

In the summer of 1955, Erich Kleiber returned to Vienna's historic Redoutensaal — the gilded ballroom of the old Hofburg Palace — to record what would become one of the most distinguished interpretations of Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*. The setting was ideal: a hall steeped in imperial history and renowned for its excellent acoustics, and one that had been well-known to the composer himself. Once again, the Vienna Philharmonic and State Opera Chorus formed the backbone of the ensemble, while an outstanding cast of singers drawn largely from Vienna's own operatic circle gathered around the maestro. The result was not only one of the earliest complete stereo opera recordings but also one that remains a touchstone of Mozart performance.

When *The Gramophone* reviewed the release in November 1955, Philip Hope-Wallace hailed it as "a most important issue: *Figaro* is at the heart of all love of music and of opera." His words were not lightly chosen. For all its popularity, the opera had never previously been presented complete on long-playing records; earlier sets had omitted the recitatives or taken drastic cuts. Decca's *Figaro* was therefore a milestone — the first version to restore Mozart's design in full, its recitatives performed with theatrical energy and naturalness, the pacing unhurried, and the tone unfailingly musical. Hope-Wallace admired the "beautifully acted, leisured and graceful" quality of these passages and the fact that "there is never the slightest effect of hustling."

Kleiber's conducting, as always, was rooted in deep respect for the score's structure and balance. He was never one for flashy tempo manipulation or sentimental exaggeration, preferring instead a steady, transparent pulse through which the music's own vitality could shine. Some listeners, familiar with the brisk sparkle of Karajan's or Giulini's *Figaro*, found his approach unusually deliberate; but closer listening reveals how perfectly it serves the drama. "All the notes are audible; all the points are made," wrote Hope-Wallace of the great Act II finale — adding that such clarity was only possible because Kleiber refused to rush. The music breathes naturally, each ensemble growing organically out of the previous one, and the tension sustained through the beauty of line rather than the force of momentum.

[continues...]



MOZART Le Nozze di Figaro



MOZART LE NOZZE DI FIGARO (CDs 1 & 2)
GUEDEN, SIEPI, VIENNA STATE OPERA CHORUS & PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA, KLEIBER

PACO 229

disc one (68:41)

1. Overture (4:06)
- ACT ONE
2. Cinque... deci... venti... Cosa stai misurando (3:25)
3. Se a caso Madama la notte ti chiama (4:00)
4. Bravo, signor padrone... Se vuol ballare... Ed aspettaste (4:19)
5. La vendetta... Tutto ancor non ho perso (3:46)
6. Via resti servita... Va là, vecchia pedante (4:12)
7. Non so più... Ah, son perduto! (5:54)
8. Cosa sento!... Basilio, in traccia tosto...Giovani (10:32)
9. Non più andrai (3:51)

ACT TWO

10. Porgi amor... Vieni, cara Susanna (8:10)
11. Voi che sapete... Bravo! che bella voce! (3:51)
12. Venite! Inginocchiatevi... Quante buffonerie! (5:48)
13. Che novità! (1:12)
14. Susanna, or via, sortite... Dunque, voi non aprite (4:03)
15. Aprite, presto, aprite... O guarda il demonietto! (1:32)

disc two (62:38)

1. Tutto è come io lasciai (1:15)
2. Esci, ormai, garzon malnato... Susanna!... Signore! (8:43)
3. Signore, di fuori... Ah! signore... signor! (9:19)
4. Voi signor, che giusto siete (3:56)

ACT THREE

5. Che imbarazzo è mai questo...Via, fatti core (2:18)
6. Crudell! perché finora... E perché fosti meco (3:20)
7. Hai già vinta la causa!... Vedrò mentr'io sospiro (6:28)
8. Riconosci in questo amplesso... Eccovi, o caro amico...
Andiamo, andiam, bel paggio (6:33)
9. E Susanna non vien...Dove sono i bieci momenti (6:39)
10. Cosa mi narri!... Che soave zeffiretto... Piegato è (7:42)
11. Ecco la marcia... Eh, già, solita usanza (6:25)

CAST

Hilde Gueden (*soprano*) Susanna
Cesare Siepi (*bass*) Figaro
Alfred Poell (*baritone*) Count Almaviva
Lisa Della Casa (*soprano*) Countess Almaviva
Suzanne Danco (*soprano*) Cherubino
Hilde Rössl-Majdan (*mezzo-soprano*) Marcellina
Murray Dickie (*tenor*) Don Basilio
Hugo Meyer-Welfing (*tenor*) Don Curzio
Fernando Corena (*bass*) Doctor Bartolo
Harald Pröglhöf (*bass*) Antonio
Anny Felbermayer (*soprano*) Barbarina

Vienna State Opera Chorus
Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra
conducted by Erich Kleiber

Recorded 21-27 June 1955
Redoutensaal, Vienna

Decca Stereo Producer: Peter Andry
Stereo Engineer: James Brown

XR remastered by Andrew Rose
Cover artwork based on a photograph of Erich Kleiber

Total duration: 2hr 52:02



© 2025 Pristine Audio

[...continued]

That clarity extended to the characterisation. Cesare Siepi, already an international favourite, gives a masterly performance as Figaro — resonant, virile, and intelligent, his Italian diction a model of precision. His Figaro is no mere servant but a man of wit and dignity, the equal of his master in all but social standing. Alfred Poell's Count Almaviva provides an ideal foil: commanding, proud, and occasionally explosive. Hope-Wallace called him "a fine vocal actor" who could sound "really loud and menacing, which is a great point dramatically." Together they bring vivid contrast and dramatic tension to every encounter.

Among the women, Lisa Della Casa's Countess offers all the radiant tone and elegance that made her one of the defining sopranos of her generation. Her "Porgi amor" unfolds with tender restraint, its phrasing poised and heartfelt. Opposite her, Hilde Gueden's Susanna sparkles with energy and quick-witted charm. Though Hope-Wallace found her sometimes "a little dry" in tone, her phrasing is alert and full of character, especially in her duets and in the Act IV reconciliation scene. Suzanne Danco's Cherubino, too, reveals Kleiber's preference for purity over exuberance: hers is a cool, inward portrayal, perfectly sung, her "Voi che sapete" and "Non so più" models of line and control. The smaller roles are no less finely taken: Fernando Corena's genial Bartolo, Hilde Rössl-Majdan's dignified Marcellina, and Murray Dickie's sharply etched Basilio all contribute to an ensemble cast that feels authentically theatrical and unmistakably Viennese in style.

Kleiber's *Figaro* occupies a unique place in the recorded history of Mozart's operas. It stands between two worlds: the elegance and discipline of pre-war Vienna and the technological modernity of the post-war recording age. In its combination of intellectual clarity, emotional truth and technical finesse, it remains one of the most complete realisations of Mozart's genius on record. As Kleiber himself once observed, Mozart's music demands "clarity and proportion — music where the light always shines through." His *Figaro* embodies that philosophy to perfection: lucid, balanced, humane, and profoundly beautiful — a cornerstone of recorded opera, and an enduring testament to one of the twentieth century's most exacting and inspired masters.



PRISTINE
AUDIO

PACO 229

MOZART LE NOZZE DI FIGARO (CD 3)
GUEDEN, SIEPI, VIENNA STATE OPERA CHORUS & PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA, KLEIBER

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO
PACO 229

MOZART LE NOZZE DI FIGARO (CD 3)
GUEDEN, SIEPI, VIENNA STATE OPERA CHORUS & PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA, KLEIBER

PACO 229

PRISTINE
AUDIO

CAST

Hilde Gueden (*soprano*) Susanna
Cesare Siepi (*bass*) Figaro
Alfred Poell (*baritone*) Count Almaviva
Lisa Della Casa (*soprano*) Countess Almaviva
Suzanne Danco (*soprano*) Cherubino
Hilde Rössl-Majdan (*mezzo-soprano*) Marcellina
Murray Dickie (*tenor*) Don Basilio
Hugo Meyer-Welfing (*tenor*) Don Curzio
Fernando Corena (*bass*) Doctor Bartolo
Harald Pröglhöf (*bass*) Antonio
Anny Felbermayer (*soprano*) Barbarina

Vienna State Opera Chorus
Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra
conducted by Erich Kleiber

Recorded 21-27 June 1955
Redoutensaal, Vienna

Decca Stereo Producer: Peter Andry
Stereo Engineer: James Brown

XR remastered by Andrew Rose
Cover artwork based on a photograph of Erich Kleiber

Total duration: 2hr 52:02

PRISTINE
AUDIO

© 2025 Pristine Audio

disc three
(40:42)

ACT FOUR

1. L'ho perduta... Barbarina, cos'hai? (4:34)
2. Il capro e la capretta... Nel padiglione a manca (5:31)
3. In quegli anni in cui val poco (4:07)
4. Tutto è disposto (5:26)
5. Giunse alfin il momento... Deh, vieni, non tardar (4:49)
6. Pian pianin le andrò più presso... Tutto è tranquillo (11:40)
7. Gente, gente, all'armi (4:36)