

# Così fan tutte



**Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**  
**Libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte**

First Performance January 26, 1790, Burgtheater in Vienna

**Study Guide for Pacific Opera Victoria's Production**  
**April 2010**



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## Welcome to Pacific Opera Victoria!

This Study Guide and Activity Guide have been created primarily to assist teachers in preparing students for their visit to the opera. It is our hope that teachers will be able to add this to the existing curriculum in order to expand students' understanding of opera, literature, history, and the fine arts.

Materials in the Study Guide may be copied and distributed to students. Some students may wish to go over the information at home if there is not enough time to discuss in class. The opera experience can be made more meaningful and enjoyable when students have the opportunity to learn about the opera before they attend the performance.

Please visit <http://www.pov.bc.ca> to download this study guide or to find more information about *Così fan tutte*, including musical selections from POV's Best of YouTube and artist biographies. POV Study Guides for other operas are also available for download.

**Teachers:** Your comments and suggestions would be greatly appreciated. Please take a few minutes to fill out the questionnaire at the end of this study guide.

*Please Note: The Dress Rehearsal is the last opportunity the singers will have on stage to work with the orchestra before Opening Night. Since vocal demands are so great on opera singers, some singers choose not to sing in full voice during the Dress Rehearsal in order to preserve their voice for opening night.*

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**Così Fan Tutte**  
**Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**  
**Libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte**

First Performance January 26, 1790, Burgtheater in Vienna

Dress Rehearsal, Tuesday, April 13, 2010, 7:30 pm  
Performances: April 15, 20, 22, 24, 2010, 8 pm; April 17, 3 pm  
The Royal Theatre, Victoria, BC

Sung in Italian, with English Surtitles  
The performance is approximately 135 minutes, with no intermission.

**Cast and Creative Team**

Fiordiligi	Charlotte Corwin
Dorabella	Lauren Segal
Ferrando	Antonio Figueroa
Guglielmo	Stephen Hegedus
Despina	Michèle Bogdanowicz
Alfonso	Doug MacNaughton
Conductor	Timothy Vernon
Director	François Racine
Set Designer	Elli Bunton
Costume Designer	Mara Gottler
Lighting Designer	Luc Prairie
Resident Stage Manager	Jackie Adamthwaite
Assistant Stage Managers	Steve Barker, Jennifer Braem
Principal Coach	Robert Holliston
Associate Conductor	Giuseppe Pietraroia

With the Victoria Symphony and the POV Chorus

## Così 2010: Why today?

*Così fan tutte* is unique among Mozart's operas. While most of his works are based on straightforward narrative, *Così* is more adventurous in its dramaturgical approach. The characters begin as archetypes, and end as fully etched individuals. The story is intentionally absurd. Of course, the women would recognize the men and their fake moustaches; of course, they would realize that they are faking the reaction to poison. They may even know the men's real identity as they succumb to the seduction. Critics who question the work's realism are missing the point. It is not intended to be realistic.

*Così*'s theatrical glory is watching the transformation and revelation of the characters. And while the theatrical form is not based in realism, the characters most assuredly are, making *Così* Mozart's most contemporary work by today's theatrical standards. For this reason, *Così* is often given an extreme theatrical treatment to highlight its dramatic nature. One need only look at Peter Sellars' setting in Despina's Diner or Doris Dörrie's popular version for the Berlin Staatsoper, complete with hippies and flower children, to see the range of updates that have been explored.

It is fascinating that while more than 200 years have passed since *Così*'s premiere, its questions of love, fidelity and human relationships are as pertinent today as ever before. The sexual freedom that emerged in the 60's is now at odds with promise rings and chastity pacts; contemporary culture explores the range of opinions on these issues in popular music, film and television.

With this updated version of *Così*, Director François Racine, Set Designer Elli Bunton, and Costume Designer Mara Gottler have created an environment which intentionally asks as many questions as it answers. The design has a high class elegance that suggests wealth and entitlement, and yet is disarmingly abstract. There are visions of haute couture, many literal open windows for the characters to consider, many height levels in which to explore the character revelation – and still enough doors to slam to reveal the work as an uproarious farce.

*David Shefsiek*

*The title for Così fan tutte actually comes from Le Nozze de Figaro (The Marriage of Figaro). The character Basilio sings these exact words in the Act I trio. In fact, Mozart weaves that vocal line into Così's overture. Clever!*

## Così fan tutte: Background

*Così fan tutte*, ossia *La scuola degli amanti* (*Thus Do All Women, or The School For Lovers*; Da Ponte wanted the latter title, but Mozart's preference for the former won out) is an *opera buffa*, the last of three Mozart operas for which Lorenzo Da Ponte wrote the libretto. It was written and composed at the suggestion of the Emperor Joseph II (some scholars insist that it is based on an actual contemporary scandal, but there is no definitive evidence to support this tantalizing claim). The libretto was originally offered to Mozart's contemporary Antonio Salieri who began but then broke off work on the opera.

The first performance of Mozart's setting took place at the Burgtheater in Vienna on January 26, 1790 and was conducted by the composer. The subject matter seems not to have offended Viennese sensibilities of the time, but the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries considered it frivolous and/or amoral, and the comparatively few performances given during those years were frequently presented with severely bowdlerized texts.

During the late 1930s and after World War II, *Così fan tutte* began to establish itself in the standard operatic repertoire, until Opera America could place it 15<sup>th</sup> on their list of the 20 most-performed operas in North America (ironic considering that its first American performance was not given until 1922).

Mozart and Da Ponte took as a theme "fiancée swapping" which dates back to at least the 13th century, with notable earlier versions being those found in Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Shakespeare's play *Cymbeline*. Elements from Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* are also present. Furthermore, it incorporates elements of the myth of Procris as found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book vii. The libretto is, however, considered an original one in that it is not based on a single source, and as such is one of only two original libretti amongst Da Ponte's output.

## Synopsis

### Act I

The comedy begins in mid-conversation, as two young officers, Ferrando and Guglielmo, proclaim the virtue of their sweethearts, insisting that these paragons are incapable of infidelity. Their older friend Don Alfonso – more experienced in the ways of the world and somewhat cynical – maintains that no woman on earth is capable of fidelity, and proposes a wager: if the brash lads will do anything and everything he says for the next 24 hours, he will demonstrate that the two young ladies in question are just as fickle and untrustworthy as the rest.

Meanwhile the girlfriends – Fiordiligi and Dorabella, two sisters living in Ferrara apparently without a chaperone – revel in their love for Guglielmo and Ferrando, respectively. Don Alfonso enters with sad news: war has been waged and the young men have been called to their regiment. They appear, and the five make elaborate farewells. After the young men leave, the sisters and Don Alfonso wish them Godspeed in an ethereal Terzetto, justly one of the most celebrated numbers in all Mozart:

<i>Soave sia il vento,</i>	Gentle be the breeze,
<i>Tranquilla sia l'onda,</i>	Calm be the waves,
<i>Ed ogni elemento</i>	And every element
<i>Benigno risponda</i>	Smile in favor
<i>Ai nostri desir.</i>	On our wish.

Left alone on stage, Don Alfonso delivers one last jeer at women's inconstancy.

As the girls' maid Despina prepares chocolate for her mistresses, she remarks wryly about a world in which she does all the work and they enjoy the luxuries. The sisters sweep in, loudly bewailing their torment at being separated from their lovers; Dorabella even proclaims that anguish such as hers has never before been experienced. Despina listens unmoved; she is another worldly type who's been around the block a few times, and offers advice that complements Alfonso's perfectly: men, especially soldiers, aren't and never will be faithful; it's just the way things are. So the girls should take advantage of the situation and have an amorous adventure or two of their own.

The sisters react with outrage to their maid's inability to comprehend their heroic suffering and to her capricious approach to love. Dramatically, they storm out of the room.

Alfonso then steals in and persuades Despina (with the help of a bribe) to introduce to her mistresses two foreign friends of his who have long loved the ladies from afar. He then ushers in two exotically attired strangers (none other than Ferrando and Guglielmo disguised as Albanians). The sisters are scandalized to encounter the strangers and firmly reject their protestations of love. In an aria that parodies the extremes of *opera seria*, Fiordiligi likens her fidelity to a rock.

Once again the sisters storm off, and the men, considering the wager as more or less won, laugh and tease Alfonso. The wily older man reminds them of the 24 hours agreed upon. In a beautifully tender and ardent aria, Ferrando reiterates his passion for Dorabella.

Despina suggests to Alfonso a plan to win the ladies' sympathy.

Alone, the sisters lament the absence of their lovers. Suddenly the "Albanians" stagger in, pretending to take poison in despair over the ladies' cruelty. Alfonso and Despina run for a doctor, leaving Fiordiligi and Dorabella alone with the strangers. Just as compassion is beginning to weaken their resolve, Despina returns, disguised as a doctor and uses Dr. Mesmer's invention, the magnet, to draw out the poison, while urging the sisters to nurse the patients. The men revive and ardently demand kisses, to the alarm of the women. Ferrando and Guglielmo begin to wonder if the girls' fury is indeed genuine.

### *Intermission*

## **Act II**

Despina chides her mistresses for their obstinacy and explains how a woman ought to handle a man ("Any woman of fifteen years should know well the ways of the world"). Dorabella is gradually persuaded that there could be no real harm in a little flirtation, and surprisingly, Fiordiligi agrees. Dorabella chooses Guglielmo, the dark one, while Fiordiligi prefers Ferrando, the blonde (each, of course, choosing the other's original sweetheart).

The young men have arranged a serenade in the garden. Don Alfonso and Despina bring the new couples together; they are tongue-tied and unsure of their feelings. Committed to seeing their wager through, Guglielmo ardently pursues Dorabella, who responds quite readily. Ferrando continues to encounter resistance from Fiordiligi, but after she sends him away he reflects that she may not be able to resist his pleading much longer. Alone, Fiordiligi admits that the stranger has touched her heart and prays that her absent lover will forgive her. When the men compare notes, Guglielmo is glad to see Fiordiligi standing fast, but Ferrando is dismayed that Dorabella has given in to Guglielmo who, in a spirit of compassion for his injured friend, comments angrily on the waywardness of the fair sex. Left alone, Ferrando again expresses his love for Dorabella, though he feels betrayed.

Even as she rebukes Dorabella for being fickle, Fiordiligi admits that she has fallen for the stranger. Dorabella coaxes her to give in, saying love is a thief, a little serpent who gives peace to our hearts and takes it away. Alone, Fiordiligi decides she and her sister will disguise themselves in their lovers' uniforms and go off to the front to join their sweethearts. But when Ferrando appears and threatens suicide, Fiordiligi gives in. Now Guglielmo is enraged, but Alfonso advises the men to just marry the women – they're all like that, he claims. The words *Così fan tutte* are sung to a tune first heard in the opera's overture.

A double wedding is arranged between the sisters and the "Albanians." Alfonso brings in the notary – Despina in another disguise. The lovers sing in canon of their happiness – except for Guglielmo, who is barely able to control his rage and therefore does not join in the ardent melody. Just as the ladies have signed the marriage contract, military music is heard outside. This can mean only that their former lovers have returned, and the sisters go more or less to pieces. The men reappear without their "Albanian" mufti and, on discovering the marriage contract, rage at the ladies, before they reveal their identities as the Albanians.

Alfonso explains that the deception is all for the best, that they are now wiser and should say no more about it. The young people reconcile with their original lovers, and, as in *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, the entire cast brings the drama to a close with a kind of moral:

*Lucky is he who takes  
The good in all  
And through chance and events  
By reason is led.*

*What is wont to make others weep  
For him is cause for laughter  
And in the turmoil of the world  
He will find peace.*

In his introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* British literary critic Tony Tanner summarized the plot of the novel thus: "A man changes his manners, and a young lady changes her mind."

No more succinct way can be found of saying that, in a great novel, the plot is the least important feature. We don't read on to find out what happens, but why, and how.

This is equally true of operas and, alas, the plot of *Così fan tutte* has prevented many people from appreciating a work that is without question one of the most compassionate and profoundly moving examinations of human behavior that the world of opera has ever given us. Without ever resorting to didacticism, it depicts love both real and idealized, and ultimately suggests that life and love are perhaps more rewarding if experienced honestly and with eyes open, no matter how unsettling, untidy, and challenging.

Certainly our willingness to suspend disbelief is necessary when confronted with certain theatrical conventions, but if we are to dismiss as "unrealistic" the age-old device of impenetrable disguise in *Così*, shouldn't we also dismiss it in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*? And wouldn't we be the poorer for doing so? As director Jonathan Miller notes, *within such an idiom the awkward improbabilities of the plot can be seen as a device that helps to make the opera more, rather than less, serious.*

Robert Holliston

*Are all woman actually fools? Upon first glance at the opera, it could seem that way. However, it seems what the music tells us is that EVERYONE in the opera is a fool!*

## Composer Background: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born January 27, 1756 in Salzburg, Austria. He was the son of Leopold Mozart, a violinist and composer in the service of the Prince Archbishop. Wolfgang was the seventh and last child of Leopold Mozart and his wife Anna Maria. Only two of Leopold and Anna Maria's children lived past infancy: Wolfgang and his sister Maria Anna Walburga Ignatia (nicknamed Nannerl) who was nearly five years older.

Leopold taught music first to Nannerl and then to Wolfgang and quickly recognized that both were extremely gifted. By the time he was five years old, Mozart was already composing his own music and playing for empresses, electors and royal families. A child prodigy, Mozart was especially gifted in playing the piano, the harpsichord, and the organ, all the while composing for other instruments and vocal music. He was also fluent in Italian and French as well as his native German. His father recognized his son's exceptional talent and was determined to make him famous. A relatively poor family had much to gain financially with a child prodigy among its members. When Wolfgang was six, Mozart's father Leopold, the ultimate stage parent, received permission from his boss to take the children on a series of tours of the courts of Europe.



During his teenage years, Mozart toured most of Europe, visiting Vienna once and Italy three times before returning home to Salzburg in 1774. In 1777, his parents thought it would be best for Mozart to find work elsewhere. Mozart and his mother moved to Munich, and then to Mannheim before settling in Paris. He returned to Salzburg in 1779 after the death of his mother. During this time, Mozart wrote many sonatas, operas, sacred works, symphonies, concertos, serenades and dramatic music as newly appointed court organist with responsibilities for composing new works for the court of the Prince-Archbishop. Late in 1780 he was offered a commission for an opera in Munich. He traveled to Munich to work on what now is considered his finest early opera, *Idomeneo, rè di Creta* (K. 366). The opera premiered successfully in January 1781.

Mozart relocated to Vienna and was one of the first self-employed musicians in the city. Mozart soon had his next operatic success, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (The Abduction from the Seraglio). In 1782, Mozart married a young woman by the name of Constanze Weber. Over the next nine years, Wolfgang and Constanze had six children, four of whom died in infancy.

Mozart's day consisted of rising at 6am and composing for a few hours. This was followed by lessons until the mid-afternoon. There would always be concerts in the evenings, and he would go to bed after composing for a few more hours.



Mozart would meet librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte after he relocated to Vienna. In December 1786, Mozart's great comic opera *Le nozze di Figaro* (The Marriage of Figaro), with Da Ponte's libretto, was rapturously received in Prague. As a result of the Prague success of *Le nozze di Figaro*, Mozart received a commission for a new opera, *Don Giovanni*, which would premiere in Prague in October 1787.

In the intervening months, Mozart worked on his new opera as well as a number of other compositions. In 1789 he wrote *Così fan tutte*. Mozart wrote the opera in four months and it premiered at Vienna's Burgtheater on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1790. It was generally thought that the libretto was weak and nowhere near the genius of his music. Unfortunately, the Emperor passed away the next month, so there were only five performances of the opera, as all the theatres were temporarily closed for a grieving period.

Mozart continued to have a steady income from new works, ticket sales from concerts, royalties from publishers and fees from lessons. However, not knowing how to manage his money very well, Mozart and his wife lived extravagantly. Mozart believed his image was essential to his success and dressed like the nobility of his day. Mozart was very generous and enjoyed giving to charities and friends. He didn't save money and when emergencies occurred like the illness of his wife Constanze, he would have to borrow money. Mozart's income was unpredictable and their debts continued to grow.

Health problems plagued both Wolfgang and Constanze and added to their financial difficulties. Mozart continued to work feverishly through 1791, his final year of life, completing not only *Die Zauberflöte* and *La Clemenza di Tito*, but some 30 other compositions, including sets of minuets and German dances, songs, concertos, even a couple of pieces for glass harmonica. In November, 1791, Mozart fell ill, and on December 5, 1791, he died from what was probably complications arising from infection, a chronic kidney ailment, and rheumatic fever, (not, as is suggested in the engrossing, but fictionalized movie *Amadeus*, by poison).

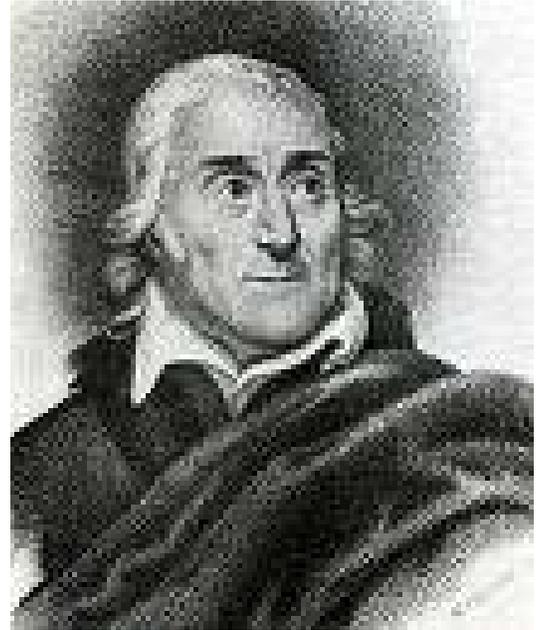


In his brief life Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart created a dazzling body of work—over 600 compositions, including symphonies, concerti, sonatas, Masses, piano works, chamber music, and some 20 operas, the best known of which — *Idomeneo*, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte*, and *Die Zauberflöte* — are among the most popular ever composed.

*Così fan tutte had five performances before the show came to a sudden halt. Emperor Joseph II died and his death caused all theatre performances to be cancelled. Performances carried on half a year later!*

## Librettist Background: LORENZO DA PONTE

Opera-goers weaned on the traditions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century tend to associate our favorite works almost exclusively with the composers of their music. Only in the country of this hybrid art form's birth is the librettist accorded something like equal status: on my wall is a poster (only 12 years old) from the Teatro Olimpico in Rome, announcing a new production of "*La traviata*, melodrama in three acts by F.V. Piave, music by G. Verdi."



Yet during the first century of opera, composers like Peri, Monteverdi, and Lully collaborated with the renowned poets of their day, and if less idealistic eras were content to leave the responsibility of libretto-writing to comparative hacks, we can still marvel at such partnerships as Verdi's with Piave and Boïto; Strauss's with Hoffmannsthal; Stravinsky's with Auden – partnerships that produced not only great works of art but volumes of endlessly fascinating and enriching correspondence. No such secondary literature exists in the case of Mozart and his greatest collaborator Lorenzo Da Ponte – alas! Few documents are as entertaining and informative as Mozart's letters (especially in Robert Spaethling's English translation [Norton, 2000]), but since the two worked closely in the same city, there was no need to write. It may therefore be appropriate to say something further about the career and character of Lorenzo Da Ponte.

Although, as the name suggests, he was an Italian, Da Ponte was born Emanuele Conegliano, in the Jewish ghetto of Ceneda, some 50 miles north of Venice, on March 10, 1749. Emanuele was 5 years old when his mother died, and nine years later his 45-year-old father Geremia, a leather tanner and merchant, fell in love with Orsola Pasqua Paietta, a Catholic girl only 5 years older than Emanuele. Marriage between faiths being unlawful, Geremia and his three sons were converted and baptized in August, 1763, by Msgr. Lorenzo Da Ponte. In accordance with the conventions of the time, the entire family adopted the bishop's surname, and as the eldest son Emanuele also took the Christian name.

The young (or new) Lorenzo developed into a colorful character and indefatigable self-promoter, but also an accomplished literary artist. We know little about his early education – some sources suggest that at the time of the conversion young Emanuele was still illiterate, others that he was already a voracious reader – but his elegant speech and gift for repartee had certainly been noticed (the fact that he was Bar Mitzvah'ed at 13 also indicates a familiarity with Hebrew and the Bible). Now that he was to be groomed by the Bishop for the priesthood, Lorenzo would be assured a thorough classical education, something that would have been unimaginable in his previous circumstances. This was particularly important in the field of language and poetry – always a lover of words, Lorenzo mastered Latin and developed a deep respect for and knowledge of Italian literature as a medium for expressing great ideas. His prodigious memory, quick intelligence, and astonishing ear for the music inherent in the Italian language made his future reputation as a poet almost inevitable, but his family's straitened circumstances and the death of his patron Monsignor Da Ponte forced the young student to concentrate on clerical studies. Lorenzo Da Ponte was accordingly ordained a priest one week after his 24<sup>th</sup> birthday. Despite the promise of financial security, seminary life with its constraints and petty internal politics simply held no appeal for him, so the new Abbé Da Ponte abandoned the priesthood for Venice. Hereafter he would conduct Mass only when financially unavoidable, although he was not above using the privilege of his status to avoid actual menial labor.

The Venice of Da Ponte's day was no longer the mighty, prosperous, liberal and international center of culture it had been during the previous century. Lorenzo probably encountered a city well on its way to debauchery and dissoluteness, full of intrigue and opportunism. Lorenzo was well-equipped for it as a young poet, but also as a young man: handsome, charming, witty, and socially gregarious, he was liked by men and attractive to women.

It was not long before he became embroiled in an almost ruinous affair with Angiola Tiepolo, a married woman from a formerly genteel family now living in poverty and engaging in all available kinds of unscrupulous activity. The unstable Angiola was subject to violent frenzies of rage, during which it was not uncommon for her to attack her young lover physically. The affair became so notorious that Lorenzo lost a respectable teaching position and had to turn to gambling, an activity favored by Angiola and her shadowy husband. Finding himself deep in debt and compromised by his unsavory connections Lorenzo left Venice, settling for a while in Treviso and making a concerted attempt to return to teaching and the art of serious poetry. But Venice lured him back, and he soon found himself involved with another young woman every bit as married as Angiola but rather more stable. It was this relationship that provided a pretext for Da Ponte's persecution by Venetian authorities and his ultimate expulsion from the city and its territories. The spectacle of a man "living in sin with an aristocrat's wife while conducting Mass in a nearby church," though certainly one of debauchery, was not entirely out-of-place in mid-18<sup>th</sup>-century Venice.

Lorenzo had, however, also used his great facility with language and his quick satirical wit to publish pamphlets expressing radically unorthodox political opinions – broadsheets that lampooned authority and were written in the Venetian dialect so that their humor would be lost on no reader, high or low. Although the liberal thinkers of Venice enjoyed something like free speech, this was too much, especially since the critical barbs were expressed so elegantly. A warrant was issued for Lorenzo's arrest but he proved wiler than his pursuers and was thus tried *in absentia*. By the time a guilty verdict was reached, Lorenzo Da Ponte had already crossed the Austrian border. If the sentiments he expressed upon fleeing Venice can be taken seriously – they were overwhelmingly negative and not free of self-pity – then perhaps the sentence would have seemed irrelevant: he was banished from Venice and all her lands for a period of 15 years. A further penalty was imposed should he be discovered in Venice: 7 years imprisonment in a "dungeon without light." I have seen a picture of one such dungeon, and doubt that anyone unlucky enough to survive such an incarceration for half this length of time would emerge with his sanity intact.

After a brief period in Dresden, Lorenzo Da Ponte arrived in Vienna in late 1781 (the same year Mozart moved there), bringing with him some meager savings and a letter of introduction addressed to Signor Antonio Salieri (he would also manage to arrange a meeting with the 84-year-old poet Metastasio). These facts alone indicate how deeply ingrained the Italian musical style was in Vienna – especially, of course, the Italian operatic style. Austria as a whole had embraced Italian opera decades before, so it was quite natural that a large community of Italian musicians, poets, singers, and hangers-on flourished in its capital. Despite the operatic reforms of Gluck – which sought alternatives to the somewhat threadbare Italian conventions – and the efforts of the new Emperor Joseph II to promote the German *Singspiel*, lovers of Italian opera with its pretty tunes and charismatic star singers prevailed, and its composers would surely need skilled librettists.

Thus Lorenzo Da Ponte, broke and unemployed after an unproductive year, was summoned to the Imperial Court. Asked by the Emperor how many plays he had written, the poet answered honestly: "None, Sire." According to Lorenzo's own account, this answer satisfied Joseph, who added, "Then we shall have a virgin muse." As the new Poet to the Imperial Theaters, Da Ponte was given an excellent salary as well as royalties and printing rights. But he had still never written a libretto and was all too aware of his inexperience. After visiting a private library and perusing several examples of Italian opera texts, Lorenzo was shocked by what he encountered:

*Poor Italy! What stuff they were! They had no plot, no characters, no interest, no scenic effects, no charm of language or style, and though they were written to make people laugh, one would rather have thought they had been written to make people weep. Not a line of all those wretched pastiches showed any charm, or any display of fancy or elegant turn of phrase which in any way would make one want to laugh. They were so many accretions of tiresome conceits and stupidity and buffoonery.*

Not surprisingly, this appointment ruffled many feathers among ambitious people who had been in Vienna longer than Da Ponte and made more contacts. Lorenzo's initial responsibility was editing and adapting other people's libretti – the first he wrote himself was for Salieri, and it was a flop, much to the chagrin of the composer and to the satisfaction of the poet's rivals. Da Ponte received encouragement only from Emperor Joseph.

Mozart and Da Ponte met at the home of an aristocrat no long after Lorenzo's new appointment. Sufficiently impressed with the poet to discuss the possibility of a collaboration, Mozart wrote to his father in a letter dated May 7, 1783:

*We have a certain Abate Da Ponte here as a text poet ... he has an incredible number of revisions to do at the theater ... he promised to write me something new after that; but who knows whether he will keep his word – you know, these Italian gentlemen, they are very nice to your face! ... and if he is in league with Salieri, I'll never get a text from him.*

Tentative though it is, this appears to be the earliest reference anywhere to a partnership that would produce three of the greatest operatic masterpieces in Italian or indeed any language.

Readers who enjoyed our production of *Capriccio* with its lively debate about the relative importance of words and music will be interested to read what Mozart had to say on the subject, in a letter to his father dated October 13, 1781:

*... I should say that in an opera the poetry must be altogether the obedient daughter of the music ... why do Italian comic operas please everywhere – in spite of their miserable libretti? Just because there the music reigns supreme and when one listens to it all else is forgotten ... The best thing of all is when a good composer, who understands the stage and is talented enough to make sound suggestions, meets an able poet, that true phoenix; in that case no fears need be entertained as to the applause even of the ignorant.*

Mozart had found his phoenix; Lorenzo Da Ponte's gifts (combining a delicacy of touch with Italian rhyme with an adventurous and flexible spirit) made him an ideal collaborator, even if in later years the poet would express views almost exactly antithetical to those in Wolfgang's letter:

*... if the words of a dramatic poem are nothing but a vehicle to the notes, and an opportunity to the action, what is the reason that a composer of music does not take at once a doctor's recipes, a bookseller's catalogue, or even a spelling book, instead of the verses of a poet, and make them a vehicle to his notes? Mozart knew very well that the success of an opera depends, FIRST OF ALL, ON THE POET ... I think that poetry is the door to music, which can be very handsome, and much admired for its exterior, but no body can see its internal beauties, if the door is wanting.*

True compatibility between artists seems to depend as much on differences as similarities. Temperamentally Mozart and Da Ponte may not have been brothers under the skin, but they complemented each other perfectly. And they were both eager for a hit that would be truly *sui generis*, rising above the interminable backbiting and political intrigue that plagued the Viennese operatic community and establishing them once and for all as the greatest artists of their day. The two chose their first subject quickly and defiantly: Beaumarchais' play *Le mariage de Figaro* had been expressly banned from performance by the Emperor himself, although in allowing copies of the script to be published, Joseph had insured that the more inquisitive members of the Viennese public were acquainted with the story and its implications. The decision taken by Mozart and Da Ponte to write the opera without a commission was extraordinary, but as it happened the court theater found itself in need of an opera just at the moment the score was complete, and the Emperor commissioned the work immediately upon hearing some of the music – which, of course, ruffled jealous feathers yet again. That the two creators knew just how unique this trailblazing new opera was can be inferred by Da Ponte's introduction to the printed libretto:

*This opera will not be one of the shortest to have been exhibited in our theater, for which we hope that ample recompense will be offered by the variety of themes woven into the action of this play, as well as its originality and large dimensions. The musical numbers are of the widest possible variety, so as not to leave any performers unoccupied for long periods, to avoid the tedium and monotony of long recitatives, and to lend expression to the many different passions which the characters experience. We wanted to present our most gracious and honorable public with a virtually new kind of play.*

After *Figaro*'s premiere in May of 1786, Lorenzo Da Ponte would continue to write libretti with great success, not only for Mozart, but for virtually all the leading composers of Vienna. But by 1789, the year Emperor Joseph ordered a new comic opera from Mozart and Da Ponte, the French Revolution was erupting and the Austrian Empire was embroiled in an expensive and ultimately futile war with the Turks. Vienna itself was changing. Intrigues and spying were ever more rampant, as the uncertainties in the political situation and the power shifts inside the capital made everyone suspect and cautious. Joseph's policy of tolerance was quickly abandoned in this harshly reactionary atmosphere, and most of his well-meaning reforms would be reversed even before his death in February 1790 – a mere month after the première of his commission, *Così fan tutte*. One historian of the day observed that in Vienna, "one never speaks openly, and never about matters of importance. It is known that the walls have ears." On top of all this, Joseph's successor, Emperor Leopold, had scant use for the arts. Lorenzo found himself unemployed and then, due to a complicated web of misunderstandings, exiled.

After fleeing Vienna, Da Ponte found himself in Trieste, where he met and married Nancy Grahl in 1792. Born in England to a German father and a French mother (both Jewish), Nancy was 20 years Lorenzo's junior but in every way seems to have been a perfect match for him: already a cultured and educated young woman she would, in the years to come, prove resilient, good-humoured, and infinitely resourceful, traits that the wayward poet would value and need. The two set off for Paris, carrying a letter of introduction from the late Emperor Joseph to his sister, Marie Antoinette. Upon learning of the French Queen's imprisonment the couple wisely changed plans and headed for London, where they would live for the next 12 years. In this highly entrepreneurial city with its international populace, Lorenzo embarked on several business schemes – most notably a bookselling business – and renewed contact with old Italian friends. He worked again in the theater and was again plagued by the intrigue of jealous rivals. Ultimately, as her husband faced financial ruin, Mrs. Da Ponte decided that family had best emigrate to the New World. In 1794 she left with the couple's children, and the next year, in 1795, the 56-year-old poet followed her.

Lorenzo Da Ponte began his new life as the manager of a hardware store in Pennsylvania. Soon afterwards, he moved to New York City, where he became a teacher of Italian (he was the first teacher in the U.S.A. to lecture on Dante's *Divine Comedy*) and something of a colorful character (whose cause was championed by none other than the author of "The Night Before Christmas"); in due course he became the first Professor of Italian at Columbia College. In addition to many plays and sonnets, Da Ponte published a three-volume autobiography.

He died in New York on August 17, 1838, and was buried in the old Catholic Cemetery on East 11th Street; as his grave was unmarked, it cannot now be located; his remains were lost during their removal in 1903 from Manhattan to Calvary Cemetery in Queen's, where he is now remembered on a tombstone beneath the flight-path into JFK airport.



Robert Holliston

*Così fan tutte* premiered in North America in the 1920's at New York's Metropolitan Opera. This was almost 100 years after the other American premiers of Da Ponte's and Mozart's other operas!

## Enlightening the Human Heart

In his 1759 novella *Candide*, Voltaire satirically declares, *All is for the best in the best of all possible worlds*, while the title character cheerfully encounters love and devastating loss. Pierre Choderlos de Laclos' 1782 novel *Les liaisons dangereuses* explores the amorality of aristocrats who use the human heart as a plaything, turning love into an intellectual battlefield. In 1790, Mozart and Da Ponte's *Così fan tutte* engages a quartet of lovers in a subversive game that confronts their youthful view of love and fidelity.

These three works all come out of the latter years of the Enlightenment, the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophic movement that held thought, reason and intellect as the primary means of creating a fair and civil society. In many ways, the Enlightenment was a golden time and the start of the modern age. Social equality began to replace the blind power of monarchy and religious dominance. Science began to champion the power of a rational mind to understand the world and master its natural laws. The values of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity would create a just and kind world for all.

But as with every social change, there is a pendulum effect where it all goes too far, and each of these three works suggests that reason is not exclusive of emotion in the human condition, and we shall ignore it at our peril.

In *Candide*, ingenues Candide and Cunegonde live entirely unexamined lives. Instructed to believe that the world's laws are unchangeable, they blindly accept as good and natural everything that befalls them – shipwrecks, starvation, forced prostitution, and a near miss with the Spanish Inquisition. Ultimately, they realize that their truth is internal: *We're neither pure, nor wise, nor good; We'll do the best we know; We'll build our house and chop our wood, And make our garden grow!* (from Leonard Bernstein's musical *Candide*)

*Les liaisons dangereuses* is the darkest of these stories. The Marquise de Merteuil and the Vicomte de Valmont play a game of emotional chess that ruins the lives of their pawns. They forge a sadistic relationship with one another by sharing the details of their exploitive sexual conquests. The challenge escalates to a level where the very hearts of their victims must be broken. Ultimately, the protagonists' rejection of their own emotions becomes their downfall, as Valmont encounters the goodness of Madame de Trouvel. While his seduction of her succeeds, her despair opens his heart. He tries to end the challenge with Merteuil, but she refuses; after he dies in a duel, their secret lives are revealed, and she is rejected by society.

*Così fan tutte* develops both of these themes, overlaid with the humanity of Mozart's music. The quartet of lovers are leading unexamined lives. The women are chaste goddesses to the men, and the ladies fatuously adore their men as heroes, until Don Alfonso challenges their sense of order by impugning feminine fidelity. As the story unfolds and the disguised men successfully seduce each other's lover, the game goes awry. Each person's true character – soulful or hedonistic, jealous or true – is exposed. The lessons they learn go beyond fidelity to life's other essential truth – that emotion can transcend reason, that the heart knows deeper than the mind, and the power of love is inexplicable.

For opera lovers, *Così* perhaps makes its case the most powerfully of the three works. While the libretto is full of sly wit, broad comedy and subversive satire, the music communicates a depth of emotion that matches and enriches the intellectual conceit so masterfully created by Da Ponte. From Ferrando's dreamy *Un'aura amorosa* to Guglielmo's fiery diatribe on the female gender *Donne mie, la fate a tanti*, from Dorabella's capricious *E Amore un ladroncello* to Fiordiligi's wrenching *Per pietà, ben mio, perdona*, each character's inner self is revealed, thoughtfully and lovingly, through Mozart's unparalleled musical understanding of human nature.

David Shefsiek

## The Enlightenment and Music

Historian and Professor Dorinda Outram provides a usefully succinct definition of the Enlightenment:

Enlightenment was a desire for human affairs to be guided by rationality rather than by faith, superstition, or revelation; a belief in the power of human reason to change society and liberate the individual from the restraints of custom or arbitrary authority; all backed up by a world view increasingly validated by science rather than by religion or tradition.

The term “Enlightenment” is the English equivalent of the German “Aufklärung,” already in common use in 1784, when Immanuel Kant described it simply as “the freedom to use one’s own intelligence.” Although no specific event or date heralds the onset of this intellectual movement, we can look to the appearance during the 17<sup>th</sup> century of such works as Descartes’ *Discourse on the Method* (1637) and Newton’s *Principia Mathematica* (1687). Many scholars consider the French Revolution, and the consequent reining in of liberal policies, as the point in history at which the tenets of Enlightenment were overtaken by other concerns. This coincides almost precisely with the creation of *Così fan tutte*.

The philosophies associated with Enlightenment were discussed and debated throughout most of continental Europe and the British Isles; the signatories of the American Declaration of Independence were motivated by Enlightenment principles.

The Enlightenment was humanitarian as well as cosmopolitan. Rulers not only patronized arts and letters, they took an active role in programs of social reform. Significant advances were made in education and social justice (torture and eventually capital punishment were abolished); ecclesiastical policies underwent considerable change.

The rule of Emperor Joseph II (1780-90) coincided almost exactly with Mozart’s residence in Vienna. One of the most important leaders of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Joseph embraced the ideas of religious tolerance and freedom of speech, but also considered himself an absolute monarch. The many reforms he introduced were intended to improve his empire and the lives of its subjects, but there was no democratic process involved and, since the Emperor wanted to achieve a great deal in a short time, little discussion: it was said of Joseph that he “takes the second step before the first.”

Professor Outram writes about the breaking down of barriers “between cultural systems, religious divides, gender differences and geographical areas.” Institutions aimed, at least in theory, for the highest possible level of inclusion. Academies, salons and coffee-houses, public debating societies, the book industry with its lending libraries, opened themselves to citizens who wished to learn about and discuss an extremely wide range of relevant topics.

An ideal central to the Enlightenment – a longing for universal human brotherhood – was embodied in the movement of Freemasonry, which was officially established in Europe in 1734, and spread rapidly throughout the continent, eventually counting among its members Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. The line “As a means to be enlightened I search for the enlightened” was part of the initiation rites in French lodges. In practice, these institutions were far from universally inclusive. Quite naturally they tended to attract members of like mind and temperament, and often a distinction was made between “the public” and “the people.”

Many institutions of the public sphere excluded both women and the lower classes, and even under the most liberal rulers censorship was practiced. In addition, it is useful to remember that the literacy rate throughout most of Europe was less than 50%, and that most readers – probably the majority – preferred romances, potboilers, and gossip rags to the highbrow political and philosophical works we consider representative of the period today. In Joseph’s Vienna there seems to have been a remarkable degree of egalitarianism. While there is no evidence to suggest that Mozart was driven to read great books or espouse revolutionary ideals, he attended many salons – some of which were hosted by intelligent, articulate Jewish women who no doubt influenced the thinking of Freemasons like himself. (In *Die Zauberflöte* the character of Pamina undergoes quasi-Masonic initiation rites

alongside Tamino – perhaps an implicit criticism of the lodges’ exclusionary policies?) Among Mozart’s friends and fellow Masons was the former African slave Angelo Soliman.

Generally speaking the Enlightenment was a prosaic age. Its best literature was prose, and it valued in all the arts the virtues of good prose writing: clarity, animation, good taste, proportion, and elegance. Rational rather than poetic, the age had little liking for the mysticism, gravity, massiveness, grandeur, and passion of the Baroque age, and its critical temper inhibited great poetry in large forms.

Music of the Enlightenment was supposed to meet the listener on his own ground, not compel him to make an effort to understand its structure. In one of the 18<sup>th</sup> century’s most important musical treatises, flautist Johann Joachim Quantz warns that “earlier composers occupied themselves too much with musical artifices, and pushed their use so far that they almost neglected the most essential part of music, that which is intended to move and please.” In other words, one must get rid of the kind of contrapuntal complexities which could be appreciated only by the few. Such opinions were shared by most critics in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.

Several terms have been used to describe the musical styles that flourished beginning around 1720 and led to the Classic period. *Rococo* has been used for early Classic music but, since it has no precise meaning, it is better avoided. The word was originally used in France beginning at the end of the seventeenth century to describe architecture that softened the angular and square forms of the post-Renaissance period with curved arabesques (rocaille or "shellwork").

Another French term, *galant*, was a catchword for everything that was thought to be modern, smart, chic, smooth, easy, and sophisticated. In music, this would tend to be non-contrapuntal, with an emphasis on melody with simple harmony in the accompaniment, and with regular phrasing and frequent cadence points. An excellent example of this style can be found in the works of Johann Christian Bach (1735-82), the most international of Johann Sebastian’s musical sons (he was known as the “London” Bach) and a composer-pianist whose style was well-loved and imitated by the young Mozart.

*Empfindsamkeit* is another term associated with the music of the mid-eighteenth century. It may be translated as "sentimentality" or "sensitivity," a refined passionateness and melancholy that characterizes some slow movements and obbligato recitatives in particular. Expressed through surprising turns of harmony, chromaticism, nervous rhythmic figures, and rhapsodically free, speechlike melody, it is found – along with elements of the *galant* idiom – in the keyboard sonatas of Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach (1714-1788), which were to be a great influence on the young Haydn.

In the mature symphonies, quartets, sonatas, operas, and oratorios of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven – the music constituting the great Classical Viennese school – we find these composers studying and revering the works of Bach and Handel, and absorbing many of the complex styles and techniques that had been discarded by the earlier classicists. All of the operas by the adult Mozart will contain enough complexity to unsettle many of his contemporaries: it is not only *The Abduction from the Seraglio* that could inspire even a cultivated listener to ask if there are not perhaps “too many notes.” In German literature, from the late 1760s to the early 1780s, we encounter a movement popularly known as *Sturm und Drang*, in which individual subjectivity and, in particular, extremes of emotion are given free expression in reaction to the perceived constraints of rationalism imposed by the Enlightenment. So already by the time of *Così fan tutte* there are stirrings of Romanticism and the age of the individual,

But that, of course, is another story, for another time.

*Robert Holliston*

*Così fan tutte* is frequently ranked in the list of the top 20 most produced operas on our continent!

## Construction Photos of the Set

Inspired by the works of M.C. Escher, Elli Bunton's set design for *Così fan tutte* suggests a topsy-turvy world, at once abstract, contemporary, and multi-dimensional, in which perspectives change and twist to reveal reality in unexpected ways.

The photos below show two views of the set while under construction in POV's Production facility.



## Links

### Così fan tutte Libretto

In Italian: <http://www.opera-guide.ch/libretto.php?id=252&uilang=de&lang=it>

In English: <http://www.opera-guide.ch/libretto.php?id=252&uilang=de&lang=en>

**Vocal Score** in Italian and English:

<http://www.dlib.indiana.edu/variations/scores/cbb7709/large/index.html>

**San Diego OperaTalk!** with Nick Reveles: Così fan tutte:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vx39EZ8J5N8>

San Diego Opera's Nicolas Reveles hosts this engaging video introduction to Mozart, Da Ponte, and Così fan tutte

**Who Marries Whom?** <http://www.peabodyopera.org/essays/cosi02/>

The libretto for Così does not actually specify the final pairing of lovers at the end of the opera. Although Mozart and Da Ponte may have mischievously left room for ambiguity, it is generally accepted that the original lovers end up together, at least for the moment, having learned some hard lessons about human frailty and forgiveness. This would be consistent with theatrical conventions of the time. By all appearances, it is a neat and tidy, if not a perfectly happy, ending. Occasionally directors toy with the ending. This article is an interesting exploration of the dilemma presented by the tension between historical accuracy and the emotional truths that are revealed as the characters develop.

### The Music of Così fan tutte

Below are video selections from several recent productions of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*.

**The first video shows three scenes from a 1996 Wiener Staatsoper production.**

1. As Ferrando and Guglielmo proclaim their sweethearts' virtue, their cynical friend Don Alfonso proposes a wager: if the brash lads will follow his instructions, he will prove that the women are not to be trusted. The men pretend to go off to war and return, disguised as Albanians. Each then tries to seduce the other's girlfriend. When sweet talk doesn't work, they pretend to take arsenic: *Si mora, sì, si mora (Let us die, yes, let us die)*.
2. Eventually the girls admit there may be no harm in a little flirtation. In their duet, *Prenderò quel brunettino (I'll take the dark one)* they divide up the two Albanians; each chooses the other's original sweetheart.
3. After both girls have succumbed to their seducers and agreed to marry them, Guglielmo and Ferrando return from the battlefield and "discover" the marriage contract: *Giusto ciel! Voi qui scriveste (Merciful heaven! You've signed here)*.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0\\_u2vRiiE9o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_u2vRiiE9o)

Fiordiligi: Barbara Frittoli. Dorabella: Angelica Kirchschrager

Guglielmo: Bo Skovhus Ferrando: Michael Schade

Despina: Monica Bacelli Don Alfonso: Alessandro Corbelli

Vienna State Opera Chorus and Vienna State Opera Orchestra, Riccardo Muti, conductor

Recorded live at the Wiener Staatsoper, 1996.

**Fiordiligi, Dorabella: *Ah guarda sorella***

Early in the opera, before Guglielmo and Ferrando depart for their regiment, Fiordiligi and Dorabella revel in their love for their sweethearts. *Ah tell me sister, If one could ever find a nobler face, a sweeter mouth.*

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9T\\_ZYHjPN48](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9T_ZYHjPN48)

Janice Feltz as Dorabella Susan Larson as Fiordiligi  
Peter Sellars' 1990 production set in Despina's Diner in the 1950s  
Vienna Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Craig Smith

**Fiordiligi, Dorabella, Don Alfonso: *Soave sia il vento***

In one of the loveliest moments in the opera, the two women and the cynical Don Alfonso wish the men godspeed as they sail away. It's all a trick, of course, and they'll be back soon, disguised as Albanians and up to no good.

*Gentle be the breeze, calm be the waves,  
And every element smile in favour on their wish.*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Wi7UsXW1As>

Fiordiligi: Miah Persson Dorabella: Anke Vondung Don Alfonso: Nicolas Rivenq  
From the DVD of *Così fan tutte*, recorded at Glyndebourne in 2006.  
Ivan Fischer directs the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.

**Dorabella: *Ah scostati... smanie implacabili***

Their lovers have ostensibly gone off to war, and the sisters are devastated. Dorabella proclaims her torment in this deliciously hysterical recitative (*Ah Scostati!*) and aria (*Smanie Implacabili*).

*Ah leave me! Flee the dread effect of a distracted love! ...  
Implacable pangs which torment me, do not subside within my being  
Until my anguish brings me death.*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-9ikpFJdrg>

Liliana Nikiteanu as Dorabella Cecilia Bartoli as Fiordiligi Agnes Baltsa as Despina  
Zurich Opera House, 2001. Directed by Nikolaus Harnoncourt.

**Fiordiligi: *Come Scoglio***

This scene is from the 2002 Berlin Staatsoper production directed by Doris Dörrie and set during the 1970s – the era of Hippies and Flower Power. Guglielmo and Ferrando, who had previously sported suits and ties, have returned, disguised outrageously as hippies. They have begun their campaign to seduce one another's girlfriends with an encouraging lack of success. The women are resisting mightily. In her aria *Come Scoglio (Like a rock)* Fiordiligi proclaims that she is immovable and will remain faithful to her true love:

*Like a rock standing impervious to winds and tempest,  
So stands my heart ever strong in faith and love.*

Alfonso asks the girls to at least be polite to the men, who again plead with the ladies to make them happy. Although the men persuasively enumerate their own attractive physical features, they are again repulsed. The men are delighted at this turn of events, but Don Alfonso reminds them that the bet isn't won yet.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HkycvPzMIMs>

Dorothea Röschmann as Fiordiligi Katharina Kammerloher as Dorabella  
Hanno Müller-Brachmann as Guglielmo Werner Güra as Ferrando  
Daniela Bruera as Despina Roman Trokel as Don Alfonso  
2002 Berlin Staatsoper. Conducted by Daniel Barenboim Directed by Doris Dörrie

**Ferrando: *Un' aura amorosa***

Confident that Dorabella will remain true to him and that he and Guglielmo will win their wager on the girls' fidelity, Ferrando sings of his love for Dorabella.

*A breath of love from our treasures  
Will afford our hearts sweet sustenance.  
A heart nourished on the hope of love  
Has no need of greater inducement.*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ull2tL5OarI>

Rainer Trost as Ferrando. Covent Garden, 1997.

**Fiordiligi: *Per pietà***

Though she has not yet given in to the stranger's advances, Fiordiligi has already lost her heart to him. In her great second-act aria she expresses her guilt and remorse, begging her absent lover to forgive her.

*In pity's name, my dearest, forgive the misdeed of a loving soul.*

But the horns in the orchestra slyly hint that despite her remorse, she will indeed betray Guglielmo.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p2vHfUMxOSM>

The late British soprano Susan Chilcott sings *Per pietà*  
Paris - Opera Garnier 1996

**Guglielmo: *Donne mie, la fate a tanti***

Guglielmo has broken the news to Ferrando that Dorabella has betrayed him. Ferrando is enraged, and Guglielmo sympathizes with his friend, commenting that although he loves the ladies, they do treat men very badly.

*Ladies, you treat so many thus that, if I must speak the truth,  
I begin to sympathise when your lovers complain.*

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Etd\\_uEH4s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Etd_uEH4s)

Simon Keenlyside as Guglielmo

