

The influence of the philosophy of the age of enlightenment on Mozart's operas

Agneta D. Borgstedt
Opera Theatre Guild of Rochester

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
 - 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 the balance of individual freedom versus the cohesion of social order

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 Act 2, track 15

➤ Osmin:

Enlightenment! What fools you are to let your
women
have their way! How plagued and harassed one
is
when one gets a hussy like this!

➤ Blonde:

A girl born to freedom will never slavishly take
orders
and even when freedom is lost she remains
monarch
of all she surveys!
Be off now!

Classical Education in Germany Center in Weimar and Mannheim

➤ Classicism and German Theatre

- The upheaval of the Sturm und Drang (Storm and force) period
- Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, Koerner, Wieland influenced German Theatre and were known to Mozart
- Struggle of the rational/formal thought and the material/sensual
- Schiller regarded aesthetic freedom as the precondition for an ultimate moral freedom

Austrian Enlightenment

Maria Theresia 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
 - Freemason lodges
- Reversal of the Reforms 1786
 - When the liberal forces started to undermine authority, security of the state
- Enlightenment at the end of 18th Century
 - Struggle to understand 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 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

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 this lodge in 1785
 - 80% of Austrian higher bureaucracy were Masons during the 1780 in Josephinian Vienna
 - Sonnenfels, the mentor of the Viennese Enlightenment and supporter of Mozart was vice-master of the lodge of True peaceful existence

Free Masonry in Vienna

- Ignaz von Born created in the Lodge of True peaceful Existence an academy of intellectual and scientific inquiry to match the famous Royal Society in London. They promoted:
 - Sympathy
 - Harmony
 - Beneficence and all the social virtues
 - Freedom and Equality of natural law as the foundation of a lodge
 - Religious Tolerance

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 Wohltaetigkeit” (Beneficence), a sister lodge to “True peaceful Existence” in 1784 This lodge was part of the catholic enlightenment
- 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

Idomeneo

Libretto G. Varesco

- Love and forgiveness in the family, between Conqueror and Conquered
- Sacrifice of the individual for the safety of the society
 - Ilia, the Trojan princess and Idamante, the Cretan prince show empathy of the victorious Cretans to the conquered Trojans. They represent the new enlightened rulers

Idomeneo

Act 2, Track 7

➤ Ilia:

- Behold wretched remains of the Trojans, saved from the enemy's fury
- Idamante:
- Now, I shall break those shackles; I feel I must console them straight away (Alas! Why I do such a thing I myself do not know). Unlock the fetters, and today, our faithful subject Kydonia, let the world see two glorious people tied by a sweet knot and bound in perfect friendship. Helen armed Greece and Asia, and now both Asia and Greece are disarmed and united by a new heroine, a lovely and even more beautiful princess
- Coro:
- Let us savor peace, let the God of Love triumph

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 sees on land for a safe sea journey. This vow almost cost him the life of his son Idamante

Idomeneo Act 3, Track 22

➤ **Coro:**

Oh terrible vow!
Horrendous sight!
Now death rules;
The gates of the abyss he cruelly throws open

➤ **High Priest:**

Oh merciful heaven
The son is innocent,
The vow is inhuman;
Stay the hand of the faithful father

The Abduction from the Seraglio A German Singspiel, Libretto G. Stephanie

➤ **Passion and Love are expressed with Music**

▪ Konstanze lamenting her lost love Act1, Track 2
Ah, I was in love and so Happy
Knowing nothing of the pain of love;
I swore to be true
To my beloved
And gave him my whole heart.
But how quickly my joy vanished, separation was my
unhappy lot;
And now my eyes overflow with tears
Sorrow dwells in my bosom

The Abduction from the Seraglio

- Rational thought is expressed in words. Pasha Selim is a speaking role. He expresses at the end of the opera forgiveness. He overcomes the urge for vengeance when he discovers that Konstanze and Belmonte wanted to flee. Mozart expresses here the virtues of the Free Masons

Selim:

Now Belmonte, are you ready for your sentence?

Belmonte:

Yes Pasha. Take revenge on me! I am prepared for anything!

Selim:

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

Mozart's three Da Ponte Operas

- La 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 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 of this act of kindness

Le Nozze Di Figaro Act 1, Tract 9

Count:

My friends, I thank You
For your honest feelings.
But for this I do not deserve
Any tribute or praise.
It was an unjust privilege,
And by abolishing it in my domain
I have restored to nature and duty their rights.

LE Nozze Di Figaro Act 3, Track 2

Two girls:

Faithful and honorable girls,
Sing praises
To our lord.
By renouncing a right
Which outraged and offended,
He leaves you pure
For your lovers.

Le Nozze Di Figaro 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

Le Nozze Di Figaro Marriage contract

- THE Ehepatent or Marriage law was enacted by Joseph II as part of his reforms in 1783. Marriage became a “civil contract”.
- Mozart married his Constance without his father’s consent, demonstrating his filial independence.
- Figaro as a free man demands the right to make his own arrangements and marry the woman he chooses and loves.
- Figaro’s previous contract with Marcellina, made when he was in debt, is valid when he secured the loan with his hand in marriage. When he defaults, Marcellina has a right to demand that he marry her.
- In Act 1 Marcellina sings about this contract to her lawyer.

Le Nozze Di Figaro Marriage Contract Act 1, Track 4

- Marcellina with contract in hand:
Oh, my dear doctor,
I’m not giving up
To break off engagements
Even later than this,
A pretext has often sufficed, and besides
this contract has certain pledges to me
I could mention...but enough; now
we must frighten Susanna; we must somehow
Make her reject the Count’s advances.
To revenge himself, he’ll take my party,
and so Figaro will become my husband.

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 Susanna
Act1, track 4.1

Figaro:

If, my dear count you feel like dancing,
It's I who'll call the tune.

If you'll come to my school, I'll teach you how to caper.
I'll know how. but wait,

I can uncover his sweet design
more easily by dissembling, acting stealthily,
acting openly, here stinging, there mocking.
all your plots I'll overthrow.

Le Nozze Di Figaro

- 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 juxtapositioned to the immature adolescent love of Cherubino

Don Giovanni

- Moliere's Don Juan is an argumentative rationalist engaging in philosophical dispute about his purile 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 of 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.

Finale Last act, track 15

Don Giovanni:

My pulse is steady:

I am not afraid, I accept.

The Statue:

Give me your hand on it!

Don Giovanni:

Here it is! Oh, Oh

The Statue:

What ails you?

Don Giovanni

Finale last act, track 15 continued

Don Giovanni:

I've never felt coldness like this!

The Statue:

Repent, change your way of life!

This is your last chance!

Don Giovanni:

No, No I refuse to repent!

Be gone, away from me!

The Statue:

Repent, miscreant!

Don Giovanni:

No you driveling dotard!

The Statue: Repent! Don Giovanni: No!

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 rationalistic 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.

Così 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. Act 2, track 17:

Fiordiligi:
Dearest love, I beg your pardon
For the faith that I have broken
May my error remain unspoken,
Stay forgotten, unknown and past
May my honest true devotion
Glowing love, and deep repentance
Purge my heart of all remembrance.
Make me worthy of you at last.

Così fan tutte Per Pietà continued

Dearest love, I beg your pardon
For the faith that I have broken.
Why did I embrace temptation,
Break the tender vows I swore,
When it was my aspiration
To be faithful ever more?
Dearest love, I beg your pardon
For the faith that I have broken.
Heaven grant me one kind favor.
Let my secret remain unknown
With unfailing endeavor
For my fault I shall atone

La Clemenza Di Tito Libretto : C. Mazzola on a Drama by P/Metastasio

- At the end of the 18th century the Enlightenment dealt with the need for spirituality in man's life
- The Free Mason's vision of life is:
 - Mercy
 - Forgiveness
 - Good deeds
- The emperor Tito forgives his enemies and sings of the joy a virtuous life brings to him.

La Clemenza Di Tito Act 1, Track 13

Tito:

Why should I deny me beneficence and what am I left with?

This is the only joy yielded by supreme office

For the rest is all torment and slavery.

What would be left, if I had to forgo the happy hours I spend

Relieving the oppressed, benefiting my friends,

Rewarding merit and excellence with costly gifts?

This is the only joy.

The Magic Flute The Masonic Opera. Libretto by 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.
- Tamino and Pamina are led by Sarastro to this highest form of wisdom.

The Magic Flute Act 2, track 2

- Sarastro:
- O Isis and Osiris send the spirit of wisdom to the young couple!
- Thou who guidest the wanderer's steps, strengthen them with patience when in danger.

The Magic Flute Tolerance and Love for Humanity Act 2, Track 7

Sarastro:
Within these holy bounds,
Revenge is not known
And if one fails,
Love leads him back to duty.
Then he wanders, led by friendship's hand,
Joyful and happy into a better land.
Within these holy walls,
Where men love their fellow men,
No traitor can lurk
Because enemies are forgiven.
He whom such teaching does not please
Does not deserve to be man.

Magic Flute
Wisdom and Beauty triumph over the dark
Forces

Finale Act 2, track 9

Sarastro:

The sun's rays drive away the night
Destroy the evil power of the dissembler.

Choir:

Hail to thee, initiates!

You have penetrated the darkness

Thanks be to thee, Osiris,

Thanks to you Isis.

Strength conquers and crowns with its rewards, beauty and
wisdom with an eternal crown.