

*Virginia  
Opera*

Presents

# *Così fan tutte*

*Composed by:*

*Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*

*Libretto by:*

*Lorenzo da Ponte*



Study Guide  
2010-2011 Season

# 2010-2011 SEASON

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## Preface

### Purpose

This study guide is intended to aid you, the teacher, in increasing your students' understanding and appreciation of COSI FAN TUTTE. This will not only add to knowledge about opera, but should develop awareness of other related subjects, making the performance they attend much more enjoyable.

### Most Important

If you only have a limited amount of time, concentrate on the cast of characters, the plot and some of the musical and dramatic highlights of the opera. Recognition produces familiarity which in turn produces a positive experience.

### The Language

COSI FAN TUTTE is written in Italian. In Mozart's day Italian was the language most often used for opera. Da Ponte was a native Italian and Mozart, as an international composer, was well acquainted with the language (though as an Austrian his own language was German). The Virginia Opera will perform COSI FAN TUTTE in the original language, Italian, but an English translation will be projected on a screen above the stage. With these **Supertitles**, audiences can experience the beauty of opera in the original language, yet still understand the meaning of all that is being sung.

## Objectives

1. To understand how opera, as an art form, reflects and comments on society and the world in which we live.
2. To develop an awareness of how the study of certain art forms such as opera can communicate ideas of the past and present.
3. To develop a basic understanding of what opera is. Students should be able to identify the many elements (musical, visual, and dramatic) of an opera and understand how they work together to produce a unified, exciting, and emotional work.
4. To understand the process of adapting a story for the stage; what changes need to be made and why. Incorporated in this objective is a basic understanding of what makes a good opera.
5. To know the basic plot/story line of COSI FAN TUTTE.
6. To understand how music serves as a mode of communication in opera and the effect music has on characteristics and mood.
7. To develop some sense of appreciation for opera as a timeless art form that brings real characters, emotions, and situations to life.
8. To understand the working relationship between words and music in an opera. Students should understand how a composer and librettist work together to create significant, dramatic, and unified meaning.

## What is Opera?

**Opera** is a unique type of entertainment—a play that is sung throughout. Because it combines music and theater, opera can be the most moving of all the arts, and can tell a story in a way quite unlike any other. It does so by means of words, actions, and music.

The words of an opera are called a **libretto** (the Italian word for “little book”), much like the words of a play are called a **script**. There are important differences between a libretto and a script, however. For one thing, a libretto usually contains far fewer words than a script. The reason for this is the music. It can take more time to sing a line of text than to say it; also, words are often repeated in operatic music for reasons of musical form. Therefore, there are fewer words in an opera than in a play of the same length.

While the spoken word can clearly show what people are thinking, singing is much better at showing emotions rather than thoughts. For this reason, the plot of an opera is likely to be filled with dramatic situations in which highly emotional characters perform bold actions.

The way **librettists** (the people who write the words) use words is also different. Opera librettos are commonly made up of poetry, while this is not often true of the scripts for plays. In *DON GIOVANNI* many of the musical passages can be considered a type of sung poetry, complete with meter, accents, and rhyme. If you were to say the words that the characters sing, this would become very clear.

A librettist can also do something that a playwright cannot—he or she can write an **ensemble**. An ensemble is a passage in the libretto in which more than one person sings; often, several characters sing different vocal lines simultaneously. In a play, if all the actors spoke at once, the audience could not understand the words. In an opera, the music helps the audience to sort out the thoughts and feelings of each singer. Frequently, each individual character has a distinct musical or vocal style which distinguishes him/her from the other characters. We will see this when we compare the characters in *DON GIOVANNI*.

If the libretto of an opera is a special language, the score (or musical portion of an opera) is a special use of music. It is music that is meant to be sung, of course, but it has characteristics that many songs do not. **Operatic music is dramatic music, written for the theater.** For this reason, it must also be capable of describing strong feelings that invite the audience’s involvement with the story and their identification with people on stage. In addition, a good operatic composer can use music as a tool to define character and personality traits of his characters.

One way in which a **composer** (the person who writes the music) can use music is through the voices of the singers themselves. A human voice, especially when singing, can express all sorts of feelings. Composers know this and use this knowledge to the fullest. First, they consider the personality of a character, and then choose a voice type (either high or low) that best suits this type of person. For example, younger characters are often sung by the higher voice types. There are five different voice categories (perhaps some students are familiar with these from singing in a choir):

**SOPRANO:** the highest female voice

**MEZZO-SOPRANO:** (also called ALTO) the lower female voice

**TENOR:** the highest male voice (like Pavarotti or Caruso)

**BARITONE:** the middle male voice

**BASS:** the lowest male voice

Each of these voice categories can be subdivided into more specialized types, such as “dramatic soprano”, “lyric soprano”, “coloratura soprano”, “basso-buffo”, depending on the specific type of music being sung. These distinctions are known as **vocal fachs**, from a German word meaning “mode”.

After a composer has chosen the characters’ voice types, he then tries to interpret the libretto in musical terms. A character may sing very high notes when agitated or excited, or low notes when depressed or calm. He or she may sing many rapid notes or a few long held notes, depending upon the mood at the time.

In an opera production, the ideas of the composer and librettist are expressed by the singers as directed by a **conductor** and **stage director**. The conductor is responsible for the musical aspects of the performance, leading the orchestra and the singers and determining the musical pace. The stage director is responsible for the dramatic movement and characterizations of the singers. He works with a **design team**—a set designer, costume designer, and a lighting designer – to determine the visual interpretation of the work. Just as the composer and librettist must work in close communion in the writing of an opera, the conductor and stage director must have a close collaboration to produce a unified interpretation of an opera. Both must collaborate with the singers and the design team (and sometimes a **choreographer**, if dancing is involved). For this reason opera is perhaps the form demanding the greatest degree of collaboration.

An opera then, is a partnership of words and music with the purpose of telling a dramatic story. While the story itself may be about everyday situations or historical figures, it usually has a moral or idea that the entire audience understands. This is one of the great features of opera—it unites a variety of people with different backgrounds by giving them a common experience to relate with.

## The Operatic Voice

A true (and brief) definition of the “operatic” voice is a difficult proposition. Many believe the voice is “born,” while just as many hold to the belief that the voice is “trained.” The truth lies somewhere between the two. Voices that can sustain the demands required by the operatic repertoire do have many things in common. First and foremost is a strong physical technique that allows the singer to sustain long phrases through the control of both the inhalation and exhalation of breath. Secondly, the voice (regardless of its size) must maintain a resonance in both the head (mouth, sinuses) and chest cavities. The Italian word “*squillo*” (squeal) is used to describe the brilliant tone required to penetrate the full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singers. Finally, all voices are defined by both the actual voice “type” and the selection of repertoire for which the voice is ideally suited.

Within the five major voice types (*Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, Baritone, Bass*) there is a further delineation into categories (*Coloratura, Lyric, Spinto, and Dramatic*) which help to define each particular instrument. The *Coloratura* is the highest within each voice type whose extended upper range is complimented by extreme flexibility. The *Lyric* is the most common of the “types.” This instrument is recognized more for the exceptional beauty of its tone rather than its power or range. The *Spinto* is a voice which combines the beauty of a lyric with the weight and power of a *Dramatic*, which is the most “powerful” of the voices. The *Dramatic* instrument is characterized by the combination of both incredible volume and “steely” intensity.

While the definition presented in the preceding paragraph may seem clearly outlined, many voices combine qualities from each category, thus carving a unique niche in operatic history. Just as each person is different from the next, so is each voice. Throughout her career Maria Callas defied categorization as she performed and recorded roles associated with each category in the soprano voice type. Joan Sutherland as well can be heard in recordings of soprano roles as diverse as the coloratura Gilda in *Rigoletto* to the dramatic Turandot in *Turandot*. Below is a very brief outline of voice types and categories with roles usually associated with the individual voice type.

	<i>Coloratura</i>	<i>Lyric</i>	<i>Spinto</i>	<i>Dramatic</i>
<b><i>Soprano</i></b>	Norina (Don Pasquale) Gilda (Rigoletto) Lucia (Lucia di Lammermoor)	Liu (Turandot) Mimi (La Bohème) Pamina (Magic Flute)	Tosca (Tosca) Amelia (A Masked Ball) Leonora (Il Trovatore)	Turandot (Turandot) Norma (Norma) Elektra (Elektra)
<b><i>Mezzo-Soprano</i></b>	Rosina (Barber of Seville) Angelina (La Cenerentola) Dorabella (Così fan tutte)	Carmen (Carmen) Charlotte (Werther) Giulietta (Hoffmann)	Santuzza (Cavalleria) Adalgisa (Norma) The Composer (Ariadne auf Naxos)	Azucena (Il Trovatore) Ulrica (A Masked Ball) Herodias (Salome)
<b><i>Tenor</i></b>	Count Almaviva (Barber of Seville) Don Ottavio (Don Giovanni) Ferrando (Così fan tutte)	Alfredo (La Traviata) Rodolfo (La Bohème) Tamino (Magic Flute)	Calaf (Turandot) Pollione (Norma) Cavaradossi (Tosca)	Dick Johnson (Fanciulla) Don Jose (Carmen) Otello (Otello)

<b><i>Baritone</i></b>	Figaro (Barber of Seville) Count Almavira (Marriage of Figaro) Dr. Malatesta (Don Pasquale)	Marcello (La Bohème) Don Giovanni (Don Giovanni) Sharpless (Madama Butterfly)	<b><i>Verdi Baritone</i></b> Germont (La Traviata) Di Luna (Il Trovatore) Rigoletto (Rigoletto)	Scarpia (Tosca) Jochanaan (Salome) Jack Rance (Fanciulla)
<b><i>Bass</i></b>	Bartolo (Barber of Seville) Don Magnifico (Cenerentola) Dr. Dulcamara (Elixir of Love)	Leporello (Don Giovanni) Colline (La Bohème) Figaro (Marriage of Figaro)	<b><i>Buffo Bass</i></b> Don Pasquale (Don Pasquale) Don Alfonso (Così fan tutte)	<b><i>Basso Cantate</i></b> Oroveso (Norma) Timur (Turandot) Sarastro (Magic Flute)

## Opera Production

Opera is created by the combination of myriad art forms. First and foremost are the actors who portray characters by revealing their thoughts and emotions through the singing voice. The next very important component is a full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singing actors and actresses, helping them to portray the full range of emotions possible in the operatic format. The orchestra performs in an area in front of the singers called the orchestra pit while the singers perform on the open area called the stage. Wigs, costumes, sets and specialized lighting further enhance these performances, all of which are designed, created, and executed by a team of highly trained artisans.

The creation of an opera begins with a dramatic scenario crafted by a playwright or dramaturg who alone or with a librettist fashions the script or libretto that contains the words the artists will sing. Working in tandem, the composer and librettist team up to create a cohesive musical drama in which the music and words work together to express the emotions revealed in the story. Following the completion of their work, the composer and librettist entrust their new work to a conductor who with a team of assistants (repetiteurs) assumes responsibility for the musical preparation of the work. The conductor collaborates with a stage director (responsible for the visual component) in order to bring a performance of the new piece to life on the stage. The stage director and conductor form the creative spearhead for the new composition while assembling a design team which will take charge of the actual physical production.

Set designers, lighting designers, costume designers, wig and makeup designers and even choreographers must all be brought “on board” to participate in the creation of the new production. The set designer combines the skills of both an artist and an architect using “blueprint” plans to design the actual physical set which will reside on the stage, recreating the physical setting required by the storyline. These blueprints are turned over to a team of carpenters who are specially trained in the art of stage carpentry. Following the actual building of the set, painters following instructions from the set designers’ original plans paint the set. As the set is assembled on the stage, the lighting designer works with a team of electricians to throw light onto both the stage and the set in an atmospheric as well as practical way. Using specialized lighting instruments, colored gels and a state of the art computer, the designer along with the stage director create a “lighting plot” by writing “lighting cues” which are stored in the computer and used during the actual performance of the opera.

During this production period, the costume designer in consultation with the stage director has designed appropriate clothing for the singing actors and actresses to wear. These designs are fashioned into patterns and crafted by a team of highly skilled artisans called cutters, stitchers, and sewers. Each costume is specially made for each singer using his/her individual measurements. The wig and makeup designer, working with the costume designer, designs and creates wigs which will complement both the costume and the singer as well as represent historically accurate “period” fashions.

As the actual performance date approaches, rehearsals are held on the newly crafted set, combined with costumes, lights, and orchestra in order to ensure a cohesive performance that will be both dramatically and musically satisfying to the assembled audience.



## Cast of Characters

The action takes place in 19<sup>th</sup> century Naples.

Fiordiligi.....Soprano  
Dorabella.....Mezzo-Soprano  
(sisters from Ferrara, now living in Naples)

Guglielmo, an officer, betrothed to Fiordiligi.....Baritone

Ferrando, an officer, betrothed to Dorabella.....Tenor

Despina, chambermaid to the Ladies.....Soprano

Don Alfonzo, an older philosopher.....Bass

Soldiers, Servants, Sailors, Wedding-guests, Townspeople

COSI FAN TUTTE  
("Woman are like that" or, "That's how they do it")

Plot Synopsis

ACT I

Scene 1: A coffee house in Naples

Two young men, Ferrando and Guglielmo, are in a café having a heated discussion with their old friend, Don Alfonzo about whether women can be faithful. Using their own fiancées as examples, they dispute Don Alfonzo's contention that no woman will stay faithful long in the absence of her lover. After much arguing Don Alfonzo proposes a wager to prove his theory. The men should announce that they must leave for army service, then put on disguises and return to woo each other's betrothed. Both Ferrando and Gugle

Two young Neapolitan men, Ferrando and Guglielmo, are sitting in a café having an argument with their old friend Don Alfonzo. They claim that their fiancées, the sisters Dorabella and Fiordiligi, are the most faithful of young women. Alfonzo, a cynical man of the world, insists that no woman will stay faithful long in the absence of her lover. He bets the two boys that, if they should pretend to go to war, he could prove his theory. All they need do, he says, is put on disguises and woo each other's fiancée. The young men take the bet, insisting their girls will remain eternally faithful no matter what the temptation.

As planned, the boys pretend to go to war and soon return disguised as Albanians. They attempt to woo the grieving ladies but are rejected. Alfonzo, with the help of the girls' mischievous chambermaid Despina, make further plans. The supposed Albanians return and, in the garden of the sisters' home, pretend to drink poison in lovesick desperation. Despina, disguised as a doctor, comes in and "cures" them. But the young ladies still refuse to become romantically involved. As the act ends, all join in a finale in which the girls maintain their loyalty to their lovers, the lovers exclaim proudly that their fiancées are loyal and the two schemers, Alfonzo and Despina, mutter derisively.

ACT II

Despina impatiently urges her mistresses to make hay while the sun shines and pay some attention to the handsome Albanians. They finally agree that they will at least talk to the new suitors and each chooses a man –Dorabella picks Guglielmo and Fiordiligi, Ferrando. In the garden, the handsome Albanians sing a rhapsodic serenade. Finally, Guglielmo succeeds in getting Dorabella to accept a heart-shaped locket in return for the medallion she usually wears containing Ferrando's portrait. But Fiordiligi still resists her "Albanian's" advances. The men meet to compare notes and Ferrando is infuriated that his beloved has given away the medallion with his portrait. Guglielmo is amused and delighted, but not for long. In a few minutes, Ferrando wins Fiordiligi over and she falls into his arms. Now it's Guglielmo's turn to be jealous. Alfonzo comes along, pleased that his bet is won, and Despina announces the girls have decided to marry their new Albanian loves at once.

As preparations are made for the wedding -- with Despina disguises again, this time as a notary -- a burst of military music signals the return of the real lovers. The Albanian bridegrooms hurry out and in a

moment the military lovers enter and find marriage contracts. But in a moment they bring out bits of the Albanian disguises and, showing their inconstant fiancés that it was all a trick, decide to make up and sing a final round of praise to the triumph of calm and reason over jealousy and confusion.

## Plot Synopsis

Act 1

## About the Composer

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is considered one of the world's greatest musical geniuses and composers. Although he created some of the most glorious music known to us, Mozart dies poor and unrecognized by his peers, and was buried in an unmarked pauper's grave.

Opera was Mozart's favorite form of music to compose, but he also created a vast number of great works for piano, works for piano, voice, orchestra, and chamber groups. Born in Salzburg, Austria, on January 27, 1756, Mozart was a gifted and active pianist, violinist, and conductor. His father, Leopold, was a court musician for the Archbishop of Salzburg and the family grew up in an atmosphere filled with musical discussion, practice and rehearsals. Leopold Mozart realized that his son was a musical genius when the boy was only three years old. At that early age he would climb up on the piano bench and play, by ear, difficult pieces that he had heard his father rehearsing with other musicians. Within a year or two he picked up a violin and played that too, expertly. By the age of six, little Wolfgang had already composed minuets and other pieces of serious music, and his performance at the piano and violin was so brilliant that his father wanted to promote him around the world. The elder Mozart set off with Wolfgang and his young sister Maria Anna (called Nannerl) on a tour of Europe, where the children played for important nobleman. In each country Mozart was greeted as a "wonder child." His improvisations and compositions, as well as his ability to read anything at sight, astounded all who heard him. But while audiences admired the young prodigy and his sister, the Mozarts made little money from the tour, and Leopold's plan for financial success came to an end.

Between the ages of 10 and 17, Mozart composed music for special occasions at his school in Salzburg. At 12, he wrote his first opera. And, even at the young age of 14, he displayed a genius for musical drama that leading composers of the period did not have and that he had shown before.

Leopold hoped that the Archbishop of Salzburg would give his son a permanent job, but the Archbishop did not understand Mozart's unique musical talent and offered him no position. Mozart went to live in Munich and then in Paris with his mother, who traveled with him to help keep his house. In Paris, they suffered in dreadful conditions of poverty; unable to get any commissions for operas, Mozart turned to composing chamber music (music for small groups of instruments), a far more marketable commodity. He also gave music lessons, which depressed him even more than his squalid living conditions; most of his pupils were children of aristocracy and had neither talent nor interest in music, studying only because it was fashionable. Throughout his life, a suitable position worthy of his talent was to elude Mozart. Returning to Salzburg at the age of 23, Mozart was given a job as a court organist, but he was still treated menially and with disdain. Finally, in 1780, he was given a commission from the Munich Opera for a full-length work. He composed *Idomeneo*, a story based on ancient Greek heroes, following the popular tradition of serious opera at that time. The modest success of the opera encouraged the composer to leave Salzburg, which he found stifling, and to take up residence in Vienna, where he lived for the remainder of his life.

During the next ten years, he composed an incredible number of pieces, including his most famous piano concerti, the remarkable last symphonies (numbers 35-41), ten of his most beautiful string quartets, the clarinet concerto, and his monumental Mass in C Minor. By 1782, he had married Constanze Weber,

who was also from a musical family. Although they were happy together, Constanze was unfortunately extravagant and disorganized, making their financial situation even more precarious.

In the last few years of his life, Mozart collaborated with a brilliant Italian librettist, Lorenzo da Ponte, who provided the words for three of the composer's greatest operas, adapting them from plays and other sources. Despite the brief successes of these operas – *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Così fan tutte* – Mozart was still unable to make a decent living or secure a steady job. The pressure of this bleak economic outlook contributed to Mozart's declining health, and by the time he wrote his last opera, *The Magic Flute* (1791), he was near physical and emotional collapse. Despite this, he also undertook the composition of what was to be his masterpiece, a Requiem Mass.

The story of this Requiem, depicted in the popular play and film Amadeus, is one of the strangest in Mozart's biography. A mysterious man, wearing a mask, appeared one day at Mozart's door and offered the composer a commission for a Requiem (a special work for chorus and soloists to be sung during funeral services in the Catholic Church). The unknown visitor stipulated one condition, however – his identity would remain secret, even to Mozart. The composer began to work, but he became obsessed by the suspicion that the devil or some supernatural force had asked him to write this Requiem and that it would be for Mozart's own funeral. He never lived to learn that a wealthy man had commissioned the work in secret so that he might later pass it off as his own composition.

By the end of 1791, Mozart was too broken in health and spirit to continue writing. He died at the age of 35 in December of that year, from what is believed to have been typhus. Since his wife was also sick at the time and unable to make proper funeral arrangements, he was buried in a unmarked grave in a pauper's cemetery.

If Mozart had lived in a different era, his life as a composer might have been far easier. In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century in Germany and Austria, the only secure jobs for musicians were players or composers in the courts of important people, either nobility or clergy. In addition to playing in small orchestras in such households and composing music for special events, composers also hoped to get "commissions" from opera houses or orchestras for larger works. If, for example, an opera company wanted to put on a new work for a special holiday, the manager would commission a composer to write the piece, paying him an appropriate sum of money.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were – as there are now – more talented musicians than good paying jobs, making the support of a patron essential for financial security. In Mozart's case, his sometimes stubborn, wayward disposition and the jealousy of other players and composers prevented him from finding success. Mozart was not willing to cultivate the favor of the rich; he preferred to concentrate his energies on his art – and his fellow musicians were only too anxious to snap up the good-paying jobs, even if it meant resorting to various political intrigues. It is both tragic and ironic that one of the most beloved composers of all time died in poverty and unhappiness, without so much as a deathstone to mark his resting place.

Mozart's compositions, conceived by such a difficult genius, are appreciated by even the most simple of men. They are unsurpassed in beauty, wit, and technical mastery, and eloquently express the whole range of human emotions. All of Mozart's works, in their amazing depths and variety, encompass the vast extent of the human condition and confirm his place at the head of the world's greatest composers.

## Lorenzo da Ponte: BIOGRAPHY OF A LIBRETTIST

**Lorenzo da Ponte** is considered to be the greatest of Mozart's collaborators, having written the librettos for three of the composer's most celebrated operas: THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO, DON GIOVANNI, and COSI FAN TUTTE. His life was as colorful and dramatic as one of his opera plots. Born Emmanuele Conegliano on March 10, 1749, he was the son of a Jewish tanner and leather dealer living in a city near **Venice**. In 1763 his father converted to Christianity in order to remarry, and the family adopted the name of da Ponte. Until the age of fourteen, Lorenzo had no formal education and was known as "lo spirito ignorante" (the witty ignoramus). He grew up speaking both Hebrew and Italian. As a teenager, he found in the attic the works of **Metastasio**, the greatest Italian librettist of the eighteenth century and the author of some twenty-seven **opera seria** (serious operas). Reading these works inspired the young da Ponte to pursue a formal education; with his brother, he entered a seminary for five years. At the age of nineteen his studies were interrupted by a long illness. His patron, a Bishop, died, leaving him and his family impoverished.

A year later da Ponte was offered a teaching position at another nearby seminary, and in 1770 he took holy orders and was later appointed Vice Rector. A visit to Venice the following year proved intoxicating; da Ponte fell in love with the magical city. What followed were a series of romantic adventures and involvements, including a friendship with the famous **Casanova**. It is rumored that the infamous playboy may have assisted da Ponte in retouching the libretto of DON GIOVANNI; (a better-suited assistant could not have been found!) Da Ponte began to write and publish what were considered to "radical" ideas (for example, "whether man is happier in an organized society or in a simple state of nature"). He was declared a subversive, forbidden to hold any teaching position in the Venetian Republic, and in 1779 was banished from the city for fifteen years because of his love affair with a married woman. Leaving Venice, da Ponte settled nearby on the Austrian border and began working as a translator and adaptor. He then traveled to Vienna on hearing a rumor that Emperor Joseph II was opening an Italian Opera Company. In **Vienna** he became associated with the court composer **Salieri** (known principally today as the main character in *Amadeus*), and was soon appointed Poet to the Imperial Theaters, in 1784. It was at this time that he began writing opera libretti, having his first great success in 1786. He met **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** in 1783; their collaboration began with the adaptation of Beaumarchais' THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO. Mozart, in a letter to his father, stresses the importance of the rapport between composer and librettist; "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." In da Ponte, Mozart found the perfect partner.

Like Don Giovanni himself, da Ponte's numerous love affairs brought about his downfall, and he was banished from Vienna in 1791 as the result of another scandal. He fled to Trieste where he met and married the daughter of an English merchant, twenty years his junior. At the suggestion of his Casanova, he moved to London and there obtained the post of Poet to the Italian Opera. Mishandling of funds caused him to go into debt, and for a brief time he tried to make money back by working in an Italian bookshop in London. He ended up fleeing his creditors in 1805, leaving for New York with his wife and children to join her relatives there. The former illustrious librettist began his life in America as a grocer, but eventually became a teacher of Italian.

In 1825 da Ponte was appointed professor of Italian literature at Columbia College, a post that offered prestige but little salary. In the same year Manuel Garcia and his daughter came to New York and da Ponte persuaded them to produce *Don Giovanni* for the first time in America. In the 1820's da Ponte wrote his memoirs, which still make lively reading today, even though the author understandably glossed over or omitted the less savory episodes in his life. He died in New York on August 17, 1838, at the age of 89.

## COSI FAN TUTTE – The Inside Story of Mozart and da Ponte

Although there were no income tax income tax report's as such in Mozart's day, people were occasionally called upon to make an accounting of their finances, wherein they signed on the dotted line a statement of their income, their method of earning it, their employer, and so forth. While Mozart was employed as chamber composer to Emperor Joseph of Austria, he was handed such a paper, with instructions to fill it out. He sat biting his pen. Name "Wolfgang Gottlieb Mozart," he wrote. Then added happily, "Changed name to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, since it means the same, and sound much more musical." At the line which required him to fill in his salary, he knit his brows, and chewed his pen anew. Reluctantly he wrote, "Eight hundred gulden" (less than 400 dollars). And under special remarks, he wrote with a bitter scratch of the pen, "Too much for what I accomplish, too little for what I could accomplish."

Towards the end of 1789 – two years before his death – Mozart was, as usual during this period of his career, in dire financial straits. On December 29, he wrote to his friend, Michael Puchberg, "According to the present arrangement I am to receive from the management next month 200 ducats for my opera. If you can and will lend me 400 gulden until then, you will be rescuing your friend from the greatest embarrassment... I invite you, you alone, to come on Thursday at 10 o'clock in the morning to hear a short rehearsal of my opera. I am only inviting Haydn and yourself." The obliging Puchberg, who already answered several appeals of this sort from his friend, sent 300gulden (approximately \$400).

The opera in question was *Così Fan Tutte, Ossia La Scuola Degli Amanti (All Women Behave Like That, or The School For Lovers)*. Since 1787, Mozart had been the official composer to the Imperial Court of Vienna, at a salary of 800 gulden a year, but had been given little to do besides writing dances. A successful revival of *Le Nozze di Figaro (The Marriage of Figaro)* in Vienna in 1789 (it was given twelve times from August to November), however, had impressed the music-loving but indiscriminating Emperor Joseph II, and Mozart was commissioned to write a new opera. He set to work immediately and completed the music in January 1790.

As usual, Mozart was thoroughly familiar with the capabilities of the singers for whom he wrote. He had no high opinion of Mme. Ferraresi's powers, but she was the current mistress of da Ponte, and Mozart, probably to oblige his friend, had composed two concert arias for her (K.577, 579). For Louise Villeneuve, Mme Ferraresi's sister in real life as well as in the opera, Mozart had written three concert arias (K.578, 582, 583). Calvesi had sung the tenor part of a vocal quartet (K.479) and trio and Bussani those of Bartotl and Antonio; and both men had also sung in the first Vienna performance of *Don Giovanni* (Leporello and Commendatore-Masseto, respectively). Mma Bussani had been the first Cherubino.

*Così Fan Tutte* was fairly successful at first. Even Count von Zinzendorf, who had found *Figaro* a bore, thought "Mozart's music charming and the subject very amusing." After five performances the theater was closed for two months because of the death of Joseph II (February 20). When it was reopened, *Così Fan Tutte* was given five times more and then it was dropped. But the following year it was performed in German at Frankfort and Mainz and in Italian at Prague, Leipzig and Dresden; and after Mozart's death it spread beyond Central Europe. Strangely enough, the first New York performance did not take place until 1922.

For some peculiar reason many 19<sup>th</sup> century critics who did not balk at the most far-fetched coincidences in opera librettos or the most absurd and obscure plots, found da Ponte's plot unrealistic. What bothered these writers in the age of Romanticism even more was what they considered a flippant attitude towards love in his libretto. Many attempts to "improve" it were made, and Mozart's music was mauled and distorted to fit more edifying tales. The work was performed with an entirely new libretto in Copenhagen in 1826; two years later Mozart's opera was given in London as *Tit for Tat or The Tables Turned*, with the music "arranged" by one W. Hawes; in Paris in 1863 it turned up as *Peines d'Amour Perdues*, with a text based on Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*; and as late as 1909 it appeared in Dresden as *Die Dame Kobolk*, with a libretto taken from a comedy by Calderon.

The charges of incredibility and an irreverent attitude towards love are of course wholly beside the point. Mozart and da Ponte were not dealing here with recognizable human figures, as in *Figaro*, or with the creation of flesh-and-blood characters out of universal types, as in *Don Giovanni*. They were engaged in telling an amusing tale, for which a small group of stock characters was perfectly adequate. And even some of these come alive. Don Alfonzo and Despina are as "real" as any characters in opera, and Fiordiligi is far from a puppet. The truth, as it seems to us, about the matter was seen as early as 1805 by a writer in a Berlin musical periodical.

The theme if this opera (he wrote) was a satire on the highly praised fidelity of the female sex and an innocent playing with the sanctity of love. That this evidence of the infidelity of all women was regarded merely as a jest is precisely the delicate charm of the whole opera, and that this infidelity, on the other hand, is let off so easily is proof of the playful sense of beauty on the part of the composer. Everything is only masquerade, playfulness, jest, dallying, and irony...Mozart was not at all serious about the serious moments that crop up now and then; they served him merely as a means of shaping the form and, one might say, of darkening, of shading the prank; even though one cannot deny that he let himself go too much in such passages, as if they had, in the process of working on them, grown in spite of himself. They should have been there merely as contrasts, to be treated, like some of the asides, not without irony.

Certain it is that Mozart lavished on this work some of his most delightful music, his most exquisite craftsmanship. If some of the arias are not perhaps as telling as the best in his other mature operas, they are outnumbered by the ensembles, which are wonderfully varied in style and construction. The orchestration is Mozart at his most sparkling-in-other words, the finest to be found in 18<sup>th</sup> century music. Occasionally a mock-serious piece, aping the style of the lamenting or heroic aria of the opera seria, underscores the gentle irony of the work. The sly humor extends even into the Overture, which unlike that to *Figaro*, employs several themes from the opera. A subtle touch is the appearance here, as a tailpiece to one of the themes, of a jolly figure sung by Basilio in *Figaro* (Act I, No. 7) to the words "cosi fan tutte le belle." It is difficult to see why *Cosi Fan Tutte* has not always been accepted, and especially in our times, for what it is – a musical lark that is one of the gems of opera buffa.

## Discussion Questions

1. Does the story and theme of DON GIOVANNI have any relevance to your lives today? In what ways?
2. Compare the roles of men and women in the time of the opera *Così fan tutte* with today. Have sexual roles and attitudes changed? How?
3. What is an Opera Buffa? What makes *Così fan tutte* an Opera Buffa?
4. After seeing the Virginia Opera of *Così fan tutte*, discuss the stage director's interpretation of the work. What ideas were brought out? How did the sets and costumes contribute to this?
5. Discuss and compare other stories that incorporate disguises such as Shakespeare's plays. How are they similar? How are they different?
6. How clearly did the singers portray and differentiate their characters?
7. How specifically did the orchestral music help in establishing the mood?
8. What was the purpose of separating the musical numbers (arias and ensembles) by recitatives?
9. With whom did you identify? The men, their fiancées or the conspirators?
10. Does the story *Così fan tutte* have any relevance to your lives today? In what ways?
11. What issues brought up or discussed in class came out most strongly in your experience of the performance?