason, a decision that would greatly affect his later opera, *The Magic Flute*. In 1785, he began his fruitful collaboration with librettist

MOZART'S LIFE TIMELINE

Lorenzo da Ponte, successfully premiering *Le nozze de Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*) in 1786. They then collaborated on *Don Giovanni* (*Don Juan*) which premiered in Prague in 1787 to acclaim. Unfortunately, Mozart's father did not live to witness that success; he died in Salzburg on May 28, 1787. At this time, Mozart's financial situation grew dire, and the family was forced to move to humbler lodgings. Mozart began to borrow money and to travel in an attempt to drum up funds. His compositional output slowed, although the last of the da Ponte collaborations, *Così fan tutte* (*Women Are Like That*) premiered in 1790.

The final year of Mozart's life proved to be a time of great productivity: the family's financial situation began to improve and he composed one of his most admired works, *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*). This opera was greatly influenced by Mozart's interest in the Baroque masters (Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frideric Handel). His study of their scores inspired Mozart's Baroque style, and had a powerful influence on his own personal musical language in fugal passages of *The Magic Flute*. Additionally, *The Magic Flute* was a culmination of a period of increasing involvement with his close friend and theatrical entrepreneur, Emanuel Schikaneder. As the librettist of *The Magic Flute*, Schikaneder worked closely with Mozart (on occasion offering advice, which the composer typically adhered to). The *Magic Flute* opened in Vienna on the evening of September 30, 1791. He conducted the first two performances while ill, but his condition did not become serious until November. He died after the opera's 67th performance, on December 5, 1791. He was buried in an unmarked grave according to Viennese tradition and was survived by his wife Constanze and their two sons. He was 35 years old. Much speculation has surrounded the circumstances of Mozart's death, and in spite of the many theories, none have been proven. It has been said that Mozart was poisoned, that he worked himself to death, or even that he died of alcoholism. However, the most widely

accepted theory is that he died of kidney failure due to infection, which was compounded by rheumatic fever. The practice of bloodletting is believed to have further weakened him. It has also been recorded that a streptococcal epidemic invaded Vienna at the time, killing a number of people; this cannot be ruled out. Memorial services and concerts upon his death were well-attended, but Mozart's reputation truly soared after his death. He was the most prolific, influential and enduring composer of the Classical era. In total, he composed over six hundred works, many acknowledged as pinnacles of symphonic, concertante, chamber, piano, operatic, and choral music.



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Sources: biographyshelf.com, mozartproject.org, balletmet.org, dictionary.com, incurable-insomniac.blogspot.com, wikipedia.com

World History

- 1756 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is born in Salzburg, Austria**
- 1756 The beginning of the Seven Years War in Europe
 - 1756 First chocolate-candy factory begins operation in Germany
 - 1758 Hailey's Comet appears for the first time after Hailey's discovery of it
- 1761 Mozart writes his first composition, a minuet and trio for piano, at age 5**
- 1764 The American City of St. Louis is established
- 1765 Mozart writes his first symphony in London**
- 1765 Great Britain imposes the Stamp Act on the 13 American Colonies
- 1767 Mozart survives smallpox and his first opera, *Apollo et Hyacinthus*, is performed in Salzburg**
- 1769 Napoleon is born
- 1770-1 Granted papal knighthood and a private audience with the Pope**
- 1770 Beethoven is born
 - 1771 The first volume of the Encyclopedia Britannica is published
 - 1773 Boston Tea Party
- 1775 *La Finita* premiers in Munich**
- 1775 American Revolution begins
 - 1775 Watt's steam engine is invented
 - 1776 U.S. Declaration of Independence is signed
- 1777 Mozart's mother dies of a fever while chaperoning Mozart on a concert tour**
- 1778 Leaves his employment with the Archbishop of Salzburg to seek fame in Vienna**
- 1780 Pennsylvania is the first state to abolish slavery
 - 1780 The modern piano is made
 - 1780 The first fountain pen is invented
 - 1781 Uranus is discovered
- 1782 Mozart marries Constanze Weber, the younger sister of a former love**
- 1783 American Revolution ends
 - 1783 The first flight in a hot air balloon in the United Kingdom
- 1783 Mozart and Constanze's son dies in Vienna while they are traveling to Salzburg**
- 1784 Another son, Carl Thomas, is born. He is one of only two Mozart children to reach adulthood**
- 1784 Threshing machine is invented, making wheat harvesting faster and easier
 - 1785 Carbonated soda is invented
- 1786 *Le nozze di Figaro* premiers in Vienna**
- 1787 Mozart's father, Leopold, dies and *Don Giovanni* premiers in Prague**
- 1787 The U.S. Constitution is ratified
- 1788 Mozart completes his last three symphonies**
- 1789 Storming of the Bastille begins the French Revolution
- 1790 *Così fan tutte* premiers**
- 1791 The U.S. Bill of Rights is ratified
- 1791 Mozart composes his last two operas, *Die Zauberflöte* and *La Clemenza di Tito* and starts his Requiem He dies on December 5 after a brief fever**

Activity – Writing about what we see and hear

Reviews of performances are important to every opera company. They help the company know how the performance was enjoyed in the outside world, and get other people excited about coming to see the show!

To write your own review, you can focus on two different elements – what you saw and what you heard.

Facts & Opinions

A review often combines two things – facts and feelings. It is a piece of straight reporting in which the reviewer tells the reader what he or she saw (facts), and an opinion piece in which the reviewer tells the reader what they liked or didn't like about those elements (opinions). Here is an example of a reviewer reporting what they saw:

“The town plaza is suggested by Paul Steinberg’s dizzyingly colorful set, with a mosaic floor and walls and piñatas hanging from above.”

For the first part of your review, briefly describe what you saw on stage – report what the sets, costumes and lights looked like. These are the facts about the show.

Next, give your opinion about whether you liked these choices. Did they help tell the story effectively?

The Art of the Adjective

critics need to have a great vocabulary of descriptive words when they write about what they hear so that the people reading their reviews can imagine what it was like to be there. People use lots of different adjectives to describe the voices of opera singers. Here’s a review that’s chock-full of great adjectives:

“The light, smoky baritone of George Gagnidze only hints at Rigoletto’s outsize emotions, and the sweet, pure soprano of Lisette Oropesa keeps Gilda sweet but inert. The handsome, hyperactive tenor Vittorio Grigolo has two registers, bellowing and crooning, and the conductor, Marco Armiliato, has his hands full trying to keep up with Mr. Grigolo’s wayward tempos.”



Sometimes it is very hard to describe the way music makes us feel. While there are definitely objective facts we can evaluate when we listen to music (qualities like loud or soft, fast or slow) most of the time we listen subjectively. This means that every opinion is valid – you don't have to know anything about opera to be moved by someone's singing or a beautiful instrumental solo.

Write a few sentences about the character you liked best and why. How did the music help tell you who the character was? Think of five adjectives to describe the way that person's voice sounded to you. How did it made you feel to listen to them?

Sum it all up

In your opinion, what did you like best about the production? What did you think could use some improvement? Would you recommend that other people come see this opera?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why would the concept of a servant outwitting his master be considered revolutionary?
2. Mozart has been called the master of musical characterization. What have you heard in the opera that supports this statement?
3. The ensemble is unique in opera. Many people are expressing themselves simultaneously, yet all remain in character and can be understood. How is this possible?



Opera tends to deal with love, hate, and gossip! It is reality television!

4. For all its humor, *The Marriage of Figaro* has some bite. Give some examples.
5. What is the message at the end of the opera?
6. The plot of the opera is very convoluted. How much time passes during *The Marriage of Figaro*? The answer is reflected in the secondary title of the play and opera - *The Crazy Day*.
7. In the original play, the author, Beaumarchais, made it clear that he considered women to be the mental and moral superiors of men. Was the opera successful in upholding Beaumarchais' belief?
8. In the opera, love is presented in four life stages, represented by four couples. Identify the four couples and put them in order according to general age grouping.
9. Two sides of the master-servant relationship are explored in this opera. Compare and contrast the relationship between the Count and Figaro, and the Countess and Susanna.
10. How does Mozart handle the concept of forgiveness? How important is it in the context of a comedy? Does Mozart cloak serious subjects in comedy for a reason?

