

Die Entfuehrung aus dem Serail

Abduction from the Seraglio
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Libretto by G. Stephanie the Younger after C.F.Bretzner

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The Abduction from the Seraglio

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Introduction

To understand the historical, social and philosophical significance of The Abduction from the Seraglio, we have to discuss these issues against the background of the enlightenment of the 18th Century.

Enlightened Philosophy of the Free Masons in Mozart's Vienna 1780-91

Reign of Emperor Joseph II, 1780-90

The Free Masons promoted these values

- Sympathy
- Harmony
- Beneficence
- Freedom and Equality of natural law as foundation of their lodges.
- Religious Tolerance.

Josephinean Reforms 1780-90

- Decrease of the power of the feudal nobility
- Decrease of the power of the Church
- Dramatic enactment of rationalistic laws including freedom of the press
- Permission of the existence of Free Mason Lodges

80% of Austrian higher bureaucracy were Free Masons in Josephinean Vienna.

- Mozart became a Mason 1784
- Haydn in 1785

Buffa Opera in Mozart's Vienna

- The Venetian playwright Carlo Goldoni provided a widely imitated model in his sentimental comedies which reformed the Opera Buffa libretti
- Diderot and Lessing called for a bourgeois and "intermediate" dramatic genre, featuring elevated natural style and recognizable characters. Even comic episodes served a serious purpose as a yardstick to measure the hero or the heroine.

Opera Buffa continued

- These styles were expressed in Italian Opera Buffa which was preferred in the cities and courts of Europe.
- Mozart elevated the German Singspiel to the same level.

The Abduction from the Seraglio The First German Opera

- Emperor Joseph II established the National-Singspiel Company 1778, which lasted to 1783. German Operas continued at the Kaertnertortheater thereafter.
- The librettist Gottlieb Stephanie the Younger became the director of the National-Singspiel 1781, the year Mozart came to Vienna.

The Abduction from the Seraglio

- Mozart hoped to have freedom and be successful as a musician in Josphinean Vienna's enlightened culture and to develop the Grand German Opera.
- Stephanie the Younger was Mozart's supporter and friend and his libretto to the opera based on a play by Bretzner became Mozart's first German Opera; its success established Mozart's reputation beyond Austria.

The Abduction from the Seraglio

- The Abduction was first performed two weeks before his marriage on August 4, 1782 to Constance Weber. This was an act of defiance, showing Mozart's independence from his over powering father. He exercised his freedom (it was customary to ask for parental permission) as Blonde does as an English woman. (England was considered the land of freedom in 18th Century Europe). Mozart also declared his believe in true love like Belmonte and Konstanze's true love in the Opera.

The Abduction from the Seraglio The Story

- This is a Buffa Opera which was preferred by the Viennese audiences but also conforms to the genre of the Rescue Operas, quite popular in the late 18th Century, which represents the Opera Seria elements. Thus we have the perfect story in this opera that follows the principles of the Shakespeare plays mixing the comic and the serious elements.

The Story continued

- Konstanze, a Spanish lady, her English maid Blonde and Pedrillo (in love with Blonde) a servant, are kidnapped by pirates and sold to the Turkish Pasha Selim, a renegade Spanish Christian Nobleman (turned Muslim) as slaves.
- After the unsuccessful siege of Vienna in 1683 by the Turkish army, the 18th Century European world had a fascination with the Turkish Muslim world. Turkish music appears often in Mozart's compositions and can be heard in the overture, some of the music of Osmin and the chorus of the Janissaries in the opera.

The Story

- Pasha Selim gives Blonde and Pedrillo as slaves to Osmin, the overseer of his harem, who represents the crude part of the Muslim world.
- Konstanze is delegated to the Pasha's harem. Selim falls in love with Konstanze, who grieves having lost her beloved fiancée Belmonte to whom she swore true love.
- Pasha Selim woos her. He is noble and represents the ideals of the enlightenment. He gets however increasingly impatient with Konstanze, who does not respond to his advances.

The Story

- The opera begins with Belmonte arriving in the Pasha's garden in an effort to rescue Konstanze.
- He tries in vain to gain Osmin's attention, who ignores him and finally fumes at him with the Buffa aria "These profligate puppies", dismissing him as another vagabond lurking after the girls in the harem and threatens what he would do with people like Belmonte.
- He flies off the handle in the coda, to which Mozart added "Turkish" music for comic effect
- Chapter 4 to watch

The Story

- After Osmin leaves, Belmonte comes back and discovers Pedrillo. Belmonte is overcome with feelings of joy and anxiety and tells Pedrillo, he has everything prepared for their rescue.
- He sings a lyric aria about his ardent love to Konstanze
- Chapter 5 to watch

The Story

- Pasha Selim appears with his entourage and Konstanze. He demands to know why she does not yield to his love. She admits that she loves another man.
- After she leaves, Pedrillo brings Belmonte to Pasha Selim, introducing him as an Italian architect. Selim invites him to his court.
- Konstanze's English maid Blonde, now has a comic duet with Osmin, her new master. She asserts her right to freedom and teaches him how to behave with European women. She finally chases him away. The duet emphasizes the difference of women in both worlds
- Chapter 8 "With tenderness and coaxing". Watch.

The Story

- Selim continues his unrequited love and when Konstanze doesn't yield, he finally loses patience and threatens her.
- Konstanze now asserts her freedom and defiantly tells him torture or death doesn't face her in one of the most difficult dramatic arias with high tessitura and coloratura in the Soprano repertory.
- She finally faints with exhaustion.
- Chapter 11 "Torture of every kind". Watch

The Story

- Pedrillo now tells Blonde of Belmonte's arrival and both rejoice in their pending rescue. Pedrillo has a plan to get Osmin drunk and slip a sleeping potion, so they can escape.
- The next comic duet is between Pedrillo, a Buffo tenor, and Osmin a Buffo Bass.
- Osmin is finally overcome by the effect of the wine and the sleeping potion and goes to bed.
- Chapter 14 "Vivat Bacchus". Watch.

The Story

- When Osmin is asleep, Belmonte finally can clasp his beloved Konstanze into his arms. But Belmonte and Pedrillo want to be sure that the two women were faithful.
- Both women are deeply hurt by their question and Blonde boxes Pedrillo's ears. The two men ask for forgiveness and the pairs make up.
- Faithfulness of women was very important in the 18th Century European society, since the inheritances laws depended on the virtuous wife to give the nobleman the rightful heir. Mozart was very concerned in his letters to his own Constance, who apparently was rather flirtatious, that she should conduct herself as a loyal wife.

The Story

- Belmonte, Konstanze, Pedrillo and Blonde prepare to escape. Osmin wakes up and discovers the attempted flight. He yells for the guards and the two pairs are arrested.
- Osmin sings a triumphant vengeance aria. He anticipates the delight of torturing and killing his enemies.
- His voice reaches his lowest bass notes (to D) and is filled with ghoulish delight.
- Chapter 6 "O how I shall triumph". Watch.

The Story

- The two pairs are brought before Pasha Selim. Belmonte begs for Konstanze's life and reveals that he is the son of a rich Spanish nobleman, who will pay any ransom the Pasha demands.
- Selim discovers now that Belmonte is the son of his biggest enemy, who robbed him of his beloved, his honor and possessions and forced him into exile, where he converted to Islam and through his abilities became a Turkish Pasha.

The Story

- He asks Belmonte what his father would do in his place. Belmonte admits that his fate would be pitiable.
- Belmonte and Konstanze lament their cruel fate but Konstanze assures her beloved she will gladly die on his side

The Story

- Pasha Selim finally returns and tells Belmonte, that he can take Konstanze and return to his homeland.
- "It is far greater pleasure for him to repay an injustice suffered with a good deed than hate with hate".
- This is followed by a jubilant ensemble singing thanking the Pasha for his magnanimity.
- The entourage and the chorus of the Janissaries praise Pasha Selim for his noble heart.

The Abduction from the Seraglio

- Pasha Selim expresses truly the enlightened ideas of the Free Masons of Mozart's Vienna.
- Please note that rational thought is expressed by the words. (Pasha Selim is a speaking role)
- Emotions are expressed in music. (See the arias by Belmonte, Konstanze and Osmin).
- The Chorus is the principal key of C major in the finale and brings back the merry "Turkish" style of the music of the overture.
- Chapter 20: Finale second act. Please watch.