

**The influence of the philosophy of the age of
enlightenment on Mozart's operas.
Updated with DVD excerpts**

Opera Guild of Rochester

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Age of the Enlightenment 17th and 18th Century

Medieval Historical Antecedents

Lack of individual freedom, people are subjects of aristocrats or kings

Church law, political, religious, philosophical, social order dominated by the Church

People are born into social positions with pre-ordained obligations such as kinship or feudal duty.

Social positions didn't change throughout a person's life

Factors undermining the stability of the medieval society

The religious reformation of the 16th Century challenged the laws and the powers of the Church

Dynamics of economic growth

- **Markets opened up**
- **Widening of the circulation of commodities**
- **Accumulation of wealth by the new class that derived its power from money rather than status. Beginning of Banking. The Fuggers in Augsburg.**
- **Formation of a new social class, the bourgeois, that sold its labor for a wage.**
- **Scientific discoveries that questioned the order of the universe. Galileo, Copernicus, Newton.**

The results of the economic changes and the religious wars, 17th and 18th Century

Destruction of feudal society, emerging absolutist rulers that needed the new bourgeois class for stability

The rational standardization of law

Abolition of exclusive rights and privileges of the feudal society that prevented people entering into a social and commercial transaction on an equal basis.

Commerce brought religious toleration, religious difference should not hinder trade and economic growth

Demands for individual freedom. The enlightenment struggled with balance of individual freedom versus the cohesion of social order

Austrian Enlightenment Maria Theresa 1740/80 Joseph II 1780/90

Economic growth and freedom

Josephinian Reforms

- **Decrease of the power of the feudal nobility**
- **Decrease of the power of the Church**
- **Dramatic rationalistic laws including freedom of press**
- **Freemasons lodges**

Reversal of the Reforms starting 1786

- **When the liberal forces started to undermine authority, security of the state.**

Enlightenment at the end of the 18th Century

- **Struggle to understand the need for the spiritual versus rationalistic thought as the driving force in society**

The movement of the Free Masons

Masons traveled to built cathedrals, influence of different cultures

Beginning of the 18th Century formation of free thinking brotherhoods in England

After 1725 the masons spread to the continent

Freemasonry was the bourgeois enlightenment's most persuasive vision of society guided by a secular religion of morality

Lessing believed that the day might come that everyone would obey Masonic moral law. He expressed his philosophy in his play *Nathan the Wise*.

Free Masonry in Vienna

During Mozart's time 1780-91 several Mason lodges existed

- **The scientific/rationalistic lodge was led by the metallurgist Ignaz von Born and was called "Zur wahren Freiheit" (True peaceful existence)**
- **Haydn entered the lodge in 1785**
- **80% of Austrian higher bureaucracy were Masons during the 1780 ties in Josephinian Vienna**
- **Sonnenfels, the mentor of the Viennese enlightenment and supporter of Mozart was vice-master of the lodge of True peaceful existence.**

Enlightenment and Bourgeois Society

France

Louis 14th, absolute ruler needed the bourgeois to promote wealth and security and to allow progress and civilization to flourish

In the next century the power and rebellion of the bourgeois scientists, philosophers, artists and play-writes from Voltaire to Beaumarchais eventually led to the French Revolution and threatened the social cohesion and security.

Enlightenment and Bourgeois Society

England

Monarchy weakened under the Stuarts

Power alliance of the progressive aristocracy with the mercantile bourgeoisie

Individual freedom, pursuit of happiness and pleasure but also demands of social duty

Protagonists of enlightened thought were Locke, Hume and at the end of the 18th Century the mysticism of Blake sought spiritual meaning of life.

The Abduction from the Seraglio Composer W.A.Mozart Libretto G. Stephanie

The English maid Blonde and her mistress the Spanish Konstanze are caught by pirates and sold to the Turkish Pasha Selim, who gives her to the overseer Osmin as a slave. Blonde expresses the enlightened thought in asserting herself to Osmin:

“ a girl born to freedom will never slavishly take orders’

Act I, Chapter 9

“ Ich gehe, doch rate ich dir”

Free Masonry in Vienna

Catholic Enlightenment

- Catholicism versus Protestantism in Enlightenment
- Rosicrucians were the mystic lodges
- Mozart, a devout catholic followed the teaching of the catholic reformer Ludovico Muratori, who preached that salvation came from good deeds.
- Mozart joined the lodge “Zur Wohltätigkeit” (Beneficence), a sister lodge to “True Peaceful Existence” in 1784. This lodge was part of the catholic enlightenment. Mozart’s beliefs are expressed in his last opera *Die Zauber Flöte* (The magic flute)
- 1786 Joseph II started to reinstitute limitations on the freedom of the Masonic Lodges for fear that their activities would weaken the social and political order.

**Excerpts of enlightened thought in Mozart's Operas
Idomeneo
Libretto G. Varesco**

Love and forgiveness in the family, between Conqueror and Conquered, sacrifice of the individual for the safety of the society.

The story is from the Greek myth and the fate of the Trojans and the Greeks are presented in the fate of the Trojan Princess Ilia and her love the Cretan Prince Idamante.

They represent the new enlightened rulers

Disc I, Act 1, Chapter 8

" Ecco il misero resto de Troiani"

Idomeneo

Vows and contracts

- **Vows are promises to God or Gods and considered by Voltaire dangerous and contravene the laws of nature and society**
- **The Enlightenment replaced the old commitment to religion and custom with the secular contract**
- **This marks the shift between medieval and modern social structure**
- **Idomeneo makes a vow to Neptune that he would sacrifice the first person, he see on land for a safe sea journey. This vow almost costs him the life of his son Idamante. The Coro and the High Priest comment on this fateful vow.**

Disc II, Act 3, Chapter 12

" Oh voto tremendo"

The Abduction of the Seraglio

Passion and love are expressed in Music

Belmonte, Konstanze's lover is in search of his love, following her to Pasha Selim's house and sings about his lost love

Act1, Chapter 5

"Konstanze, dich wiedersehen, O, wie aengstlich, o wie feurig"

Rational thought is expressed in words Pasha Selim forgives the lovers who tried to escape. Forgiveness is the virtue of the Free Masons

Selim: " now Belmonte, are you ready for your sentence"?

Belmonte: Take revenge on me!

Selim: "You are mistaken. Take Konstanze, take your freedom, sail home! It is far greater pleasure for me to repay injustice suffered with a good deed than hate with hate.

Mozart's three Da Ponte Operas

**Le Nozze Di Figaro based on a play by Beaumarchais
Vienna 1786**

Don Giovanni Prague 1787, Vienna 1788

Cosi Fan Tutte " The School for Lovers" Vienna 1790

Le Nozze Di Figaro

Abolishment of the Master's right to have the first night with the servant bride. This custom became considered against the natural law.

The Count, the aristocratic figure of the feudal society is officially giving up his right to the first night though reluctantly. The servants laud him for his act of kindness.

Act 1, Chapter 18

Recitativo: " Così e questo commedia?"

Act3, Chapter 5 the middle part of the 2 girls and the Coro .

"Amanti costanti " stop when the Count comes in

Le Nozze Di Figaro The marriage contract

Social contract

Mozart celebrates the ideal of marriage in bourgeois society as the central, non political contractual institution of the new order.

Bourgeois marriage is central to Mozart's moral world as it is for Rousseau, Kant, Goethe, mediating the conflicting interests of the individual, family, religion and the state.

Marriage was the primary institution in which men and women were able to exercise their power to make autonomous ethical decisions.

The Ehepatent of Marriage law was enacted by Joseph II as part of the reforms in 1783. Marriage became a civil Contract.

Le Nozze Di Figaro Marriage contract

Figaro as a free man demands the right to make his own arrangements and marry the woman he chooses and loves. His previous contract with Marcellina, made when he was in debt, is valid when he secured his loan with his hand in marriage. When he defaults, Marcellina has a right to demand he marry her.

Marcellina tells Dr. Bartolo about her contract.

Act 1, Chapter 8

"Recitativo: " Ed aspettaste il giorno"

Le Nozze Di Figaro Rebellion of the servant against an unjust master

Figaro rebels against the Count when he discovers the Count wants to steal the affection of his bride Suzanna

Act 1, Chapter 7

" Se vuol ballare"

Forgiveness

At the end of the opera the count asks forgiveness from his wife for his transgressions.

She forgives him.

Her mature marital love is juxta positioned to the immature adolescent love of Cherubino.

Act 4, Chapter 69 "contessa, perdonna"

Don Giovanni

Moliere's Don Juan is an argumentative rationalist engaging in philosophical disputes about his puerile principles.

Mozart's Don Giovanni is devoid of any principles, morals: he is a sensualist indulging himself in wine, food and fast sex. If the woman does not succumb fast enough, he rapes her. He is a sexual libertine, a threat to society. He threatens the sort of humane society based upon free contractual agreements and guided by the moral principles of Christianity.

The damnation of Don Giovanni for Mozart is real in the sense that the Enlightenment accepted a beneficent Divinity for the just but punishment for the wicked as a necessary condition for any sort of social order

Don Giovanni

**So at the end when Don Giovanni refuses to repent his crimes
"The Statue" drags him to hell.**

Disc 2, Act 2, Chapter 26

" a cenar teco m'invitasti"

Cosi Fan Tutte A School for Lovers

The story of the opera goes back to a play by Marivaux " La Dispute". It tests the ideal of human constancy and fidelity.

Don Alfonso, the pragmatic rationalist teacher goes out to prove that this ideal is unrealistic in the face of nature .

He attempts to guide and monitor the educational experience of the two young couples, but fails to understand the feelings, passion and struggle of conscience that in the process of this Rousseauen educational experiment he almost destroys the young couples.

Cosi Fan Tutte

Rousseau's program for moral education has three components.

- **Practical training through lessons of experience via the senses.**
- **Development of reason that teaches good versus evil.**
- **Final full ethical maturity allows the individual to exercise a moral conscience, able to " love and hate" the good and evil that has been taught by reason.**

**Così fan tutte
Struggle with faithfulness**

Fiordiligi is terrified by her remorse when she realizes that she is about to violate her oath of fidelity to Guglielmo, her fiancée. Her mind and body are thrown into turmoil. Her anguish is expressed in her aria "Per pietà". She pitifully accuses herself.

Disc 2, Act 2, chapter 13

Rondo: " per pietà, ben mio, perdonna"

**The Magic Flute
The Masonic Opera. Libretto E. Schikaneder**

The story of man's progression through stages of enlightenment to become a mature morally responsible individual, assuming spiritual autonomy and dignity of ethical choice. According to Rousseau and Kant this was the highest form of freedom.

In this Opera Tamino and Pamina are led by Sarastro to this highest form of wisdom.

Disc2, Act 2, Chapter 13