The Marriage of Figaro

A comparative study of the theatre play by Beaumarchais and the opera by Mozart and Da Ponte

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Abstract of dissertation

The Marriage of Figaro. A comparative study of the theatre play by Beaumarchais and the opera by Mozart and Da Ponte.

This dissertation compares the theatre play of Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais Le Mariage de Figaro (1784) and the opera Le nozze di Figaro (1786) by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and his librettist, Lorenzo da Ponte, which is based on the play.

For background information the life and most important works of Beaumarchais and Da Ponte are discussed as well as Mozart's operas and his residence in Vienna (during which he composed Le nozze di Figaro) until his death

The controversy surrounding Beaumarchais's Le Mariage de Figaro (and King Louis XVI's initial banning of the play) is highlighted. Its strong social criticism of the inequality of social classes and the nobility's privileges by right of birth echoed the sentiments of the rising bourgeois social class and made it a forerunner to the French Revolution in 1789.

Mozart, who was looking for a good libretto to establish him as an Italian opera composer, suggested the controversial play to Da Ponte as a possible libretto. This would be the first of three extraordinary operas produced by this fruitful partnership. For the libretto to be acceptable to the Austrian emperor, Da Ponte had to make changes to the original play. These alterations, as well as the adjustments needed to make it suitable as an opera text (for example, the inclusion of new text for arias) are pointed out.

After a separate discussion of the play and the opera (in which many of the important differences become clear), the final chapter reveals the most significant changes that both the librettist and composer had to make in order to convert the play into an opera.

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Contents

Introduction 5

Chapter 1. Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais 8

Chapter 2: The Plots 20

The Barber of Seville

The Marriage of Figaro

Chapter 3: Beaumarchais: La Folle Journée ou Le Mariage de Figaro 28

Chapter 4: Lorenzo da Ponte 36

Chapter 5: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart 46

Chapter 6: Mozart and Da Ponte: Le nozze di Figaro 57

Chapter 7: Transformation of play to opera 70

Section A: The librettist at work 77

Section B: The composer at work 90

Conclusion 110

Bibliography 112

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Introduction

The French dramatist, Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732-1799), is today probably best known for his two great comedies, Le Barbier de Séville ou La Précaution inutile (The Barber of Seville or The Futile Precaution) of 1775 and La Folle Journée ou Le Mariage de Figaro (The Crazy Day or The Marriage of Figaro) of 1784. They are part of a trilogy and owe much of their fame today to the respective operas by Rossini and Mozart.

Beaumarchais caused a lot of controversy in his lifetime by first establishing his fortune through a rich marriage and then pursuing an adventurous career as financial speculator, confidential agent, gun-runner for the American War of Independence against England and, ultimately, challenging the authorities and aristocratic class in France with his letters and dramas. Numerous lawsuits and a very successful series of Mémoires, in which he attacked his adversaries, ensured his fame.

However, the controversy around Beaumarchais culminated in the response to his comedy Le Mariage de Figaro, in which he voices strong political and social criticism. What especially enraged the aristocratic class was his criticism of the special rights that the nobility had by birth and his highlighting of the unjust and anachronistic *droit du seigneur* (the right of the lord of the manor to sleep with any young bride from his estate on her wedding night).

This anti-establishment drama not only reflected the political situation of the time (the period shortly before the French Revolution), but also helped to prepare the people for the necessity of a revolutionary change in society. Not surprisingly, king Louis XVI banned the play for six years

Unfortunately for the king, Beaumarchais's cunning and skill, together with private readings and the power of word of mouth and subsequent interest from all parts of Europe, forced him to allow the play to be performed The première took place in 1784 - five years before the French Revolution.

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The great success of this controversial play soon came to Mozart's attention. He had just completed his Die Entführung aus dem Serail and was looking for an interesting play that would help him to make a name for himself in Italian opera. That and the recent success in Vienna of Paisiello's The Barber of Séville (1782) prompted Mozart to take advantage of the popularity of Beaumarchais's play and he approached Da Ponte to write the libretto for him. This would mark the beginning of one of the most fruitful partnerships in opera history. After working on it for only six weeks in 1785, Mozart had completed most of the score.

Even though a theatre performance of a German translation of Beaumarchais's play had been prohibited in Vienna by Josef II, the somewhat shorter and tamer version of Da Ponte's libretto was accepted and the 1786 première of Mozart's opera Le nozze di Figaro was met with great acclaim. What had previously not been allowed on the theatre stage had thus, through music, been presented to the audience on the opera stage – albeit in a somewhat tamer version.

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Aims of study

This dissertation proposes to make a comparison between the play of Beaumarchais, on the one hand, and the opera by Da Ponte and Mozart, on the other. First of all the general format of both works will be discussed and, as The Marriage of Figaro is a sequel to The Barber of Seville, the plot of the latter will be included. Only the general outlines of the plots will be presented. To avoid any complications, the Italian names of the characters will be used, except in the discussion of Beaumarchais's play in chapters 2 and 3.

With the help of a tabular comparison the small discrepancies between Beaumarchais's theatre play and Da Ponte and Mozart's opera will be highlighted. The reasons for changes to the general plot will be investigated, especially the dramatic and musical factors that illustrate the strong social commentary and strengthen the comedy.

One of the most important dramatic changes in Mozart's opera is the omission of Figaro's famous monologue in the fifth act of Beaumarchais's play. It is in this monologue that Figaro bemoans the innumerable strokes of fate in his life as a servant and openly criticises the privileges claimed by the aristocracy by right of birth.

Apart from the discussion of the play and opera, the personal backgrounds of all three artists as well as the political background and controversy surrounding these works during their composition and first performances will be reviewed.

For the purpose of this study John Wood's English translation (1964) of the French play and Lionel Salter's English translation (1968), as well as an anonymous English translation (1987), of the Italian libretto were used.

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Chapter 1

Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais

(1732-1799)

The French writer and dramatist Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais was born in Paris on 24 January 1732 (Angermüller & Robinson in Sadie 2001:29) as the seventh of ten children and the only surviving son (Wood 1964:13). Despite a limited schooling, his interesting life at home in a talented family was an education in itself. His father, Caron, was a master clockmaker and a fascinating character: a Calvinist turned Catholic, a soldier turned artisan, a provincial settled in Paris, and a lover of science as well as music and literature. The young Beaumarchais shared his father's love for literature and he read widely in French, English and classical literature. However, Caron was a strict father and at the age of 18 Beaumarchais ran away from home. When he eventually returned because of his mother's pleas, he devoted himself entirely to his craft and subsequently his relationship with his father improved and they became much closer (Wood 1964:13).

Master watchmaker

The young Beaumarchais first came to public attention with his exceptional talent as watchmaker, and his inventiveness and determination to defend himself when he was accused of theft by the royal clockmaker Lepaute. Beaumarchais had invented a watch escapement mechanism, which Lepaute claimed to have invented himself (Angermüller & Robinson in Sadie 2001:29).

This produced the first of many polemical essays that Beaumarchais wrote and for which he would become famous. On this occasion he documented his protest with so much conviction and skill that not only was the Académie des Sciences convinced of his innocence (Wood 1964:13), but the king also decided to replace Lepaute with Beaumarchais as his new royal watchmaker in 1775 (Angermüller & Robinson in Sadie 2001:29).

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A career of ambition

This new appointment launched the 22-year-old Beaumarchais into a career which he pursued with burning ambition. Within one year he purchased an office in the Royal Household and became a court functionary and within two years he married the widow of his predecessor in his office and gained control of her fortune. It is at this point that he also took the name Beaumarchais from a small property that belonged to his wife. His marriage did not last long and after tiresome litigation he lost all the fortune he had acquired. Nevertheless, he soon found a new way to build up a fortune by utilising another of his many talents. In 1759 he started teaching the harp to the daughters of Louis XV and soon was very much at home in the court's inner circles (Wood 1964:15).

Pâris-Duverney

He soon became closely acquainted with the successful financier Pâris-Duverney, who initiated him into the complex world of combined banking and farming of royal finance by means of speculation and the promotion of vast projects of his own account? not sure what you mean. In 1770 Beaumarchais was made a beneficiary under Pâris-Duverney's will. Beaumarchais also became acquainted with another financier, Lenor-mant d'Etioles, the husband of Madame de Pompadour (Niklaus 1983 17)

Beaumarchais quickly became rich through the joint ventures and help from his new business partners and purchased one of the secretaryships in the Royal Household in 1761, a sinecure which carried formal admission to the nobility.

Next he obtained the post of deputy Capitainerie de la Varenne du Louvre – the keepership of the Royal Warren – which entailed certain judicial functions that he continued to exercise for the next twenty years, even when he was himself at odds with the royal judiciary (Wood 1964:14).

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By the age of 30 Beaumarchais was a very successful man, but he also soon learned about his numerous enemies when an inquiry was made into his fortunes (Wood 1964:15)

Spain

In May 1764 Beaumarchais departed for Spain to vindicate the honour of his sister, Marie Louise, who had been jilted in Madrid by her fiancé, the writer Clavijo y Fajardo. Beaumarchais turned the whole matter into a European sensation and the name of poor Clavijo became a byword. This event would later be the inspiration for plays by Goethe in Weimar (Clavigo) and Marsollier in Paris. Even Beaumarchais used parts of it in his first play, Eugénie, which had only limited success (Buck in Blume 1949:1469).

Beaumarchais was a man of intrigue who carried on numerous activities simultaneously during his stay in Spain (Niklaus 1983.17). He launched a vast project for himself and his partner, Pâris-Duverney, to exploit the Spanish colony of Louisiana by importing slaves and trading in tobacco, and by supplying the Spanish armies with munitions (Wood 1964:15). He also tried to establish his own mistress as the mistress of the Spanish monarch in a shady diplomatic move to further his standing with the king of France (Niklaus 1983:17). Other activities include establishing his brother-in-law in business in Spain, collecting his father's debts and beginning his correspondence with Voltaire (Wood 1964:15).

Although the major enterprises came to nothing, his adventures in Spain showed that he was perfectly at home in dealing with the complicated plots and counter-plots of his plays They also provided him with the Spanish local colour of Le Barbier de Séville and Le Mariage de Figaro and supplied him with the name, profession and character of Figaro himself (Niklaus 1983:17).

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Eugènie and Les Deux Amis ou Le Négociant de Lyon

When he returned to France, Beaumarchais wrote his first play to be performed publicly, Eugénie (produced by the Comédie Française in 1767) and, five years later, Les Deux Amis ou Le Négociant de Lyon (Wood 1964.15-16). Both plays were *drames* and mainly inspired by the French classical writer, Denis Diderot (Rex 1992:365), who developed the theory and practice of a new dramatic form, the *drame*, which is neither tragedy nor comedy (Bradby 1991:xxix).

In April 1768 Beaumarchais married again, this time to a young, rich widow. This marriage, however, was tragically short-lived when his wife and their young son died in November 1770 (Wood 1964:16).

The La Blache case

In the same year Beaumarchais sustained a further personal blow when his business partner Pâris-Duverney died. Duverney's heir, Count de la Blache, contested his uncle's will in respect of a legacy to Beaumarchais. He accused Beaumarchais of forging a signature. In 1772 the court pronounced in Beaumarchais's favour, but La Blache decided to appeal and subsequently a judge, Goëzman, was appointed rapporteur in April 1773 (Niklaus 1983:17).

La Blache succeeded in his appeal and Beaumarchais was comdemned to pay up. His house and goods were impounded and his late wife's relatives revived old claims upon him and vilified him without mercy. He was not only a victim of the civil process, but also branded as a criminal and sentenced to deprivation of civil rights by the French Parliament. When the case with Judge Goëzman was at its most critical stage, Beaumarchais clashed with Duc de Chaulnes (a highly placed but erratic member of the nobility) on a personal matter and without further ado thrown into jail. However, this only resulted in Beaumarchais being more determined than ever to fight back and to survive (Wood 1964:17).

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Mémoires

Beaumarchais challenged an unjust and corrupt decision in a series of four Mémoires, which were essays against Judge Goëzman. He not only accused Goëzman and his wife of bribery and corruption, but the whole judicial system and the ministers who maintained it. His Mémoires were read all over Europe and displayed every resource of reasoned argument and rhetoric, wit, narration, innuendo and appeal to sentiment. Voltaire said of him: "What a man. He has everything – pleasantry, seriousness, reason, vigour, pathos, eloquence of every kind, and yet he strives after none of them..." (Wood 1964:16).

Beaumarchais took Goëzman to court sixteen days after the publication of the last Mémoire and, in February 1774 he became a popular hero when Goëzman's wife was reprimanded for bribery and the ridiculed Goëzman professionally ruined (Niklaus 1983:18). It was seen as only a minor flaw in his triumph that Beaumarchais himself was declared at fault too. He continued to be deprived of civil rights, though, and the road to rehabilitation remained long and hard (Wood 1964:18).

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Secret agent

He made the wise decision to leave France for a while and went abroad. Since he had undertaken a secret mission in the past on behalf of Louis XV, his talent as a negotiator was known and Louis XVI now sent him to London as a secret agent. His task was to obtain important national documents from a French spy, suspected of being a double agent, Chevalier d'Eon. Chevalier d'Eon was posing as a woman. Beaumarchais was to buy him off and secure from him an undertaking to wear women's clothes for the rest of his life. This may have been the inspiration for the sexual duality in the role of Chérubin in Le Mariage de Figaro, a young page whose part is traditionally played by a girl and who is also dressed up in woman's clothes at a certain point in the plot.

Apart from visiting London, Beaumarchais also travelled to Germany and Vienna on secret missions. Even though he earned little reward and uncertain credit for his work, he gained an understanding of English politics. He used this knowledge in support of the cause of the Americans (Wood 1964:18) by supplying huge amounts of arms and raising a fleet to aid the colonials fighting in the American War of Independence. Much of this was funded by him personally and never fully repaid (Buck in Blume 1949:1469).

Le Barbier de Séville

Beaumarchais returned triumphantly to the theatre in 1775 with his play Le Barbier de Séville ou La Précaution inutile (The Barber of Seville or The Futile Precaution). It was originally completed as a comic opera in 1772 and offered to the Opéra Comique, which turned it down. Rewritten as a play in five acts, it was submitted to and accepted by the Comédie Française, but forbidden by the censor. Finally it premièred on 23 February 1775, but the five-act version was not a success. However, after Beaumarchais took just three days to compress it into four acts, the new version was a triumph (Bradby 1991:xxx).

It was so successful that it has remained in the repertory of the Comédie Française ever since; it appeared within less than a year in England in a translation by Elizabeth Griffith and performed soon after in most European languages (Wood 1964:19).

In August 1775 Queen Marie Antoinette arranged for a special performance at Versailles, which Beaumarchais was invited to attend. The queen herself played the part of Rosine (Niklaus 1983:14) and the king's brother, the Count of Artois, the part of Figaro. The play was also produced as an opera. The earlier version, by Paisiello, premièred in St Petersburg in 1780, while the later, and today better known, version by Rossini was composed in 1816 to a text adapted by Cesare Sterbini (Wood 1964:19).

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Political involvement

Beaumarchais continued his involvement in politics and various other fields amidst the great success of his plays. A conflict with the Comédie Française led to the foundation of the Société des Auteurs Dramatiques and the acceptance of the principle of an author's copyright (Niklaus 1983:18). The death of the great French writer François-Marie Voltaire in 1778 prompted Beaumarchais to purchase all his manuscripts and to establish a publishing house at Kehl (across the Rhine from Strasbourg and beyond the reach of the French monarchy's censors), where a full, definitive and uncensored edition of Voltaire's works was printed and published.

Le Mariage de Figaro

On 27 April 1784 Beaumarchais reached the climax of his career as dramatist with the first performance of La Folle Journée ou Le Mariage de Figaro. The idea for the play went back as early as Le Barbier de Séville. In the preface to this play Beaumarchais referred to the family affairs of Figaro and subsequently his patron and friend, the Prince de Conti, urged him to stage a sequel (Wood 1964:22).

The same characters were portrayed in a new situation along the lines of Beaumarchais's proposal in his Lettre modérée (which was a spirited defence of Le Barbier de Séville) (Niklaus 1983:12) and so the second play of the Figaro trilogy was born. Before Beaumarchais, the invention of stage characters who would change, grow older and who were to be imagined as leading lives outside the lines that were written for them was unheard of in France. Furthermore, the idea of writing a sequel to a play and subsequently adding a third play to produce a trilogy (in this case, La Mère coupable (The Guilty Mother)) was a very daring and original conception and apparently modelled after the famous trilogies of Aeschylus and Sophocles (Rex in Sadie 1992:365).

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Beaumarchais began to work on Le Mariage de Figaro soon after Prince de Conti's death in 1776 and probably completed it as early as 1778 (Niklaus 1983:12). However, even though the Comédie Française accepted it with great enthusiasm, it still took another three years for it to be performed in public (Wood 1964:22).

The censor Coqueley de Chaussepierre had no problem with passing it as suitable for public performance and a copy was forwarded to the court where Marie Antoinette read it with enjoyment and requested Madame Campan to read it to Louis XVI. The king, taking strong exception to the famous monologue of Figaro in Act V, did not share his wife's enthusiasm and judged the play to be in bad taste. He is reported to have exclaimed: "It's detestable. We should first have to destroy the Bastille if a performance of this play were not to be a dangerous blunder" (Niklaus 1983:12-13).

It is important to note, however, that the king was greatly offended by the text of the first draft in which the action takes place in France and the Bastille is specifically mentioned in the monologue. In other passages, later suppressed, the clergy and the censorship were attacked.

Beaumarchais immediately responded to this by moving the play to Aguas-Frescas in Spain (as he had done in the case of Le Barbier de Séville) and to cut out a few offending passages and make minor alterations (Niklaus 1983:12-13). A second censor, Suard, was appointed, but approval was still refused (Wood 1964:23).

The king's reaction and the subsequent banning of the play gained much publicity for Beaumarchais, which he fully exploited. He received numerous requests for private readings from prominent people, including the Archduke of Russia, the future Tsar Paul II, and the Archduchess, the Princesse de Lamballe and the Maréchal de Richelieu (Niklaus 1983:13).

A performance that was planned by members of the Comédie Française in the hall of the Menus Plaisirs in the honour of the king's brother, the Count of

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Artois (Wood 1964:23), was cancelled in the last minute by the king who feared establishing a dangerous precedent (Niklaus 1983:13). This attempt was followed by a semi-private performance in September 1783 for members of the royal family, which turned out to be a great success, but Beaumarchais would only be satisfied if it were to be performed to the theatre-going public in Paris (Wood 1964:23).

Three new censors were appointed: the first expressed reservations on moral grounds, the second praised it highly, while the third approved it without comment (Niklaus 1983:13). And so, finally, in 1784 the king himself granted permission and the first triumphant performance of the play took place on 27 April 1784 presented by the Comédiens du Roi in a new auditorium, Théâtre Français (Niklaus 1983:13). The opening night was one of the great social occasions of Louis XVI's reign. Louis de Loménie wrote in his book Beaumarchais et son temps (published in 1856) that "all Paris from the earliest morning thronged the doorways of the Théâtre Français, ladies of the highest rank dining in the dressing-rooms of the actresses in order to be sure of their places. The guards were overwhelmed, the doors broken in, the railings gave way before the pressure of the crowds . . ." (Wood 1964:23). The play began at five-thirty in the afternoon and ended at ten o' clock at night (Wood 1964:23).

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The prolonged banning of the play and all the advance publicity, the excellence of the acting and above all the quality of Beaumarchais's writing all ensured a great triumph for the author (Niklaus 1983:14).

The play ran for 68 successive performances with gross receipts amounting to 347 000 livres, the greatest theatrical success of the century. At the height of his success Beaumarchais was sharply reminded of the arbitrary nature of royal power (Wood 1964:24) when his comment on the difficulties of getting his play on stage (that he had "had to dare lions and tigers" [Niklaus 1983:14]) was carried to the king as criticism of the king and the queen. Beaumarchais was immediately sent to Saint-Lazare, a gaol chiefly used to discipline delinquent adolescents, but he was freed again after five days (Niklaus

1983:14). The first performance after his release was an event of great demonstration of sympathy by an audience that included most of the king's ministers.

The play was performed in both the original French and translations all over Europe, and also in London at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden in 1785, where the translation by Holcroft followed in the same year (Wood 1964:24). It was the longest staged comedy of the century; it overflowed with incidental songs, dances and musical ceremonies (composed mainly by Baudron) and came closer to resembling an *opéra comique* than any previous French play. Mozart and Da Ponte recognised these special features and capitalised on them in the opera Le nozze di Figaro, first heard in Vienna in 1786 (Rex in Sadie 1992:365).

Third marriage

In 1786 Beaumarchais entered into his third marriage, this time with Mlle Willermaulaz, a Swiss lady of distinction, after a relationship of twelve years. This was no doubt in order to legitimise their daughter, Eugénie, who had been born in 1777 already. However, it must also be remembered that Beaumarchais had had to fight for a long time to reacquire his full rights as a citizen and could therefore not legally enter into a contract of marriage (Niklaus 1983:15). His wife stood by him in the years of misfortune to come, coped with his frequent infidelities and behaved with great dignity until his death (Wood 1964:24).

Tartare

Beaumarchais followed the success of Le Mariage de Figaro with a philosophical opera or *drame chanté* Tartare. The music was composed by Antonio Salieri and is generally considered a masterpiece. It was performed at the Opéra in June 1787 and had considerable success (Rex in Sadie 1992:365).

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French Revolution

With the advent of the French Revolution the world that Beaumarchais had known rapidly dissolved. The citadels of power and privilege were under attack from new men and by methods that were not his. Beaumarchais was accused of trafficking in arms and his great house near the Bastille did not endear him to the militants. He was still mistrusted in court circles as a parvenu, an adventurer and a man of dangerous ideas. To the new men he was a creature of the régime they were determined to destroy (Wood 1964:25).

He saw old friends and old enemies alike fleeing into exile or being led to the scaffold. Beaumarchais himself was only saved from the guillotine by the intercession of a woman admirer (Niklaus 1983:15).

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La Mère coupable

The third and last part of the Figaro trilogy, a *drame* with the full title L'Autre Tartuffe ou La Mère coupable, was staged during the Revolution in June 1792 with little success, but revived to public acclaim in May 1797.

The new spirit of the times was aptly reflected in the play's painful emotions and dark-coloured settings. The "guilty mother" is the Countess who has had an illegitimate son by Chérubin, after a moment of distraction in which he had forced himself upon her. When Chérubin is killed later in a far-off land, his death seems to have drained the life and gaiety from the remaining characters. The entire family faces financial disaster in the final act, but escapes ruin through Figaro once again using his wits. The play ends with the Count called upon to make a dramatic gesture of forgiveness towards the guilty mother, just as the Countess had earlier done for him. Although the play was praised by connoisseurs such as Victor Hugo and Charles Péguy, it is all but forgotten today (Rex in Sadie 1992:365).

Death

In 1794, while he was abroad, unfortunate events Beaumarchais's name to be inscribed on the list of criminal émigrés and his family placed under arrest. On his return to Paris in 1796 his finances and health were in total disarray and he spent the last three years of his life recovering from his losses (Rex in Sadie 1992: 365). He died in Paris on 18 May 1799 (Niklaus 1983:15).

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Chapter 2
The Plots

The plots have been summarised from John Wood's 1964 English translation of Beaumarchais's play and CW Kobbé's 1954 synopses of the operas by Rossini and Mozart. To avoid confusion, the Italian names of the characters are used and the basic story lines discussed. The plots have been reduced to the common denominators shared by both play and opera. The small differences between the French plays and the Italian operas will be highlighted later.

The Barber of Seville (or The Futile Precaution)

Setting

Seville, Spain. First outside Doctor Bartolo's house beneath Rosina's window, and thereafter inside.

Characters

Count Almaviva: a Spanish grandee in love with Rosina
Figaro: barber of Seville
Rosina: a young lady of noble birth, ward of Bartolo
Doctor Bartolo: physician and Rosina's guardian
Basilio: music master to Rosina
Notary, police officer, servants and soldiers

Characters only in Beaumarchais's play:

L'Éveillé (Wakeful): servant of Bartolo, a dull sleepy boy
La Jeunesse (Youthful): an elderly servant of Bartolo

Characters only in Rossini's opera:

Fiorello: servant to the count
Ambrogio: servant to the doctor
Berta (or Marcellina): Rosina's governess

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Plot

Count Almaviva is waiting outside Dr Bartolo's house to see Rosina, with whom he is in love. While he is waiting, Figaro comes down the street. When the Count tells him his desire, Figaro tells him that he is Bartolo's barber and immediately plots with him to bring about an introduction to Rosina. The beautiful and rich Rosina is watched very strictly by Bartolo, who plans to marry his ward himself. Rosina, however, returns the Count's affections and drops him a letter from the balcony declaring her love and asking his name. He serenades her and tells her his name is Lindoro.

Meanwhile Bartolo tells Basilio, Rosina's music master, that Count Almaviva is in town and in love with Rosina. Basilio suggests addressing the problem by starting a rumour and creating a scandal about the Count.

In order to see Rosina, the Count disguises himself as a drunken soldier, and forces his way into Bartolo's house. After a lot of consternation he finally leaves, but enters the house again disguised as a music-teacher who has been sent by Basilio, who supposedly had fallen ill. He wins Bartolo's trust by showing him Rosina's letter to the Count and offering to tell Rosina that the letter has been given to him by a mistress of the Count.

In this way Almaviva finally gets to be alone with Rosina. Under the pretence of a music lesson and in whispering tones he proposes to her an elopement and private marriage at midnight. Figaro also manages to obtain the keys to the balcony for their escape Suddenly Basilio makes his appearance at the house, but the lovers manage to persuade him that he really is ill and he goes home.

When Figaro and the Count leave the house (to return in secret later), Bartolo shows Rosina the letter and tells her he secured it from another mistress of the Count. In her anger she tells him of the plan to escape and agrees to marry him

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When Figaro and Almaviva appear at midnight, the lovers are reconciled, and a notary, produced by Bartolo for his own marriage to Rosina, celebrates the marriage of the loving pair. Moments later Bartolo enters with officers of justice to arrest Figaro and the Count, only to discover that he is too late.

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The Marriage of Figaro (or The Crazy Day)

Setting

The Castle of Aguas-Frascas, near Seville

Characters

Count Almaviva: Governor of Andalusia

The Countess (Rosina): his wife

Figaro: his valet

Susanna: maid to the Countess, betrothed to Figaro

Cherubino: a page to the Count

Bartolo: doctor from Seville

Marcellina: Bartolo's former housekeeper

Don Basilio: music master to the Countess

Antonio: The Count's gardener (in Beaumarchais's play he is also the uncle of Susanna)

Characters only in Beaumarchais's play

Fanchette: Antonio's daughter

Don Guzman Brid'oison: a judge

Doublemain: his clerk

Gripe-Soleil: a shepherd lad

Pedrillo: the Count's huntsman

An usher, a shepherdess, a police officer, a magistrate, servants, valets, peasants and huntsmen.

Characters only in Mozart's opera

Don Curzio: counsellor at law

Barbarina: Antonio's niece

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Plot

Figaro and Susanna are in the room where they will live as a married couple. It is their wedding day and Figaro is measuring a space on the floor for their bed. Susanna is unhappy about the fact that the room is between the rooms of the Count and Countess respectively. While it will be easy for her to go to the Countess, it will also be easy for the Count to get to her. The Countess rings and Figaro is left alone to contemplate the situation.

Don Bartolo and Marcellina enter the room and tell Figaro that he cannot marry Susanna, but must marry Marcellina because of a debt that he still owes her. Don Bartolo with his legal knowledge will ensure that there is no escape for him. As they leave the room, Susanna passes Marcellina and they can't disguise their dislike of each other.

When Susanna is left alone in the room, a very unhappy Cherubino comes up to her and asks for help to be reinstated by the Count as page of the Countess. The Count had sent him away after he had found him in Barbarina's room. Cherubino sings a song in which he pours out his adolescent infatuation and love for every woman he meets.

Suddenly the Count enters the room to declare his love for Susanna and Cherubino only has time to hide behind a chair. Moments later Basilio enters the room and, as the Count scrambles behind the chair for concealment, Cherubino jumps into the chair where Susanna covers him with a dress. Basilio teases Susanna with gossip about Cherubino and also enquires about Cherubino and the Countess – an intrigue which he says everyone is talking about. The Count can bear it no longer and reveals himself to demand that the gossips be found and punished.

Susanna pretends to faint, but revives in time to plead the cause of Cherubino. As he explains to her how he caught Cherubino behind a wardrobe curtain in Barbarina's room he draws the cover on the chair and discovers Cherubino. Cherubino is saved only by his admission that he

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overheard the conversation between the Count and Susanna. The Count gives him a commission in his regiment for which he must leave immediately.

In the next scene the Countess bemoans her husband's neglect of her and fears that he does not love her anymore. Susanna consoles the Countess by telling her of a little plan that she and Figaro have devised. The Count will receive a letter to meet Susanna, who will actually be a disguised Cherubino, and at the same time he shall be told that the Countess has plans to meet an unknown man. Cherubino enters the room to see if he can be dressed for the part and sings a song that he composed to Susanna and the Countess. When the Count is at the door, Cherubino and Susanna hide in the bedroom.

The Count is very suspicious when he finds a nervous Countess and a locked bedroom door. When he returns with tools to break it open, he only finds Susanna (Cherubino escaped by jumping out of the window).

Figaro comes in to invite them to the wedding dance but is interrupted by the gardener, Antonio, who complains that the page jumped out of the window into his flowerbeds. Figaro pretends he was the one who jumped, but his attempts are futile when Antonio produces a paper found near the flowerbed which turns out to be Cherubino's letter of commission. To add to the chaos Marcellina comes in, supported by Bartolo and Basilio, to lodge a formal complaint before the Count against Figaro for breach of promise.

The Count has not yet given up on Susanna and declares his love again to her when she comes to borrow smelling salts for the Countess. She finally agrees to meet him at night time in the garden. When she leaves the room, she sees Figaro and assures him that he can win his case against Marcellina. When the Count overhears them, he vows to punish them. However, shortly after that it is discovered that Marcellina is Figaro's mother and Bartolo his father.

In the meantime, the Countess dictates a letter to the Count which Susanna takes down. According to their plan, it says that Susanna will meet the Count

University of Cape Town

that evening in the garden. The wedding festivities are about to begin and a crowd of village girls present flowers to the Countess. Amongst them is a disguised Cherubino, who is recognised by the Countess just as the Count enters. The situation is saved when Barbarina asks the Count to give her Cherubino as husband.

Figaro announces the beginning of the wedding march and there is a chorus of praise of the generosity and right-mindedness of the Count in having abolished the *droit du seigneur*. The happy couples, Bartolo and Marcellina, and Figaro and Susanna, receive their wedding wreaths and Susanna slips the letter to the Count. As he opens it, he pricks his finger on the pin, a comedy watched by Figaro.

The next scene is in the garden, where Susanna arrives dressed in the clothes of the Countess and the Countess dressed in Susanna's clothes. Barbarina (Fanchette in the play) informs Figaro of the secret meeting and, being very upset by his wife's unfaithfulness, he also goes to the garden.

So the comedy of mistaken identities begins. Cherubino attempts to flirt with the Countess (thinking it is Susanna), but is interrupted by the Count, who then starts to make love to his wife in disguise. Figaro, also believing that it is Susanna, interrupts them and vows to avenge his honour. Susanna (still dressed as the Countess) calls to him and persuades him to make love to her. However, Figaro sees through her disguise and pretends to make love to her Susanna then reveals herself and her indignation to Figaro, but forgives him when he explains.

The enraged Count, who believes that Figaro was making love to the Countess, summons everyone to bear witness to his wife's unfaithfulness, while Susanna (still disguised as the Countess) pleads in vain.

The truth is revealed when the Countess suddenly appears behind them and the astonished Count recognises that she has disguised herself in Susanna's clothes. He realises his mistake in accusing her of infidelity and begs her for

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forgiveness, which he receives. The comedy ends with everyone celebrating in song and dance and enjoying the wedding festivities and follies of a day.

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Chapter 3

Beaumarchais: La Folle Journée ou le Mariage de Figaro

Beaumarchais's La Folle Journée ou le Mariage de Figaro (the full title as it appears on the title page of the first published edition of the play in 1785) was an indisputably phenomenal success. People queued to see the play from morning until afternoon, when the box office opened on the first night and the applause was so great and so persistent that the performance took 5 hours instead of 3½.

The reasons for its success are various, as are the critics' opinions, but all come back to Beaumarchais's fascinating personality (Niklaus 1983:10). His involvement in shady affairs and court cases, his wit and satire of current abuses, and simply his boldness had made him notorious in all the circles that mattered: at court, among the aristocracy and bourgeoisie, men of finance and law, intellectuals, theatre-goers and actors. Consequently it is no wonder that most people saw Figaro as a projection of Beaumarchais himself (Niklaus 1983:19). The funny, quick-witted and cunning character of Figaro is, on the one hand, a most accomplished presentation of the traditional servant role but, on the other hand, a true reflection of Beaumarchais's personality.

In Le Mariage de Figaro the character of Figaro is still central to all the action, but to a lesser extent than in Le Barbier de Séville. (In Le Mariage de Figaro it is rather Suzanne that determines the course of the play.) In Le Mariage de Figaro Figaro becomes a representative of the Third Estate (in the French socio-political order of the time), when he fights for the rights of his oppressed people against the privileged Estates, the aristocracy and the clergy (Buck 1949:1471).

Figaro outshines all the valets in earlier French comedies by his dominance in the play, his personality and his bold opinions. He is not only his master's rival, but also superior to him in intelligence and life experience. Figaro has lost the subservience (that can still be detected in Le Barbier de Séville) in

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order to present his master with a new challenge. He is transformed into a representative of humanity at large, which becomes far more significant than his actual station in pre-revolutionary France would normally warrant (Niklaus 1983:27). Napoleon said of Le Mariage de Figaro and Beamarchais: "If I had been a king, a man such as he would have been locked up...Le Mariage de Figaro is already the revolution in action" (Wood 1964:30).

Despite the Spanish setting, it was obvious to Beaumarchais's audience that his chief target was contemporary French society. While Beaumarchais charms the audience with an idyllic picture of a caring feudal community, he at the same time undermines all the assumptions on which it is built. The result is a fascinating depiction of social hierarchy in a state of flux (Bradby 1991:xxiii).

The view that Le Mariage de Figaro was a product of the *ancien régime* in France was aptly endorsed by the French twentieth-century scholar, Jacques Vier, in the subtitle to his study of Le Mariage de Figaro (published 1957): *miroir d'un siècle, portrait d'un homme* (Niklaus 1983:20).

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Brid'oison

Whereas the French dramatist, Molière, always denied any similarities between his theatre plays and real situations or people, Beaumarchais made no secret of the fact that he liked to portray real life and real people. For example, it was very clear to every contemporary that Brid'oison was the personification of the idiotic judicial system as well as Judge Goëzman himself, Beaumarchais's arch-enemy (Wood 1964:28).

During the court scene between Figaro and Marceline in Act III, Brid'oison is depicted as an age-old caricature of a judge with a stutter (to enforce his stupidity), who is part of a corrupt and outdated judicial system (Niklaus 1983:50). When Marceline tells Brid'oison it is wrong that judgeships be for sale, he surprisingly agrees, but for entirely different reasons. "Yes," he says, "they should give it to us for free."

Even though the old feudal structures had been replaced in the previous century by a centralised bureaucracy (answerable only to the king) and the rise of a new merchant class, the myths of the feudal system had lost little of their power. It was still assumed that the lord of the manor would act as a father figure and protector of his people. It was believed that he would display a true devotion to his people, act with wisdom and exemplary behaviour, see to justice and provide security. However, in Beaumarchais's play every aspect of these feudal ideals is demolished, not by means of direct attack, but by a subtle undermining of pretensions and by playing off appearance against reality (Bradby 1991:xxiv).

As Le Mariage de Figaro is a true literary sequel, the freshness, gaiety and wit in Le Barbier de Séville's Aguas Frescas is continued and the characters still recognisably the same, but time has not stood still – as it had at the French court of Versailles (Wood 1964:28). Even though the mood in the sequel is still one of irresponsibility, there are undertones of discontent from the world outside the theatre and there is disillusion and a weary recognition that happiness cannot necessarily be won by pursuing it. Figaro is not the only one to answer back any longer. There is also Antonio, when he has had a drink too many, and the speeches of Marceline (which the actors would have preferred to cut) (Wood 1964:29).

The Count and the Countess

It is three years since the Count and Rosine's joyful wedding in Le Barbier de Séville and the effect of age on them quickly becomes visible to the audience. This in itself in an indictment of the Count. Whilst the young aristocratic lover of Le Barbier de Séville remains true to type by plausibly becoming a libertine with the natural distinction and manners of his social class and a certain regard for his wife, he disappoints his audience by losing interest in her and neglecting her (Niklaus 1983.29). After she has given up everything to marry him, the unhappy Countess is now left in the château and succumbs to

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alternating moods of melancholy and infatuation with the young page Chérubin, who is in love with her (Bradby 1991:xxiv)

The Countess and Chérubin

At this point it is very interesting to note that Beaumarchais possibly already had a sequel to Le Mariage de Figaro in mind. The ambiguous relationship of the Countess with the adolescent Chérubin gave Beaumarchais the scope and freedom to reveal much more about them at a later stage (Wood 1964:31). The third play of the Figaro trilogy, the *drame* La Mère coupable (The Guilty mother) confirms all previous suspicions, when it is revealed that the Countess allowed herself to be seduced by Chérubin. The result is an illegitimate son, Léon, while Chérubin is off to war, where he is killed (Niklaus 1983:30).

In Le Mariage de Figaro, the sad and disappointed Countess languishes away in a situation that she finds intolerable (Niklaus 1983:44). Nevertheless, the Countess somehow preserves some of her love for her erring husband and holds the audience's sympathy (Niklaus 1983:29). Later in the play the Countess wakes up and plays her part with more fire when she agrees to participate in Suzanne's plans. Rosina's character maintains an element of elegance, refinement and charm throughout the whole play (Niklaus 1983:45).

The Count

In contrast to the Countess, the Count is depicted as a bored man (as all the great men of Versailles seem to have been). The sympathetic young lover who ran after true love and happiness in Le Barbier de Séville has turned into a man for whom vanity and self-indulgence have become the only motives (Wood 1964:29). He is portrayed as a weak-willed man wanting to behave well and trying to foster the image of himself as the father of his people, but more often seems like a spoilt child. His desire for his people's approval is shown by encouraging traditional village ceremonies (like the presentation of a new bride at the château with singing and dancing at the end of Act IV) and

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by his abolition of the old *droit du seigneur*. However, his weakness is shown by his attempt to reverse his decision in the case of Suzanne, so that he could sleep with her on her wedding night (Bradby 1991:xxiv)

Yet Beaumarchais endows the Count with lightness and charm and thus prevents him from being detestable and preserves the Countess from being a mere object of pity. It is a very fine line, though, as the last act requires far more than just an absurd feat. When the tragic undertones come uncomfortably close to those of the French *drame* towards the end of the play, Beaumarchais manages to tip back the balance to comedy and a happy ending.

Figaro

In Le Barbier de Séville the relationship between the Count and Figaro was still that of master and servant. Even though the young Figaro made impudent remarks like "How many masters would pass muster as valets?" and "Aren't the poor to be allowed any faults?" he still worked alongside the Count.

However, in Le Mariage de Figaro things have changed and master and man are now in opposition. Behind the conventions of privilege it becomes clear that the better man will win and that the better man is not the master, but in fact the servant . Figaro immediately wins the sympathy of the audience with his bold and witty character, his complete devotion to Suzanne and also because of the way the Count is treating him. However, even though Figaro is still young, his wit now turns more often to irony, his cynicism to misanthropy and his social impertinence to social criticism (Wood 1964:29). Figaro is still able to run circles around the Count, but the Count has all the power and he none, for no other reason than the accidents of birth (Bradby 1991:xxiv).

It is this unfair aristocratic privilege on the basis of birth that is Beaumarchais's main target in Figaro's famous Act V monologue. Here Beaumarchais's alter ego, Figaro, strongly supports the view that merit should be the sole principle for achieving social rank.

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"No, my Lord Count, you shan't have her, you shall not have her! Because you are a great nobleman you think you are a great genius...Nobility, fortune, rank, position! How proud they make a man feel! What have *you* done to deserve such advantages? Put yourself to the trouble of being born – nothing more! For the rest – a very ordinary man! Whereas I, lost among the obscure crowd, have had to deploy more knowledge, more calculation, and skill merely to survive than has sufficed to rule all the provinces of Spain for a century! Yet you would measure yourself against me..."

These lines verge on the tragic and are delivered by a man in total despair. Not only is the Count going to have his way with Suzanne, his fiancée, but he will do so apparently with her consent. Here Beaumarchais makes clever use of Figaro to express the strong political and social criticism that so enraged the king and caused the play to be banned for so long. However, he manages to lessen the tragic effect on the audience somewhat by having them know that Figaro's suffering is all based on a comic misunderstanding and that Suzanne will not betray him (Bradby 1991:xxv).

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Suzanne

Suzanne is a perfect match for Figaro with her charm, resourcefulness and quick wit. In fact, at one point Beaumarchais even considered making her part more important that than of Figaro from a moral and dramatic point of view (Niklaus 1983:45).

She is in many ways the cleverest of all the characters in that she is the only one who keeps her head and who always stays ahead of a situation (Bradby 1991:xxv). With her open nature and wisdom she has her feet solidly on the ground and is prompt to respond when her honour or her honesty is threatened. She is also much more liberated than the Countess and always ready with clever remarks. Despite this, she still is refined enough to be able to change places with her mistress in the final garden scene (Niklaus 1983:46). Above all, her optimism and the successful conclusion of her

marriage serve to counterbalance the tragic undertones of the Countess's experience (Bradby 1991:xxv).

Marceline

Marceline's character is curiously inconsistent. She is known only to the audience by report in Le Barbier de Séville and later on referred to as Rosina's former governess in Le Mariage de Figaro. In the beginning of Le Mariage de Figaro she is depicted as Suzanne's comic rival (Wood 1964:31) and immediately becomes an object of ridicule in her attempts to find a husband and status. In one moment Antonio proposes to her, but she shows her preference for Figaro, who is obviously unsuitable for her, and her desire to marry him renders her ridiculous. Together with Bartholo, she is a very unpleasant woman with evil intentions, but then her character suddenly changes and she is shown as one who has been deprived of love and had to endure great misfortune in life. When it is suddenly revealed that she is the long-lost mother of Figaro and the victim of Bartholo, she is transformed from a villain into a kind of moral heroine (Niklaus 1983:49).

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Even though Marceline's strong feminist outbursts in Act III were very progressive for the eighteenth century and of great interest as expression of a new attitude towards women, they were dramatically out of place. For this reason, and because of their extremely liberal nature, the actors wished to cut her speeches, but Beaumarchais restored them in the published version of the play (Wood 1964:31).

In the following passage of Act III, Marceline condemns the double standard in sexual ethics and the price she had to pay for an indiscretion of her youth:

"You men, lost to all sense of obligation, who stigmatise with your contempt the playthings of your passions – your unfortunate victims! It's you who ought to be punished for the errors of youth."

Beaumarchais is particularly progressive in his assessment of the status of women when he reveals his understanding of the economic grounds of their oppression. Marceline continues:

"You and your magistrates so vain in their right to judge us, you who by your culpable negligence allow us to be deprived of all honest means of existence. What is there for these unhappy girls to do? They have a natural right to make all feminine apparel and yet they let thousands of men be trained to it."

Comedy

Despite all its social and political criticism Le Mariage de Figaro remains a comedy and Beaumarchais knew exactly how to apply all the ingredients for a good comedy. He constantly sought to make people laugh by using all the tricks of farce: stage whispers and asides, misunderstandings sometimes based on mistaken identity, kisses and slaps that may go the wrong way (Niklaus 1983:59). He combined elements such as the presentation of simultaneous actions, the coincidence of events, conflict between people and the inherent contradictions within a personality. He also played with ambiguities, the unexpected (for example when Suzanne takes the place of Chérubin), dramatic irony and recognition scenes following on moments of suspense (Niklaus 1983:60).

All this resulted in Le Mariage de Figaro surviving to this day as Beaumarchais's best-known and most popular play. It is a timeless comedy as well as a fascinating reflection on the complex personality of the author and the *ancien régime* under which he lived.

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Chapter 4
Lorenzo da Ponte
(1749-1838)

The Italian poet and librettist, Lorenzo da Ponte was born on 10 March 1749 in Ceneda (now Vittorio Veneto) into a Jewish family. His real name, Emmanuele Conegliano, was changed to Lorenzo da Ponte, when his father, Geremia Conegliano (a tanner and leather dealer) decided that he and his sons (Da Ponte had two younger brothers) should convert to Christianity. His mother, Ghella (Rachele) Pincherle had already died when he was only five (Abert in Blume 1952:1913) and his father wanted to marry a Christian woman, Orsola Pasqua Pietta, who was little older than her stepsons (Hodges 1985:4).

The young Da Ponte was 14 years old then and, according to the custom of the day, the Bishop of Ceneda, Monsignor Lorenzo da Ponte (who led the conversion to Christianity and baptised the family), gave him and his family his name (Abert in Blume 1952:1913).

Until his fourteenth year Da Ponte had received little formal training. His father had little interest in his education and his only skills were reading and writing (Hodges 1985:5w). His saving grace was that he discovered some books in his father's attic that he read and reread, amongst others the great works by Pietro Metastasio. At that time Metastasio was a famous poet at the imperial court in Vienna whose poetry was set to music by composers such as Mozart and heard in every opera house in Europe. "It produced in me exactly the same impression as music," Da Ponte wrote, and thereafter the Caesarean poet became his hero (Hodges 1985:6).

Ceneda

The good and wise Bishop of Ceneda recognised Da Ponte's talents and did much to help him and his brothers by admitting them to the excellent

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episcopal seminary of Ceneda "with rare kindness and furnishing our modest needs as inmates," as Da Ponte was to write later (Hodges 1985:5).

At the seminary the brothers were taught by the excellent masters and had access to a splendid library (Hodges 1985:6). However, the tuition was mainly in Latin (as most of the students were destined for priesthood) and consequently they were taught little about their own language and literature (Abert in Blume 1952:1913).

Luckily for Da Ponte the young Abbé Càgliari of Altivòli came to the seminary to teach, having just completed his studies at the then famous Padua University, where he had been encouraged to study Dante, Petrarch, Virgil and Horace. He shared both his knowledge and enthusiasm for the prose and poetry of these great Italian writers with his students and soon his lessons became legendary (Hodges 1985:6).

Together with two fellow-students, Michele Colombo (who later became a most respected Italian stylist and philologist) and Girolamo Perucchini, the Abbé had a profound influence on the young Da Ponte, who owed much of his rapid progress in literature and in writing poetry to them (Abert in Blume 1952:1913).

Da Ponte's conversion to the Christian faith opened a whole new world of knowledge to him and he would later always name Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto and Tasso as his first teachers (Carter & Link in Sadie 2001:8).

Portogruaro

When the Bishop of Ceneda died in 1768, Da Ponte and his brothers were reduced to a state of extreme poverty, since the Bishop had paid for their education as well as helped the family in other ways. The unfortunate Da Ponte had to sell his treasured books to help provide for his family, but then help came from Monsignor Girolamo Ziborghi, a canon of Ceneda cathedral,

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who arranged for the boys to go to the seminary of Portogruaro (which lies between Ceneda and Venice) (Hodges 1985:8).

Here the brothers began their studies in 1769 (still mainly Latin, but also philosophy and mathematics) and soon it was decided that Lorenzo and his brother Girolamo should enter the church. He was ordained in 1773 and by that time also appointed as the vice-rector, after he had already worked as an instructor, and in 1771 become professor of languages (Abert in Blume 1952:1913).

He enjoyed considerable success as vice-rector and also won great praise for his Italian and Latin poetry. This, together with the high regard of the bishop, Da Ponte's pupils and the local citizens, inflamed the envy of his colleagues (Hodges 1985:10).

Soon Da Ponte quit his post and went off to Venice, where the whole course of his life would change and he would discover that his taste for liberal politics and numerous love affairs made the clerical lifestyle more than a little unsuitable (Abert in Blume 1952:1913).

In his memoirs Da Ponte wrote with great bitterness of the turn of fate that caused him to enter the priesthood. He regretted the step for the rest of his life and later laid the blame on his father. He wrote: "It led me to embrace a way of life entirely opposed to my temperament, character, principles and studies, thus opening the door to a thousand strange happenings and perils, in the course of which the envy, hypocrisy and malice of my enemies made me a pitiable victim for more than twenty years" (Hodges 1985:9).

Nevertheless, given the circumstances of the day and of his family, the truth remains that there was no other way in which he could have obtained the education for which he so yearned (Hodges 1985:9).

University of Cape Town

Memorie

At this point it is interesting to note that most biographers rely largely on Da Ponte's Memorie (published between 1823 and 1830) for information about his life. He started writing his memoirs at the age of 60 and presented a very carefully constructed image of himself and his work (Carter & Link in Sadie 2001:8). Like most other autobiographers he chose to omit certain details about his life and embroider on others. For example, he wrote very little about his background and real name, and only mentioned that he took the name of the Bishop of Ceneda (Rosen in Abbott 2000:ix).

Da Ponte mixed accounts of wild adventures with pompous descriptions of his achievements and accusations of treachery by friend and foe. This flamboyant style was very much in the manner of his friend, Giacomo Casanova, a Venetian adventurer and autobiographer, who also is believed to have inspired the character of Don Giovanni for Mozart (Carter & Link in Sadie 2001:8).

Therefore Da Ponte's Memorie should not be read for their accuracy or as a means to discover his true character, but rather as a picturesque adventure story (Rosen in Abbott 2000:ix).

Despite the difficulty sometimes of separating fact from fiction, Da Ponte succeeds in giving a wonderful image of the particular upper-class society that he often had to deal with in order to make his way in the world. European and American cultures come to life only as a setting and background scenery for his road to success or failure (Rosen in Abbott: 2000:x) He offers intriguing insights into theatre life in Vienna, London and New York as well as contemporary librettists (whom he generally derided) and composers. Although he was obviously an admirer of Mozart, his favourite composer seems to have been Martín y Soler (Carter & Link in Sadie 2001:9).

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Venice

When Da Ponte was still living in Portogruaro, he paid short visits to Venice, during which time it is suspected that he might have met and fallen in love with the young Angiola Tiepolo, who was a member of one of the oldest and noblest Venetian families. She was married at that time with two children, but when her husband left her in 1773 to become a priest, Da Ponte decided to leave Portogruaro and the priesthood to join her in Venice. And so Tiepolo became the first of three women that Da Ponte would become hopelessly enslaved to and who would cause him a lot of misfortune by their jealousy, hot tempers and sometimes vicious personalities (Hodges 1985:12).

Treviso

In the autumn of 1774 Da Ponte broke away from the jealous Tiepolo and returned to Ceneda to teach. Soon afterwards he was offered a teaching position at Treviso (which he almost lost when he was accused of eloping with a woman and of other sins). However, in 1776 he was accused of teaching liberal politics and the Senate of Venice ordered that he never be allowed to teach in Venice again.

So Da Ponte lived in Venice again and moved in high society circles where he met Giacomo Casanova, amongst others, and lived more colourful adventures until he was accused of adultery in December 1779 and banned from Venice for fifteen years (Abert in Blume 1952:1914).

Dresden

He fled to Gorizia and then to Dresden, where he helped his friend, the poet and librettist Caterino Mazzolà Mazzolà, to translate and arrange plays and librettos (including the French dramatist Philippe Quinault's Atys) (Carter & Link in Sadie 2001:8).

University of Cape Town

Mazzolà liked his work so much that he asked Da Ponte why he did not write for Italian opera companies. Da Ponte replied that librettists were paid very little in Italy by greedy impresarios, who poured out all their fortunes on the chief singers, and that all the good poets went off to work abroad, where the rewards were greater. The suggestion, however, stayed in his mind and in the meantime, he was gaining valuable experience from Mazzolà for his next career.

When Da Ponte's ongoing amorous adventures in Dresden created too much trouble and he also sensed that he had become a rival for his dear friend Mazzolà, he decided to leave Dresden and travel to Vienna. Mazzolà helped him by writing a letter of recommendation to Antonio Salieri, the most famous and popular composer of the day in Vienna, as well as being court composer at Vienna and favourite of the emperor. It was one of the greatest gifts that Da Ponte could ever have received, because there was no better place to be introduced to for a career that would bring him immortality (Hodges 1985:43).

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Vienna

Da Ponte arrived in Vienna in the second half of 1781 and shortly after had the great privilege of meeting Metastasio. Metastasio was very impressed with one of Da Ponte's newest poems Filemone e Bauci (considered to be one of his best poetical works) and asked him to read it at one of his regular gatherings of poets and intellectuals shortly before his death.

The praise of Metastasio, the help of Salieri and the personal favour of emperor Joseph II soon led to his appointment as poet to the court theatre (Carter & Link in Sadie 2001:8).

In his first few years in Vienna Da Ponte encountered many problems as an inexperienced, struggling librettist. He wrote libretti with varying levels of success for different composers including Salieri, Martín y Soler, Gazzaniga, Storace Righini, Piticchio and Weigl (Abert in Blume 1952:1915).

He had quickly become aware of the miseries endured by most of those involved with Europe's opera houses. He came to know the ongoing intrigues and learned that both the composers and poets were treated with little respect and only the principal singers seemed to do well for themselves by commanding enormous salaries and terrorising everyone else (Hodges 1985:49).

Da Ponte's first new libretto for Salieri as musical director of the court theatre, Il ricco d'un giorno (premièred in December 1784) was seen as a complete failure. However, thirteen months later he was hugely successful with the libretto of Il burbero di buon cuore for the young Spanish composer, Vicente Martín y Soler (Carter & Link in Sadie 2001:8).

The opera premièred on 4 January 1786 at the Burgtheater and was applauded from beginning to end, even after the recitatives. The opera remained in the Burgtheater repertoire for some years, and was performed in many great opera houses in Europe, bringing both composer and librettist much fame (Hodges 1985:59).

University of Cape Town

Mozart

During the year 1786 Da Ponte produced six libretti, including Le nozze di Figaro for Mozart and the hugely popular Una cosa rara for Martín y Soler (Carter & Link in Sadie 2001:8).

Da Ponte met Mozart for the first time early in 1783 in the house of Baron Wetzlar and promised to write a libretto for him someday. This promise would only be fulfilled much later when Mozart suggested that he rewrite Beaumarchais's play Le Mariage de Figaro as a libretto (Abert in Blume 1952:1915).

Le nozze di Figaro proved to be the beginning of a fruitful partnership. Da Ponte and Mozart wrote the libretto and music in close collaboration and

completed it in about six to eight weeks (Hodges 1985:66). After many intrigues, obstacles and resistance (also from Mozart's jealous enemies), the opera premièred on 1 May 1786 in Vienna with great success (Abert in Blume 1952:1915). There were nine performances, but thereafter it was not revived until 1789 (Hodges 1985:70).

Mozart and Da Ponte continued their partnership by writing two more operas: Don Giovanni in 1787 (a story of the legendary seducer remarkable for its rapid mood changes from light to dark and from humour to terror) and Cosi fan tutte in 1790 (based on dramatic elements that recur time and again in literature: disguises, mock poisonings, men and women testing one another's fidelity) (Abert in Blume 1952:1915).

In the meantime Da Ponte also wrote Una cosa rara for Martín y Soler, which was very popular and soon overshadowed the success of Le nozze di Figaro. Da Ponte claims to have saved the Italian opera in Vienna from threatened closure, but the death of his patron Joseph II on 20 February 1790 and court intrigue on the succession of Leopold II led to his dismissal (for which he blamed Salieri, amongst others) in 1791.

London

He left Vienna in 1792 and travelled to Trieste, Prague (where he once again met Casanova), Paris (where the political situation greatly discouraged him) and finally went to London (Carter & Link in Sadie 2001:8). He was accompanied by his new wife, the young daughter of a businessman from Dresden who had lived in London for many years, named Ann (Nancy) Grahl They were to live together in harmony until her death in 1832

Initially Da Ponte had little success in London and therefore attempted to establish Italian opera in Brussels, Rotterdam and The Hague, with no success. Finally in 1793 he was appointed to the King's Theatre, Haymarket, in London, where he arranged operas by Cimarosa and others and worked again with Martín y Soler, who stayed in London for the 1795 season. They

University of Cape Town

worked together on two operas and he also provided libretti for Francesco Bianchi (Abert in Blume 1952:1915).

In 1798 Da Ponte went on a short trip to Italy to see his family and his beloved Venice again, but very soon his old enemies forced him to return to London, where he was dismissed because of intrigue and financial disarray at the theatre. In 1800 he declared himself bankrupt, but was reinstated at the theatre in 1801, where he wrote libretti for three operas. Hunted by his creditors, he decided to leave London again and travel to America in 1805, where he joined his wife Nancy (Carter & Link in Sadie 2001:8), who had settled in New York with their four children a year earlier when she followed her family there.

America

Nancy entrusted her savings to Da Ponte, who could speak English fluently and decided to follow her father's advice and invest it in a grocer's shop (Hodges 1985:173). During his time as a grocer and general merchant in New York, then Sunbury (Pennsylvania) and Philadelphia, he supplemented his income with private teaching and dealing in Italian books (an activity already begun in London) (Carter & Link in Sadie 2001:8).

University of Cape Town

Unfortunately he suffered great losses as a merchant and decided to apply his knowledge of Italian literature and Latin to earn an income. However, he very soon discovered that Americans knew very little about his culture and cared even less. When he was just about to give up on his idea, he met the young Clement Clarke Moore (best-known as the author of the children's book The Night Before Christmas) in a bookshop, where they had a lively discussion on Italian literature.

Columbia University

Moore soon became a trusted friend and helped him to obtain a teaching post and so Da Ponte began his final career as a teacher of Italian and unofficial

ambassador of Italy; he eventually became the first professor of Italian language and literature at Columbia University in New York (Hodges 1985:174).

During his stay in America Da Ponte wrote his Memorie and obtained American citizenship. In his old age he helped to raise funds and establish the Italian Opera House in New York, where there were 28 performances of Italian opera before the theatre was transferred to other management. The venture represented the first attempt to permanently establish Italian opera in America.

Death

For Da Ponte it was an ongoing challenge to establish Italian literature and culture in America, and he toyed with the idea of returning to Italy before his death. Eventually he decided against it and continued living in New York until his death on 17 August 1838 at the age of 89 (Abert in Blume 1952:1916).

University of Cape Town

Chapter 5
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

It can be assumed that the general lines of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's extra-ordinary life are known to the music lover: his early days in Salzburg, how he astounded the world as a young child prodigy with his virtuoso harpsichord performances and earliest compositions, and how he and his equally gifted sister Maria Anna (Nannerl) travelled all over Europe with their father Leopold to perform before the most distinguished audiences of emperors, ambassadors and other dignitaries

This dissertation will therefore mainly focus on Mozart's career as an opera composer and on his years in Vienna, which were to be the busiest and most successful of his life, and where he composed Le nozze di Figaro.

Mozart's career as an opera composer stretched over more than two decades, from Apollo et Hyacinthus in 1767 to Die Zauberflöte in 1791. He showed a remarkable command of the popular styles and conventions of his time and covered most of the major operatic genres in his composed work including *opera seria, opera buffa* and the *Singspiel.* He was commissioned by diverse institutions ranging from the Archbishop's court in Salzburg and the ducal court in Milan to the imperial court in Vienna and the Prague National Theatre (Tyler in Larue 1993:911).

Early operas

After early attempts at setting dramatic text to music, Mozart's first attempt at a longer span of opera was at the tender age of eleven: Apollo et Hyancinthus (with Latin text). It would be his only work composed in the genre of *Finalkomödien* or school dramas, and is in many respects a successor to his

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earlier "sacred *Singspiel*" Die Schuldigkeit des ersten Gebots (K35) (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:296).

In 1768 Mozart composed his first full-length operas, La finta semplice and Bastien und Bastienne, which were both premièred in Salzburg (Tyler in Larue 1993:911). La finta semplice was Mozart's first opportunity to compose in the *opera buffa* style and requirec a command of the Italian language as well as an ability to depict emotions quickly, thorough a wide range of orchestral effects and a control of the extended, multi-sectional finales of the Goldoni-Galuppi tradition favoured in Vienna (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:296)

The one-act Bastien und Bastienne was composed in the genre of the Austro-German *Singspiel* with simple but beautiful melodies and the use of quick, light *buffo*-type effects as well as mock-*seria* elements to achieve a musical effect to suit the sentimental pastorale (Tyler in Larue 1993:911).

His next two dramatic works, Ascanio in Alba and Il sogno di Scipione were of the *serenata* or *festa teatrale* type. Ascanio in Alba consists of pastoral choruses and ballets interspersed with arias, whereas Il sogno di Scipione consists of lengthy arias full of bravura writing (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:296).

The young Mozart's first operas show his gradual development and increasing experience of the broad range of operatic styles that had developed across late eighteenth-century Europe (Tyler in Larue 1993:911).

The *opera seria* Lucia Silla composed in 1772 is the most important of his early dramatic works. Compared to his first *opera seria*, Mitridate, re di Ponto (1770), it is much less convention-bound and more individual (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001.296).

Mozart composed only one comic opera in the 1770s (Tyler in Larue 1993:911). The *opera buffa* La finta giardiniera was the result of a commission

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in 1774 by the Count of Zeill for the Munich court and premièred with great success on 13 January (Rehm in Blume 1961:707).

A commission to compose a *serenata,* Il re pastore, for an important state visit by the Archduke Maximilian Franz to Salzburg followed a few months later. The elegant work was performed on 23 April 1775 at the Archbishop's Palace and greatly admired by its distinguished audience (Rehm in Blume 1961:708). Aminta's beautiful aria "L'amerò, sarò costante" with solo violin obbligato is today still much loved and a favourite programme choice for sopranos (Paumgartner 1945:181).

During a visit to Munich and Mannheim Mozart saw many innovative German operas and melodramas. He was especially impressed by the melodramas of Georg Benda and inspired to write his own. The opera director of the national theatre in Mannheim offered him an opportunity to write the music for a melodrama entitled Semiramide in 1778, but whether Mozart ever completed it is unknown as the music is lost (Rehm in Blume 1961:714).

Mozart wrote the incidental music to a play, Thamos, König in Ägypten (1773, revised in 1776-1777 and 1779), and he also composed the *Singspiel* Zaide (1779-1780). In Zaide he displays a great development in his style, especially the use of melodrama instead of recitative, the better representation of texts and a daring mixture of comic and serious conventions (Tyler in Larue 1993:912).

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Idomeneo

Mozart marked the end of his early experimental years as opera composer with the *opera seria*, Idomeneo, re di Creta. He was commissioned in the summer of 1780 to write a serious opera for the electoral court in Munich on a libretto based on Danchet's Idomenèe and prepared by the Salzburg-based Giovanni Battista. The plot concerns the king of Crete, Idomeneus, who prays to Neptune to save him from shipwreck and promises to sacrifice the first person he sees, who turns out to be his son Idamantes (Eisen & Sadie in

Sadie 2001:284). It is without doubt the most complex and opulent work Mozart composed before his permanent move to Vienna in early 1781, much more natural in its emotional expression and more complex in structure (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:298). The powerful quartet in Act 3, in which Idamantes resolves to seek death is a tour de force in which intensely chromatic music reflects four characters' diverse emotions (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:299).

The première of Idomeneo took place in Munich on 29 January 1781 and was attended by Mozart's father and sister. The opera was received with great acclaim and Mozart hoped that he might be invited by the Elector of Bavaria to remain in Munich longer, as he was growing tired of the court society in Salzburg. However, the invitation did not come and instead Mozart was summoned by the Archbishop of Salzburg to join him in Vienna, where he was in temporary residence for the celebrations of the accession of Emperor Joseph II (Rehm in Blume 1961:715).

University of Cape Town

Mozart arrived in Vienna on 16 March and lodged with the archbishop's entourage. Fresh from his triumphs in Munich, he grew increasingly enthusiastic about the possibility of working as a freelance in Vienna and more annoyed at being treated like a servant by the archbishop. After stormy interviews with the archbishop, Mozart finally got his freedom on 8 June "with a kick on my arse...by order of our worthy Prince Archbishop" (as he wrote in a letter of 9 June 1781) (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:284).

The Vienna years

Mozart made a modest living during his first year as a freelance composer in Vienna by teaching and participating in concerts. Many programmes included his own work and by the end of 1781 he was known as the finest keyboard player in Vienna (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:285).

Die Entführung aus dem Serail

After Idomeneo Mozart was only commissioned to write comic operas for the next ten years. In 1782 he wrote Die Entführung aus dem Serail to be performed at the Viennese National *Singspiel*, the theatre for German opera that the emperor Joseph II had set up in 1778 to advance the cause of Austrian and German musical drama (Tyler in Larue 1993:912).

The Turkish subject of the opera was well-chosen as Vienna was preparing to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Austria's victory over the Turks in 1683. Mozart's clever and innovative use of musical models and techniques from the Italian *opera buffa*, the strophic song and the French *vaudevilles* as well as the grand tragic aria, combined with the added attraction of a strange and exotic atmosphere (Braunbehrens 1990:82), resulted in a tremendously successful opera, which remained his most performed stage work during his lifetime (Rehm in Blame 1961:718).

Marriage to Constanze Weber

Shortly after the première of Die Entführung aus dem Serail Mozart married Constanze Weber, (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:286), whom he already knew from Mannheim and with whose family he had lodged for a few months when he had first decided to freelance in Vienna (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:284). Despite their chronic financial problems their marriage seemed to be happy. They had six children of whom four died in infancy (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:286).

Der Schauspieldirektor

Mozart worked on two new *opera buffa* projects L'oca del Cairo and Lo sposo deluso during the next year but never completed them. He only returned to dramatic music again in 1786 when he composed Der Schauspieldirektor, a one-act "comedy with music" about a competition between two prima donnas.

University of Cape Town

It was performed at the Schönbrunn Palace for the visit of the Governor-General of the Austrian Netherlands (Tyler in Larue 1993:912).

In between Die Entführung aus dem Serail and Der Schauspieldirektor Mozart composed several new and highly acclaimed works for Vienna concerts, including a dozen piano concertos, the "Linz" Symphony, parts of the Mass in C minor, his two violin-viola duos for Michael Haydn, several sonatas and the six quartets dedicated to the composer Joseph Haydn.

A review of the December Tonkünstler-Societät concert in 1785 noted "the deserved fame of this master, as well known as he is universally valued" (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:287) and Joseph Haydn told Mozart's father, Leopold: "Before God and as an honest man I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name. He has taste and, what is more, the most profound knowledge of composition" (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:288).

University of Cape Town

Le nozze di Figaro

Mozart's next three operas, Le nozze di Figaro (1786, Vienna), Il dissolute punito, ossia il Don Giovanni (1787, Prague) and Così fan tutte (1790, Vienna) were all the result of his successful partnership with the librettist Lorenzo da Ponte. They are a testament to his mastery of the *opera buffa* style and astounding ability to shape the pacing, development and tone of the entire operas and their constituent parts (Tyler in Larue 1993:913).

Le nozze di Figaro was surrounded with a great deal of intrigue because of the socio-political background of Beaumarchais's play that inspired Da Ponte's libretto (discussed earlier in the dissertation). Mozart had already seen Paisiello's opera based on Beaumarchais's Le Barbier de Séville in 1775 in Vienna and saw the opportunity to ride on its popularity by writing an opera to the very controversial sequel Le Mariage de Figaro. He was very aware of the fact that, even though he enjoyed great success as opera composer in the

German-speaking countries, he still needed a great Italian *opera buffa* to establish his name in the rest of Europe (Paumgartner 1945:342).

Le nozze di Figaro had a successful first performance in Vienna on 1 May 1786 and ran for nine performances, but was not produced again in Vienna until August 1789, after the first news of the French Revolution had reached the city This time it ran for 28 performances.

Only in Prague did Mozart's Le nozze di Figaro enjoyed sustained success (Braunbehrens 1990:283). On 15 January 1787 Mozart wrote excitedly: "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" (Carter in Larue 1993:949).

Le nozze di Figaro's resounding success resulted in a longer stay for Mozart in Prague, a special concert (which included his new "Prague" Symphony K504) and ultimately a commission to write an opera for the next autumn season in Prague (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:290).

Don Giovanni

When Mozart returned to Vienna, he immediately asked Da Ponte for another libretto and received Don Giovanni, which (like Le nozze di Figaro) is based on the tensions of class and sex. The plot dates back to the time of Tirso de Molina (1584-1648), even though Da Ponte also drew on the most recent stage version, a one-act opera (performed in Venice, February 1787) with music by Giuseppe Gazzaniga and libretto by Giovanni Bertati (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:290).

The libretto's depiction of the continuous battle between those who tolerate and those who condemn the Don's actions is translated musically by Mozart into a struggle between the high moralism (represented by the *opera seria* style of Donna Anna, Don Ottavio, Donna Elvira and the Commendatore) and the early easy-going indulgence of the *buffa* style (Tyler in Larue 1993:913).

University of Cape Town

The masterful first-act finale is a perfect example of Mozart's mastery of different styles, as three stage orchestras simultaneously play an aristocratic *minuet*, a middle-class *contredanse* and a peasant *allemande*. However, neither Mozart nor Da Ponte tried to reconcile the clashing moralities and therefore the opera remains a reflection of the power struggles and gender issues in Enlightenment Europe (Tyler in Larue 1993:914).

Don Giovanni premièred successfully in Prague on 29 October 1787. When it was staged a few months later in Vienna (May 1788), several changes had been made including the magnificent new recitative and aria for Elvira "In quali eccessi...Mi tradì quell'alma ingrata" (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:290).

Così fan tutte

The last of Mozart's operas in partnership with Da Ponte was the charming and superbly crafted Così fan tutte, premièred on 26 January 1790 (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:293). It is widely regarded as the most carefully and symmetrically constructed of the Da Ponte operas (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:292).

The origin of this opera is unknown, but legend has it that the story is based on an actual occurrence in Vienna which the emperor wished to be the subject of an opera (Braunbehrens 1990:336). In a nutshell, the plot is about two men who place a bet with a friend that their fiancées are faithful to them. To prove it they pretend to go away to war and then secretly disguise themselves as Albanians and try to seduce them.

Although the opera was a success, its female fickleness (with all the action happening in only 24 hours - like in the other two Da Ponte operas) was found shocking. Nevertheless, some of the characters and their behaviour could be explained by Mozart's use of the *commedia dell'arte* traditions (for example, the use of poison, disguises and elevated rhetoric). Also, the opera's balance of sympathy and ridicule reflects the strength and uncontrollability of amorous

University of Cape Town

feelings and emphasises the value of a mature recognition of them (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:293).

La clemenza di Tito

Mozart spent the last months of his life composing works in three genres that had occupied very little of his time for nearly ten years: the *opera seria* La clemenza di Tito, the *Singspiel* Die Zauberflöte and the Requiem, left unfinished at his death on 5 December 1791 (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:302).

La Clemenza di Tito was commissioned for Leopold II's coronation as king of Bohemia in Prague on 6 September 1791. The opera, based on an adapted text of Metastasio, was composed in only eighteen days and combines the *opera seria* style that Mozart had practised in his youth with an Enlightened elegance and restraint (Tyler in Larue 1993:914).

Die Zauberflöte

Mozart's *Singspiel* Die Zauberflöte (on a libretto by Emanuel Schikaneder) premièred on 30 September 1791, only twenty-four days after La clemenza di Tito (Tyler in Larue 1993:914).

Although little is known about the exact sources of Die Zauberflöte, much has been written about freemasonry in the opera. Both Mozart and Schikaneder were freemasons and contributed freemasonry-inspired works to their lodges, which probably led to their idea to produce an opera together which incorporated their ideals of freemasonry (Rehm in Blume 1961:729).

By 1790 the freemasons had fallen out of favour. When emperor Joseph II died in February 1790, his successor banned freemasonry and suddenly the freemasons became vulnerable. They were seen as the enemy of order, religion and the imperial family, and were accused of instigating the French Revolution. Many freemasons left the lodges and others continued their

University of Cape Town

activities in secret. It is very possible that the idea of Die Zauberflöte was born during that time and that the events surrounding freemasonry convinced Mozart and Schikaneder to proceed with their plans (Paumgartner 1945:445).

In May 1791 Mozart met with Schikaneder, whose theatre company had been performing at the Theater im Freihaus auf der Wieden since 1789. It is assumed that most of the opera was written in the Garden House (near the Freihaustheater at that time) and in Josephsdorf on the Kahlenberg.

By July 1791 most of the work was done, but there was a short interruption for La clemenza di Tito and the first work on the Requiem, until the opera was finally completed on 28 September 1791. The first performance followed two days later on 30 September. The initially moderate reception became more enthusiastic through the repeat performances until there were overwhelming standing ovations (Rehm in Blume 1961:729)

University of Cape Town

Mozart and Schikaneder described their opera as a *grosse Oper* (grand opera) with a blend of Viennese comedy, German fairy tales, *Singspiel*, *opera seria*, *opera buffa*, and the high Baroque polyphonic style. The main conflict in the drama between Sarastro's realm of the Enlightened and the Queen's kingdom of the Night is represented by two different music styles. Sarastro and his followers sing in the German Baroque church style, while the Queen and her followers sing in an Italian operatic style (with the Queen relying on the coloratura virtuoso style). Tamino and Pamina, who must choose between the two kingdoms, sing in a more earnest lyrical style, while Papageno (Tamino's comic companion) sings folk-like songs with occasional *buffo* elements (Tyler in Larue 1993:914).

Many attempts have been made to interpret the complexity of Die Zauberflöte as a symbolic reflection of the socio-political atmosphere of late 18th century Europe. The exact arrangement of the scenes, as indicated in the text, also strengthened the possibility of interpreting Die Zauberflöte as an allegory on the French Revolution. Even though Mozart and Schikaneder did not

necessarily want to convey a political message (for or against the Jacobins or the freemasons), it could easily be read as such by contemporaries (Braunbehrens 1990:395).

In 1794 a Jacobin pamphlet was circulated that attributed the following symbolism to the opera's principal figures: The Queen of the Night (the *ancien régime*), her daughter Pamina (freedom, which is always a daughter of despotism), Tamino (the people), Sarastro (the wisdom of better legislation), the nymphs/three ladies of the Queen (the deputies of the three estates), Papageno (the wealthy), Three Boys (intelligence, justice, and patriotism, which guide Tamino) and so on. The pamphlet further says: "The basic idea of this opera is the liberation of the French people from the hands of the old despotism through the wisdom of better legislation" (Braunbehrens 1990:396).

It is unlikely that Mozart and Schikaneder had intended their characters to symbolise figures involved in the recent history of the freemasons. It is better to interpret them as more general and symbolic figures, for example: Tamino and Pamina are ideal beings in search of self-realisation and ideal union. In this sense Die Zauberflöte could be seen as a continuation of the theme of self-conscious knowledge as presented in Cosi fan tutte.

In a broader sense the opera could serve as an allegory of the human soul's quest for both inner harmony and enlightenment in the light of the philosophical, cosmological and epistemological background of the eighteenth century. This helps to explain how Die Zauberflöte is not only significant for its sublime music and theatrical effects, but also contains a more profound element of philosophical or religious quality. Goethe tried to write a sequel to it and Beethoven pointedly quoted from the opera in his Fidelio (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:294).

University of Cape Town

Chapter 6

Mozart and Da Ponte: Le nozze di Figaro

Even though little information is available on Da Ponte and Mozart's collaboration and working process, they were both known for their specific requirements of a composer and librettist. Many of the best-known composers of the day wrote their greatest operas to libretti by Da Ponte, while great composers (like Mozart) inspired talented librettists such as Da Ponte to write their best libretti. Therefore the successful partnership of Da Ponte and Mozart could perhaps be explained best as a process of mutual understanding and inspiration (Hodges 1985:62).

Mutual inspiration

Some examples of this process can be gathered from Mozart's correspondence with his father and Da Ponte's notes in his Memorie.

In 1783 Mozart wrote to his father about his belief that "the more comic an Italian opera is the better" (Hodges 1985:64). Da Ponte, however, was convinced that changes of mood were essential to keep the audience's interest. All three of the Mozart/Da Ponte operas contain such mood changes and it is partly this special feature that makes them immortal and gives the audience the feeling that they are watching human beings struggle with real emotions, rather than stock characters. Had Mozart changed his opinion between 1783 and 1785 or did Da Ponte convince him otherwise?

Another example is Mozart's loathing of the constraints imposed by rhymes in opera libretti. He wrote to his father: "An opera is sure of success when the plot is well worked out, the words written solely for the music and not shoved in here and there to suit some miserable rhyme (which, God knows, never enhances the value of any theatrical performance, be it what it may, but rather detracts from it) – I mean, words or even entire verses which ruin the composer's whole idea. Verses are indeed the most indispensable element for

University of Cape Town

music – but rhymes – solely for the sake of rhyming – the most detrimental" (Hodges 1985:64).

Nevertheless, Da Ponte wrote rhymes with great ease and they abound in all three operas (Hodges 1985:64). Perhaps Da Ponte convinced Mozart of his skill to use rhyme as true poetry and to make it functional in the libretto (Hodges 1985:65).

In his Memorie Da Ponte reports very little about his artistic ideals in opera but gives the finest description of the idiosyncratic structure of the opera finale, which just happens to be the element of his libretti in which he most excelled. As Mozart was already known as a composer who demanded effective finales from his librettist (he had the libretto of Die Entführung aus dem Serail rewritten in order to provide him with a satisfactory finale to the second act), it is very likely that Da Ponte's opinion of this operatic structure was inspired directly by his work with Mozart and the composer's own formulation of operatic style (Rosen in Abbott: 2000:xi).

University of Cape Town

On the other hand, Mozart was helped greatly by Da Ponte's intimate command of Italian literary and theatrical traditions. This in-depth knowledge as well as his familiarity with colloquial speech, the subtleties of language and modes of expression used by different classes could only come from a native Italian speaker such as Da Ponte (Hodges 1985:65).

The choice of Beaumarchais's play

As explained earlier in this dissertation, Beaumarchais's play was politically very daring and initially banned by the French king. Da Ponte and Mozart had no intention of exploiting Beaumarchais's text for political gain, but simply recognised a good story-line that (surrounded by the public sensation and combined with a brilliant operatic score) had all the potential to be a winner with opera audiences and could put Mozart permanently on the map as a leading composer of Italian opera.

Mozart recognised the freshness of characterisation and the human intensity that Beaumarchais had managed to develop in roles traditionally related to the old Italian *commedia dell'arte*. The play's potential as opera score was strengthened even more by the fact that Beaumarchais had imagined some kind of musical complement to the play by providing songs and dances to accompany the action (Scholl & White 1970:160).

Changes to the play

It took Da Ponte's considerable gift for diplomacy to persuade the emperor to allow Beaumarchais's Le Mariage de Figaro to be adapted as a libretto. Da Ponte agreed to blunt the revolutionary edge of the comedy, deleting political references and placing greater emphasis on human relationships than on politics, although he nonetheless preserved the political implications (Abert in Blume 1952:1915).

In his Memorie Da Ponte writes that he told the emperor: "I have omitted or shortened anything that might offend the delicacy and decency of a spectacle at which Your Majesty would be present. As for the music, so far as I can judge it seems to me marvelously beautiful" (Hodges 1985:66). He further reports that the emperor commanded Mozart to go to the court and play him parts from the score: "He (Mozart) obeyed the command, and played to him various pieces which pleased him immensely and even – it is no exaggeration – filled him with amazement" (Hodges 1985:66).

Nevertheless, he did not alter the play as much as one might expect, or as the emperor was led to believe. To avoid any objections from the emperor, Da Ponte omitted or softened passages that might have offended the imperial court, especially Figaro's arguments with the Count. He also subtly altered the relationship between the Countess and her page Cherubino. In Beaumarchais's play the mutual adoration between the Countess and Cherubino is very obvious and Cherubino is seen as a charming and beautiful boy who is capable of rousing the Count to a fury of jealousy. To avoid the emperor's objection, Da Ponte opts to portray the adolescent Cherubino as

University of Cape Town

clever, charming and precious, but still a child in the eyes of the Countess (Hodges 1985:69).

Overwhelming success

Da Ponte and Mozart wrote the libretto and music in close collaboration and completed it in about six to eight weeks (Hodges 1985:66). Finally, after many more intrigues, obstacles and resistance (also from Mozart's jealous enemies) the opera premièred on 1 May 1786 in Vienna to great acclaim (Abert in Blume 1952:1915). There were nine performances but thereafter it was not revived until 1789 (Hodges 1985:70).

According to the tenor Michael Kelly (who sang the roles of Basilio and Don Curzio at the première on 1 May 1786 in Vienna), the audiences were enthralled: "At the end of the opera, I thought the audience would never have done applauding and calling for Mozart: almost every piece was encored, which prolonged it nearly to the length of two operas...Never was any thing more complete, than the triumph of Mozart, and his Nozze di Figaro, to which numerous overflowing audiences bore witness" (Carter in Larue 1993:949).

Skill as librettist

In his great number of libretti Da Ponte showcased his phenomenal talent as poet and skilled improviser. He mostly relied on existing works and used his precise knowledge of the dynamics of opera to adapt them to successful libretti. He condensed situations, pinpointed characters and directed the action in such a way that the composer was at liberty to create drama through music (Carter & Link in Sadie 2001:9).

Apart from Da Ponte's ability to comprehend the specific needs of each composer, he also had a rare versatility in being able to write both *opera seria* and *opera buffa* and could easily move between the two opera forms (Hodges 1985:58).

University of Cape Town

In Le nozze di Figaro Mozart and Da Ponte left the well-worn formula of *opera buffa* behind and instead created a new form of the *commedia per musica*. It became primarily "a play with music" in which everything is conceived in terms of theatrical effect (Braunbehrens 1990:278).

In fact Mozart and Da Ponte have been credited with bringing the *opera buffa* form to maturity. Whereas the *opera buffa* style was in the past merely enjoyable but trivial entertainment, it was now transformed into a medium that celebrated the richness and diversity of human experience by a mixture of comical and serious elements and the introduction of socially significant themes (Steptoe 1988:106-107).

This fusion of comedy and seriousness in the opera relates directly to the Italian dramatist Carlo Goldoni's notion of a new kind of drama for the eighteenth century, which he called *dramma giocoso* and is closely linked to the French *drame* of Molière and Beaumarchais (Carter & Link in Sadie 2001:10).

Mozart's mastery

In Le nozze di Figaro Mozart demonstrates his extraordinary mastery of the *opera buffa* style and his ability to shape the pacing, development and tone of an entire opera (Tyler in Larue 1993:913). He gives the finest attention to detail, interprets every word, gesture and emotion with extraordinary subtlety and employs elements of "tone painting" as well as forms of absolute music (Braunbehrens 1990:278).

With Mozart's music Le nozze di Figaro becomes much more than a mere comedy. It starts out as an innocent game, but by the middle of Act II it has gradually changed into an almost revelatory experience, when the underlying currents of class and gender struggle and social change are reflected in great dramatic and musical depth. Mozart found inventive ways to restore the political elements that Da Ponte had to cut from the play. The music of Figaro and Susanna, for example, exceeds the traditional *opera buffa* conventions

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for the lower classes by far and dance patterns (in particular the courtly minuet) allow the servants to challenge their masters in a subtle way (Carter in Larue 1993:948).

Characters

None of Mozart's opera characters is a *commedia dell'arte* stereotype, but they rather are responsible individuals with many different facets. They each endure some sort of humiliation (Susanna perhaps the least and the Count the most) and each has a lesson to learn. No special attempt is made to establish any universal meanings and there is no simple happy ending at the end where all the conflicts are finally resolved. Even the wedding features less at the end of Le nozze di Figaro than in Beaumarchais's original play and is hardly touched on.

The rebellion of the servants against the Count is turned into a clash of bourgeois values and feudal rights. This conflict is strengthened when it becomes evident that even the Countess (who comes from a bourgeois background) supports the bourgeois moral concepts of love and fidelity, and that she is prepared to defend them with the help of Figaro and Susanna (Braunbehrens 1990:280).

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Figaro

Figaro is a very complex character. On the one hand, he is witty and clever, but, on the other hand, he is also innocent and vulnerable at times. At the beginning of the opera, for example, he is entirely unaware of the Count's intentions with Susanna (Simon 1989:296). The Belgian bass-baritone, José van Dam, agrees that Figaro is not just a funny character and that there is a much more complex and serious level to him under the surface. "Five minutes after the beginning of the opera Figaro discovers that the Count (who up to that point has been as much a friend as a master) wants to make love to his fiancée. This wounds him through and through. All this is not funny. The only reason why Figaro has to use humour and cunning is that, because of his

position, he is powerless to do anything else. He can only win or lose by his wits" (Matheopoulos 1986:273).

Because of his low birth, and his wits as his only weapon, Figaro has to return to his scheming and intrigue to undermine the Count. He somehow finds a new awareness that he is better than his worldly circumstances show. However, this new courage is again contrasted with his vulnerability when he discovers Susanna's note to the Count and reacts by storming out. Not knowing how to handle the situation, Figaro sings his damning aria about women and their schemes. This level of hurt that Susanna caused Figaro reveals his great love for her (Simon 1989:296).

Despite these contrasts in Figaro's character, he still has the edge over the Count. The great British baritone, Thomas Allen, believes that the key to Figaro is a lightness of touch which should be even greater than the Count's and which should, at certain moments, make the latter look "like an absolute donkey". "The Count would be considered a very clever man in most societies. But he is up against a man like Figaro, who has been involved in, and manipulated, his life for years and thus knows more about him than is healthy" (Matheopoulos 1986:149). Allen especially loves the role of Figaro because of its "vital spark, the sharpness of touch and the alertness it requires, plus the undercurrent of something bordering on the dangerous" (Matheopoulos 1986:149).

The Count

The Count, however, preserves a slightly pompous aspect. His commanding tones are especially well presented in Act II when he compels the Countess to open the little room where he believes Cherubino is hiding. The women's voices bubble about his loud and powerful tones like frightened birds. To everyone's surprise Susanna then emerges to the accompaniment of a tune with ironically grave martial dignity (Scholl & White 1970:160).

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Count Almaviva is, like Figaro, an extremely complex character. His main interest in the opera seems to be the fulfilment of his amorous desires and the intrigue surrounding his efforts to seduce Susanna. Although he is seemingly unfaithful to his wife, he reveals his true love for her when he thinks she is hiding Cherubino in her room. He grows passionate, fearful, and vulnerable (Simon 1989: 297).

The Count's main interests in the opera seem to be the fulfilling of his amorous desires and the intrigue surrounding his efforts to seduce Susanna. However, the truth goes much deeper than this. He becomes a representative of the feudal-patriarchal nobles who refuse to recognise the emancipation of the bourgeoisie until they are forced to do so by their loss of power. Even though he theoretically still holds the ultimate authority on his estate and has the power to prevent the marriage of Figaro and Susanna, he discovers through the course of the opera his inability to fulfil his frivolous desires (through money, his *droit du seigneur* or intrigues) and the gradual dismantling of aristocratic power until the end when he experiences final defeat (Braunbehrens 1990:280). The Count's role also aptly demonstrates the double standards of his day in that he becomes extremely angry when he suspects his wife of infidelity, but he does not seem to have a problem with his own unfaithfulness and pursuit of women.

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It is interesting to note how Beaumarchais describes the Count in his original play, "It was customary in those days for great noblemen to treat any design upon the fair sex in a spirit of levity The part is all the more difficult to play well in that it is always the unsympathetic role. The depravity of his morals should in no way detract from the elegance of his manners. He should be played with great dignity yet with grace and affability" (Wood 1964:220). In comparison to the Count in the opera, Beaumarchais's Count still has the added dimensions of dignity appropriate to a Spanish aristocrat and also displays considerable insight into his own mentality (Steptoe 1988:111).

The Italian bass-baritone Ruggero Raimondi views the Count's continuous search for love as an attempt to cling to his youth, which is constantly

challenged by the presence of Cherubino. He finds the Count a sad, rather than a comic, character who is aware of being trapped in a web of intrigue, but somehow cannot unravel it. He is challenged with new situations all the time and "every time he comes close to unravelling the intrigue he senses around him, it eludes him even further" (Matheopoulos 1986:248).

The two female counterparts

The two main female roles and counterparts to Figaro and the Count are Susanna and the Countess. As in Beaumarchais's play, they are on stage (and sing) far more than the male protagonists. Both of them contrive to conquer their men with their female tricks and spin the fine strands of their amorous play with masterly cunning. The Countess is the experienced woman of the world abandoned by her lover, whereas the young and infatuated Susanna is the perfect complement to Figaro (Paumgartner 1945:343).

The Countess

In his original theatre play Beaumarchais notes that the Countess's role is one of the most difficult to play. However, compared to Mozart and Da Ponte's Countess, he does not allow her to delve into her emotions to deeply. He describes the Countess as following: "Torn between two conflicting emotions she should display only a restrained tenderness and very moderate degree of resentment, above all nothing which might impair her amiable and virtuous character in the eyes of the audience" (Wood 1964:220).

In the opera the Countess is portrayed as being desperately unhappy. The mere fact that she is only introduced at the beginning of the second act alone in her room emphasises her isolation and loneliness. Nevertheless, despite her unhappiness, she never becomes pathetic and never loses her intelligence, wit and hope.

Even though she feels humiliated by her husband's indiscretions, she maintains her confidence and elegance. When she decides to go along with

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Susanna's plans in trapping the Count, she shows her courage and wit, and gets the opportunity to prove him wrong. She finally teaches him that she is really very strong, smart and worthy of his affection and gets an overdue apology from him (Simon 1989: 297).

The role of the Countess is the first Mozart role that the Italian lyric soprano, Barbara Frittoli, ever sang. She finds it a difficult role and believes that the Countess should not be portrayed as being too young.

"She is not the Rosina of Barbiere, but she is not the Marschallin of Der Rosenkavalier either. She is somewhere in between, still young enough to indulge in the whole rigmarole with Susanna even though she realises how irregular it is for her to stoop to ask her maid for help. I try to make her very active, agile and energetic. Although she is married to a nobleman and knows she has to carry herself with a certain aplomb, she nevertheless abandons this and dresses in servants' clothes in order to trap her husband. A woman who is willing to do this must be a very particular sort of person, cunning in a way reminiscent of Rosina in Barbiere - a Rosina mellowed by the years and by Mozart's being an Austrian rather than an Italian composer. In her first aria 'Porgi, amor' you have to establish a character out of nothing. You have an aria that sounds like heaven on earth but which has to explain what this woman is about, that nostalgia for lost happiness which is the real cause of her misery. That is what kills her, much more than the Count's momentary infatuation with Susanna" (Matheopoulos 1998:61).

Nevertheless, the American soprano, Carol Vaness, has a somewhat different view of the Countess. She believes the Countess is still the young, laughing, fun-loving Rosina in her private life (especially in the scenes with Cherubino) but in public she has to put on her Countess act. "This way when it comes to 'Dove sono' the contrast between the laughing woman the audience had just seen and the sadness of this aria makes a far greater impact on the audience" (Matheopoulos 1998:225).

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Susanna

Susanna is also a highly developed character in the opera. In the opening scenes she is playful, contented and happy. Although she is very bright and seems to be sure of herself, she becomes insecure and vulnerable when she learns about the Count's advances. Her reaction towards Marcellina (who wants to marry Figaro) betrays her jealousy and her lack of confidence as a woman and as Figaro's fiancée. This is especially evident when she discovers Marcellina and Figaro embracing after the court scene. She reacts passionately and angrily, and thus reveals her fear of betrayal but also her love for Figaro. However, earlier on in the first act Susanna does manage to defend herself with quick thinking and witty insults to Marcellina. Susanna shows her loyalty towards the Countess by openly speaking to her about the Count's intentions and disclosing her plans to teach him a lesson (Simon 1989: 296).

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Italian mezzo-soprano, Cecilia Bartoli (who swopped the role of Cherubino for that of Susanna when she grew older) admires Susanna's ability to maintain good relations with everyone. "That is one of the greatest qualities anyone can have. She is friends with Cherubino. She has her bond with Figaro and she is the Countess's confidante. She is always very definite, very clear about where she stands. But she's also elastic and diplomatic with those around her, while always maintaining her dignity." (Matheopoulos 1998:253-254).

However, Bartoli does acknowledge the delicacy of Susanna's situation with the Count and that that is by far the most difficult relationship to handle. "She struggles to maintain a good contact with the Count: she never plays with his feelings, but simply confronts him with the fact that what he is doing is not right. She is never acquiescing, she never thinks that as he is the Count she had better accept his advances so as to have a better life (Matheopoulos 1998:253-254).

The American soprano, Barbara Bonney, counts the role of Susanna as one of her favourites and has sung it numerous times. She has a completely

different view on Susanna and her motives. "Susanna is a very clever girl who wants a better position in life than the one she holds and knows what she is capable of getting. The Count knows this, too, and it's what makes her so attractive to him. The Countess, on the other hand, is a real mess. She has the greatest music ever written, she has 'Dove sono', but she's a mess of a woman. In fact the Countess's life is acted through Susanna's will. So Susanna has to be two people and this is what takes so much energy" (Matheopoulos 1998:12)

She also believes that Susanna is fond of Figaro, but not in love with him. "I think he's all that she can get. He's a powerful man in the household and the Count's personal valet" (Matheopoulos 1998:12). However, she doesn't think that he is very smart. "When she slaps him quite hard two or three times in the opera she really means it. If she were truly in love with him, she wouldn't do that. Cherubino's attentions she quite enjoys but she knows he's a waste of time. Basically I think that she fancies herself...and the Count. She feels terribly guilty about this" (Matheopoulos 1998:12).

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Cherubino

According to Beaumarchais, the basis of Cherubino's character is an undefined and restless desire. "He is entering on adolescence all unheeding and with no understanding of what is happening to him, and throws himself eagerly into everything that comes along. In fact, he is what every mother, in her innermost heart, would wish her own son to be even though he might give her much cause for suffering" (Wood 1964:222). He also adds that Cherubino is very bashful in the Countess' presence but otherwise a very charming young rascal (Wood 1964:222).

This restlessness and continuous play of contrasting emotions is reflected very aptly in Mozart and Da Ponte's Cherubino, especially in his two arias. He is portrayed as a young man struggling to cope with his new emotions towards women and his fluctuating state of half boy, half man, is very attractive to the ladies. This innocence and youth combined with his beauty

transform him into a kind of poltergeist in the opera who causes trouble for both the women who are charmed by him and the men who feel annoyed or threatened by him (Paumgartner 1945:343).

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Chapter 7

Transformation from play to opera

When a play is transformed into an opera, the librettist has to adhere to requirements different from those of a play. Accordingly, situations or speeches of the original play are omitted, altered or added to create a greater scope for musical expression and development.

To get a better understanding of how Da Ponte alterea Beaumarchais's play into a suitable libretto for Mozart's opera, the order of events and main scenes of each act are directly compared on the following pages in the form of a tabular summary.

This tabular summary is followed by discussions of the librettist (Section A) and composer (Section B) at work.

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Order of events in play and opera

* The Italian character names are used for both the play and opera

Play (Beaumarchais)	Opera (Da Ponte)
	Overture
Act I Scene: A bedroom partly stripped of furniture; a large high-backed chair in the middle. Figaro with a six-foot rule is measuring the floor. Susanna is trying on a wreath of orange blossom in front of the mirror (Wood 1964:107)	Act I Scene: A partly-furnished room, with an easy-chair in the centre. Figaro with a measure in his hand, Susanna at the mirror, trying on a hat decorated with flowers (Salter 1968: 28). Scene 1:
Dialogue: Figaro + Susanna (Wood 1964: 107 – 110)	**Duet: Figaro + Susanna** ("Cinque…dieci…" – Seven…fourteen…) **Duet: Figaro + Susanna** ("Se a caso madama la notte ti chiama" – Some night if your mistress should ring)
	Scene 2: Figaro alone, feverishly pacing up and down the room, rubbing his hands (Salter 1968: 42).
Monologue: Figaro (Wood 1964: 110 – 111)	**Cavatina: Figaro** ("Se vuol ballare" – Should my dear master want some diversion)
Dialogue: Marcellina + Bartolo (Wood 1964: 111 – 114)	Scene 3: Bartolo and Marcellina with a contract in her hand (Salter 1968: 44) **Aria: Bartolo** ("La vendetta" – Taking vengeance) Scene 4: Marcellina, later Susanna, carrying a lady's cap, a ribbon and a dress (Salter 1968: 48).
Dialogue: Marcellina + Susanna (Wood 1964: 114 – 115)	**Duet: Marcellina + Susanna** ("Via resti servita" – To greet you, my lady)
Dialogue: Susanna + Cherubino (Wood 1964: 115 – 118)	Scene 5: Susanna, later Cherubino (Salter 1968: 54). **Aria: Cherubino** ("Non so più cosa son, cosa faccio" – I can't give you a good explanation) Scene 6: Cherubino, Susanna, later the Count Cherubino, seeing the Count approaching,

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	hides behind the armchair (Salter 1968: 62) <u>Scene 7:</u> Susanna, Count + Basilio (Salter 1968: 68).
Scene: Susanna, Count, Basilio (Wood 1964: 118 – 122)	**Trio: Count, Basilio + Susanna** ("Cosa sento! Tosto andate" – That's the limit! Go this minute!)
Scene: All (incl. Countess) + Peasants (Wood 1964: 122 – 128)	<u>Scene 8:</u> Figaro with a white veil in his hand: villagers dressed in white scatter before the Count flowers arranged in little baskets (Salter 1968: 86). **Chorus: Country men + women** ("Giovani liete" – Strew in his praises)
Speech: Figaro (Wood 1964: 126)	**Aria: Figaro** ("Non più andrai" – From now on)
<u>Act II</u> Scene: A bedroom furnished with great splendour, a bed in a recess; a dais downstage of it; a door upstage right; door to a small closet downstage left; door upstage to the maid's quarters; window at the other side (Wood 1964: 129)	<u>Act II</u> <u>Scene 1:</u> A handsome room with an alcove. The Countless, alone (Salter 1968: 100).
Dialogue: Countess + Susanna (Wood 1964: 129 – 130)	
Speech: Countess (Wood 1964: 130)	**Cavatina: Countess** ("Porgi, aor, qualche ristoro" – Pour, O love, sweet consolation)
Scene: Countess, Susanna + Figaro (Wood 1964: 131 – 133)	<u>Scene 2:</u> The Countess, Susanna, later Figaro (Salter 1968: 100).
Scene: Countess, Susanna + Cherubino (Wood 1964: 133 – 137)	<u>Scene 3:</u> The Countess, Susanna, later Cherubino (Salter 1968:112).
Song: Cherubino (to the tune of "Marlbrough s'en va t'en Guerre") (Wood 1964: 134 – 135)	**Canzona: Cherubino** ("Voi che sapete" – You know the answer)
Speech: Susanna (Wood 1964: 136)	**Aria: Susanna** ("Venite, inginocchiatevi" – Come here and kneel in front of me)
Scene: Count, Countess + Cherubino (Wood 1964: 137 – 138)	<u>Scene 4:</u> Count, Countess + Cherubino (Salter 1968: 132).
Scene: Countess + Count (Wood 1964: 138 – 139)	<u>Scene 5.</u> The Countess and the Count (Salter 1968: 134).

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Scene: Count, Countess, later Susanna (Wood 1964: 139 – 141)	Scene 6: Count, Countess, later Susanna (Salter 1968: 138). **Trio: Count, Countess + Susanna** ("Susanna, or via sortite!" – Susanna, what's the matter?) Scene 7: Susanna hurries out of the alcove; later Cherubino coming out of the dressing-room (Salter 1968: 148).
Dialogue: Susanna + Cherubino (Wood 1964: 141)	**Duet: Susanna + Cherubino** ("Aprite, presto aptrite" – Unlock the door and hurry!)
Scene: Countess + Count (Wood 1964. 142 – 143)	Scene 8: The Countess, and the Count with tools for opening the door: he examines all the doors (Salter 1968: 152).
Finale: Count, Countess, Susanna, Figaro, Antonio, Marcellina, Bartolo + Basilio (Wood 1964: 143 – 157)	**Finale: Count, Countess, Susanna, Figaro, Antonio, Marcellina, Bartolo + Basilio** The Count and Countess, later Susanna in the dressing-room (Salter 1968: 158). ("Esci ormai, garzon malnato" – Out you come don't waste a moment)
Scene: Count, Countess, Susanna (Wood 1964 144 – 147)	Scene 9: The afore-mentioned, and Susanna coming out of the dressing-room (Salter 1968: 164)
Scene: Count, Countess, Susanna + Figaro (Wood 1964: 147 – 149)	Scene 10 The afore-mentioned and Figaro (Salter 1968: 176). ("Signori, di fuori son già i suonatori" – My lord and lady, the musicians are outside)
Scene: Count. Countess, Susanna, Figaro + Antonio (Wood 1964. 149 – 152)	Scene 11. The afore-mentioned. Antonio the gardener comes in furiously with a broken pot of carnations (Salter 1968: 184).
Scene. Afore-mentioned + Marcellina, Bartolo + Basilio (Wood 1964: 152 – 156)	Scene 12: The afore-mentioned, Marcellina, Bartolo and Basilio (Salter 1968: 204). ("Voi signor, che giusto siete" – Oh my just and noble lord)
***** During the Interval attendants arrange the Great Hall: they bring in benches for the lawyers which are placed to either side but leaving free passage behind. Mid-stage they put a platform with two steps and set the Count's chair on it Downstage they set a table for the clerk and his stool beside it and	

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seals for Brid'oison and the other judges on either side of the Count (Wood 1964: 156).	
<u>Act III</u> Scene: A room in the castle known as the Throne Room, which serves as an audience chamber: on one side a canopy over a portrait of the king (Wood 1964: 157).	<u>Act III</u> <u>Scene 1</u> A large hall (Salter 1968: 210)
Dialogue: Count + Pedrillo (Wood 1964. 157) Dialogue: Count + Figaro (Wood 1964. 158 – 164)	<u>Scene 2:</u> The countess, Susanna and the Count. The Countess and Susanna stay in the background, unseen by the Count (Salter 1968: 212)
Dialogue: Count + Susanna (Wood 1964: 164 – 165)	**Duet: Count + Susanna** ("Crudel! perchè finora" – But why, why make me suffer)
Scene: Figaro, Susanna + Count (Wood 1964. 165)	<u>Scene 3.</u> Figaro, Susanna and the Count (Salter 1968: 224) <u>Scene 4:</u>
Monologue: Count (Wood 1964. 165 – 166)	**Recitative + Aria: Count** ("Hai già vinta la causa! Vedrò, mentr'io sospiro" – You have won the decision?, Shall I look on desiring)
Scene: Count, Marcellina, Brid'oison, Figaro, Bartolo and Antonio (Wood 1964: 166 – 174)	<u>Scene 5:</u> The Count, Marcellina, Don Curzio, Figaro and Bartolo (Salter 1968: 228)
Scene: Marcellina, Figaro, Bartolo, Brid'oison, Count + Susanna (Wood 1964: 174 – 177)	**Sextet: Marcellina, Figaro, Bartolo, Don Curzio, Count + Susanna** ("Riconosci in questo amplesso" – Now at last I may embrace you)
Speech: Marcellina (Wood 1964: 175 – 176) **Scene: Marcellina, Bartolo, Figaro and Susanna** (Wood 1964: 177 – 180)	<u>Scene 6.</u> Marcellina, Bartolo, Figaro and Susanna (Salter 1968: 246)
<u>Act IV</u>	<u>Scene 7.</u> Barbarina and Cherubino (Salter 1968: 248)
Dialogue: Susanna + Figaro (Wood 1964: 181 – 183)	<u>Scene 8:</u> Countess alone (Salter 1968:250) **Recitative + Aria: Countess** ("E Susanna non vien! Dove sono i bei momenti" – And Susanna is late, Are they over, those cherished moments) <u>Scene 9:</u> The Count and Antonio (Salter 1968: 252) <u>Scene 10:</u> The Countess and Susanna (Salter 1968: 254)

University of Cape Town

Dialogue: Susanna + Countess (Wood 1964. 183 – 185)	**Duet: Susanna + Countess** ("Che soave zeffiretto" – How sweet the breeze)
Scene: Cherubino, Barbarina and country girls (Wood 1964: 185 – 186)	Scene 11: The afore-mentioned and: Cherubino dressed as a peasant girl, Barbarina and other village girls dressed in the same way, with bunches of flowers (Salter 1968: 260). **Chorus: Country girls** ("Ricevete, o padroncina" – Mistress, dear, accept these flowers)
Scene: Afore-mentioned, Count, Figaro + Antonio (Wood 1964. 186 – 188)	Scene 12: The afore-mentioned, the Count and Antonio Antonio, holding Cherubino's cap, enters very quietly, pulls off Cherubino's headdress and puts the cap on him (Salter 1968: 264) Scene 13: The afore-mentioned and Figaro
Finale: All (Wood 1964. 188 – 196)	**Finale: Figaro, Susanna, Countess, Count + Chorus** ("Ecco la marcia" – There's the procession Scene 14: Hunters with rifles on their shoulders; villagers Two young girls carrying a bridal hat with white feathers, two others, a white veil; two more, gloves and bouquet. Figaro with Marcellina, Bartolo with Susanna Two girls begin the chorus, which the others take up. Bartolo leas Susanna to the Count, and she kneels to receive the hat etc form him Figaro leads Marcellina to the Countess similar business (Salter 1968: 278)
Act V Scene: A chestnut grove in a park; pavilions, kiosks, or garden temples are on either side; upstage is a clearing between two hedges; a garden seat downstage. It is dark (Wood 1964: 197)	**Act IV** Scene 1: The garden. Barbarina alone, later Figaro and Marcellina
Monologue: Barbarina (Wood 1964. 197)	**Cavatina: Barbarina** ("L'ho perduta, me meschina" – I have lost it, Heaven help me!)
Scene: Figaro, Basilio, Antonio, Bartolo, Brid'oison, valets, workmen (Wood 1964: 197 – 199)	Scene 2. Barbarina and Figaro (Salter 1968: 282). Scene 3 Marcellina and Figaro (Salter 1968: 288). Scene 4.

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	Aria: Marcellina ("Il capro e la capretta" – The birds and beasts)
	<u>Scene 5:</u> The depths of the garden. Barbarina alone, with some fruits and sweetmeats (Salter 1968, 292).
	<u>Scene 6:</u> Figaro alone, with a cloak and dark lantern; then Bartolo, Basilio and a group of workmen (Salter 1968: 294).
	<u>Scene 7:</u> Basilio and Bartolo (Salter 1968.296).
	Aria: Basilio ("In quegli anni" – Youth is headstrong)
	<u>Scene 8.</u>
Monologue: Figaro (Wood 1964: 199 – 202)	**Recitative + Aria: Figaro** ("Tutto è disposto. Aprite un po' quegli occhi" – It won't be long now. O fellow man, be smarter!)
Scene: Susanna, Countess, Marcellina, Figaro, Cherubino (Wood 1964: 202 – 203)	<u>Scene 9:</u> Susanna and the Countess, both in disguise, Marcellina and Figaro (Salter 1968 306)
	<u>Scene 10:</u> The afore-mentioned, without Marcellina (Salter 1968 306)
	Recitative + Aria: Susanna ("Giunse alfin il momento. Deh vieni, non tardar" – This at last is the moment Beloved, don't delay)
	<u>Scene 11:</u> The afore-mentioned, later Cherubino (Salter 1968: 310).
Finale: Cherubino, Countess, Count, Susanna, Figaro, Barbarina, Marcellina, Basilio, Bartolo, Antonio + Brid'oison (Wood 1964: 203 – 217)	**Finale: Cherubino, Countess, Count, Susanna, Figaro, Barbarina, Marcellina, Basilio, Bartolo, Antonio + Don Curzio** ("Pian, pianin le andrò più presso" – Very softly I'll approach her) <u>Scene 12:</u> (Salter 1968: 314) <u>Scene 13:</u> Figaro and Susanna (Salter 1968. 326) <u>Scene 14/Final scene.</u> **("Gente, gente, all'armi, all'armi" – Ho there! Bring your swords)**

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Section A: The librettist at work

The above comparison of the order of events in the play and opera reveals their many similarities (especially in the first two acts), but also some significant changes (from Act IV to the end). The most obvious difference is the length of the opera compared to the play. The opera consists of four acts whereas the original play consists of five acts. In reality the duration of the opera is not much shorter than the play (they were both exceptionally long compared to other plays/operas of their time), but Da Ponte chose to condense Acts Three and Four of the play into one act. He also chose to arrange the actions of the play quite differently in his libretto. He did this for various reasons to make the text more suitable for opera libretto and more relevant and politically acceptable for his contemporaries. It would also leave greater scope for Mozart as opera composer.

At this point it is interesting to mention Da Ponte's report in his Memorie that Beaumarchais admired the libretto of Le nozze di Figaro for "contracting so many *colpi di scena* in so short a time, without the one destroying the other" (Carter & Link in Sadie 2001:9). Whether this statement was really made by Beaumarchais is not of great importance, but what does matter is that it reflects Da Ponte's view of and pride in his own abilities and achievement (Carter & Link in Sadie 2001:9).

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Beaumarchais's court scene

The original court scene in Act III of Beaumarchais's play is omitted in the opera. In the original play Figaro is put on trial and he has to argue his case in highly entertaining detail from Act III, Scene 12 onwards until the judge's final ruling at the end of Scene 15 and the recognition of Marcellina and Bartolo as his long-lost parents. Beaumarchais expands this scene to focus on the judge and ridicule the inefficiency and corruption of the judicial system in France

and, in particular, to mock Judge Goëzman, who caused so many problems for him. As explained earlier, the judge's name in the play is Don Guzman Brid'oison, and would have been easily recognised by the Parisian audience in Beaumarchais's lifetime.

However, this scene has no significance to any audience outside France and the snappy wordplay will lose its effectiveness in an opera libretto. Consequently, Da Ponte wisely decided to cut it (by making the trial scene happen off-stage) and only allow Don Curzio to arrive with the news of the court's decision that Figaro should either marry Marcellina or pay her his debt (Act III, Scene 5).

This is immediately followed by the recognition scene and sextet. The dramatic essence of this moment is thus strengthened in that Da Ponte chose to provide more text for ensemble singing, fully exploited by Mozart, who created a perfect example of dramatic musical expression within a sound musical structure.

Order of events and action

In the first two acts Da Ponte follows Beaumarchais closely in the order of events. From the very first dialogues between Figaro and Susanna (two duets in the opera) in Act I right through to the scene at the end of Act II with Cherubino hiding from the Count, there are no big surprises. The only exception is that Act II of the opera starts with the Countess being alone in her bedroom and singing a *cavatina* bemoaning her lost love. In the play Act II starts immediately with a dialogue between the Countess and Susanna. In the play the audience has also already had a fleeting glimpse of the Countess in the final ensemble scene of Act I. Da Ponte, however, chooses to present the Countess in a much more noble fashion for the first time with her solo at the beginning of Act II. She also is featured as desolate and inconsolable again in the middle of Act III with another solo aria in the true *opera seria* sense.

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Pedrillo

In Beaumarchais's play Act III starts with a conversation first between the Count and his huntsman Pedrillo and then between the Count and Figaro. Da Ponte chooses to omit these scenes and the character of Pedrillo from the opera (partly to save time, but also because Figaro's politically daring speeches to the Count concerning class privileges would not be accepted in the opera by the Austrian emperor).

However, in Beaumarchais's play, Pedrillo has to run an errand which is necessary for the continuity of the plot. Da Ponte solves this problem by getting Basilio to run the errand. This is perfectly convincing, since Basilio is one of the Count's confidants.

Marcellina and Figaro

Near the end of Beaumarchais's Act IV Marcellina features with her great "feminist" speech bemoaning the plight of women. Da Ponte chooses to omit this speech at this point, but retains the material by using it for her solo aria in Act IV of the opera. The famous political monologue of Figaro which was banned by the French king was also completely omitted and instead Figaro sings an aria about women's deceitfulness when he believes Susanna is about the meet the Count in secret.

The choice of arias

In deciding which sections of Beaumarchais' play could be treated as arias and ensembles, Mozart and Da Ponte sometimes took their cue from musical references. An example is Chérubin's romance "Mon coursier hors d'haleine" sung to the Countess in Act II that was transformed into Cherubino's "Voi che sapete" (Hodges 1985:69). Alternatively some of the speeches in the play were directly translated into arias, for example, Cherubino's "Non so più cosa son, cosa faccio" and Figaro's "Non più andrai farfallone amoroso" in Act I (Carter in Larue 1993:948).

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Sometimes an aria was also inspired by a remark of the character in Beaumarchais's play. In the first act Figaro's *cavatina* "Se vuol ballare, signor Contino" stems from his remark in Beaumarchais' text "Puis dansez, monseigneur" ("Would you like to dance, Sir"). Apart from the *cavatina* Da Ponte's Figaro ironically remarks twice elsewhere that he is making the ignorant Count dance to his tune (Hodges 1985:69).

Furthermore, Da Ponte selected certain sections of Beaumarchais's episodic organisation for extended musical treatment because of their pace, their importance to the overall intrigue and their possibilities for comic characterisation. Good examples are the trio in Act I "Cosa sento! Tosto andate" (from Act I, Scene 9 in the theatre play) and the Act II finale (Hodges 1985:69).

It was customary in Da Ponte's lifetime for all the singers to be supplied with at least one aria in which they could show off their voices. Da Ponte was obliged to create some opportunity for Mozart to compose smaller arias for these characters, e.g. Barbarina, Marcellina and Basilio. However, they are the weakest links in the opera as Da Ponte was unable to justify the inclusion of these arias from a dramatic point of view. The first three acts move quickly and the tension and excitement builds up to the sextet at the end of Act III, where Mozart brilliantly weaves the threads of the different main actions to a climax. But then the speed of events is stalled in Act IV by the three extra arias that were forced in. Apart from Barbarina's mournful *cavatina* over a lost pin (which is a good example of short but significant exposure and serves to show Mozart's exceptional skill as musician and dramatist), they are completely irrelevant to the denouement of the events and consequently the arias of Marcellina and Basilio are often cut by opera directors. Only once Act IV has advanced to the final aria of Figaro and of Susanna is the excitement resumed and the opera can end in the triumphant finale.

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Visual aspects

As the theme of The Marriage of Figaro is the conflict between the noble and servant classes, both Beaumarchais and Da Ponte/Mozart would concentrate on depicting the differences sufficiently. For both the play and opera the criteria would be based on the visual and aural perceptions of the audience. Visual aspects would most obviously include costumes and the appearance of the characters.

Beaumarchais included notes on the characters and their costumes in the first edition of Le Mariage de Figaro. He advised that the costumes should generally be in the "Old Spanish style" and gave very fine details. For example, he described Figaro's costume as following:

"Figaro wears the costume of a Spanish dandy, his head covered with a *redecilla* or Spanish hair net, a white hat with coloured ribbon, a lace neckerchief very loosely knotted, a waistcoat and breeches of satin with silver buttons and frogs of silver braid, a broad silk sash, garters with tassels on each leg, jacket in contrasting colour with facings the same colour as the waistcoat, white stockings and grey shoes "

(Wood 1964: 219)

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He also gave precise information on Figaro's character:

"One cannot too strongly recommend the actor who plays this role to get right into the part as did Monsieur Dazincourt. If he sees in it anything other than good sense seasoned with gaiety and sallies of wit - above all, if he introduces any element of caricature - he will diminish the effect of a role which, in the opinion of Monsieur Préville, the leading comic actor of our theatre, would bring honour to the talents of any player able to appreciate the fine shades of the part and fully rise to the opportunities it offers."

(Wood 1964: 220-221)

Use of language and style

In contrast to the visual aspects, the aural aspects would focus a lot on the type of language used and the style (and, finally, in the way in which Mozart

translates it into music). Composers relied on librettists to illuminate operatic characters, especially with respect to their social class. Some characters spoke in elevated or archaic language, designed to connote nobility, while others employed the comically straightforward language of the lower classes. For the Italian libretto of Le nozze di Figaro Da Ponte followed Beaumarchais's fine formulae of style and language very closely.

In Beaumarchais's play the servants, for example, would make use of colloquial language amongst each other, but would use much more formal language when addressing their superiors. The following conversation at the beginning of Act I between the two servants, Marceline and Bartholo is an example of the more informal and daring speech used:

"Bartholo (*watching Figaro go*): Just the same scoundrel as ever! If he escapes the gallows I predict that he'll end up as the most insolent, outrageous...

Marceline (*turns him about*): There you are! The everlasting Doctor! Always so grave and formal that one might die waiting for your help just as a certain person once got married in spite of all your precautions

Bartholo: Nasty-minded and spiteful as ever! Anyhow, why is my presence required at the castle? Has My Lord the Count had some mishap?

Marceline: No, Doctor.

Bartholo: Rosine, his deceitful Countess, is perhaps unwell, Heaven be praised!

Marceline She's listless, languishing, pining away

Bartholo: What's wrong with her?

Marceline: Her husband neglects her

Bartholo (*with satisfaction*) Ah! Noble husband! He avenges me.

Marceline: One doesn't know just how to describe the Count. He's both dissolute and jealous

Bartholo Dissolute from boredom. Jealous from vanity That goes without saying."

(Wood 1964: 111-112)

In another Act I scene, between the Count, the Countess, Figaro and Suzanne, Figaro makes use of formal language and flattery to subtly let the Count know that he knows of his desires to exercise his *droit du seigneur* with Suzanne and makes him decline it publicly:

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"The Count. Well? What do you want?

Figaro: My Lord! Your vassals, gratified by the abolition of a certain objectionable privilege which you, in your affection for My Lady...

The Count: Very well! The privilege is abolished. What do you want to say?

Figaro (*slyly*): That it is high time that the virtues of so good a Master were publicly acclaimed. Since I derive such signal benefit from it today, I would like my marriage to be the first celebration of it.

The Count (*more embarrassed still*): You are mistaken, my friend. The abolition of a shameful custom is no more than an acknowledgement of what is due to common decency. A Spaniard may aspire to achieve the conquest of beauty by his own assiduities, but to exact the first, the most precious enjoyment of it as a servile requirement - that's the tyranny of a vandal, not the privilege of a noble Castilian

Figaro: (*taking Suzanne by the hand*): Permit, then, that this young lady, whose honour your wisdom has preserved, may publicly receive at your hands, as a symbol of the purity of your intentions, this virginal toque adorned with white feathers and ribbons: accept this ceremony for all future marriages, and may these verses which we sing in chorus for ever preserve the memory...

The Count (*embarrassed*): If I didn't know that lover, poet, and musician are the three titles of indulgence for every sort of folly and...

Figaro: Join with me, friends!

All: His Lordship! His Lordship!"

(Wood 1964: 123-124)

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Choice of aria

Apart from style and use of language, Da Ponte and Mozart were able to take the aural aspect one step further by the choice of aria used for each character. In the Classical era, opera composers like Mozart and Gluck still relied heavily on the Baroque era's system of the *Affektenlehre* or the doctrine of affections. A character would portray one strong emotion (e.g. love, hate, anger or fear) and a specific aria type (either from the *opera seria* or *opera buffa* genre) would be implemented to achieve this. The noble characters would sing the bigger arias (in the style of *opera seria*), whereas the servant class would sing simpler songs that suit their personality and humbler lifestyle better.

Da Ponte's clear recipe

Da Ponte helped Mozart greatly with the composition of the music by writing a clear recipe that he could follow. Like any good librettist, Da Ponte took the essence of every speech or scene between characters and translated it not only language-wise from a spoken French to a singable Italian, but also translated it into specific musical forms in order to make the musical portrayal of every scene most convincing. For example, he wrote the text for songs or arias in a specific style or archetype model (e.g. the *Affektenlehre*) and it was then easy for Mozart to recognise that he had to compose an aria in a certain style. For example: The Countess' aria "Dove sono" in Act III is written as a *rondo aria* and, Cherubino's first aria "Non so più cosa son" in Act I is composed in the style of *aria agitato*. Cherubino's second solo, however, is composed as a simpler song, a *canzona*, as Beaumarchais also suggested in his play. It is interesting to note that Beaumarchais even suggested the melody to which Cherubino's composed text could be sung ("Marlbrough s'en va t'en Guerre").

In the above tabular comparison there is frequent evidence of how a monologue, dialogue or scene between numerous characters of the play has been translated into suitable arias, duets and ensemble pieces for the opera

The following are a few examples:

Example 1
Duet, Act I, Figaro and Susanna: "Cinque...dieci...venti...trenta..."

Beaumarchais: Act I, First dialogue: Figaro and Suzanne

Figaro: Nineteen feet by twenty-six

Suzanne. Look, Figaro, My wreath of orange blossom Do you like it better so?

Figaro: Splendid, my darling! Oh! How precious in an adoring bridegroom's eyes is the charming virginal wreath that adorns the head of his beloved on her wedding morning.

(Wood 1964: 107)

Da Ponte: Act I, First duet: Figaro and Susanna

Figaro: Five...ten...twenty...dhirty...thirty-six...forty-three
Susanna: Yes, I'm very pleased with that, it seems just made for me. Take a look, dear Figaro, Just look at this hat of mine
Figaro: Yes, my dearest it's very pretty; it looks just made for you.
Susanna and Figaro: On this morning of our wedding how delightful to my (your) dear one is this pretty little hat which Susanna made herself.

(Salter 1968: 28 + 30)

Very little of the original main thought has been changed. Apart from the fact that Susanna has a hat (in the opera) instead of an orange blossom wreath (as in the play), the only major difference is the last sentences in the opera duet where Figaro and Susanna sing together. For obvious reasons this had to be changed as in a normal dialogue two people would not speak the same thought together at the exact same time. In essence the moment remains the same.

Example 2
Duettino, Act I, Susanna and Marcellina:
"Via, resti servita, madama brillante"

Beaumarchais: Act I, Dialogue: Marceline + Suzanne:

Suzanne *(curtseying)*: Your servant, Madam! There's always something nasty about your remarks.
Marceline: *(curtseying)*: And I, yours! What is there nasty in that, may I ask? Isn't it right and proper that so liberal a nobleman should have a share in the happiness he procures for his servants?
Suzanne: Procures?
Marceline: That was the word used
Suzanne: Fortunately your jealousy is as notorious as your claims on Figaro are slight.
Marceline: I might have strengthened them had I cared to cement them by the same methods as yours.
Suzanne: Oh! The methods are well known to ladies of your learning and experience.
Marceline: And you have no experience? Innocent as sin, eh?
Bartholo *(drawing Marceline away)*: Good-bye, sweetheart of Master Figaro.

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Marceline *(curtseying)*: And object of My Lord's secret understanding.

Suzanne *(curtseying)*: Who holds you in the highest esteem.

Marceline *(curtseying)*: Will she not do me the honour of adding a measure of affection?

Suzanne *(curtseying)*: You may be sure that I leave you nothing to desire in that respect, Madam.

Marceline *(curtseying)*: Such a pretty young lady!

Suzanne *(curtseying)*: Sufficiently so to spoil your satisfaction –

Marceline *(curtseying)*: And above all so careful of her reputation –

Suzanne *(curtseying)*: Reputation one leaves to duennas.

Marceline *(outraged)*: Duennas! To duennas!

Bartholo *(checking her)*: Marceline!

Marceline: Let us go, Doctor. Or I shan't be able to control myself. Good day to you, Madam. *(Curtseys.)*

(Wood 1964: 114 – 115)

Da Ponte: Act I, Duet: Marcellina and Susanna:

Marcellina: Your humble servant, gracious lady.

Susanna: I'd not be so bold, worthy ma'am.

Marcellina: No, you go first, pray.

Susanna: No, no, after you.

Susanna + Marcellina: I know my place, I'd not so presume.

Marcellina: A bride-to-be first.

Susanna: A lady in waiting

Marcellina: The Count's favourite.

Susanna: The toast of Spain

Marcellina: Your qualities.

Susanna: Your bearing.

Marcellina: Your position.

Susanna: Your age.

Marcellina: I'll fly into a rage if I stay here any longer.

Susanna: Decrepit old witch, she's a laughing-stock.

(Exit Marcellina in a fury.)

(Salter 1968: 52 + 54)

Example 2 again shows little difference from the original text. Da Ponte's sentences are just shorter to make it easier for Mozart to musically portray how the two women snap at each other in a superficially civil (but in reality highly sarcastic) manner. Furthermore, unlike in the play, Bartolo is not

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present in this scene of the opera. This could be explained by the fact that it is a duet and there is no place for a third voice.

Example 3

Aria, Act I, Cherubino: "Non so più cosa son, cosa faccio"

Beaumarchais: Act I, Aria: Chérubin:

Chérubin (exalted): Upon my word it's quite true! I don't know what' coming over me. For some time I have had such a strange feeling within me. My pulse quickens at the very sight of a woman. The word love makes my heart go pit-a-pat. In fact, I feel such a need to say "I love you" to someone that I catch myself saying it to myself walking in the park, to your Mistress, to you, to the trees, to the clouds, to the wind which wafts them away with my fleeting words..

(Wood 1964: 117)

Da Ponte: Act I, Aria: Cherubino:

Cherubino: I no longer know what I am or what I'm doing, now I'm burning, now I'm made of ice

Every woman makes me change colour, every woman makes me tremble. At the very word love or beloved my heart heaps and pounds, and to speak of it fills me with a longing I can't explain! I speak of love when I'm awake, I speak of it in my dreams, to the stream, the shade, the mountains, to the flowers, the grass, the fountains, to the echo, the air, the breezes, which carry away with them the sound of my fond words .And if I've none to hear me I speak of love to myself.

(Salter 1968: 60 + 62)

Again it is more or less the same text that has been adapted by Da Ponte to create a suitable aria for Cherubino. The text has been transformed into many short phrases instead of longer sentences. This fragmentation allows Mozart the opportunity to compose an aria that portrays the urgency and confusion of Cherubino's emotional turmoil.

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Example 4
Recitative and Aria, Act IV, Figaro:
"Tutto è disposto" - "Aprite un po' quegli occhi"

Beaumarchais: Act V, Monologue, Figaro:

Figaro *(gloomily walking up and down in the dark)*: Oh, woman, woman, woman, feeble creature that you are! No living thing can fail to be true to its nature Is it yours to deceive? After stubbornly refusing when I urged her to it in the presence of her mistress – at the very moment of her plighting her word to me, in the very midst of the ceremony...and he smiled while he read I, the scoundrel! And I standing by like a blockhead! No, my Lord Count, you shan't have her, you shall not have her! Because you are a great nobleman you thing you are a great genius...Nobility, fortune, rank, position! How proud they make a man feel! What have *you* done to deserve such advantages? Put yourself to the trouble of being born – nothing more! For the rest – a very ordinary man! Whereas I, lost among the obscure crowd, had had to deploy more knowledge, more calculation and skill merely to survive that he has sufficed to rule all the provinces of Spain for a century! Yet you would measure yourself against me...etc...

(Wood 1964: 199 – 202)

Da Ponte: Act IV, Recitative and Aria, Figaro:

Figaro *(alone in a cloak)*. Everything is ready, the hour must be at hand, I hear someone...Is it she?...no, no one...it's very dark tonight...and now I begin to learn the foolish art of being a husband. Traitress! At the very moment of our wedding...He reading with pleasure, and I, watching him, unwittingly laughing at myself. Oh Susanna, Susanna, what anguish you have cost me! With that sweet face and those innocent eyes...Who would have believed it! Ah, to trust women is sheer folly. Just open your eyes, you rash and foolish men And look at these women; see them as they are, these goddesses, so called by the intoxicated senses, to whom feeble reason offers tribute.. etc.

(Salter 1968: 302 – 304)

Da Ponte begins this famous monologue of Figaro like Beaumarchais's Figaro. He talks about the deceit of Susanna. But, where Beaumarchais's Figaro then continues to talk about the unfair privileges of the ruling noble class and subsequently launches into his daring political speech which so enraged the French king Louis XVI, Da Ponte takes the safer route by letting Figaro continue with a lament on the wiles and treachery of the female sex.

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Even though the weighty content therefore has been altered, Da Ponte still manages to keep the serious mood that also allows Mozart to transpose the prevailing emotions of anger, bitterness and deceit into a full *opera seria* aria archetype.

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Section B: The Composer at work

Classical form

In Le nozze di Figaro Mozart's full realisation of the potential of the Classical style resulted in a comic masterpiece. He developed a musical style that fully meets the demands of comedy. This is evident especially in the wonderful ensembles where he applied two structural procedures (which he was developing at that time in his instrumental music) with great success to the opera score. He made use of contrapuntal techniques to enable the characters to present different points of view simultaneously, as well as the sonata form's organisation to exploit the ability of tonality in establishing and resolving musical conflicts that echo the conflicts and resolutions of the action. The finale of Act II is an excellent example and will be discussed later.

General musical structure and tonality

Although the opera consists of four acts, it is in basic binary structure, in which the first two acts constitute a unit against the last two Both sections of the opera end with large-scale finales. The first finale recapitulates the dramatic confusion and tension and the curtain falls on an unresolved situation. The second finale brings the ultimate solution. The beginning of the opera is in D major, which is tonic, and the first finale ends on the Neapolitan supertonic, or E-flat major. The beginning of the third act is in A major, the dominant of the tonic D, and the finale of the opera returns to the tonic, D major. Mozart seems to follow a form of stating a musical task in the opening measures of each number, which each subsequent movement sets out to solve *Cavatinas* in which a character is introduced, arias, duets, trios, sextets, choruses and finales follow pure and perfect musical structure throughout the composition (Levarie 1977: 233-245).

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Overture

Mozart's overture to the opera is composed in sonata form without development and full of sparkle and gaiety (Boyden 1973:271). Its *allegro* immediately sets the atmosphere and character of the comedy (Zentner & Würz 1960:76).

The role of the orchestra

Mozart's orchestration is central in the portrayal of the characters and the dramatic and emotional events on the stage. Woodwinds are figured especially prominently, for example, the combination of oboe and bassoon in the duets "Se a caso madama" (Figaro and Susanna) and "Che soave zefiretto" (the Letter Duet of Susanna and the Countess) and the Countess's aria "Dove sono", and the clarinet in the Countess's *cavatina* "Porgi amor" (Steptoe 1988 156-157)

Mozart's beautiful melodic lines merge with honestly portrayed characters and events to create not only a perfect picture of the Rococo world but also to reflect that era's understanding of human nature (Zentner & Würz 1960 76)

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Aria types

Mozart still made use of different formal aria types (for example, the complex two-part form in Figaro's aria "Aprite un po' quegl'occhi" in Act IV and the rondo in the Countess's aria "Dove sono" in Act III), but in general he chose to avoid the earlier aria forms in order not only to represent an action but also a variety of emotions, differences in social standing as well as social tensions (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001.300).

Characterisation

Whereas Da Ponte portrays very clear characters in his libretto, Mozart gives the characters greater depth by musical means. Each individual character and

situation is represented by specific melodies, rhythms and harmonic suggestions. He also makes use of dynamics to represent emotional change and in the bigger ensemble pieces Mozart individualises characters with specific melodies (Boyden 1973:271).

Repetition

Music requires a far greater use of repetition than would be acceptable in a spoken drama. In a play the progress of the story and action are for the most part linear. The rapid flow of the plot and a sustained level of tension are essential to keep the attention of the audience. However, in an opera the action is halted at certain times to allow for the development of musical material and structure, of which repetition is the most significant element. Such repetition does not necessarily have to be at the cost of dramatic tension and can in fact serve the dramatic situation or even enhance it, especially in the hands of masters such as Mozart and Da Ponte.

Some examples are the Act I trio "Cosa sento! Tosta andate", Act III sextet "Riconosci in questo amplesso" and the letter duet of Act III:

In the Act I trio of Susanna, Basilio and the Count "Cosa sento! Tosta andate" Basilio's phrase "Ah, del paggio" ("Ah, with the page") is ironically repeated when Cherubino is discovered in Susanna's room. Whereas the text is not repeated in the original play, repetition in this trio creates an opportunity for musical repetition, structure and, in this case, irony. Mozart's clever repetition of the phrase does not detract from the dramatic intensity of the moment but instead strengthens it.

The sextet of Act III "Riconosci in questo amplesso" is composed in sonata form and the recapitulation of the music of the "reconciliation" (i.e. the repetition of the musical material first introduced in the exposition) is justified by the explanation of Figaro's reconciliation with Susanna. She enters the scene only after Figaro has already been reconciled with his new-found parents, Marcellina and Bartolo. She finds Figaro embracing Marcellina and

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still is under the impression that Figaro must marry her in return for the money he owes her.

The Letter Duet of Susanna and the Countess in Act III is another good example of where the repetition in the music is justified by the dictation and reading back of the letter resulting in a perfectly balanced musical structure. In the original play the letter scene is extremely short and there is no reading back (or repetition of any kind) in the text.

Analysis of some solo arias and ensembles

Mozart's skill in expressing and interpreting the emotional content and development of the plot and the characters will now be illustrated through the analysis of some solo arias and ensembles.

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***Cavatina*, Act I, Figaro: "Se vuol ballare"**

The frustrated Figaro sings his first *cavatina* directly after Susanna tells him how the Count has been trying to make love to her. In this aria (in three-part form with a presto part in the middle) Figaro relates to the audience his resolve to thwart the Count and Don Basilio (the Count's go-between). The text of this aria provides Mozart with many opportunities for word painting and he makes the most of them through the orchestra. He reflects Figaro's belief in his own wit and abilities to outsmart the Count as well as his suppressed anger and sarcasm very aptly by composing the aria in the style of a courtly minuet, an elegant dance form which is normally associated with the noble class. This excellent choice of musical structure for this aria adds to Figaro's mockery of the Count and his lifestyle and, of course, also directly reflects the first few lines of the text: "If, my dear Count, you feel like dancing, it's I who'll call the tune."

Aria, Act I, Figaro: "Non più andrai"

Figaro ends off the first act of the opera brilliantly with an amusing and satirical aria that quickly became the most popular song of the opera. Its catchy tune and lively *vivace* tempo conjures up the excitements of Cherubino's future military life. Figaro contrasts Cherubino's life as an adolescent who is in love with all women with his new military life of a soldier marching through mud and snow. The text and basic contrast in mood offer Mozart many opportunities for musical characterisation. He makes use of woodwinds such as flutes, oboes and bassoons as well as trumpets and timpani to create a military atmosphere. At the end of the aria he brings this mockery of "military glory" to a climax by using march-like music with trumpets when Figaro sing his satirical words "Cherubino, alla vittoria, alla gloria militar (Cherubino, on to victory, on to military glory!) to a scared and very uncomfortable Cherubino (Boyden 1973:273).

Aria, Act IV, Figaro: "Aprite un po' quegli'occhi"

In this Act IV aria, Figaro is under the wrong impression that Susanna is unfaithful to him. He is very bitter and reproaches Susanna and all women for their infidelity. The orchestration reflects his situation very aptly in that the passage "the rest we'll pass over in silence; you all know what happens" is heavily underscored with horns. According to an old belief, a man whose wife is unfaithful, grows horns on his head. This tale and its accompanying musical pun would have been easily understood and recognised by Mozart's audience (Boyden 1973:274).

Interestingly this aria represents the most important dramatic change in Da Ponte and Mozart's opera from the original play. It replaces Figaro's famous monologue of Act V in Beaumarchais's original play (where he openly criticises the privileges claimed by the aristocracy by right of birth) that enraged Louis XVI immensely. Instead Da Ponte thought it wise to replace it with an outbreak of fury about the supposed infidelity of women.

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Aria, Act III, Countess: "Dove sono i bei momenti"

This aria resembles the Countess's Act II *cavatina* "Porgi amor" in being a soliloquy where she is plagued by the same mixed emotions of sadness, loneliness and self-pity. However, where "Porgi amor" was very introspective and without hope, "Dove sono" is different. This aria is much more understandable to the audience as they have already gained some information on the Countess's problems and how Susanna plans to help her. Whereas the Countess was without hope before, she now has a plan to take action and regain her dignity and her husband's love (Webster in Eisen 1991:170).

The aria is preceded by a recitative where the Countess expresses her doubt about Susanna's plan and also her fear of the Count's reaction if they were caught. She also feels humiliated that she has to rely on the help of her servants to help her regain her husband's love.

The aria consists of two parts. The first part is marked *Andantino* and is slow with long lines to reflect her sadness. It is composed in the style of a *da capo* aria. It starts off with "Dove sono", has a middle section and then returns to "Dove sono" with the same melody. In the second part of the ana the audience perceives the new side of the Countess. Her new hope and optimism are expressed by a faster *Allegro* from "Ah, se almen la mia constanza" (where she starts expressing her hope that her faithfulness and love might change the Count's heart). Whereas the first slower section of the aria is generally marked as *piano* (soft), the second part is much louder. Also the tessitura of the first part is mostly middle-voice, whereas the second part moves to the higher register and ends triumphantly with high notes and more virtuoso vocal lines to accentuate the Countess's new hope and joy.

Aria, Act IV, Susanna: "Deh vieni, non tardar"

Susanna's aria in Act IV "Deh vieni, non tardar" in which she sings of her approaching love is her only serious aria. This aria seems to reveal her

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genuine character. Whereas she is outwardly a *buffa* character, this beautiful aria shows her inner nobility which is equal to that of the Countess. Her intelligence, good sense and integrity elevate her above the other servants.

Even though Susanna has disguised herself and wants to teach Figaro a lesson (she knows that Figaro is eavesdropping and believes that she is really sincerely addresses this aria to the Count), this aria shows her true colours. This aria is truthfully what she would have sung to Figaro, if she were to meet him instead of the Count. In that sense it is a true reflection of her deeper feelings and love for Figaro (Webster in Eisen 1991:181).

The aria is composed in F major and follows after Susanna's recitative "Giunse alfin il momento ("At last comes the moment"). The 6/8 time and occasional dotted triplet figures remind one of a quick dance rhythm. However, the tempo is marked *Andante* and the slower tempo with the strings playing pizzicato make the aria very elegant and graceful. This portrays Susanna as very charming and seductive, which probably enrages the jealous (eavesdropping) Figaro even more. Furthermore, Susanna's lyrical melody seems to contradict the underlying dance pulse which also stresses the ambiguity of this aria. Figaro believes that it is sung to the Count, but in reality she sings it to Figaro.

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Aria, Act I, Cherubino: "Non so più cosa son, cosa faccio"

Cherubino sings this aria after a short recitative with Susanna. It is the very first time that the audience meets him and his aria immediately reveals much of his character. The combination of lyricism with sudden short phrases portrays Cherubino's confused emotions and ambivalent feelings towards women. The fast almost rushed *Allegro vivace* tempo together with the many different thoughts that follow each other so quickly create a feeling of urgency, breathlessness and even desperation. The young Cherubino's confusion is both charming and heart-warming and immediately creates a feeling of sympathy and warm support in the audience.

The structure of the aria is relatively simple. The main key is E-flat major and in general the harmonies are uncomplicated. As the aria progresses Cherubino's fantasies and different thoughts are expressed by dynamic and harmonic fluctuations (that are built on the relative keys of the home key, for example, the dominant in B-flat major). However, the most important feature of this aria is Mozart's use of appoggiaturas to represent Cherubino's sighs and desires.

The following passage is Cherubino's aria in Da Ponte's original Italian text (as sung in the opera) to show the exact places where Mozart uses appoggiaturas (especially downward appoggiaturas) to reflect Cherubino's feverish adolescent anxiety as sighs in his sung melodic lines. These places in the text are printed in bold.

Non so più cosa son, cosa **faccio**, or di foco, ora sono di **ghiaccio**, ogni donna cangiar di **colore**, ogni donna mi fa palpitar. Solo ai nomi d'amor, di **diletto**, mi si turba, mi s'altera il **petto** e a parlare mi sforza d'**amore** un **desio** ch'io non **posso** spiegar. Parlo d'amor **vegliando**, parlo d'amor so**gnando**, all'acque, all'ombre, ai **monti**, ai fiori, all'erbe, ai **fonti**, all'eco, all'aria, ai **venti**, che il **suon de' vani** accenti portano **via con** sé. E se non ho chi mi **oda**, parlo d'amor con me.

(Anon. 1987:8-9)

Translation

I no longer know what I am or what I'm doing. Now I'm burning, now I'm made of ice. Every woman makes me change colour, every woman makes me tremble. At the very word love or beloved my heart leaps and pounds, and to speak of it fills me with a longing I can't explain! I speak of love when I'm awake, I speak of it in my dreams, to the stream, the shade, the mountains, to the flowers, the grass, the fountains, to the echo, the air, the breezes, which carry away with them the sound of my fond words. And if I've none to hear me I speak of love to myself.

(Salter 1968:60-62).

Cherubino is exalted, as the text of his aria demonstrates. His adolescent ardour is perfectly expressed in the music by the overabundance of

University of Cape Town

appoggiaturas. In this example it is clear why appoggiaturas - downward moving ones in particular - are often compared with sighs. The same passage without the appoggiaturas would have much less tension and lose its urgency and is much less effective in expressing the young Cherubino's adolescent emotional turmoil.

The aria ends with a slower *Adagio* where Cherubino sings his last phrase "And if I've none to hear me I speak of love to myself". The phrase is divided in short fragments to show Cherubino's sudden hesitation and doubt. It also gives a feeling of the loneliness and self-doubt which are so typical of an adolescent's confusion and state of mind. After the pause on "con me" (to me) Cherubino swiftly ends his aria by repeating that he will simply tell all these things to himself if no-one else wants to listen.

Canzona, Act II, Cherubino: "Voi che sapete"

Cherubino's second solo, however, is composed as a simpler song, a *canzona*, as Beaumarchais also suggested in his play. He even suggested the melody to which Cherubino's composed text could be sung ("Marlbrough s'en va t'en Guerre"). Da Ponte and Mozart recreated this beautiful scene perfectly. The simplicity of Susanna's guitar accompaniment and the bashfulness of Cherubino in the presence of the Countess are echoed in the simple orchestral accompaniment by Mozart.

Aria, Act IV, Marcellina: "Il capro e la capretta"

Marcellina's speech about the plight of women originally occurs in the court scene of the play, but in the opera it becomes the content of her Act IV aria. In the court case the speech has more dramatic merit as it follows after Figaro and Marcellina's reconciliation. Marcellina laments the double standards for men and women and the fate of young girls who fall victim to the passing passions of young men and then are ruined for the rest of their lives. In the opera, however, Marcellina expresses (a much tamer version of) her feminist

University of Cape Town

outburst at the beginning of the fourth act, rather impeding the flow of the action.

The aria is composed in the G major key and has two parts. The aria starts out in the tempo of a minuet and is orchestrated with strings throughout. This choice of the minuet form fittingly reflects Marcellina's desire to be perceived as a stately older lady with something important to say. She wants to be taken seriously, but also wants to show that she can be elegant in her ways and pronounce her grievances in a decent way without losing control of her emotions. In its friendliness and elegance on the surface, this first part also sketches almost an idyllic scene of the different animals in nature that live together in peace and harmony and how the female animals (of even the fiercest creatures) are treated as equals by their male counterparts.

However, in the second part, Marcellina's mood changes and this is reflected in a tempo change to a faster *Allegro* and in the change from 3/4 to 4/4 time. In this part Marcellina leaves the niceties behind and gets to the point by clearly expressing her grievance against men's disrespectful treatment, their unfaithfulness and cruelty towards women.

As mentioned already, the main key is G major but right before the second *Allegro* part where Marcellina sings "Leave their fellows in peace and liberty" there is a short reference to the G minor key. It returns to G major via an Italian augmented sixth chord which resolves in the dominant chord. This Italian augmented sixth chord falls on the word "liberta" and has a *fermata*. The tension in the Italian augmented sixth chord together with the pause really singles out the word "libertà" as the most important in this aria. Consequently this one word "freedom" very aptly summarises the essence of Marcellina's grievance as well as her greatest desire in her life

The aria also contains long coloratura lines on important words such as "libertà" (again accentuating the idea of freedom, this time almost like a fluttering bird), "amiam" and "crudeltà" (stressing the love of the women and the cruelty of the men). Apart from the function of the coloratura to stress

University of Cape Town

certain thoughts, the chances are very good that the first Marcellina of this opera had an agility in her voice that she wanted to show off and that Mozart wrote this aria to suit her voice

Feminism

At this point it is appropriate to pause briefly and reflect on Mozart and Da Ponte's subtle advocacy of what has come to be called feminism throughout the opera. Even though Marcellina's aria could not really be dramatically justified in the course of events of the opera, they insisted on using her speech. This expressed their support of Beaumarchais's revolutionary sentiments on gender equality (albeit it in a more subtle way than in the original play), a topic only properly addressed almost two centuries later. Even though Beaumarchais, Da Ponte and Mozart lived in the era of Enlightenment, gender issues were still unheard of or extremely controversial.

Apart from Marcellina's aria, this support for feminism is best illustrated in the character of Susanna and her role (together with that of the Countess) in the course of the plot. Whereas Figaro remains the key character in all the action in Beaumarchais's Le Barbier de Séville, the tables have been turned in Le Mariage de Figaro. Now it is Susanna who is in complete control of the events. Figaro even seems ridiculous at times and, together, Susanna and the Countess outwit the men in the end.

In the opera Susanna (as compared to Figaro) and the Countess (as compared to the Count) appear on stage more frequently and also feature in more musical numbers than their male counterparts. Of course the focus in opera was shifting at this time towards the female voice and especially that of the soprano, which offered the widest scope to the composer. Le nozze di Figaro could probably be described as one of the greatest "feminist" operas of all time. In fact, in an era of gender equality, the opera could justifiably have been called Le nozze di Susanna!

University of Cape Town

Duet, Act I, Figaro and Susanna: "Cinque...dieci...venti...trenta..."

The first duet between Figaro and Susanna in the opening scene of Le nozze di Figaro is a perfect example of Mozart's brilliant ability to portray the true nature and feelings of his characters in even the most simple situations, like this normal domestic quarrel. He manages to create a little story out of almost nothing and does this with simple methods like the repetition of phrases and modulation to related keys:

Figaro: Five...ten...twenty...thirty...thirty-six... forty-three...
Susanna: Yes, I'm very pleased with that; it seems just made for me. It seems just made for me.
Figaro: Five...
Susanna: Take a look, dear Figaro
Figaro: Ten...
Susanna: Take a look, dear Figaro
Figaro: Twenty...
Susanna: Take a look
Figaro: Thirty...
Susanna: Take a look. Just look at this hat of mine.
Figaro: Thirty-six
Susanna: Just look at this hat of mine.
Figaro. Forty-three
Susanna: Take a look, dear Figaro, Just look at this hat of mine. This hat of mine. This hat of mine.
Figaro: Yes, my dearest it's very pretty; it looks just made for you. It looks just made for you
Susanna and Figaro: On this morning of our wedding how delightful to my (your) dear one is this pretty little hat which Susanna made herself.
Susanna. Take a look.
Figaro: Yes, my dearest.
Susanna. Take a look.
Figaro. It's very pretty
Susanna: Yes, I'm very pleased with that. Yes, I'm very pleased with that.
Figaro: Yes, my dearest it's very pretty.
Susanna: It seems just made for me.
Figaro: It seems just made for you.
Susanna: For me.
Figaro: For you.

University of Cape Town

Susanna and Figaro. On this morning of our wedding how delightful to my (your) dear one is this pretty little hat which Susanna made herself

The above extract shows the exact text that Mozart used for this duet. If compared to Beaumarchais's original text and Da Ponte's rendition of this text (already discussed in Section A of this chapter), it is clear that Mozart added the repeated phrases by own choice. Mozart added them to reflect something of the characters' personalities and emotions.

It is the day of their wedding and Susanna excitedly tries on her new hat. She looks at herself in the mirror and repeatedly asks Figaro to look and admire her hat. However, he does not answer immediately, being preoccupied with measuring the room for their bed. This could be a typical situation for a man and woman and most probably Mozart had personal experience of this kind of scenario.

So, in the beginning of this little scene both characters are wrapped up in their own thoughts and they only have a dialogue in the middle of the duet when Figaro finally responds to her requests. The duet ends then with the two singing together in one voice and looking forward to their life together as a married couple.

The differences in the characters' actions and attitudes in this duet are emphasised musically by Mozart. He starts off with a normal little domestic scene and gradually builds it up to a musical climax. First Figaro and Susanna sing contrasting musical lines and then when Susanna gets annoyed and asks Figaro repeatedly to look at her hat, Figaro finally responds to Susanna by singing a melodic line that was first sung by Susanna. As their dialogue progresses they first alternate with each other in their singing until they finally sing together in closer harmony, mostly a third apart.

In the beginning Figaro's phrases are short and fragmented and a typical reflection of someone counting and thinking out loud while taking measurements. In contrast to this Susanna's first lines are very lyrical to show

University of Cape Town

her joy and rapture at her new hat and the prospect of her wedding. When she tries to attract Figaro's attention, her singing changes. There are short rests between her phrases while she's waiting for him to answer. But one only hears his counting in those rests, which confirms his preoccupation and the fact that he is not listening to Susanna at all. As Figaro continues to ignore Susanna, her response becomes more and more insistent (as can be seen in Mozart's arrangement of the text). Mozart shows this very cleverly by making Susanna sing faster notes and by finally taking the rests away. Also the tessitura becomes higher and thus more penetrating and urgent than before. Susanna's irritation with Figaro reaches a climax when the key (which was mainly G major up to this point) suddenly changes to A major.

When Figaro finally responds to Susanna (by singing a phrase that she has sung earlier on) and calms her with his attention and compliments, the key turns to D major, which is one step closer to the original G major key and therefore lowers the musical and emotional tension.

Finally Figaro and Susanna sing together in close harmony and are back in the original G major and the tension of their little domestic quarrel is resolved

Duettino, Act III, Count and Susanna:
"Crudel! Perché finora farmi languir così?"

Da Ponte:

Count. Cruel one, why have you caused me thus to languish?
Susanna: My Lord, a woman always needs time before she says Yes
Count: Then you'll come into the garden?
Susanna: If it pleases you I'll come
Count: And you won't fail me?
Susanna: No, I won't fail you.
Count: In contentment I feel my heart full of joy
Susanna: Forgive my deception, you who truly love

Mozart:

Count: Cruel one, why have you caused me thus to languish?
Susanna: My Lord, a woman always needs time before she says Yes.
Count: Then you'll come into the garden?
Susanna. If it pleases you I'll come.

University of Cape Town

Count. You won't fail me?
Susanna: No, I won't fail you?
Count. You'll come?
Susanna: Yes
Count: You'll not fail?
Susanna No
Count: You'll really come?
Susanna No.
Count: No?
Susanna Yes! If it pleases you, I'll come
Count and Susanna:
Count. In contentment I feel my heart full of joy
Susanna (aside): Forgive my deception, you who truly love

In this duet Susanna is arranging to meet the Count in the garden that evening. Since she has no intention of doing so and is actually deceiving the Count, she is understandably nervous. In the original Da Ponte text Susanna only says "no" once and never says "yes" at all. However, Mozart changed the text in order to make the conversation more realistic and also to show Susanna's nervousness as she suddenly gives wrong answers to the Count. This probably also betrays her true thoughts on the matter (that she does not really want to give in to his flirtations).

The music begins in the key of A minor and changes to C major for Susanna's entry. After a few exchanges the music reverts to A minor and the Count is almost breathless with anticipation. His short phrases are fast and almost breathless when he suddenly doubts whether Susanna truly wants to meet him later in the garden. When the Count is convinced that Susanna will meet him in the garden, his joy is expressed by the modulation from A minor to A major and in contrast with his previous shorter phrases, he starts singing his text "In contentment I feel my heart full of joy" in longer and more elegant phrases.

In the middle of the duet Mozart modulates to E major when the Count becomes doubtful again about whether Susanna will truly meet him in the garden and he seeks reassurance from her again. The nervous and flustered Susanna suddenly answers "no" instead of "yes". The Count responds to this by repeating "no" with a loud note in his higher register to express his surprise and disbelief. Susanna nervously corrects her mistake with a higher pitched "yes" and both the Count and the music "relax" and the key returns to A

University of Cape Town

major. This part is repeated as the Count doubts Susanna again. Only this time the confused Susanna says "yes" instead of "no". The duet ends with the Count singing his happy long phrases again and Susanna singing a kind of counter-voice above him (which emphasises the fact that she speaks this last text aside and not to the Count, when she asks those who truly understand love to forgive her deception).

Sextet, Act III: "Riconosci in questo amplesso"

The sextet in Act III is an extraordinary achievement and an excellent example of Mozart's application of Classical form (and specifically sonata form) to portray action and intrigue on the operatic stage. It is not only beautiful music, but also manages to keep up the tension and speed of the narrative with great success.

Throughout the sextet Mozart is constantly varying his musical material, with new musical ideas even appearing in the final section. The different elements in the vocal parts are unified by the use of closely related ideas throughout the accompaniment.

The musicologist Charles Rosen brilliantly demostrates the sextet's sonata form in the chapter on comic opera of his book The Classical Style. Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven. He writes:"The adaptability of the sonata style to opera can be seen in its least complex and most perfect form in Mozart's own favourite among the individual numbers of Figaro, the great sextet of recognition in the third act, which is in slow-movement sonata form (i.e., without a development section, but with a recapitulation starting in the tonic – although the 'second group' of the exposition is sufficiently heightened and intensified here as to provide some of the effect of a development)" (Rosen 1971: 290).

University of Cape Town

The following is a simplified summary of the various themes:

Exposition

First theme: The sextet begins with Marcellina embracing her newfound son Figaro. She sings a simple theme in F major.

Second theme: The first theme is followed by a series of short phrases sung by the Count and Don Curzio expressing their astonishment and conclusion that the marriage between Marcellina and Figaro cannot proceed.

Third theme: Next come lyrical expressions of love between Marcellina, Bartolo and Figaro.

Beginning of bridge passage

Susanna's entrance: The exposition ends off with Susanna's entrance. Mozart changes the key to C major, which signifies a new development in the scene as Susanna tells the Count that she has come to pay off Figaro's debt to Marcellina. This also marks the beginning of the bridge passage.

Susanna sees Figaro embracing Marcellina: When Susanna sees Figaro embracing Marcellina, she misunderstands the situation and the music reflects her anger, moving now into C minor.

Figaro attempts to explain: The accompaniment moves into a repetitive ring as Figaro tries to explain

All the characters sing their thoughts: By this point all the characters on stage are singing, with several different musical lines reflecting the different points of view.

University of Cape Town

Recapitulation

Return to tonic: The situation is resolved when Marcellina succeeds in explaining matters to Susanna. Her explanation is preceded by the music's return to its original key (F major).

Return to first theme: With the return to F major comes the reappearance of the sextet's opening theme. Marcellina's text at this point would not fit this melody, so it is played by the orchestra.

Variation of 2nd theme: Susanna can hardly believe her ears and the phrase "sua madre" is thrown into the ensemble in a variation of the sextet's second theme.

Susanna's coloratura: As Susanna finally comes to terms with this new development her happiness is reflected in the coloratura that Mozart writes for her.

Finale, Act II: "Esci omai, garzon malnato"

Whereas the Le nozze di Figaro's beautiful solo arias were remembered and appreciated best by Mozart's audience, its big ensembles (especially the finales) are claimed today as Mozart's most glorious achievements (Kobbé 1954:79).

The finales of Acts II, III and IV carry the action forward by using typical *opera buffa* techniques. Changes in tempo, metre, tonality and orchestration produce an alternation between the creation and resolution of tensions and are always closely linked to the action on stage (Eisen & Sadie in Sadie 2001:300).

The lengthy finale of Act II, "Esci omai, garzon malnato", covers an incredibly wide span of 937 bars and is a masterpiece of sustained dramatic and

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musical invention with innumerable twists and turns to the plot, each one represented by a new musical development. It is a tour de fource in which Mozart gradually builds a symphonic crescendo culminating in a triumphant ending. To this day this is seen as one of the highlights of Mozart's creative genius (Paumgartner 1945:351). Gradually the tempo becomes faster and more characters are included, until the finale ends with seven characters on the stage and a fast *Prestissimo*. The finale consists of playful action episodes (that move the plot forward) that are alternated with more expansive reflection on those events (Tyler in Larue 1993:913).

The finale is filled with much action, including the discovery of Susanna hiding in the closet by the Count and Countess, the entrance of Figaro requesting an immediate wedding, the entrance of Antonio who is angry about his crushed flowers, and the arrival of Dr Bartolo, Marcellina and Don Basilio, who further complicate matters. The music is divided into three sections, which appear to be built around sonata form (Levarie 1977:107-123).

University of Cape Town

The following is a summary of the musical structure.

Exposition

First theme: Count at the dressing room door, *Allegro*, E-flat major, "Esci omai garzon malnato".

Second theme: Susanna from dressing room, *Andante*, B-flat major, "Signore, cos'è quel stupore?"

Development

Enter Figaro: Allegro, G major, "Signori, di fuori son già I suonatori"

Count asks about letter: *Andante*, C major, "Conoscete, signor Figaro, questo foglio chi vergò?"

Enter Antonio: *Allegro molto*, F major, "Ah, signor...signor".

Antonio produces papers: *Andante*, B-flat major, "Vostre dunque saran queste carte che perdeste".

Recapitulation

First theme (considerably modified): Enter Marcellina, Basilio and Bartolo, *Allegro assai*, E-flat major, "Voi signor, che giusto siete ci dovete ascoltar".

Second theme (considerably modified): *Più allegro*, E-flat major; Count peruses Figaro's contract with Marcellina, ensemble joins in, "Son confusa/o, son stordita/o, disperata/o, sbalordita/o".

Coda: Climax to previous section, *Prestissimo*, E-flat major, complete confusion, "Certo un diavol dell'inferno qui li ha fatti capitar".

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Conclusion

Le nozze di Figaro is an incomparable masterpiece that has been praised throughout its history for a variety of reasons. It is still popular today in the sense that it is very frequently performed and neither the public nor musicians ever tire of listening to it.

The opera combines a sensitivity and delicacy in its musical construction and workmanship with the all-important common touch (Kobbé 1954:69).

The Earl of Harewood writes in Kobbé's Complete Opera Book: "It is easy to pile superlatives when describing Mozart's Figaro but the plain fact is that an enormous number of opera-goers would proclaim Figaro the most entertaining operatic comedy they had ever heard" (Kobbé 1954:69).

Beaumarchais's Le Mariage de Figaro came closer to an *opéra comique* than any previous French play, a feature on which Mozart and Da Ponte capitalised. The structure of Beaumarchais's comedy largely survived the transformation into an opera libretto. Beaumarchais's innovative strategy in giving the lead to women (the Countess and Suzanne) when deceptions of the plot are devised, rather than to men as was more customary in theatrical practice, was also one of the elements that ensured the popularity of both the play and the opera.

Mozart and Da Ponte's Vienna was rather conservative and demanded certain changes to be made to the plot, mainly to its political but also to its sexual features. Figaro's famous monologue with his thrusts against the nobility disappeared almost entirely. The sexual overtones of the relationship between the Countess and Chérubin (which were considered almost shocking in the original play) were played down considerably in the opera.

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Marceline's feminist outbursts were reduced to a single and fairly expendable aria, and the trial scene, thought unsuitable for opera, was left out completely. Mozart and Da Ponte's Countess was much more innocent than Beaumarchais's. Even though her final gesture of forgiveness was touching enough in the original play, it could never come close to the sublimity achieved in the operatic version.

In 1793 a heavily revised version of the Mozart-Da Ponte opera was produced at the Paris Opéra, in French translation. As in an *opéra comique*, extensive parts of Beaumarchais's original spoken dialogue were reinserted in place of the recitatives. However, this production had no success (Rex in Sadie 1992:365).

In conclusion: Beaumarchais, Da Ponte and Mozart were all three key characters and arguably the most important and memorable figures of the eighteenth century in their respective artistic fields. They all were seen as individualists who caused controversies in various ways in their field of expertise. They lived in the era of Enlightenment: they all saw or personally experienced the French Revolution and felt its effect ripple through Europe and saw the slow changes in society and the rise of the bourgeoisie.

They all made valuable contributions in the battle to establish a new world-order of freedom, equality and fraternity in their own unique ways and by reflecting it in their revolutionary work. Therefore it comes as no great surprise that they should all be involved in representing one of the greatest feats of the Enlightenment: The Marriage of Figaro. Even though there might be small differences between the theatrical and operatic versions (brought about by the different circumstances in France and Austria), the overall message of freedom for humankind is the same and thus The Marriage of Figaro has achieved a timeless quality which has transcended its immediate context.

University of Cape Town

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