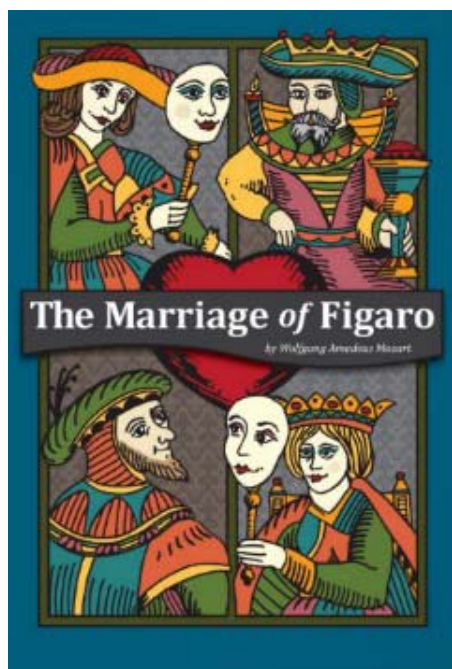


The Pescadero Opera Society presents
Le Nozze di Figaro
(The Marriage of Figaro)



Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte

Based on a stage comedy
by Pierre Beaumarchais

Opera Buffa in Four Acts
Runtime: 192 minutes

Setting: Seville, Spain
Time: Late 18th century

Characters

Figaro, personal valet to the count (bass) Ruggero Raimondi
Susanna, the countess's maid (soprano) Kathleen Battle
Don Bartolo, doctor from Seville, also a practicing lawyer (bass) Athur Korn
Marcellina (soprano) Jocelyne Taillon
Cherubino, the Count's page (soprano) Frederica von Stade
Count Almaviva (baritone) Thomas Allen
Don Basilio, music master (tenor) Michael Sénéchal
Antonio, the Count's gardener, Susanna's uncle (bass) James Courtney
Countess Rosina Almaviva (soprano) Carol Vaness
Don Curzio, judge (tenor) Anthony Laciura
Barbarina, Antonio's daughter (soprano) Dawn Upshaw

Conducted by James Levine
Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus

Première performance on May 1, 1786 at the Burgtheater in Vienna, Austria

Synopsis

Background. Rossini’s opera, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, recounts the first of the plays from the Figaro trilogy, by French playwright Pierre Beaumarchais. Mozart’s opera, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, composed 30 years earlier in 1786, is based on the second part of the Beaumarchais trilogy and is a continuation of the plot several years later.

Le Nozze di Figaro recounts a single “day of madness” in the palace of the Count Almaviva near Seville, Spain. Rosina is now the Countess; Dr. Bartolo is seeking revenge against Figaro for thwarting his plans to marry Rosina himself; and Count Almaviva has degenerated from the romantic youth in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* into a scheming, bullying, skirt-chasing cad. Having gratefully given Figaro a job as head of his servant-staff, he is now persistently trying to obtain sexual favors from Figaro’s bride-to-be, Susanna, as was the centuries-old custom.

Act I

Count Almaviva’s country estate, outside Seville



Figaro is happily measuring the space where the bridal bed will fit, while Susanna is trying on her wedding bonnet in front of the mirror.¹ Figaro is quite pleased with their new room; Susanna far less so. She is bothered by its proximity to the Count’s chambers — it seems he has been making advances toward her and plans on exercising his “droit du seigneur²,” the purported feudal right of a lord to bed a servant girl on her wedding night before her husband can sleep with her. The Count had abolished the right when he married Rosina, but he now wants to reinstate it. Figaro is livid and plans to outwit the Count. Figaro leaves the room.

Dr. Bartolo arrives with Marcellina, his former housekeeper. Marcellina has hired Bartolo as her counsel. Figaro had once promised to marry her if he should ever default on a loan that she had made to him. Now she intends to enforce that promise. Bartolo, still annoyed at Figaro for having facilitated the union of the Count and Rosina, promises to help Marcellina marry Figaro. Bartolo leaves the room.

Susanna returns; Marcellina and Susanna share an exchange of very politely delivered sarcastic insults. Susanna triumphs in the exchange by congratulating her rival on her impressive age. The older woman leaves in a rage.

Cherubino arrives and, after describing his emerging infatuation with all women, and particularly with his “beautiful godmother,” the Countess, asks for Susanna’s help with the Count. It seems that the Count is angry with Cherubino and plans to punish him after having discovered him with the gardener’s daughter, Barbarina. Cherubino wants Susanna to ask the Countess to intercede on his behalf.

When the Count appears, Cherubino hides behind a chair, not wanting to be seen alone with Susanna. The Count uses the opportunity of finding Susanna alone to demand sexual favors from her, including offering her money.

¹In the present day, a more traditional French floral wreath or a modern veil are often substituted, often in combination with a bonnet, so as to accommodate what Susanna happily describes as her wedding “cappellino.”

²“Droit du seigneur” is an alleged legal right allowing the lord of a medieval estate to take the virginity of his serfs’ maiden daughters. There is no historical evidence that such a right ever existed outside of literature.



Basilio, the slimy music teacher, arrives. The Count, not wanting to be caught alone with Susanna, also goes to hide behind the chair. Just in time, Cherubino leaves that hiding place and jumps onto the chair while Susanna scrambles to cover him with a dress.

Basilio starts to gossip about Cherubino's obvious attraction to the Countess. The Count angrily leaps from his hiding place. Lifting the dress from the chair he finds Cherubino. The young man is only saved from punishment by the entrance of the peasants of the Count's estate. This entrance is a preemptive attempt by Figaro to commit the Count to a formal gesture symbolizing the promise of Susanna's entering into the marriage unsullied.

The Count evades Figaro's plan by postponing the pledge. The Count says that he forgives Cherubino, but sends him to Seville for army duty. Figaro mocks Cherubino about his new, harsh, military life from which women will be totally excluded.

Act II In the Countess' boudoir

The Countess laments her husband's infidelity. Susanna comes in to prepare the Countess for the day. She responds to the Countess's questions by telling her that the Count is not trying to "seduce" her. He is merely offering her a monetary contract in return for her affection.

Figaro enters and explains his plan to distract the Count with anonymous letters warning him of adulterers. He has already sent one to the Count (via Basilio) that indicates the Countess has a rendezvous that evening of her own. They hope that the Count will be too busy looking for imaginary adulterers to interfere with Figaro's and Susanna's wedding. Figaro additionally advises the Countess to keep Cherubino around, that she should dress him up as Susanna and lure the Count into an illicit rendezvous where he can be caught red-handed. Figaro leaves.

Cherubino arrives, sent in by Figaro and eager to cooperate. Susanna urges him to sing the song he wrote for the Countess. After the song, the Countess, seeing Cherubino's military commission, notices that the Count was in such a hurry that he forgot to seal it with his signet ring [which was necessary to make it an official document].

They proceed to dress Cherubino in women's clothes, and Susanna goes out to get a ribbon. While the Countess and Cherubino are waiting for Susanna to return, they suddenly hear the Count arriving. Cherubino hides in the closet.

The Count demands to be allowed into the room, and the Countess reluctantly unlocks the door. The Count enters and hears a noise from the closet. He tries to open it, but it is locked. The Countess tells him it is only Susanna, trying on her wedding dress. The Count shouts for her to identify herself by her voice, but the Countess orders her to be silent.

At this moment, Susanna re-enters unobserved, quickly realizes what's going on, and hides behind a couch. Furious and suspicious, the Count leaves with the Countess in search of tools to force the closet door open, locking all the bedroom doors to prevent the intruder from escaping.



Cherubino and Susanna emerge from their hiding places, and Cherubino escapes by jumping through the window into the garden. Susanna then takes his place in the closet, vowing to make the Count look foolish.

The Count and Countess return. The Countess desperately admits that Cherubino is hiding in the closet. The raging Count draws his sword, promising to kill Cherubino on the spot but, when the door is opened, they both find to their astonishment that it is only Susanna.

The Count demands an explanation. The Countess tells him that it is just a practical joke, to test his trust in her. Shamed by his jealousy, the Count begs for forgiveness. When the Count presses about the anonymous letter, Susanna and the Countess reveal that the letter was written by Figaro, and then delivered through Basilio. Figaro then arrives and tries to start the wedding festivities, but the Count berates him with questions about the anonymous note.

Just as the Count is starting to run out of questions, Antonio the gardener arrives, complaining that a man had jumped out of the window and broken his flowerpots. The Count immediately realizes that it was really Cherubino who had jumped out of the window. Figaro claims that it was he himself who had jumped out the window, faking a foot-injury.

Antonio brings forward a paper which, he says, was dropped by the escaping man. The Count orders Figaro to prove that he was the jumper by identifying the paper (which is, in fact, Cherubino's appointment to the army). Figaro is able to do this because of the cunning teamwork of the two women.

Figaro's victory is, however, short-lived. Marcellina, Bartolo, and Basilio enter, bringing charges against Figaro and demanding that he honor his contract to marry Marcellina. The Count happily postpones the wedding in order to investigate the charge.

Act III

A rich hall, with two thrones, prepared for the wedding ceremony

The Count mulls over the confusing situation. At the urging of the Countess, Susanna enters and gives a false promise to meet the Count later that night in the garden. As Susanna leaves, the Count overhears her telling Figaro that he has already won the case. Realizing that he had been tricked, he resolves to make Figaro pay by forcing him to marry Marcellina.

Figaro's trial follows, and the judgment is that Figaro must marry Marcellina. Figaro argues that he cannot get married without his parents' permission, and that he does not know who his parents are because he was stolen from them when he was a baby.

The ensuing discussion reveals that Figaro is Rafaello, the long-lost illegitimate son of Bartolo and Marcellina. A touching scene of reconciliation occurs. During the celebrations, Susanna enters with a payment to release Figaro from his debt to Marcellina. Seeing Figaro and Marcellina in celebration together, Susanna mistakenly believes that Figaro now prefers Marcellina over her. She has a tantrum and slaps Figaro's face. Figaro explains, and Susanna, realizing her mistake, joins the celebration. Bartolo, overcome with emotion, agrees to marry Marcellina that evening in a double wedding.



All leave, and the Countess, alone, ponders the loss of her happiness. Susanna enters and updates her regarding the plan to trap the Count. The Countess dictates a love letter for Susanna to give to the Count, which suggests that he meet her that night "under the pines." The letter instructs the Count to return the pin which fastens the letter.

A chorus of young peasants, among them Cherubino disguised as a girl, arrives to serenade the Countess. The Count arrives with Antonio and, discovering the page, Cherubino, becomes enraged. His anger is quickly dispelled by Barbarina (a peasant girl, Antonio's daughter), who publicly recalls that he had once offered to give her anything she wants, and asks for

Cherubino's hand in marriage. Thoroughly embarrassed, the Count allows Cherubino to stay.

The act closes with the double wedding, during the course of which Susanna delivers her letter to the Count. Figaro watches the Count prick his finger on the pin, and laughs, unaware that the love-note is from Susanna herself. As the curtain drops, the two newlywed couples rejoice.

Act IV

The garden, with two pavilions

It is evening. Following the directions in the letter, the Count has sent the pin back to Susanna, giving it to Barbarina. Unfortunately, Barbarina has lost it. Figaro and Marcellina see Barbarina. Figaro asks her what she is doing. When he hears that the pin is Susanna's, he is overcome with jealousy, especially as he recognizes the pin to be the one that fastened the letter to the Count.

Thinking that Susanna is meeting the Count behind his back, Figaro complains to his mother, and swears to be avenged on the Count and Susanna, and on all unfaithful wives. Marcellina urges caution, but Figaro will not listen. Figaro rushes off, and Marcellina resolves to inform Susanna of Figaro's intentions. Marcellina sings of how the wild beasts get along with each other, but rational humans can't.¹

Actuated by jealousy, Figaro tells Bartolo and Basilio to come to his aid when he gives the signal. Basilio comments on Figaro's foolishness and claims he was once as frivolous as Figaro. He tells a tale of how he was given common sense by "Donna Flemma," and ever since he has been aware of the wiles of women. They exit, leaving Figaro alone.

Figaro muses on the inconstancy of women. Susanna and the Countess arrive, dressed in each other's clothes. Marcellina is with them, having informed Susanna of Figaro's suspicions and plans. After they discuss the plan, Marcellina and the Countess leave, and Susanna teases Figaro by singing a love song to her beloved within Figaro's hearing. Figaro is hiding behind a bush and, thinking the song is for the Count, becomes increasingly jealous.

The Countess arrives in Susanna's dress. Cherubino shows up and starts teasing "Susanna" (really the Countess), endangering the plan. Fortunately, the Count gets rid of him by striking out in the dark. His punch actually ends up hitting Figaro, but the point is made and Cherubino runs off.

The Count now begins making earnest love to "Susanna" (really the Countess), and gives her a jeweled ring. They go offstage together, where the Countess dodges him, hiding in the dark. Onstage, meanwhile, the real Susanna enters, wearing the Countess' clothes. Figaro mistakes her for the Countess, and starts to tell her of the Count's intentions, but he suddenly recognizes his bride in disguise. He plays along with the joke by pretending to be in love with "my lady," and invites her to make love right then and there. Susanna, fooled, loses her temper and slaps him many times. Figaro finally lets on that he had recognized Susanna's voice. They make peace, resolving to conclude the comedy together.

The Count, unable to find "Susanna," enters the room frustrated. Figaro gets his attention by loudly declaring his love for "the Countess" (really Susanna). The enraged Count calls for his people and for weapons, claiming that his servant is seducing his wife. Bartolo, Basilio and Antonio enter with torches as, one by one, the Count drags out Cherubino, Barbarina, Marcellina and the "Countess" from behind the pavilion.

All beg him to forgive Figaro and the "Countess," but he loudly refuses, repeating "No!" at the top of his voice, until finally the real Countess re-enters and reveals her true identity. The Count, seeing the ring he had given her, realizes that the supposed Susanna he was trying to seduce, was actually his wife. Ashamed and remorseful, he kneels and pleads for forgiveness himself. The Countess, more kind than he, forgives her husband and all are content. The opera ends in a night-long celebration.

¹This aria and Basilio's ensuing aria are usually omitted from performances due to their relative unimportance, both musically and dramatically; however some productions include them.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born: January 27, 1756 in Salzburg, Austria; Died: December 5, 1791 in Vienna, Austria



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was one of two surviving children born to Leopold and Anna Maria Pertl. When Wolfgang was four (as noted by his father in his sister's music book), he was playing the same pieces as his sister, Maria Anna, who was a gifted keyboard player. At the age of five, he wrote a miniature andante and allegro. In 1762, Leopold took Wolfgang and Maria Anna on tour throughout Vienna performing for nobles and ambassadors. Later in 1763, Leopold took Wolfgang and Maria Anna on a three-and-a-half year tour throughout Germany, France, England, Switzerland, and other countries.

Amid the many tours, Mozart wrote music for a number of occasions. In 1770, Mozart (only 14) was commissioned to write an opera (*Mitridate, re di Ponto*) by that December. He began work on the opera in October and by December 26, after eight rehearsals, the show was performed. The show, which included several ballets from other composers, lasted six hours. To much of his father's surprise, the opera was a huge success and went on to perform 22 more times.

In 1777 Mozart left Salzburg with his mother to search for a higher paying job. His travels led him to Paris, where unfortunately, his mother became deathly ill. Mozart's efforts to find a better job were unfruitful. He returned home two years later and continued working in the court as an organist with accompanying duties, rather than as a violinist. Mozart was offered an increase in salary and generous leave.

After the successful premier of Mozart's opera *Idomenée* in 1781 in Munich, Mozart returned to Salzburg. Wanting to be released from his job as court organist, Mozart met with the archbishop. In March of 1781, Mozart was finally released from his duties and began working freelance. A year later, Mozart gave his first public concert consisting entirely of his own compositions.

Mozart married Constanze Weber in July of 1782, despite his father's constant disapprovals. As Mozart's compositions flourished, his debts did too; money always seemed a bit tight. In 1787, Mozart's father, Leopold, died. The affects of his father's death was devastating to Mozart, and can be seen in a lull in new compositions. Four years later in 1791, Mozart died of military fever, at the age of thirty-five. Mozart was buried with little ceremony in a suburb of Vienna, in an unmarked grave, in accordance with prevailing custom.

Mozart Trivia

- "Köchel" numbers are used instead of opus numbers to designate the works of Mozart.
- Of the 41 symphonies that Mozart wrote, only two are in a minor key, both of which are in g minor (Symphonies No. 25 and No. 40).
- Mozart's music was often criticized as being too complex and "having too many notes."
- Mozart was known to take familiar musical lines from one piece of music and insert them into another piece of music.

Le Nozze di Figaro

Le Nozze di Figaro, ossia la folle giornata (*The Marriage of Figaro, or The Day of Madness*), K. 492, is an opera buffa¹ composed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in 1786. The Italian libretto was written by Lorenzo da Ponte. It is based on a stage comedy by Pierre Beaumarchais, *La folle journée, ou le Mariage de Figaro* (1784).

Although the play by Beaumarchais was at first banned in Vienna because of its satire of the aristocracy, which was considered dangerous in the decade before the French Revolution, the opera became one of Mozart's most successful works. The overture is especially famous and is often played as a concert piece. The musical material of the overture is not used later in the work, aside from two brief phrases during the Count's part in the terzetto *Cosa sento!* in Act I.

The opera was the first of three collaborations between Mozart and Da Ponte; their later collaborations were *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan Tutte*. It was Mozart who had originally selected Beaumarchais' play and brought it to Da Ponte, who turned it into a libretto in six weeks, rewriting it in poetic Italian and removing all of the original's political references. In particular, Da Ponte replaced Figaro's climactic speech against inherited nobility with an equally angry aria against unfaithful wives. Contrary to the popular myth, the libretto was approved by the Emperor, Joseph II, before any music was written by Mozart.

Figaro premiered at the Burgtheater in Vienna on May 1, 1786. Mozart himself directed the first two performances, conducting seated at the keyboard, the custom of the day. It was performed eight more times that year. Later performances were conducted by Joseph Weigl.

Although the total of nine performances was nothing like the frequency of performance of Mozart's later success *The Magic Flute*, which for months was performed roughly every other day, the premiere was generally judged to have been a success. The applause of the audience on the first night resulted in five numbers being encored, seven on May 8th. Joseph II, who, in addition to his empire, was in charge of the Burgtheater. He was concerned about the length of the performance and, in time for the third performance on May 24th, directed his aide Count Rosenberg to print posters saying that no piece was to be repeated for more than a single voice.

Joseph Haydn appreciated the opera greatly, writing to a friend that he heard it in his dreams. In summer 1790 Haydn attempted to produce the work with his own company at Eszterháza, but was prevented from doing so by the death of his patron, Nikolaus Esterházy.

The Emperor requested a special performance of *Le Nozze di Figaro* at his palace theater in Laxenburg, which took place in June 1786. *Le Nozze di Figaro* was produced in Prague starting in December 1786 by the Pasquale Bondini company. This production was a tremendous success; the newspaper Prager Oberpostamtszeitung called the work "a masterpiece," and said "no piece (for everyone here asserts) has ever caused such a sensation." Local music lovers paid for Mozart to visit Prague and hear the production; he listened on January 17, 1787, and conducted it himself on the 22nd. The success of the Prague production led to the commissioning of the next Mozart/Da Ponte opera, *Don Giovanni*, premiered in Prague in 1787.

Frequently omitted numbers. Two arias from Act IV are usually omitted: one in which Marcellina regrets that people (unlike animals) abuse their mates (*Il capro e la capretta*), and one in which Don Basilio tells how he saved himself from several dangers in his youth, by using the skin of an ass for shelter and camouflage (*In quegli anni*).

- In spite of all the sorrow, anxiety, and anger the characters experience, only one number is in a minor key: Barbarina's brief aria, "L'ho perduta," at the beginning of Act IV, where she mourns

¹**Opera buffa** — a comic opera, especially that originating in Italy during the 18th century.

the loss of the pin and worries about what her master will say when she fails to deliver it, is written in F minor. Other than this the entire opera is set in major keys.

- Mozart used the sound of two horns playing together to represent cuckoldry, in the Act IV aria, “Aprite un po quelli’ochi.” Verdi later used the same device in Ford’s aria in *Falstaff*.

In 1819, Henry R. Bishop wrote an adaptation of the opera in English, translating from Beaumarchais’ play and re-using some of Mozart’s music, while adding some of his own.

Le Nozze di Figaro is now regarded as a cornerstone of the standard operatic repertoire, appearing as number #6 on Opera America’s list of the most-performed operas in North America.

Le Nozze di Figaro: The Video (1985)

Starring Carol Vaness, Kathleen Battle, Frederica Von Stade and Thomas Allen



James Levine had already established himself as a formidable Mozartean when he made this triumphant foray into the riches of *Le Nozze di Figaro* — the first time he conducted the opera at the Met. Mozart lovers have been waiting patiently for this “Live from the Met” telecast finally released on DVD.

This 1985 Met production is a great one. The costumes and sets are traditionally beautiful. Picture quality and sound are mostly very good, though sometimes a tad muffled. The music is performed with great style by the ever-reliable Metropolitan Orchestra, and James Levine conducts with brisk precision. The cast is also wonderful. Ruggiero Raimondi is terrific as Figaro — handsome and hearty with a fine voice, showing once again how extraordinary an actor he is.

Kathleen Battle is a charming Susanna, Carol Vaness a touching Countess and the irresistible Frederica Von Stade as the page, Cherubino, looking great in trousers while singing like a nightingale and acting with allure. Also, Thomas Allen as the Count is arrogance personified.