

## C. The Brotherhood of Mankind

**Emanuel Schikaneder** (1751–1812), the impresario, leading comedian, and librettist of *The Magic Flute* (1791), was a Freemason, as Mozart was himself. Although presented as a closed brotherhood and based on Masonic rituals, the society presided over by Sarastro in the opera is something of an Enlightenment ideal, a republic of reason that relies upon the assent of all its members. The Queen of Night, by contrast, is an absolute ruler holding sway through magic and fear. It makes a powerful statement that such a regime should be defeated at the end by the apostles of Light... but also that this should be a world in which the ordinary man can enjoy his moments of domestic bliss.

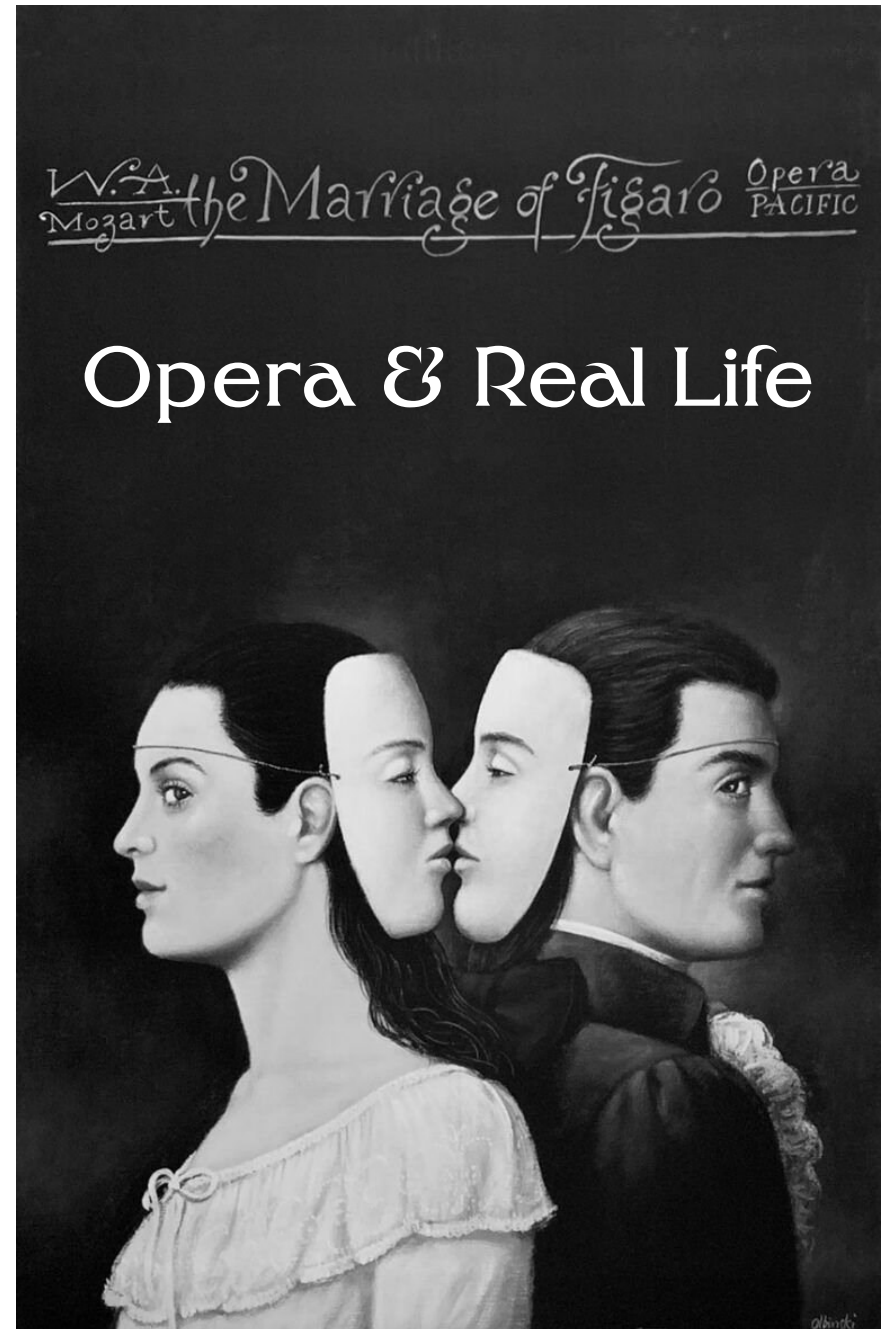
**Mozart:** *Die Zauberflöte*, opening of Act II

London 2020; c. Julia Jones, d. David McVicar; Mika Kares (Sarastro)

**Mozart:** *Die Zauberflöte*, from the Act II finale

Roderick Williams (Papageno), Christina Gansch (Papagena), Sabine Devieille (Queen of Night), Peter Bronder (Monostatos)

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## 4. Twilight of an Era

March 22, 2022

# Twilight of an Era

THE STORMING OF THE BASTILLE took place three years after Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* (1786) and eleven years after the Beaumarchais play on which it was based. Yet the sun was already setting on the *ancien régime*. Beaumarchais' *Figaro*, which features the comeuppance of a lascivious aristocrat, is inevitably a political play, yet Mozart's genius makes it also a personal drama played out in terms of universal human emotions. In the second hour, we shall look more briefly at how Mozart addressed social themes in *Don Giovanni* (1787) and *The Magic Flute* (1791).

## A. The Revolution in Action

**Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais** (1732–99) wrote *Le mariage de Figaro* in 1780. But **King Louis XVI** forbade its performance for some years, until the author had cut it a bit and changed the setting from France to Spain. **Joseph II of Austria** also banned the spoken play, but allowed the Italian opera version by **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756–91) and **Lorenzo da Ponte** (1749–1838). Years later, **Napoleon** described the play as “the Revolution already put into action,” so the initial bans are not surprising. What is notable, though, is that both play and opera were eventually mounted in royal theaters under royal patronage. We shall look at scenes from the opera in an attempt to untangle this paradox.

**Beaumarchais:** *Le mariage de Figaro*, Act V. Renaud Heine (Figaro)

**Mozart:** *Le nozze di Figaro*, Act I. Aria, “Se vuol ballare”

London 2006; c. Antonio Pappano, d. David McVicar,  
Erwin Schrott (Figaro)

**Mozart:** *Le nozze di Figaro*, Act II. Quartet of the finale

London 2006, as above with: Dorothea Röschmann (Countess), Miah Persson (Susanna), Gerald Finley (Count)

**Mozart:** *Le nozze di Figaro*, Act I. Terzetto

London 2006, as above with: Philip Langridge (Basilio), Rinat Shaham (Cherubino)

**Mozart:** *Le nozze di Figaro*, Act II. Septet of the finale

London 2006, as above with: Graciela Araya (Marcellina), Jonathan Veira (Bartolo)

**Mozart:** *Le nozze di Figaro*, Act III. Aria, “Vedrò mentr’io sospiro?”

Gerald Finley (Count)

**Mozart:** *Le nozze di Figaro*, Act III. Sextet

London 2006, as above with Francis Egerton (Don Curzio)

**Mozart:** *Le nozze di Figaro*, Act IV. Ending

## B. A Force for Anarchy

*Don Giovanni* (1787), the next project of Da Ponte and Mozart, is on its surface a more normal operatic social structure. As opposed to the presence of middle-class figures and others of ambiguous social standing in *Figaro*, the characters in *Don Giovanni* are clearly divided into aristocrats and peasants. Except that the figures of Giovanni himself and his servant Leporello refuse to be so categorized, but rattle around in the center as a force of social anarchy. The opera has been interpreted in both moral and religious terms, but it is as a challenge to social order that we shall view it now.

**Mozart:** *Don Giovanni*, Act I. Aria, “Fin ch’han dal vino”

Helsinki 2021; Tuomas Pursio (Don Giovanni)

**Mozart:** *Don Giovanni*, Act I. Duet, “La ci darem la mano”

Zurich 2006; Rod Gilfry (Don Giovanni), Isabel Rey (Zerlina)

**Mozart:** *Don Giovanni*, Act I finale (ending)

London 2008; c. Charles Mackerras, d. Francesca Zambello; Marina Poplavskaya (Donna Anna), Joyce di Donato (Donna Elvira), Miah Persson (Zerlina), Ramón Vargas (Don Ottavio), Simon Keenlyside (Don Giovanni), Kyle Ketelsen (Leporello), Robert Gleadow (Masetto)

**Mozart:** *Don Giovanni*, Act II finale (excerpt)

London 2008; as above, with Erik Halfvarson (Commendatore)