



“Così fan tutte” or “The school for Lovers”

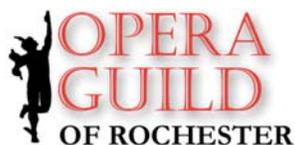
Playful drama in two acts
to be performed
in Prague's National Theatre
under the enterprise, and the direction
of Domenico Guardasoni
in the year 1791

Poetry by Abbate DA Ponte , Poet of the Imperial Theatre

Music by Mr. Wolfgango Mozart, choirmaster in the service of His Majesty Caesarea

Lecture

by Peter Dundas
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- In 1786, Lorenzo da Ponte was the best librettist in Vienna and well known by the Emperor and all those associated with the production of opera at the Burgtheater.
- He had met Mozart a year earlier and produced for him the libretto for *Le nozze di Figaro*, based on the French play by Pierre Beaumarchais.
- *Le nozze di Figaro* was premiered at the Burgtheater in Vienna on May 1, 1786 and performed only 10 times during 1786/87 season.
- In December 1786 the Italian impresario Bondini asked his partner Domenico Guardasoni to stage *Le nozze di Figaro* in Prague. It was a great success and 'was played almost without interruption throughout the winter.' On January 11, 1787 Mozart came to Prague for the first time, where he met Guardasoni and conducted *Le nozze di Figaro* himself, only eight months after the premiere in Vienna.

- In Prague, Mozart's operas played 'on and on', starting with *Idomeneo* in 1781 and *Il Seraglio* in 1783. This was because in politically provincial 18th-century Prague, Italian opera had for decades been the main attraction of the local secular culture.
- Italian opera had enjoyed an uninterrupted life there since 1724 and this turned out to be very important for Mozart. Opera in Prague was managed quite differently from Vienna. It was not the private theatre of the ruler and a small circle of his court society, but a publicly accessible city opera that anyone could attend if they had the interest and money for a ticket.
- Everyone needs a champion sometime in life!
- Guardasoni became that champion for Mozart.
- After the success of *Le nozze di Figaro* in Prague 1787, he commissioned and staged *Don Giovanni* in Prague 1788, commissioned and staged *La clemenza di Tito* in Prague 1791 and then staged *Così fan tutte* in Prague, Leipzig and Dresden 1791, all before the untimely death of Mozart, on December 5, 1791 .

- But I'm getting a little ahead of myself.
- On October 29 1787 Guardasoni staged the world premiere of *Don Giovanni*, at the Nostic Theatre in Prague.
- Perhaps in response to this event, it was in February 1788 that Antonio Salieri was elevated to the position of Imperial Hofkapellmeister in Vienna, making him responsible for all state music affairs.
- The war with the Turks had escalated to such a state that life in Vienna was becoming unbearable. Inflation had risen to a point that food prices had doubled and many were fleeing the city to avoid conscription.
- The cultural life of Vienna suffered as well. The number of concerts in Vienna dwindled and the court opera shared this burden. At the end of the month, the Emperor departed Vienna for his war camp near the front lines.

- It was under these conditions that Mozart's *Don Giovanni* finally came to the stage in Vienna on May 7, 1788. The apparent delay in staging *Don Giovanni* was due to the necessities of a war economy and not machinations on the part of the new Imperial Hofkapellmeister as some have suggested.
- After *Don Giovanni* there are no letters from Mozart or da Ponte to tell us how they worked together to produce *Così fan tutte*. The only information we can gather from the letters from 1788 and 1789, is that he was destitute and pleaded with a few rich friends for money.
- However, Mozart was very busy composing during this period, including his last three symphonies, his famous clarinet quintet, three piano trios and six piano sonatas, but no mention of a new opera.
- So where was *Così fan tutte*?

- It has now been shown, with a high degree of certainty, that Da Ponte's libretto was never intended for Mozart.
- Piecing together the large quantity of research done, described in the Cambridge Opera Journal in 1996 by Bruce Alan Brown and John A Rice, entitled "*Salieri's Così fan tutte*".
- Da Ponte's good friend, Catarino Mazzola, had introduced him to Salieri in 1779. Mazzola had just written a libretto *La scuola de' gelosi* (*The school of Jealousy*) for Salieri which was very successful at its premiered a year before and was then used by Emperor Joseph II to introduce the 1783/84 season in Vienna, and then reprised in 1787.
- In 1789, Da Ponte decided to write a similar libretto for Salieri called *La scuola degli amanti* (*The school for Lovers*).

- Evidence has recently come to light in the form of manuscripts in Salieri's hand that record his attempt to set this libretto to music. The Austrian National Library's huge collection of Salieri's autograph manuscripts includes, among works catalogued as "terzetti", settings of the first two numbers of Da Ponte's *La scuola degli amanti*:
- After Salieri gave up trying to compose music for this new libretto, Da Ponte asked Mozart to do it.
- Mozart changed the name of his opera to *Così fan tutte* and it was premiered at the Burgtheater in Vienna on January 26, 1790.
- It was performed five times before Emperor Joseph II died on February 20, 1790. A second series of five performances took place from June 6, 1790 to August 7, 1790.

- It was to be several generations before *Così fan tutte* was given again in Italian in Vienna following the conclusion of the first run on Saturday August 7, 1790.
- That the opera continued to receive performances in its original language was largely due to its promotion by Domenico Guardasoni, whose association with Mozart went back to the staging of *Le nozze di Figaro* in Prague in 1786. After that success, he was responsible for further Italian language performances of the opera in both Prague and Leipzig.
- Guardasoni also staged *Così fan tutte* in Prague on November 23, 1791, just eleven days before Mozart died in Vienna.
- I have a copy of this libretto, dated 1791, Praga. The 1996 MET performance, used in this lecture, makes a few minor cuts, but is faithful to the actual thoughts and meanings written into the original.

- *Così fan tutte* is an opera with many ensembles, 4 Duets, 5 trios, 2 quartets, 1 quintet and 3 sextets; some of the best music ever written by Mozart.
- It is divided into two acts. The first is pure 18th Century Italian buffa, (comic opera), a farce.
- The basis of the plot is that two 'high born' young military officers who love their fiancés and believe them to be faithful.
- Their older philosophical friend assures them that no women are faithful and he can prove it in 24 hours, providing the two officers agree to his plan.
- The first scene, consisting of three trios and some recitative, details this plan and I think is so important that I'm using it, in its entirety, as my first video clip.
- Salieri tried to set the first two of these trios to music, "La mia Dorabella" (My Dorabella) and "E' la fede delle femmine" (Woman's constancy).

- The two officers are *Ferrando*, sung by Jerry Hadley, tenor and *Guglielmo*, sung by Dwane Croft, baritone. The older philosopher *Don Alphonso* is Thomas Allen, bass, from a 'Live from Lincoln Center' MET recording in 1996, with James Levine conducting.
- This 20yr old recording has video quality that shows its age, but the singing and TV direction are splendid!
- Video Clip 1 (Act 1 Scene1 - 7:20)

- The plan is that Don Alphonso will explain to the Officer's fiancés that their lovers have been called into military service to fight at the frontline.
- Naturally, the ladies are distraught when they see their lovers board a ship to take them away.
- In Scene 9 we see *Dorabella*, sung by Susan Mentzer, mezzo-soprano, attempt to kill herself in the presence of her sister *Fiordiligi* and their maid *Despina*, who artfully substitutes *Dorabella's* knife with a wooden spoon, in a comic display that is masterful.
- Video Clip 2 (Act 1 Scene 9 N11 – 3:01)

- The sisters explain the terrible situation that has caused them to be so unhappy and *Despina*, their maid, tries to cheer them up.
- "You look for fidelity in men, in soldiers? Don't tell me that, for pity's sake! All of them are made of the same stuff; crocodile tears, lying looks, deceiving words, false endearments are the basis of their tricks".
- *Despina* is sung by Cecilia Bartoli, soprano, in her MET debut.
- Video Clip 3 (Act1 Scene 9 N12– 2:27)

- Continuing his plan, *Don Alphonso* disguises the two soldiers in elaborate costumes and brings them to meet, first *Despina*, and then the sisters.
- This magnificent sextet, for me, is one of the best Mozart ever wrote, from both a musical and theatrical aspect.
- Video Clip 4 (Act 1 Scene 11 N13 – 4:06)

- Perhaps emboldened by their disguises, *Ferrando* and *Guglielmo* are now paired with their friend's fiancées, *Fiordiligi* and *Dorabella*, respectively.
- They become very amorous and attempt to woo them. *Guglielmo* sings, "It was love, that powerful god who drew us here in search of you. No sooner having glimpsed the light of your dazzling eyes, than their bright sparks like moths tormented by desire we flew before you".
- *Dorabella*, the younger sister, is tempted, but *Fiordiligi*, holds steadfast to her love for *Guglielmo*.
- She sings her aria "Come Scolio immoto resta" (Like a rock standing impervious).
- This is one of Mozart's bad jokes. He wrote this for the first *Fiordiligi*, Adriana Ferrarese, who sang it at the premiere on January 26, 1790, even though she was the mistress of his librettist, Lorenzo da Ponte.

- Apparently, this singer had a musical technique where she moved her chin downwards for low notes. Mozart composed a technically difficult aria peppered with wide intervals, causing Ferrarese's head to bob up and down in an amusing way, at least for Mozart.
- *Fiordiligi* is sung by Carol Vaness, soprano.
- Video Clip 5 (Act 1 Scene 11 N14 – 5:12)

- Now I cannot resist one of the funniest moments in the opera, starting when *Guglielmo* pursues *Dorabella* with the words “to the heavenly beauty of your eyes; let two loving lightning flashes strike for a moment here”.
- *Dorabella* is weakening when *Fiordiligi* rushes over to save her and take her out of the room.
- Both *Guglielmo* and *Ferrando* dissolve in tears and laughter; they are winning the bet.
- There is now a short and sublime syncopated trio for the three men, *Don Alphonso*, *Ferrando* and *Guglielmo*.
- Video Clip 6 (Act 1 Scene 12 N17 – 2:49)

- However, nothing that *Guglielmo* or *Ferrando* say or do makes *Dorabella* or *Fiordiligi* succumb to their charms.
- In desperation, and with help from *Don Alphonso* and *Despina*, the two men decide to fake taking poison, thus shocking the ladies and inducing the others to get a doctor and an antidote for the poison.
- The action is hilarious, and without any more of my description, here is the Finale of Act 1. This is very demanding on the voices; all six are involved.
- I have selected this particular performance because of the excellence of the individual voices and the wonderful way that Brian Large, the TV film producer, captures the numerous individual solos within this marvelous sextet.
- *Ferrando's* part, sung here so well by the tenor Jerry Hadley, is seldom seen or heard on other DVD versions.
- Video Clip 7 (Act 1 Scene 16 Finale – 9:25)

- Act 2 opens in the ladies bedroom where their maid *Despina* is dressing them.
- The two ladies do not know what to do about their new ardent foreigners, so *Despina* instructs them, as intended by da Ponte in his original title for the opera, *La scuola degli amanti* (The school for lovers).
- *Despina* sings an aria that probably offended many audience members, even at the premiere, “By the time she’s fifteen years old, a woman should know a thing or two Where the devil keeps his tail What’s good and what’s bad.... She should know all the tricks to make lovers fall in love.”
- This is all unchanged from the original libretto of 1789.
- *Dorabella* is very interested in what *Despina* recommends but *Fiordiligi* is, at first, definitely against her advice.
- Video Clip 8 (Act 2 Scene 1 N19 – 4:20)

- Left alone, *Dorabella* discuss which lover to choose. *Dorabella* says she already chosen “I’ll take the one in black, who seems to be more fun”. *Fiordiligi* replies, with less confidence “And meantime I’ll laugh and joke a bit with the fair one”.
- *Don Alphonso* sets up an elegant tableau that Da Ponte specified “A garden by the seashore, with garden seats and two small tables.
- At the landing stage is a barge decorated with flowers. *Ferrando* and *Guglielmo* in the barge, with singers and musicians; *Despina* in the garden; *Fiordiligi* and *Dorabella*, accompanied by *Don Alphonso*, come in from one side. Richly attired servants, etc.
- *Ferrando* and *Guglielmo* sing an elegant duet, accompanied by instruments and chorus, with the intention of making a formal introduction to the ladies, who respond -- “What is this masquerade?”

- After a period of contemplation, the ladies and gentlemen begin their formal courtships.
- First *Guglielmo* takes a walk with *Dorabella*.
- I’m starting the next video clip where *Dorabella* is falling under the spell for *Guglielmo*, who says, *to himself* “The mountain is weakening. I don’t like this, but I’ve pledged my honor as a soldier”.
- He then continues with his ardent wooing “I adore you! ... I am all yours! ... Give in my dear one!” and then *to himself* “Poor Ferrando!”
- *Guglielmo* seduces *Dorabella* but it is not an act of love; it is just a seduction.
- *Dorabella* is willingly seduced.
- Video Clip 9 (Act 2 Scene 5 N23 – 4:46)

- Now it is Ferrando's turn. *Fiordiligi* runs away from *Ferrando* and says "I've seen an asp, a hydra, a basilisk!"
- He replies "All of these fierce monsters you see in me?"
- The problem is that *Fiordiligi* is falling in love, stronger than she has felt for *Guglielmo*.
- She sings "Ah yes, it's true! You would rob me of my peace", and *Ferrando* replies "Only to make you happy".
- She sings "Leave me!" *Ferrando* replies "I will not, until you gaze at me more tenderly"
- *Ferrando* then sings an aria "Ah, lo veggio, quell'anima bella" (Ah, I see, your lovely spirit) that is generally cut because of its tessitura, but which I think is important to show the genuine nature of feelings between this couple.
- *Fiordiligi* is torn between love and honor.
- Video Clip 10 (Act 2 Scene 6 N24 – 3:20)

- *Fiordiligi's* big aria "Per pieta, ben mio, perdona"
- She confesses to herself the guilt she feels for *Guglielmo*. Even though *Ferrando* has not been successful in his attempt to seduce her, she is in love with him. "--- And who is it whom this unworthy heart has betrayed? Dear heart, your trust deserved a better reward!
- Here Mozart mirrors the sentiment written by Da Ponte and uses horns to enhance the melancholy of this key moment in the opera.
- This is no longer Opera Buffa – we are now dealing with true feelings and the inevitable consequences.
- Video Clip 11 (Act 2 Scene 7 N25 – 7:36)

- In Act 2 Scene 8, *Ferrando* and *Guglielmo* discuss their wooing of each other's fiancées.
- *Ferrando* is very pleased. He tells *Guglielmo* that, although he tried to seduce *Fiordiligi*, she remained faithful to *Guglielmo*. We have won the bet.
- When he asks about *Dorabella*, *Guglielmo* is, at first, loathe to tell the truth.
- However, when *Guglielmo* finally admits that *Dorabella* was not faithful, *Ferrando* screams "I will tear her heart from her wicked bosom and avenge the betrayal of my love".
- In Act 2 Scene 9, *Guglielmo* brags to *Ferrando* "Dear friend, one must make distinctions in everything. Do you imagine a woman could fail a *Guglielmo*".

- In Act 2 Scene 10, *Fiordiligi* and *Dorabella* share their current feelings about the two foreigners.
- *Fiordiligi* talks to *Dorabella*, "The devil's in me; let him take me ... I'm in love, and my love isn't just for *Guglielmo*" ...
- *Dorabella* replies, "and perhaps you too have fallen in love with the fair gallant?"
- *Fiordiligi* responds, "Ah only so deeply!" to which *Dorabella* says, "Take seventy thousand kisses: You for the fair one, I for the dark one, and there we are, both married!"
- Video Clip 12 (Act 2 Scene 10 – 1:44)

- *Ferrando* now knows that *Guglielmo* has seduced his *Dorabella*.
- He is hurt and now has a bigger incentive to seduce *Fiordiligi*.
- He has no difficulty in his second chance with *Fiordiligi*, especially since she has already fallen for him.
- But here da Ponte moves away from Opera Buffa. Now we are no longer in comedy. It is no longer a farce. This begins to be very personal for most people in the audience. In 1790, the opera was saved only by the exquisite music of Mozart.
- *Così fan tutte* had failed to adhere to the strict rules of the “Age of Enlightenment” – the need for, at least, a sense of redemption. In *Don Giovanni*, for instance, the main character, who had seduced many ladies, finally goes to hell in the last Act. The full title of the opera is *Il dissoluto punito ossia Don Giovanni tenorio*.
- Video Clip 13 (Act 2 Scene 12 N29 – 5:40)

- *Guglielmo*, who has just seen *Ferrando* seduce his lover, *Fiordiligi*, shouts his pain to *Don Alphonso*,
- “Alas, poor me, what have I seen! What have I heard! I’ll pluck out my beard. I’ll tear my flesh, and charge the stairs with my horns!
- So that was *Fiordiligi*, my Penelope, the chaste Diana of the age! Strumpet, assassin, cheat, swindler, bitch!”
- *Don Alphonso* responds, “I know what to do; marry them.
- Both *Ferrando* and *Guglielmo* refuse. “Then you’ll stay bachelors for ever”, says *Don Alphonso*.
- “The lover who finds that he’s been deceived should blame not others but his own mistake; whether they’re young or old, fair or plain – repeat with me: Women are all the same!”
- “*Così fan tutte*”
- Video Clip 14 (Act 2 Scene 13 N30 – 3:26)

- *Despina* rushes in to say that the ladies have agreed to marry their new foreign lovers.
- After some more debate, *Don Alphonso* convinces the men to accept their offer and marry them.
- An elaborate ceremony is staged, enhanced by Mozart's music with chorus. Then there is a mock wedding
- The last video clip begins when a notary is brought in, played by *Despina* in a ridiculous disguise.
- A marriage contract is written and signed. However, just as the ladies sign, martial music heralds the return of their original lovers. The libretto makes it clear that only the ladies have signed the marriage contract.
- The ladies realize that they both have deceived their soldier lovers and now expect to be severely punished.

- *Don Alphonso* then reveals the whole deception to the ladies, including *Despina*, who now realizes that she too has been duped;
- Yes she helped *Don Alphonso* with his plan but she didn't know that the Albanians were the soldier lovers in disguise.
- The ladies accuse cruel *Don Alphonso* of deceiving them. He explains his reasons, as written in the libretto by Da Ponte "*La scuola degli amanti*", "The school for lovers"
- However, feelings are hurt. Even though *Ferrando* and *Dorabella* apparently return to their original relationships, it is quite obvious that *Guglielmo* will not forgive *Fiordiligi*. The actual words of the libretto are respected and it is significant that Da Ponte was able to expose such raw emotions in 1789.
- This is not a happy ending, especially for *Fiordiligi*, who now knows that there are different levels of love.
- *Despina* also feels used and cheated. *Don Alphonso* gives her a share of his winnings, which she then throws to the ground in disgust.

- Throughout the 19th and half of the 20th Century, *Così fan tutte* was not performed because of the perceived misogyny. Da Ponte had 'crossed the line', possibly relating to the hurtful amorous events in his own life.
- The Second Act music is still pure Mozart, in the solos or ensembles, but the aftertaste is bitter. This is no longer comedy; it is verity! You leave with a smile – but with jaded feelings in the heart.
- Today, each of us understands the fragility of relationships and the pain that can result from broken love affairs. So *Così fan tutte* is more believable, more acceptable. Today, the London opera database shows that *Così* is the 14th most popular opera performed there in the past 70 years, but still ahead of most Verdi or Wagner operas. At the MET, its ranking is 24th for the same time period.
- Video Clip 15 (Act 2 Scenes 17 & 18, Finale - 12:51)

Further Reading

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**The National Court Theatre in Mozart's
Vienna**

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by Dorothea Link

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