

The Magic Flute

Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart • Libretto by Emanuel Schikaneder

Study Guide to the Opera

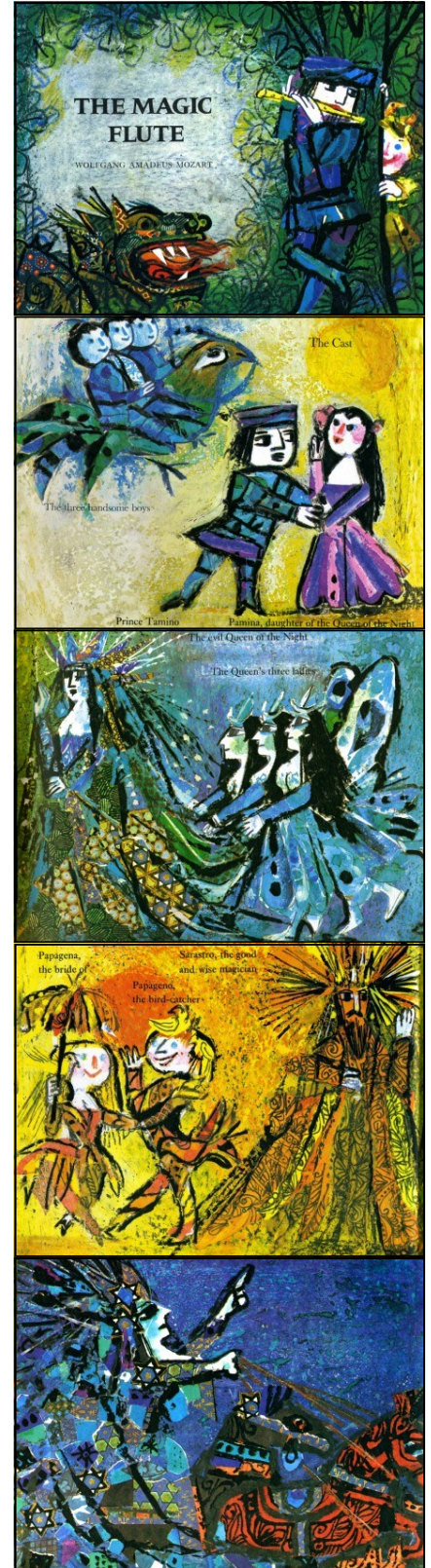
Mozart's Magical Tour de Force

by Jill Leahy

Mozart was just 35 years old when he wrote *The Magic Flute* (*Die Zauberflöte*). To put this in perspective, Verdi had not even begun his “galley years” at 35—*Rigoletto* was still three years away—and Brahms was 40 when he wrote *Symphony #1*. Even more surprising is the fact that Mozart, while seriously ill, wrote *The Magic Flute*, completed the opera *La clemenza di Tito* for Leopold II’s coronation, and almost completed the *Requiem*. Mozart was known to attend performances of the opera with family and friends, including Antonio Salieri. Sadly, Mozart died in December 1791, just three months after *The Magic Flute* opened.

There are many books dedicated to analyzing this magical operatic creation. It’s no secret that Mozart was a Freemason, and his librettist and friend Emanuel Schikaneder probably also belonged to the same lodge in Vienna. Scholars have written extensively about the “Masonic symbolism” that can be found throughout the opera. Janos Liebner, the Artistic Director of the Berlin Opera, concludes that “just as every age looked at Mozart through its own, sometimes distorting, in the same way every age looked for and found its own ideas, desires, and aspirations in *The Magic Flute*. One found it to be a naively popular, colorful fairy-tale; for another it was an historical allegory; for a third the eternal mystical struggle between light and darkness; a fourth saw in it mankind’s striving towards the knowledge of truth; a fifth thought it to be an ancient Egyptian ritual; for a sixth it was a Freemason’s symbolic ceremony; while for the audience of the Viennese premiere, it was a political pamphlet, a musical social satire, in which the spirit of the “good emperor,” Joseph II, liberates the Austrian people from the hateful despotism of the wicked Queen of the Night, Maria Theresa.”

Since its premiere, *The Magic Flute* has been one of the most beloved works in the operatic repertoire. No matter how today’s audiences interpret the meaning, characters, and symbolism, the fantastical story and charming music are touching and memorable.



Emanuele Luzzati teamed with animator Giulio Gianini many times to produce some of the most beautiful films of the 1960s and 1970s. Luzzati adapted their 1978 feature version of *The Magic Flute* into a book.

The Magic Flute Synopsis

A mythical land between the sun and the moon.



ACT I Three ladies in the service of the Queen of the Night save Prince Tamino from a serpent. When they leave to tell the queen, the birdcatcher Papageno appears (**I'm Papageno**). He boasts to Tamino that it was he who killed the creature. The ladies return to give Tamino a portrait of the queen's daughter, Pamina, who they say has been enslaved by the evil Sarastro. Tamino immediately falls in love with the girl's picture (**This portrait's beauty**). The queen, appearing in a burst of thunder, tells Tamino about the loss of her daughter and commands him to rescue her (**My fate is grief**). The ladies give a magic flute to Tamino and silver bells to Papageno to ensure their safety on the journey and appoint three spirits to guide them (**Quintet: Hm! hm! hm! hm!**).

Sarastro's slave Monostatos pursues Pamina but is frightened away by Papageno. The birdcatcher tells Pamina that Tamino loves her and is on his way to save her. Led by the three spirits to the temple of Sarastro, Tamino learns from a high priest that it is the Queen, not Sarastro, who is evil. Hearing that Pamina is safe, Tamino charms the wild animals with his flute, then rushes off to follow the sound of Papageno's pipes. Monostatos and his men chase Papageno and Pamina but are left helpless when Papageno plays his magic bells. Sarastro enters in great ceremony. He punishes Monostatos and promises Pamina that he will eventually set her free. Pamina catches a glimpse of Tamino, who is led into the temple with Papageno.

Intermission

ACT II Sarastro tells the priests that Tamino will undergo initiation rites (**O Isis and Osiris**). Monostatos tries to kiss the sleeping Pamina (**Men were born to be great lovers**) but is surprised by the appearance of the Queen of the Night. The Queen gives her daughter a dagger and orders her to murder Sarastro (**Here in my heart, Hell's bitterness**).

Sarastro finds the desperate Pamina and consoles her, explaining that he is not interested in vengeance (**Within our sacred temple**). Tamino and Papageno are told by a priest that they must remain silent and are not allowed to eat, a vow that Papageno immediately breaks when he takes a glass of water from a flirtatious old lady. When he asks her name, the old lady vanishes. The three spirits appear to guide Tamino through the rest of his journey and to tell Papageno to be quiet. Tamino remains silent even when Pamina appears. Misunderstanding his vow for coldness, she is heartbroken (**Now my heart is filled with sadness**).

The priests inform Tamino that he has only two more trials to complete his initiation. Papageno, who has given up on entering the brotherhood, longs for a wife instead (**A cuddly wife or sweetheart**). He eventually settles for the old lady. When he promises to be faithful, she turns into a beautiful young Papagena but immediately disappears.

Pamina and Tamino are reunited and face the ordeals of water and fire together, protected by the magic flute.

Papageno tries to hang himself on a tree but is saved by the three spirits, who remind him that if he uses his magic bells he will find true happiness. When he plays the bells, Papagena appears and the two start making family plans (**Duet: Pa-pa-pa-papago!**). The Queen of the Night, her three ladies, and Monostatos attack the temple but are defeated and banished. Sarastro blesses Pamina and Tamino as all join in hailing the triumph of courage, virtue, and wisdom.

Characters of the Opera

Tamino [tah-MEE-noh] *tenor*
A prince from foreign lands who is destined to be with Pamina.

Pamina [pah-MEE-nah] *soprano*
The daughter of The Queen of the Night, who passes from one universe to another, and is destined to be with Tamino.

Sarastro [zah-RAHS-troh] *bass*
Priest of the Sun who rules over a world of male initiates.

Queen of the Night *soprano*
The lunar symbol of rebellion, cast in a heroic mold. (Her famous aria ascends to a high F.)

Papageno [pah-pah-GEH-noh] *baritone*
A bird-catcher employed by the Queen, representing ordinary humanity, lacking courage and intelligence.

Papagena [pah-pah-GEH-nah] *soprano*
First appearing as a horrible old woman, later young and pretty. She is feathered like Papageno, ready to people the earth with little birds like them.

Monostatos [moh-NAH-stah-tos] *tenor*
A Moor, overseer at the Temple, who lusts after Pamina.

Three Ladies *sopranos, mezzo-soprano*
Attendants to the Queen.

Three Spirits *sopranos*
Sometimes played by boys, the three *Knaben* represent “good-looking, gracious, and wise” Masonic ideals.

Two Priests *tenor/bass*
Functionaries of the Masonic hierarchy.

Two Armored Men *tenor/bass*
Guardians of Fire and Water trials that Tamino and Pamina undergo.

Priests, Attendants, Acolytes, Slaves

Mozart's Genius Revealed

by Jill Leahy

Mozart's genius became evident during his short life—most often revealed subtly through the skill and artistry of his music.



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756–1791)

Schikaneder was mostly interested in filling as many theater seats as possible. So, his libretto for *The Magic Flute* wasn't exactly a literary masterpiece, but he knew the story would appeal to ordinary people. However, in Mozart's hands, the musical score took all the disparate elements in the plot and wove them into a charming, cohesive whole.

Mozart wrote the music for *The Magic Flute* with specific singers in mind. He knew his sister-in-law Josepha Hofer was a very accomplished singer, and so he knew that she could rise to the challenge of the difficult music that he wrote for the Queen of the Night. Understanding that many others in the cast were more vocally limited, Mozart doubled the vocal lines in the orchestration to create an overall richer sound.

But Mozart's genius was sometimes revealed in a truly spectacular way. One legendary incident has been written about extensively.

Gregorio Allegri composed *Miserere* around 1630, using Psalm 51 as the text. The work was only performed in the Sistine Chapel during matins on Wednesday and Friday of Holy Week. The Vatican wanted to preserve the music's reputation for mystery and inaccessibility, so forbade musical transcription. Writing it down was punishable by excommunication. According to a popular story (backed up by a letter from Mozart's father to his mother dated April 14, 1770) the fourteen-year-old Mozart was visiting Rome when he first heard the piece during the Wednesday service. Later that day, he wrote it down entirely from memory, including the secret ornamentations—the *abbellimenti*—and then returned to the Chapel on Friday to make minor corrections. During his travels, he met British historian Dr. Charles Burney, who obtained the piece from him and took it to London, where it was published in 1771. Mozart was summoned to Rome, but instead of excommunicating the boy, the Pope showered him with praise for his feat of musical genius and the ban was lifted.

Source: Zen Moments Website

Interesting bits about *The Magic Flute*

compiled by Jill Leahy

The Magic Flute is a two-act opera written in the form of a *Singspiel*, a German-language music drama similar to our modern musical theater. A *singspiel* has spoken dialogue as well as arias and ensembles, and usually has a comic or romantic plot with exaggerated characterizations of good and evil. *Singspiele* were more popular and accessible for the general public. *The Magic Flute* offered impressive stage machinery and lavish special effects, with 13 elaborate scene changes. The *singspiele* became very popular during the reign of Emperor Joseph II, who was known as the "Musical King." He wanted to move away from the dominant Italian opera, preferring opera performed in German, the native language of Austria. The Emperor commissioned Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, but *The Magic Flute* was commissioned by Emanuel Schikaneder.

All the characters in *The Magic Flute* have some symbolic significance—some easy to spot, some not.

The Queen of the Night, in particular, has been the object of a lot of speculation. She's certainly evil, but who or what is she supposed to represent? All of these: Mozart's mother-in-law, superstition, ignorance, blind faith, and Empress Maria Theresa. One theory holds that all the characters in the opera were meant to be figures significant to Viennese Freemasons: Tamino is Emperor Joseph, Pamina is Austria, and The Queen of the Night is Maria Theresa, the woman who had the nerve to have her own husband's lodge raided. Another theory claims that *The Magic Flute* is a celebration of the Enlightenment and the triumph of reason (Sarastro) over ignorance and superstition (The Queen of the Night). The mother-in-law theory shows up in the film *Amadeus*. Yet another notion suggests that the queen's pyrotechnical arias satirize the formal, Italianate operatic style.

The Magic Float?

The Bregenzer Festspiele, a performing arts festival, is held every summer in Austria (except 2020, when it was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic). One of the most intriguing aspects of this festival is the 7000-



seat *Seebühne* on the shores of Lake Constance, where the company performs large-scale opera or musical performances on a floating stage. In 2013, the singers who were performing in *The Magic Flute* were in a boat as part of the outdoor show when it capsized, reportedly due to the waves in the lake that bent the rail guiding the boat towards the stage. None of the singers were hurt during the incident. The performance resumed after a half-hour pause.

Pittsburgh Opera Education thanks our generous supporters:

James and Electra Agras
Allegheny Regional Asset District
Anonymous
The Olga Barry Fund
The Berkman Charitable Trust
The Frick Fund of the Buhl
Foundation
The Jack Buncher Foundation
Davis Vision
DTE Energy Foundation
EQT
Dr. Donald R. and Nora Barry Fischer
Dr. Freddie and Hilda Fu
The Grable Foundation
Hefren-Tillotson, Inc.
Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield
Roy A. Hunt Foundation
Intermediate Unit #1, Pennsylvania
Department of Education
The Christian A. Johnson Endeavor
Foundation
Michalka Family Charitable Fund
Howard and Nell E. Miller Foundation
Nancy N. and Maurice A. Nernberg
Mr. and Mrs. Willie M. Owens
Pennsylvania Council on the Arts
PNC
UPMC & UPMC Health Plan
The Hilda M. Willis Foundation

*The music is not in the
notes, but in the silence
between.*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

For more information on Pittsburgh Opera's education programs, please contact:

Marilyn Michalka Egan, Ph.D.
Director of Education
megan@pittsburghopera.org

Pittsburgh Opera
2425 Liberty Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15222
www.pittsburghopera.org