B. Antithesis

We jump to the opening of Act Three of the opera, with Susanna putting her plan into action to arrange a meeting with the Count that evening. We then shift focus to the Countess who, in an accompanied recitative and two-tempo aria, examines the situation in which she finds herself, lamenting the past, but realizing that she will need to take the reins into her own hand if she is to regain her husband's love. From the director's point of view, the first of these scenes involves the handling of various opera conventions in a meaningful way, while the second requires an unusually deep penetration into the mind of a leading character.

Mozart: *Le nozze di Figaro,* scenes from Act III (London 2006, production as above, plus Gerald Finley, *Count*; Dorothea Röschmann, *Countess*)

C. Synthesis

We pick up the Act IV finale from the point where there are only the two couples left onstage, and take it through to the re-entrance of the other characters, the melting *adagio* just before the end, and the joyous *allegro molto* that rings down the curtain. The ability to manage scenes of such complexity calls upon the director's most basic technique: blocking (aka. traffic-management). But the task doesn't stop there; we will discuss what else is involved.

Mozart: *Le nozze di Figaro,* ending of Act IV (London 2006, production and cast as above, plus many other characters)

The class website is **www.brunyate.com/RenInstProduction/**
I will always answer eMail at **rogerbrunyate@gmail.com**

Opera Production



5. Staging Mozart's Lovers

October 13, 2026

5. Staging Mozart's Lovers

The photo shows me in rehearsal for "The Marriage of Figaro." For although the class will include an abbreviated account of *Figaro* (or at least its main characters), its main purpose is to give a glimpse of the bread-and-butter of the Stage Director's craft: telling a story on the stage, developing the characters, and making them interact in meaningful ways. No updating today, no clever concepts—no need for them in so well-known an opera.

The director in question, however, is not me but the infinitely more experienced Scottish director **Sir David McVicar**. His 2006 staging at the Royal Opera House in London endures as a classic. While we don't *know* the reasons why he made the choices he did, we can at least look into the issues that face the director in each scene, and enjoy Sir David's solutions, not as the only possibility, but at least as an intelligent and musically astute approach that has stood the test of time. *rb.*

A Tale of Two Marriages

The Marriage of Figaro is not the simplest story to summarize. Its plots and subplots get introduced with wild abandon, shift from one scene to the next, and get quickly solved or discarded. The opera has an unusually large cast for its period: 12 separate characters. In order to make the class manageable, however, I will confine myself to scenes that involve only the four central characters: two couples, two marriages.

One couple is the Count and Countess Almaviva. In the Beaumarchais play *The Barber of Seville,* to which *Figaro* is a sequel, the Count won the lively Rosina from under the nose of her jealous guardian, with the aid of the resourceful Figaro, the Barber of the title. Now he and Rosina are married and Figaro has become his valet. But the Count has not given up his taste for adventure, and the Countess feels abandoned. Figaro has fallen in love with her maid Susanna, and this is to be their wedding day. The catch is that although the Count, as an Enlightened Ruler, has given up his traditional *droit du seigneur,* he still hopes to take Susanna before Figaro can have her.

Susanna explains this to Figaro in Act One, and he determines to prevent it. The rest of the act consists mainly of subplots, including the introduction of Cherubino, a horny teenage boy turned on by anyone with a skirt. He will feature again in Act Two, the marvelous mayhem of whose finale is occasioned by the Count's jealous belief that Cherubino is hiding in his wife's bedroom closet. Although he is proved wrong, he ends the act by summoning a group of other characters intent on stopping the marriage of the two servants.

Act Three will resolve most of these subplots, but one basic part of the plan remains: Susanna will agree to a rendezvous in the garden that night, but the appointment will be kept by the Countess is disguise as her own maid. Two problems: Figaro does not know of the plan and suspects that Susanna really is unfaithful, and Cherubino shows up once more with his knack of getting in the way. But all is resolved and the Count is exposed. Another composer might have rung down the curtain on this outcome, but Mozart performs a musical miracle, giving the Count an apology and the Countess a response so beautiful as to turn the entire drama from farce to something far, far deeper.

A. Thesis

The opening of the opera consists of two short duets and an aria, linked by various kinds of recitative. How do the duets differ, what is learned at each stage, and how does the director use the material in his primary function of telling a story in the clearest possible terms?

Mozart: *Le nozze di Figaro,* opening of Act I (London 2006; David McVicar, *director*; Antonio Pappano, *conductor;* Erwin Schrott, *Figaro*; Miah Persson, *Susanna*)