



GLYNDEBOURNE
EDUCATION

Opera Experience



Le nozze di Figaro

Wolfgang Amadeus
Mozart

Opera in three acts
Libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte

First performed
Vienna, 1st May 1786

This programme is generously supported by
The Foyle Foundation and



Le nozze di Figaro



Preparing for a workshop

This pack contains information about the basic storyline and characters of *Le nozze di Figaro* - it would be useful for your students to know something of this before the workshop. The entire pack will not take long to read.

Breaks and refreshments

There will be a break of approximately 30 minutes during the workshop, and about one hour and 45 minutes between workshop and performance at the theatre.

Please ensure that the students bring drinks, snacks and a packed meal as food and refreshments will not be available.

Parking

Please allow adequate time for parking before a workshop as workshops must start promptly (please make sure you check the start time of your workshop)

Information

Students below year 10 should not attend the workshop.

If you would like further information, please contact Glyndebourne Education on 01273 815023 or at tessa.chisholm@glyndebourne.com

Le nozze di Figaro

What will happen in a workshop

Many of the students who will attend our workshops have never been to see an opera before. The workshop will serve as an introduction to opera itself as well as the specific opera to be seen that evening.

The afternoon will consist of:

Warm up activities

Musical exercises

Dramatic exercises

Listening to singers from GOT Company

Discussing the opera

By the end of the workshop, the students will be ready to see and hear and enjoy the opera with genuine understanding.

Students should wear comfortable clothes suitable for physical activities (if you would like to please bring a change of clothes for the evening performance).



Le nozze di Figaro

Who's who

Count Almaviva

After expertly wooing Rosina (now his wife) in *The Barber of Seville*, the Count finds himself bored by married life and is increasingly interested in his female staff, especially Susanna. Seeking justification for his desire, he uncovers the ancient *droit du seigneur* (right of the Lord) which allows the Count to seduce any employee on her wedding night.

Baritone

Countess Almaviva

Neglected by her husband after only a few years of marriage, the Countess Rosina is upset and is set apart from other characters by her serious music. However, she is soon convinced by Susanna that the Count needs to be taught a lesson.

Soprano

Figaro

Figaro, now the Count's valet, was the crafty engineer of the plan which got the Count and Countess together in *The Barber of Seville*. But since the Count has turned his amorous attention on Figaro's fiancé Susanna, he has lost all trust for his boss and is intent on punishing the Count.

Baritone

Susanna

Savvy, bright with a good sense of humour, Susanna uses her position as maid to Countess Almaviva to plan her revenge for the Count's philandering ways. She's also incredibly adept at gently nudging her would-be husband, Figaro, to arrive at decisions which suit her.

Soprano

Cherubino

A playboy pageboy who loves pretty much every woman in the opera. Confusingly, he is played by a female singer (a tradition of opera at the time) — which is even more confusing later in the opera when he dresses up as a woman.

Soprano

cont...

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Who's who

Doctor Bartolo

A proud, arrogant doctor, formerly the ward of the Countess. He still bears a grudge against Figaro for helping the Count win the hand of Rosina, thereby thwarting his plans to marry his young charge.

Bass

Marcellina

Now the Count's Housekeeper, Marcellina used to be Bartolo's maid. During this time she made a loan to Figaro on condition that he would marry her if unable to repay her financially.

Mezzo-soprano

Don Basilio

Sleazy music master who takes delight in other people's misfortunes. He acts as a snoop and informer for the Count.

Tenor

Antonio

The (usually drunk) gardener.

Bass

Barbarina

Antonio's young and attractive niece who moves from one pair of male arms to another.

Soprano

Don Curzio

Stuttering, flustered lawyer.

Tenor

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Overview

This hectic tale takes place over a mere twelve hour period, during which time the characters plot amorous encounters, revenge, marriage, counter-marriage and betrayal.

It starts with Figaro and his fiancé, Susanna, planning their life as a happily married couple, a future which is quickly thrown into doubt when the Count decides to assert his *droit du seigneur*, his right to seduce any female servant on her wedding night.

This sets in motion a series of complicated plots designed by Susanna and the Countess to punish the Count for his philandering ways. Figaro is at first an important part of the plots, but by the evening he is left out by Susanna and the Countess and his own jealousy and suspicion is aroused.

Meanwhile the Count has been contending with the amorous advances of his servant, Cherubino, towards his wife. Unable to stand the challenge to his Alpha-male status, the Count (literally) gives Cherubino his marching orders, sending him off to the army.

Cherubino, however, remains and becomes further involved in the complicated plot to teach the Count a lesson.

Sure enough the women are much craftier than either the Count or Figaro and the dénouement of the opera sees the Count repentant, begging forgiveness and promising never to do it again.

Le nozze di Figaro

Synopsis

Act 1

Early Morning



The servants Figaro and Susanna are to be married today. Susanna warns Figaro that the Count intends to seduce her. Figaro swears to prevent this. But Figaro has borrowed money from the housekeeper, Marcellina, promising to marry her if he can't repay the loan, which falls due today.

The adolescent page Cherubino has been banished by the Count for flirting with the servants, and he comes to complain to Susanna and to confess his love for the Countess. The Count himself then arrives and Cherubino hides. In hiding, Cherubino overhears his master forcing his attentions on Susanna. Basilio, who has been snooping for the Count, enters and talks of Cherubino's infatuation with the Countess. The Count is enraged to hear of this and when Cherubino is eventually discovered hiding, he narrowly escapes a beating by gently blackmailing the Count.

Figaro organises a deputation of estate workers in an attempt to bring forward the wedding and thereby outwit both the Count and Marcellina. Figaro reminds the Count that he has abolished the *droit du seigneur*. Furious, the Count turns his frustration on Cherubino, who is ordered to join his regiment at once. Figaro mockingly warns the boy of the rigours of army life.

Act 2

Midday

Rosina, Countess Almaviva, is desolated by her husband's neglect. Susanna has told her of his intentions towards her. Figaro reassures them both by telling of his plan to play on the Count's jealousy with an anonymous letter suggesting that the Countess is to meet a lover that evening. Figaro further suggests that Susanna should make an assignation with the Count for the evening, and then send Cherubino dressed as a woman in her place.

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Susanna and the Countess are already dressing Cherubino up when the Count arrives, furious after receiving the anonymous letter about the Countess's imaginary lover. Cherubino hides in a wardrobe and the Countess, fearing for the boy's life, refuses to unlock the door. The Count goes to find tools to break down the door, taking the Countess with him and locking the room so that Cherubino cannot escape. While they are gone, however, Cherubino escapes by jumping from the window and Susanna takes his place in the wardrobe.

When the Count returns, Susanna steps out of the wardrobe and he is forced to eat his words. The Countess and Susanna admit that the anonymous letter was a prank. The Count's suspicion rekindles, however, when Figaro denies all knowledge of the letter.

Figaro is continuing his attempts to hasten the wedding when the gardener Antonio enters, complaining that someone has just jumped out the window and landed on his carnations. Figaro quickly claims that it was he who jumped.

Marcellina and Dr Bartolo rush in, demanding settlement for Figaro's loan; the Count sees another way to confound the marriage. The outlook is bleak for the bridal couple.

Act 3

Afternoon

Susanna and the Countess have come up with a new plan — Susanna will make another assignation with the Count for that evening, but this time the Countess will go disguised as Susanna to unmask her husband's hypocrisy.

The Count is delighted with Susanna's suggestion of a meeting, but he overhears her boasting to Figaro. The Count is once more infuriated, and determined to make Figaro marry Marcellina. When the judge Don Curzio decides in Marcellina's favour (Figaro must repay the money he owes her or

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Synopsis

marry her), it seems that all is lost. However, the Count's plan is foiled when in a bizarre twist, it is discovered that Figaro is in fact Marcellina's long-lost son.



The Countess, waiting to hear how the Count received Susanna's suggestion, grieves for the happy days at the beginning of her marriage. When Susanna arrives, the Countess dictates a note confirming the assignation for that evening.

Barbarina and Cherubino (now dressed as a girl) bring flowers for the Countess. The Count discovers Cherubino, but the boy escapes punishment by the timely start of Figaro and Susanna's wedding ceremony. The Count's good humour is restored when he receives Susanna's notes — but now it is Figaro's turn to be deceived. He knows nothing of Susanna's plot, but he recognises a love letter when he sees one.

Act 4

Barbarina, acting as a go-between for the Count, has lost the pin she was charged to return to Susanna, sender of the note. When she tells Figaro of her errand, his jealousy is aroused and he swears vengeance on his new but faithless wife. Marcellina, however, cannot believe that Susanna is guilty and intends to warn her of what has happened.

Evening. Outside.

Figaro has recruited Bartolo and Basilio as witnesses for the unmasking of his faithless wife and her supposed lover. He laments his own fate as yet another cuckolded husband.

Susanna lets him overhear her pour out her love for an unnamed admirer — Figaro is convinced of her treachery. However, Figaro is unable to see that she is now dressed up as the Countess as part of the women's plan.

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Cherubino, looking for Barbarina, notices the Countess, dressed up as Susanna for the 'assignation' with her own husband. The page begins to flirt with 'Susanna', but the Count arrives and sends him packing.

Now the Count begins to woo 'Susanna' but they are soon disturbed by Figaro. The real Susanna breaks cover for a moment and Figaro recognises her. To repay her deception he pretends to make love to the 'Countess'. Susanna in turn is enraged, but then Figaro reveals that he knew who she was all along and they make peace.

The Count returns to resume relations with 'Susanna' only to find Figaro apparently making love to the Countess. He calls all to witness the infidelity of his wife. Everyone begs him to forgive her, but he refuses — until the real Countess steps from the shadows and speaks.

Unmasked as a hypocritical seducer, the Count himself begs for forgiveness. His wife grants his request and the long, mad, wedding day is nearly over.

Malcolm Hunter 2000

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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

b. Salzburg, Austria, 1756

d. Vienna December 1791

The Man and the Myth

Perhaps more than any other composer in history, Mozart's life is surrounded by mythology. From his infancy, stories about his abilities were exaggerated and fabricated and his death has provided material for a hugely successful Hollywood thriller. He is perhaps the first composer in Western classical music to have attracted this kind of biographical interest, and it is no coincidence that he is essentially the first free-lance composer, writing what he wanted to write, rather than what he was told to write by a royal or religious patron. With this romantic approach to composition comes a natural interest in the personality behind the music and Mozart's life certainly does not disappoint in this respect.

Mozart confirms (or perhaps even helped to create?) many myths that we have in our society about genius. He was prodigy - his talent seems to have been innate and present from a very early age. We would like to believe that he didn't ever have to work at his compositions, but rather they were handed down to him from somewhere celestial. He was a passionate individual — he left the service of the Archbishop of Salzburg in a storm after refusing to be treated like a servant. He was a hedonist; interested in the pleasures that life has to offer. And of course he died extremely young at only 36 — and don't 'All the best die young'? (James Dean, Jimi Hendrix, Jeff Buckley, Eva Cassidy, Kurt Cobain etc)

Wunderkind

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria, in 1756. His father, Leopold, was a violinist, music theorist, composer and teacher. Wolfgang and his sister, Nannerl, both showed astonishing musical talent from an early age. Wolfgang would pick out chords at the keyboard when he was only three years old and, at the age of six, he was discovered writing notes in a mess of blots and smudges, which was proudly announced to be a concerto! At about the same time he taught himself to play the violin, and was soon able to play chamber music perfectly, although his father had given him no lessons.

Trawling round Europe

Leopold Mozart — realising that he was sitting on a gold mine took his two 'prodigies of nature' on several gruelling tours to show them off to the nobility and paying public of Europe. Whilst travelling along poorly kept roads, the young Mozart would spend the time writing music, which he retained in his head until he could write it down at the end of the day. A letter from this time reminds us just how young the performer was — in 1762, Leopold refers to Mozart 'cutting a new tooth'.

After excursions to Munich and Vienna the family undertook a long journey culminating in triumphal receptions in Paris and London (1763-4). Both children came down with smallpox, but, undaunted, Leopold took them off round Europe again. In 1768, Mozart began his operatic career with, *La Finta Semplice*, aged only twelve. By this time, he was also writing instrumental music; symphonies, wind ensemble pieces and, inspired by Joseph Haydn, string quartets.

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Impressive in Italy

In 1770, Leopold took his son on a tour of Italy. During the trip, two particular myths are particularly interesting. Firstly, to prove that it was not his father but Mozart writing such advanced music, the young Wolfgang is said to have agreed to undertake a trial in which he (successfully) wrote an orchestral aria in complete isolation. Also during this trip, the Mozarts visited the Sistine Chapel in Rome. After only one hearing of Allegri's *Miserere* (a 20 minute, 8-part choral work), it is alleged that Mozart was able to write down the whole piece note for note having never seen the score, which had in fact never left the chapel.

Work Experience

At 15, Mozart started his first full-time paid job as music master for the Archbishop of Salzburg. His relationship with the Archbishop was incredibly fiery and after a youth spent rubbing shoulders with European aristocrats and royals, the young Mozart did not take kindly to being treated as a common servant.

He wants to break free

In 1777, frustrated with his employer, Mozart visited the court of Carl Theodor at Mannheim looking for a position. Although he was unsuccessful in this, during his four-month stay, he made a number of useful contacts amongst the singers and orchestra and acquainted himself with the progressive musical style. Then in 1780, after leaving the employ of the Archbishop following a serious dispute, he was finally given the opera commission that he so dearly wanted from Carl Theodor, who was now Elector of Bavaria. *Idomeneo* was based on a French setting of an ancient Greek myth and afforded Mozart the opportunity to use chorus, dancers and lavish spectacle.

During his initial visits to Mannheim, Mozart had fallen in love with Aloysia Weber, a singer, but when she married someone else Mozart turned his attentions to her younger sister, Constanze. They were married in Vienna in 1782 where Mozart was now desperately trying to earn a living as a freelance composer.

A match made in Heaven

Perhaps Mozart's finest operas were written in the last five years of his short life. *Le nozze di Figaro* (The Marriage of Figaro) was written in 1786. The librettist was Lorenzo da Ponte with whom Mozart produced two other successful operas; *Don Giovanni* (1787) and *Così fan tutte* (1790).

Librettist, lover, lout

Lorenzo Da Ponte (1749 — 1838) was a pretty colourful character. After becoming a priest in 1773, he spent some time as a poet in Venice. He was forever escaping from his creditors, or from various scandals, and in 1779 was expelled from the city for writing scurrilous political verse. After a short time in Germany he arrived in Vienna where he eventually obtained the post of poet to the Italian theatre in 1783.

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During that year Da Ponte and Mozart met for the first time and forged their hugely successful partnership, borne of the same craftsman-like attitude to their work, and the ability to tailor and trim their contributions to fit those of their collaborator. It seems that it was Mozart who first suggested that pair work on a play called *Le Mariage de Figaro* by the political French playwright Beaumarchais.

Watches, writing and espionage

Beaumarchais (1732 — 1799) started life as watchmaker to the Royal family in Paris. It wasn't until the 1760's the he began writing. His first work was, he said, written only for himself, but with *Le Barbier de Seville* (1775) he had his first theatrical success.

Meanwhile, his position at court continued to become increasingly elevated and he was involved in secret missions for the Court. He also negotiated for the rights of his fellow playwrights in addition to continuing his creative work.

Mad day, crazy first night

La Folle Journee, or *Le Mariage de Figaro* (The Day of Madness, or the Marriage of Figaro) was first performed after three years of delays, in 1784. The opening night was surrounded by indescribable excitement, with throngs surrounding the theatre from eight hours before curtain-up to be sure of good seats — three people were crushed to death in the rush. Beaumarchais and his actors were terrified that after such a wait the play would disappoint. It didn't — there was applause after almost every line, extending the show to over five hours. The premiere was followed by a run of a further 67 performances — a record at the time — and two German translations were printed immediately.

Beaumarchais became the first writer in history to become rich from writing a play.

The strong social criticisms within the play were incredibly timely — only five years later, the French Revolution erupted. The French commentator Danton said that "Figaro has killed the aristocracy" and Napoleon said "Figaro is already the revolution in action".

Though Beaumarchais himself was not a revolutionary, he did see the need for social change — a feeling which was sweeping across Europe at this time.

Politically sensitive

In Vienna, the Emperor had banned its performance (though not its publication). Da Ponte only received permission from the Emperor to use the play on the condition that the operatic version contained nothing that might "offend the decency of a theatre over which your majesty presides".

In fact, Mozart had little interest in politics and was more likely to have been attracted to the play by the convoluted plot and its characterisations. In converting the play into a libretto, Da Ponte deleted a lot of the socio-political references and reduced the sixteen characters of the play to eleven. He removed some of the

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wordier parts and squeezed five acts into four. Notably, he also removed or reduced the leading characters' less desirable characteristics — for example, Figaro is far less bitter in the opera than the play and the Countess is more sympathetic, with no signs of an amorous affection for Cherubino (as in the play).

First Impressions

The music seems to have been drafted in late 1785 and the opera was first produced on May 1, 1786. Even at the rehearsal its success was most decided; when, according to Michael Kelly (an Irish tenor who was in the cast under the name of "Signor Ochelly"), the enthusiasm of singers and orchestra rose to fever heat. Kelly says: "I remember that at the first rehearsal of the full band Mozart was on the stage, with his crimson pelisse and his gold-banded cocked hat, giving the time of the music to the orchestra. I shall never forget the little animated countenance when lighted up with the glowing rays of genius. It is as impossible to describe it as it would be to paint sunbeams."

He goes on to tell how at one point, "those in the orchestra I thought would never have ceased applauding by beating the bows of their violins against the music desks. The little man acknowledged by repeated obeisances his thanks for those distinguishing marks of enthusiastic applause bestowed upon him." This was at the rehearsal. At the public performance the furore was equally remarkable. All the principal numbers were re-demanded. Indeed, so numerous were the encores that the performance lasted nearly twice the time that had been calculated upon. The success, too, of the first night was maintained at subsequent representations.

At the second performance, one duet had to be sung three times. So trying, in fact, did the encores become that the Emperor forbade them for the future. Kelly accounts how Joseph II, after issuing this order, spoke to some of the leading artists on the subject. "I daresay," he said, "you are pleased at my having put a stop to encores. It must be fatiguing for you to repeat so many songs." The artists obsequiously signified their agreement. But Kelly, who was standing by, boldly said to the Emperor: "Do not believe them, Sire; they all like to be encored. At least, I am sure I always do."

The final year

1791, Mozart's final year, was one of frantic activity. As well as numerous instrumental works, he composed the (unfinished) Requiem, which had been commissioned by an unknown messenger on behalf of an anonymous patron. Work on the Requiem was interrupted by another opera, *La Clemenza di Tito*, and when he resumed work on the Requiem progress was hindered by the onset of an illness. At the same time, Mozart was also busily working on his final operatic project, *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute). Whilst desperately working on these two compositions, he began to see the visits of the unknown messenger as omens of doom and finally became convinced that he had been poisoned in a conspiracy against him, though this was never proved. He died in Vienna in December 1791, two months after the opening night of *Die Zauberflöte*, aged only 35. He left no money for a proper funeral and was buried in an unmarked pauper's grave.