



MOZART'S

Don Giovanni

In-depth Guide
written by Stu Lewis

LYRIC OPERA
KANSAS CITY

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THE 2015-2016 SEASON

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A JOLLY DRAMA

The history of opera has been marked by a number of landmark works which almost immediately changed the operatic landscape. After Wagner, everyone wanted to write “music dramas” with the emphasis on drama instead of vocal display. After the premiere of Leoncavallo’s *Pagliacci* (1892), everyone wanted to write verismo (realistic) operas, with their passionate musical description of life among the lower economic classes. After Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein unveiled *Oklahoma!* in 1943, the musical comedy was transformed into the Broadway musical.

On the other hand, there have been works that are so far ahead of their time that thought they may have enjoyed some success, they produced no immediate heirs. In 1875, the world was not ready for Bizet’s *Carmen*, a tragedy about a gypsy factory worker. In 1935, American audiences were not ready for the truly indigenous American opera that the Gershwins had created in *Porgy and Bess*, which had to be pared down into a musical before it could be accepted; nearly two decades were to pass before the first golden age of American opera.

Mozart and Da Ponte’s second collaboration, *Don Giovanni* (1787) falls into this second category. In their time operas were generally divided into opera seria (serious operas) and opera buffa (comic operas). Yet *Don Giovanni* has elements of both, leading them to label it a drama giocoso (jolly drama), a term which had been used before but was still somewhat unusual. What is most remarkable about this work, however, is not simply the mixing of these various elements but rather the invention of a whole new musical vocabulary near the opera’s conclusion, a form of dramatic dialogue that transcends both traditional melody and recitative. It is no wonder that many listeners (and directors) have chosen to treat this work as a romantic tragedy, for it was not until the advent of Verdi, a half-century later, that music of such intensity was to be heard again on the operatic stage. And after more than two centuries, this work still has the power to both move and unsettle audiences throughout the world. Perhaps Gustav Flaubert’s sentiments might be only a slight exaggeration: “The three finest things God ever made are the sea, *Hamlet*, and *Don Giovanni*.”

CAST, CHARACTERS, AND ARTISTS

General character information is listed below. To view the actual cast and artists in the Lyric Opera 2015-16 season production of *Don Giovanni*, visit kcoopera.org/performances/don-giovanni-15/cast-characters-and-artists/.

Leporello – Servant and right-hand man to Don Giovanni (Bass)

(Le-poh-REL-loh)

Don Giovanni – a nobleman by rank, if not by character (Baritone or Bass)

(Don [rhymes with cone] Jo-VAHN-nee [not gee-oh-vahn-nee])

Donna Anna – a young noble-woman (Soprano)

(DOH-nah AH-nah)

Il Commendatore – Donna Anna's father (Bass)

(eel koh-mahn-dah-TOH-rey)

Don Ottavio – engaged to Donna Anna (Tenor)

(Dohn oh-TA-vyoh)

Donna Elvira – a lady of high birth discarded by Don Giovanni (Soprano)

(DOH-nah EI-VEE-rah)

Zerlina – a country girl engaged to Masetto (Soprano)

(dzer-LEE-nah)

Masetto – engaged to Zerlina (Baritone or Bass)

(ma-ZET-toh)

BREIF SYNOPSIS

The synopsis reflects the updated Lyric Opera production.

Lyric Opera of Kansas City production setting: America, 1950s

ACT I

At night, in the street outside the Commendatore's house, Leporello bemoans his fate working for the dissolute Don Giovanni. Suddenly Giovanni runs into the street pursued by Donna Anna, the Commendatore's daughter, who accuses him of trying to attack her. The Commendatore rushes to his daughter's aid and is killed by Don Giovanni. Anna asks her fiancé, Don Ottavio, to avenge her father's death.

At a café the next morning, Giovanni and Leporello encounter one of Giovanni's former conquests, Donna Elvira, who is still angry at Giovanni's betrayal. Leporello tries to discourage her from pursuing Giovanni by showing her his catalogue with the name of every woman Giovanni has seduced.

Meanwhile, Masetto and Zerlina celebrate their upcoming wedding with friends. Don Giovanni asks Leporello to get rid of the groom. Alone with Zerlina, Giovanni persuades her to come away with him. Before they can leave, Elvira interrupts them and leads Zerlina away. Momentarily thwarted, Giovanni greets the mourning Anna and Ottavio, only to be embarrassed by the persistent Elvira, who denounces him as a seducer. Trying to dismiss her as a madwoman, he ushers Elvira off. Anna, in horror, recognizes him as her father's murderer and calls on Ottavio to avenge her honor.

Later that afternoon, Giovanni looks forward to an evening of revelry he has arranged in Zerlina's honor. Zerlina begs the furious Masetto to forgive her. Anna, Ottavio and Elvira arrive in disguise, swearing vengeance, and Giovanni tells Leporello to invite them in.

Inside Giovanni's nightclub, Leporello distracts Masetto while Giovanni dances with Zerlina, trying to drag her into an adjoining room. When Zerlina cries for help, Anna, Elvira, and Ottavio unmask and confront Giovanni, who escapes.

ACT II

Under Elvira's balcony, Leporello exchanges clothes with Giovanni to woo the lady in his master's stead. Leporello and Elvira go off, leaving Giovanni free to serenade Elvira's maid. When Masetto arrives with his friends to punish Giovanni, the disguised Don tricks Masetto and assaults him. Zerlina tenderly consoles him.

Elvira follows the disguised Leporello into a dimly lit courtyard. Leporello tries to escape, but is discovered by Anna, Ottavio, Zerlina and Masetto. Mistaking servant for master, they join in denouncing the supposed Don. Frightened, Leporello reveals his identity and manages to escape. Ottavio asks Zerlina and Masetto to comfort the distraught Anna and go to the authorities for help. Left alone, Elvira thinks about her love for Giovanni in spite of everything.

Leporello finds Giovanni in a cemetery, where a statue of the slain Commendatore warns Giovanni of his doom. The Don forces the terrified Leporello to invite the statue to dinner.

Ottavio urges Anna to stop grieving and accept his love. She implores him to wait until her father is avenged.

Late that night in the empty club, Giovanni orders Leporello to serve supper. Elvira arrives and attempts to persuade Giovanni to reform his ways, but he sends her away.

In a final confrontation with the Commendatore, Giovanni is finally forced to pay for his crimes.

DETAILED PLOT OUTLINE

ACT I

As was standard in all operas of the time, Don Giovanni begins with an overture, but it is one that is far more integrated with the story than any of Mozart's other overtures. Not only do the opening chords suggest anything but a comic opera; in a move that was rare for his time (though almost expected in the works of later composers), Mozart introduces a motif that was to recur later in the opera – a series of ominous ascending and descending scales. A sudden transition, however, moves us quickly to the world of opera buffa, with a much more Mozart-like sound.

The overture never concludes; it rather segues immediately into the opera's opening scene. The curtain rises on a garden at night, and as the music suggests, we see Leporello, Don Giovanni's servant, pacing up and back, complaining in a brief aria about having to wait outside while his master has all the fun. Suddenly, Don Giovanni comes rushing from the house, with Donna Anna hanging onto his arm, insisting that he give her his name before he leaves. (Her reasons will be discussed later). In true opera buffa fashion, Leporello provides a rapid bass line for their argument, as he expresses his own fears. Hearing her father, the Commendatore, approach, Donna Anna releases Don Giovanni and runs back into the house. (Is she afraid that her father will see them together? This is just one point of contention about her actions.) The Commendatore, however, does see them together, and in anger he challenges Don Giovanni to a duel. At first refusing because of the disparity in their ages, Don Giovanni eventually accepts the challenge, and the orchestra describes a quick and violent battle, one which ends with the old man receiving a mortal blow. Appropriately, the music takes on a solemn tone, and the three men sing a trio in which it is clear that both Don Giovanni and Leporello are shaken by the victim's death.

The following scene jarringly brings us back to the comic world of opera buffa. In a scene built on secco (dry) recitative – dialogue accompanied only by harpsichord – Leporello ignores the corpse still lying on the stage and begins

cracking jokes, first asking his master which of the two men has died and then, in response to Giovanni's response that the old man had it coming, inquiring as to whether Donna Anna got what she wanted as well.

The two men make their escape just ahead of Donna Anna and Don Ottavio, whom she has fetched to help rescue her father. Almost immediately she discovers the body, and the dialogue changes to recitative *accompagnato* (with orchestral accompaniment), allowing the orchestra to heighten the drama. Though he is supposed to be one of the "good guys" in this opera, Don Ottavio is hardly sympathetic in this scene. He orders that the "object" which is causing his beloved so much distress – the corpse – be removed immediately, and he tells her that he will be both husband and father to her – hardly the sort of thing a woman wants to hear within minutes of her father's death. Nevertheless, in their duet Donna Anna gets him to swear that he will help her obtain vengeance on the killer.

The scene changes to a street, where Leporello tries to tell Don Giovanni that he is leading the life of a scoundrel, but he backs off when his clearly unrepentant master intimidates him into silence. Blood on his hands or not, Don Giovanni has important business to attend to, the seduction of a woman he has been following. He is delighted, however, that he senses the presence of yet another woman. Unbeknownst to Don Giovanni, the woman is Donna Elvira, a former conquest of his in search of revenge. He even offers to help console her as she sings of her desire for revenge on her former lover "Ah! Chi mi dice mai" ("Who will tell me"). Suddenly, the two recognize each other. She reminds him of the three days that they spent together and how he referred to her as his wife, though it is not clear if this marriage was ever consecrated or merely consummated. In an ironic aside, Leporello says that she talks like a novel, referring to the sentimental romantic fiction which was in vogue in that era.

Don Giovanni runs off after instructing Leporello to tell her what sort of man he really is. Leporello then sings the famous "Catalogue Aria." He explains to her that she is neither the first nor last of his master's lovers. In fact, there have been thousands, and Leporello carries a notebook so he can keep a running

tally. With the rapid-fire delivery typical of the buffo bass singer (for example, Dulcamara's sales pitch in *The Elixir of Love*) he tells her that his master will seduce anyone in a skirt, and he gives her the present count, broken down by country. Spain is in the lead, he tells her with comic precision, at 1,003. Leporello's attitude toward Donna Elvira may be somewhat ambivalent at this point. He could be seen as mocking her or consoling her, depending upon the singer or the director. In any event, Don Giovanni is exposed here as a pathetic sex addict, less concerned with sensual pleasure than with impressive numbers. Not mollified by this explanation, Donna Elvira stalks off, swearing vengeance.

The scene shifts to the wedding party of two villagers of the lower economic class. Zerlina and Masetto, the bride and groom, enter, leading a chorus of villagers in a pleasant country song with lots of "la-la-la's." In contrast to the highborn ladies we have encountered earlier, Zerlina is characterized as a soubrette, usually a peasant or servant. The "ina" ending of her name suggests a woman of a lower economic class; in fact, sopranos sometimes refer to such rolls as "-ina and -etta" roles (cf. Adina, Giannetta, Despina). With Leporello at his side, Don Giovanni enters and gallantly makes the acquaintance of the wedding couple, but he is clearly motivated not by friendship but by a desire to deflower the bride before her husband has the chance. He invites the entire party to come to his castle to dine at his expense, and he instructs Leporello to keep the groom busy. Though not an explicit theme here, the custom of *droit de seigneur* – the master's prerogative to have relations with the bride before her husband does – seems to be lurking in the background. (This theme was explicit in *The Marriage of Figaro*.) The "seduction" of Zerlina takes place in an atmosphere poisoned by the disparity in power between the classes. Despite his transparent gallantry, Don Giovanni is clearly attempting to intimidate the peasants with his power.

Realizing he has no choice in the matter, Masetto, after a brief aria, goes off to join the others, leaving Zerlina behind. Don Giovanni immediately begins his sinister seduction of Zerlina, telling her that to save her from marrying a man who does not deserve her, he will marry her himself. In the charming duet "Là ci darem la mano," (Give me your hand") which many consider to be the

biggest “hit” number in the opera, Zerlina at first hesitates but soon gives in to Don Giovanni’s advances. Presumably, the opportunity to move up in social and economic class is too hard to resist.

Before they can run off, however, Donna Elvira, who has a remarkable knack for showing up at the most inconvenient times, enters. (In keeping with the conventions of the time, entrances and exits are not always supported by logic.) In her usual accusatory tone, she sings “A, fuggi il traditor” (“Flee the Traitor”), warning Zerlina of Don Giovanni’s duplicity and leads her away. Don Giovanni comments to himself that the devil has been thwarting all of his pleasant plans this day. (This may help settle the question that Leporello raised earlier; it implies that he was not able to consummate his seduction of Donna Anna.) Not recognizing Don Giovanni as the seducer/killer, they ask for his help. As if waiting for a cue, Donna Elvira storms in and warns them that he cannot be trusted. In the ensuing quartet, Don Giovanni tries to convince them that Donna Elvira is hysterical, but the couple suspect that she may have greater credibility. As Donna Elvira leaves, Don Giovanni follows her, presumably to keep her from doing harm to herself. Donna Anna now reveals to Don Ottavio that she recognized Don Giovanni’s voice and manner, and that she is certain that he is the man who killed her father. She describes the attempted rape. She had let the attacker enter her room because she had mistaken him for her fiancé. Several critics have noted that this explanation hardly makes sense, in that a proper gentleman of the time would not have entered the bedroom of a woman to whom he was not married, and a proper woman would not have admitted him. Nevertheless, this sets up the aria “Or sai chi l’onore,” (“Now you know who came to take my honor”) in which she asks him to seek vengeance on her behalf. The style of this aria is in the exalted opera seria form, and many listeners have heard in it an element of parody of the older style of music.

Leporello and Don Giovanni enter, and the servant provides a progress report. In a frenzied aria (often illogically referred to as the “champagne aria”), Don Giovanni tells Leporello to prepare a great feast with lots of wine and dancing, where he can add ten names to his book. The two men go off to make their preparations, and Masetto and Zerlina return. He is angry at her infidelity, and

she, realizing her mistake, beg for another chance. “Batti, batti” (“Beat me”) she sings to him, telling him she will understand if he beats her, but afterwards she still wants him back. Directors and critics are somewhat divided on the question of how seriously we should take her words. Is she a coquette or a masochist? (From Mozart’s letters to his wife, we know that the couple engaged in erotic spanking as part of their love life.)

In opera buffa, each act concluded with a big ensemble. The Act I finale begins with Masetto still expressing his doubts. Don Giovanni enters and draws Zerlina to him, over her protests. Seeing Masetto, he invites the couple to join in dancing. Three masked figures show up (Don Ottavio, Donna Ana, and Donna Elvira) and are invited in. The musicians begin to play a minuet. Leporello contrives to separate Masetto and Zerlina, over their objections. Don Giovanni leads the others in a cry of “Viva la libertà,” (“Love live liberty!”) clearly not a political statement but a tribute to sexual license. He lures Zerlina into another room. Soon, the party is interrupted by her scream for help. Don Giovanni enters, with Leporello at knifepoint. He accuses Leporello of the attempted rape, and while no one really believes this, the confusion facilitates his escape as the curtain falls.

ACT II

Many critics have found the plot of the second act, with the exception of the conclusion, to be less interesting than the first, but it nevertheless contains some of Mozart’s most glorious music. There is no appreciable passage of time between the two acts. Don Giovanni and Leporello enter and sing a brief duet in which Leporello, angry about being exposed to danger in the previous scene, threatens to quit, while Don Giovanni tells him he is being foolish. In the ensuing recitative, Don Giovanni gives him a cash bonus to stay on. When Leporello suggests that he should cut down on his amorous adventures, he replies that women are more necessary for him than the food he eats or the air he breathes, and he observes that if he were to be faithful to one woman he would be unfair to all the others. He informs Leporello that he is now interested in courting Elvira’s maid (a character never seen or heard in the opera). He orders Leporello to change cloaks with him, since a maid would be intimidated by a man of high degree.

Donna Elvira appears at the window. Don Giovanni sings sweetly to her, inviting her to come down to be with him. Leporello, in typical buffo fashion, punctuates their duet with his asides, at first laughing at her but then pitying her trusting heart.

Don Giovanni instructs Leporello, now disguised as his master, to make advances to Donna Elvira so he can devote his attention to the maid. Leporello carries off the deception effectively, and Don Giovanni scared them off with a feigned threat. To a pizzicato accompaniment suggesting a guitar, Don Giovanni sings a folk-style love song, "Deh vieni alla finestra" ("Come to the window), to the unseen object of his affections. He is interrupted, however, by Masetto and a group of followers, who are seeking revenge. Pretending to be the disgruntled Leporello, he sings a brief aria in which he points the men in various directions. Alone with Masetto, he tricks him into handing over his weapons, beats him up, and runs off.

Zerlina enters, in search of Masetto. When she finds him, she cajoles him for his hotheaded escapade and asks him where he is hurt. He points to a number of places on his anatomy and she replies suggestively that as long as the rest of him is all right, it's not so bad. In the touching aria "Vedrai, carino" ("You will discover, my dear") she tells him that she has the cure for his pains, and she tells him to put his hand on her chest so he can feel her heart beating.

One might find the implied eroticism of this scene somewhat comic, but the music suggests that her love is essentially maternal. The idea that man can find redemption through the love of a woman is one that we generally associate with Wagner, but in Zerlina's magnificent aria, the grandeur of which rises above the light-hearted girl that Da Ponte apparently envisioned, Mozart seems to be pointing us in that direction as well. (We will see more of this theme later).

Meanwhile, Leporello, still disguised as his master, continues his courtship of Donna Elvira, and they sing a duet. Without a break in the music, Don Ottavio and Donna Anna enter, and when Masetto returns to threaten the supposed villain, the six voices blend seamlessly. Leporello sings a lengthy plea for mercy,

but when he has successfully distracted them he decides that he would be better to run off than to further test their forgiveness.

In the scene that follows we are treated to a pair of Mozart's greatest arias in quick succession, each preceded by a brief recitative. Don Ottavio declares that he is now sure of Donna Anna's identification of Don Giovanni as her father's killer, and in the aria "Il mio Tesoro" ("My treasure") he asks the others to console his beloved while he goes off to seek revenge.

Oblivious of the emotions his actions have caused, Don Giovanni is now seen laughing at the chaos he has left in his wake. Encountering Leporello in a graveyard, he tells how he had made advances on a woman who mistook him for his servant. Leporello remarks that it could have been his wife (the first mention of her; perhaps a minor inconsistency). Their conversation is interrupted, however, by a ghostly voice, which we soon learn to be the spirit of the Commendatore, warning that his laughter will end before the morning. Noticing the statue of the deceased leader, Don Giovanni orders the frightened Leporello to read the inscription. It says, "Here I await heaven's vengeance upon a vile assassin." (Since the entire action of the opera appears to take place in the period of about a day, the speed with which this monument was erected – even if the inscription was added to an existing statue – reminds us that in opera time can be relative.) Unafraid, Don Giovanni insists that Leporello invite the statue to dinner, which Leporello does, with comic politeness and deference directed to the spirit of the deceased. The Commendatore needs only one word – "Si" – to respond.

They go home to prepare the feast, and Donna Anna and Don Ottavio reappear. Though he had appeared to grow in his understanding of her during the course of the opera, he continues tastelessly to press for an immediate marriage. Since the other two ladies have had a second-act aria, it is now Donna Anna's turn, and Mozart obliges with the lovely "Non mi dir," ("Do not tell me") a perennial favorite of Mozart sopranos. She apologizes for putting her lover off, but she insists that her mourning prevents her from thinking of romance at this time.

The scene shifts to Don Giovanni's dining room, where he has begun

eating a sumptuous feast and is even willing to look the other way when Leporello sneaks some food for himself. He has hired a chamber orchestra for the occasion, and they proceed to play a number of hit songs of the day, arias from other operas. In a scene that is unusual, if not unique in the annals of opera, Don Giovanni and Leporello's voices join the background orchestra so that each section of dialogue is sung to the tune of a different composer. There are a couple of "inside jokes" here. First, we hear an aria from Martin y Soler's *Una Cosa Rara*, much to Leporello's delight. This is a joke which Mozart allowed Da Ponte to play on him, for this opera, with a libretto by Da Ponte, had surpassed *The Marriage of Figaro* in popularity in Vienna—one reason that Don Giovanni premiered in Prague. Then comes "Non piu andrai" ("You won't go") from *The Marriage of Figaro*, and Leporello complains that he knows that opera too well. The joke is that the singer who played Leporello in the premiere had played the title role in Figaro the year before.

As we noted earlier, Mozart seems to have been exploring the idea of the redemptive power of women. A hint of this was heard in the final scene of *The Marriage of Figaro*, where the Countess' hymn-like music suggested forgiveness far greater than that of a mortal woman forgiving her husband's infidelities. Now Donna Elvira, who, as we noted before, keeps showing up at the strangest times, confronts Don Giovanni once more, not seeking revenge but rather offering salvation. She is giving him one more chance to redeem himself. Through loving her, he can save himself. He cruelly rejects this opportunity, and as she leaves, we hear her scream.

The reason for the scream is soon apparent. It is the statue, who in a dramatic declamation announces that he has indeed accepted the invitation to come to dinner. Don Giovanni, trying not to appear afraid, tells Leporello to bring food, but the statue replies that he no longer needs human food.

Here is the remarkable dramatic scene we alluded to earlier. No longer tied to the conventions of opera seria or opera buffa, the dialogue between the two (occasionally punctuated by Leporello's attempts to persuade his master to retreat) reaches a dramatic intensity which we were not to hear again until

Verdi's middle period. A declamatory style has replaced the traditional melody we generally associate with Mozart. In the background, we hear the ominous ascending and descending scales we first heard in the overture, as well as a chorus of demons from below.

The statue tells him that it is time to reciprocate Don Giovanni's invitation, and Don Giovanni must now come to dine with him in the next world. The statue takes his hand in a frozen grip. The Spanish play upon which the Don Juan legend was built was written to demonstrate that one could reach a point where repentance was no longer an option, but the Enlightenment Catholicism of Mozart's time taught that the gates of repentance were always open. The statue offers Don Giovanni one last chance to repent, but even in the grip of a visitor from beyond the grave, he is too proud to repent. Only then does the statue drag Don Giovanni down to Hell, and we hear his anguished cry, followed by the frightened scream of Leporello.

W. A. MOZART

Of all the great composers, perhaps none has been the subject of more romantic speculation than Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Several years ago, in the film *Amadeus*, Hollywood presented us with a Mozart for our own age – an irreverent, uncouth young man with an innate and inexplicable gift for composing immortal music. In the Peter Schafer play upon which the film was based, it was clear that what we were seeing was a caricature of the composer as filtered through the deranged mind of his rival, Antonio Salieri (also a caricature). But film audiences, accustomed to television biopics, often have missed that distinction.

When we look at the historical record, much of which can be derived from the large amount of Mozart's correspondence which has been preserved, we find a quite different picture. For one thing, he was a keen student of music theory, aware of the effects of various harmonies and key changes. He also was a devout Catholic who drew inspiration from the rituals of the church. As for the vulgarity, much of which can be confirmed from the letters, we need to remember that in the 18th century scatological humor and sexual frankness were much more acceptable than they were to become later. Rumors of Mozart's sexual affairs are unsubstantiated, and the erotic letters we do have are addressed to his wife.

But even if we strip away the myths, one indisputable fact remains: Mozart was clearly one of the greatest creative geniuses (if not the greatest) the world has ever known. In a lifetime just short of thirty-six years he revolutionized Western music. Whereas most other great opera composers, with the exception of Richard Strauss, were known almost exclusively for their operatic compositions, opera was just one area in which Mozart excelled. His symphonies clearly surpassed those of his predecessors and contemporaries, and the last four are still considered among the greatest of all time. Many of his concertos are still part of the standard orchestral repertoire, and those for oboe and clarinet are probably the most popular for those instruments. His *Requiem* is the most frequently performed version of that text, and his *Exsultate, jubilate*

motet for solo singer and orchestra may also be the most popular such work. In the world of opera – his first love – he demonstrated his versatility as well, creating the finest examples of operas in three distinct formats: *opera seria*, *opera buffa*, and the German *singspiel*.

Mozart was born in Salzburg (which was not yet part of Austria) on January 27, 1756, the son of a professional musician, Leopold Mozart. After wasting a few years in childhood pursuits, the three-year-old Wolfgang began to demonstrate such a musical talent that his father immediately recognized that he had been blessed with a remarkable gift. By the time he was six, he had already composed a keyboard piece and been taken on tour, along with his one sibling who did not die in infancy, his sister Nannerl, herself a gifted musician. (Might she, in another time, have rivaled her brother's creative genius?) By age 14 he had composed his first opera, *Mitridate*, a rather conventional work which is rarely performed today.

For the next several years Mozart traveled throughout Europe, barely managing to make a living through performing and composing. In 1781, he made the most important decision of his life, relocating to Vienna, which at that time was the cultural capital of the German-speaking world. Here he was able to find a wider audience for his works, eventually landing a post in the court of Emperor Joseph II.

It was during his travels that he came in contact with a music copyist named Fridolin Weber, a friendship which led to a brief romance with the latter's sixteen-year-old daughter, a talented singer named Aloisia. Though she soon broke off the relationship, Mozart remained in touch with the family and eventually turned his attention to her sister Constanze, the woman who was to become his wife. Leopold was furious about the match, having hoped that Wolfgang, like his sister, would find someone who could provide him with some financial stability. But the young Mozart knew best, and by all accounts it was an excellent marriage, despite the couple's financial difficulties.

Though he had written a number of operas in his teen years, it was in 1781 that the young composer first began to write the works which would bring him immortality in the annals of opera. First came *Idomeneo* (1781), based on

classical mythology, which is occasionally performed today. The following year Mozart turned his attention from Italian to the creation of an indigenous German-language opera, collaborating with Gottlieb Stephanie on *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. It was this opera that led to a legendary exchange between composer and emperor: "Too monstrous for our ears, and monstrous many notes, my dear Mozart." "Exactly as many as necessary, your Majesty." Whether or not this dialogue actually took place, it illustrates the fact that the young Mozart was writing with a complexity new to the Viennese audiences.

Shortly afterward, he became aware of a new poet in the Viennese court, Lorenzo Da Ponte, and hoped that he could lure him away from Salieri long enough to work with him on an opera. Fortunately for both men this wish was fulfilled, and *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786) was born. The following year the two men took advantage of Mozart's popularity in Prague to compose a new work to be premiered in that city, the result being *Don Giovanni*. Following the third of their collaborations, *Così fan tutte*, Mozart surprisingly turned briefly to opera seria to write *La Clamenza di Tito* (1791), considered by some to be the greatest example of that form of opera. Despite some gorgeous music, it is rarely performed today. Later that year, however, Mozart again found his comic touch, collaborating with his good friend Emanuel Schickaneder on *The Magic Flute*, possibly intended as a tribute to the Freemason movement, of which Mozart was an active member. (Much has been made of the supposed subversive nature of this organization; however, few Viennese had trouble reconciling the Masons' humanism with their Catholic faith.)

At the height of his creative powers, however, the young composer was struck by a disease which his biographers have been unable to identify, though few take seriously the rumor that he was poisoned. He died December 5, 1791, just weeks short of what would have been his thirty-sixth birthday, leaving his *Requiem* unfinished. It was completed by a colleague named Franz Sussmeyer, and that is the version we are familiar with today. (Peter Schafer showed Salieri completing it.) In accord with funeral practices of the time (part of Joseph II's reforms), he was buried in an unmarked grave. Mozart does not need a stone monument, however. His works are certainly enough of a monument for any man.

LORENZO DA PONTE

Though he is best known as a writer of opera libretti (lyrics), Lorenzo Da Ponte's life itself could well provide the subject of an opera for some enterprising composer and librettist. Born March 10, 1749 in the Jewish ghetto of Ceneda, Italy under the name Emanuel Conegliano, Da Ponte lost his mother at age 5, and when his father chose a Catholic woman for his second wife, the entire family converted to her religion. While Da Ponte failed to mention his Jewish origins in his memoirs and therefore does not comment on his feeling about this change, it appears that he welcomed it not so much out of religious fervor but rather because it opened for him the world of Western culture and education, which was closed to non-Christians at the time. To express his gratitude for these opportunities, he changed his name to that of the bishop who baptized him.

Recognized early as a gifted student, Da Ponte recognized that the best way to obtain a liberal education in his day was to study for the priesthood (he apparently went as far as to become ordained), though he had no intention of serving in that capacity (or, for that matter, of adopting a celibate lifestyle). In fact, prior to his move to Vienna in 1781, his addictive gambling and affairs with married women were well known.

Vienna at the time was a true cultural center. Emperor Joseph II was especially devoted to Italian opera, and he had worked to bring the finest creators and performers of that genre to his court. He was also known for his tolerance of Jews, and he would not have held Da Ponte's origins against him. Da Ponte was appointed poet to the Italian theatre, and he soon was writing libretti for such major composers as Martin y Soler and Antonio Salieri. Mozart immediately recognized his genius and sought him out to collaborate on his adaptation of Beaumarchais' *The Marriage of Figaro*. Following the success of that work, Da Ponte proposed the subject of the Don Juan legend for the subject of their next work, a suggestion which Mozart embraced enthusiastically. They were to work together once more, on *Così fan tutte*, before the two moved on to other ventures.

In 1792 Da Ponte met a young Englishwoman named Nancy Grahl, and it appears that the two entered into what in effect was a common-law marriage; it has been speculated that Da Ponte's status as a priest prevented them from marrying. Under chaotic circumstances, he moved to London to work with an Italian opera company there, and in 1805, one step ahead of his creditors, he and Nancy departed for the United States, where he spent his remaining years as a merchant, bookseller, and professor of Italian at Columbia University. He devoted much of his time to promoting Italian opera in the United States. He was greatly encouraged in his endeavors by scholar and poet Clement Moore, best known today as the writer of *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*.

Da Ponte eloquently expressed his theory of opera as follows: "The success of an opera depends, first of all, on the poet....I think that poetry is the door to music, which can be very handsome, and much admired for its exterior, but nobody can see its internal beauties, if the door is wanting." While some critics tend to downplay the importance of Da Ponte in the creation of the three operas on which he collaborated with Mozart, it is best to say that the two men brought out the best in each other. None of Da Ponte's other works have stood the test of time; yet no other works of Mozart have the same depth of characterization as these three. These three operas represent the integration of text and music at its finest.

THE DON JUAN SAGA

Don Giovanni is, of course, the Italian name of the legendary romancer and seducer, Don Juan. The origins of the Don Juan character can, however, be traced not to ancient folklore but rather to a single literary source, the play *The Trickster of Seville and his Guest of Stone*, written by the Spanish monk Tirso de Molina in about 1616, who grafted onto his story an old folktale about a man who insults a deceased person with a jesting dinner invitation only to have the guest show up.

While Tirso intended his drama to be a morality play, demonstrating that one cannot lead a life of debauchery with the intention of repenting before one's death, the character and drama took on a life of their own as the Don underwent several literary metamorphoses. The French playwright Moliere (1665) made the Don an atheist rebelling against both religion and society, in contrast to Tirso, who saw him as a believer naively counting on having time to repent in old age. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries there were numerous literary treatments, including several Italian operas, among them one by Giovanni Bertati, which apparently was Da Ponte's most direct literary source. The Mozart and Da Ponte version, in fact, was one of the three Italian operas on the subject to appear in 1787. In our day, another name synonymous with Don Juan is Casanova. The latter, however, was a real person with whom Mozart and Da Ponte were personally acquainted. In fact, he attended at least one performance of their opera.

With the growth of individualism in the 19th and 20th centuries, Don Juan became more hero than villain, a romantic rebel against the conventions of society. Jose Zorilla (1844) allowed him to be saved by a love from beyond the grave (cf. Goethe's *Faust*). The German writer E.T.A. Hoffmann saw him as representing "that infinite longing which brings us into direct contact with the supernatural." (Offenbach's opera *The Tales of Hoffmann* takes place during a performance of *Don Giovanni*). In fact, in some versions, the Don becomes almost Faust-like in a search for knowledge.

Some writers, in fact, have turned the legend on its head, making Don Juan not the pursuer but rather the pursued, as in Lord Byron's poem on the subject (1821), in which he becomes an innocent young man pursued by women. And in *Man and Superman* (1903), George Bernard Shaw portrays him as a man who must yield to marriage with the woman who pursues him in order to advance the human race.

Perhaps such reversals are inevitable. The original Don Juan legend was based on the social inequality of the sexes. The term "seduction" may no longer apply given the current acceptance of non-marital sex; a man who is constantly in search of new "conquests" is more likely to be the subject of pity rather than envy or admiration.

OPERA BUFFA

While, as we have noted, *Don Giovanni* contains elements of both *opera seria* and *opera buffa*, it is essentially a *buffa* piece. This highly stylized form of comedy apparently arose out of the *commedia del arte* improvisational comedy groups who traveled through Europe, and many of the stereotypical character types developed in the presentations found their way into *opera buffa*. The inclusion of music which resembled *opera seria* in style was not entirely original with Mozart, though he seems to have mixed the two forms more deftly than had his predecessors.

Essentially, light as they often were, these comic works were seen as morality plays, and the typical *buffa* plot was designed to hold certain forms of human behavior up to ridicule. As morality plays, however, the satire was never political but always general enough as not to offend the audiences.

During the final quarter of the 18th century, *opera buffa* was extremely popular in Vienna, where a distinction was made between German-language opera, which was considered more serious and philosophical, and comic Italian operas. These works not only were presented in Italian but also followed the conventions of Italian opera; whereas German works used spoken dialogue between the musical numbers. Italian operas linked the arias and ensembles with recitative, a form of sung speech. *Opera buffa*, in fact, made frequent use of *secco* (dry) recitative, with only a harpsichord for accompaniment, allowing for rapid-fire dialogue to advance the plot.

The *buffa* format remained vital for several years after Mozart's death and it can be seen in the comic works of the great *bel canto* composers, such as Donizetti and Rossini (as in *The Elixir of Love* or *La Cenerentola*). Gradually comic opera in general fell out of favor and was replaced by tragic opera. While Verdi and Puccini each wrote one purely comic opera, their musical idiom was in general best suited to tragedy. Most of the great comedies of the late 19th and 20th centuries were composed as operettas rather than operas and were written not in Italian but in German, French, and English. It was not until the 1920s that Richard Strauss developed an entirely new style of music appropriate for comic opera.

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