

PROBLEM OPERAS SOLVED



5. EAST-WEST ENCOUNTERS

17 October, 2023

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THE ABDUCTION FROM THE SERAGLIO (1782), was Mozart's first opera after he quit his job in Salzburg and came to Vienna. Like its predecessor, *Idomeneo*, it contains a number of long showy arias for its principal singers, but in other respects it is quite different. It is a comedy, written in German, and with spoken dialogue rather than recitative. While there are serious characters, notably the Spanish noblewoman Konstanze and her fiancé Belmonte, they are outnumbered by the comic ones: their respective servants Blonde and Pedrillo, and the bass Osmin, guardian of the Seraglio in which all except Belmonte have been imprisoned. Uniquely for Mozart, the key role of Selim, the powerful Pasha who loves Konstanze, is spoken only.

Unlike the other operas in this course, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* is performed relatively frequently, but it still presents problems in its extreme contrasts of style, the length of its larger musical numbers, and a plot which deals in stereotypes of Islamic culture: cruel, lustful men and subjugated women. We shall watch excerpts from a remarkable production of the opera from Glyndebourne in 2015 by Sir David McVicar, who reestablishes the piece in the Enlightenment context that created it, and traces an emotional line that totally explodes the sexual preconceptions of its original script. In this, he is paying deep homage to Mozart, convincing us that he felt so too. *rb.*

Mozart: *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. Glyndebourne 2015 (DVD).
Sally Matthews (Konstanze), Mari Eriksmoen (Blonde), Edgaras Montvidas (Belmonte), Brenden Gunnell (Pedrillo), Tobias Kehrer (Osmin); Robin Ticciati (c), David McVicar (d)

ACT ONE

Some months before the opera begins, the Spanish noblewoman **Konstanze** was captured by pirates and sold to the **Pasha Selim**, along with her English maid **Blonde** and Blonde's sweetheart **Pedrillo**—whose master, Konstanze's fiancé **Belmonte**, sets out to rescue them.

[As the curtain rises, Belmonte has just arrived outside Pasha Selim's palace.] Here he has an encounter with **Osmin**, the grouchy overseer who guards the gate.

2. Duet: "Wer ein Liebchen hat gefunden" (Osmin, Belmonte)

We then see Osmin with Pedrillo, who has obtained a job as a gardener. Pedrillo tells Belmonte that Konstanze has become the Pasha's favorite, but that he respects her and has not taken her by force.

3. Aria: "Solche hergelaufne Laffen" (Osmin)

The Pasha arrives, greeted by a chorus of Janissaries (to an imitation of the music the Viennese would have heard played by Janissary bands). He urges Konstanze to return his love, but she tries to convince him of the joys of true love, such as the one she has lost.

5. Chorus of Janissaries

6. Aria: "Ach, ich liebte" (Konstanze)

[Pedrillo presents Belmonte to the Pasha as a visiting architect, and gets him admitted to the palace, over the objections of Osmin.]

ACT TWO

The Pasha has given Blonde to Osmin as his servant, but she quickly disabuses him of the notion that her services include sex.

8. Aria: "Durch Zärtlichkeit und Schmeichlen" (Blonde)

Konstanze sings of her unhappiness. The Pasha appears, begging once more for her love. When he loses his patience and threatens force, she stands up to him in a bravura aria of defiance involving solos from many of the instruments in the orchestra.

10. Aria (part): "Traurigkeit" (Konstanze)

11. Aria: "Märtern aller Arten" (Konstanze)

[Pedrillo finds Blonde and tells her that Belmonte has arrived. She goes to bear the news to her mistress, while Pedrillo prepares a plan to get Osmin drunk on drugged wine. With the guard safely out of the way, Belmonte appears, full of eager anticipation at seeing Konstanze.] The two couples are reunited, but their joy is clouded by the men's suspicion that the women might have submitted to their male captors. But they soon realize their mistake and work hard to apologize.

16. Quartet (Konstanze, Belmonte, Blonde, Pedrillo)

ACT THREE

[That night, Belmonte and Pedrillo arrive with a ladder to help the women escape; each sings an aria. The abduction proceeds in silence, but Osmin wakes up unexpectedly and catches them. While waiting for the Pasha to be sent for, he sings a bloodthirsty aria delighting in their inevitable execution.] The Pasha arrives. His fury is only intensified when he discovers that Belmonte is the son of his old enemy. Certain now of their death, Konstanze and Belmonte attempt to console one another.

20. Recitative: "Welch ein Geschick!" (Konstanze, Belmonte)

[This recitative leads to a long duet that becomes almost ecstatic at the end.] The Pasha reappears, but declares that as he does not wish to be as barbarous as Belmonte's father, the two couples are free to go. In a final *vaudeville* (multi-verse song with a repeated refrain), all sing the Pasha's praises—except Osmin, who storms off in frustrated fury.

21a. Vaudeville finale (All)

21b. Chorus of Janissaries

For materials used in each class, see the instructor's website:

<http://www.brunyate.com/problem-operas/>

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