

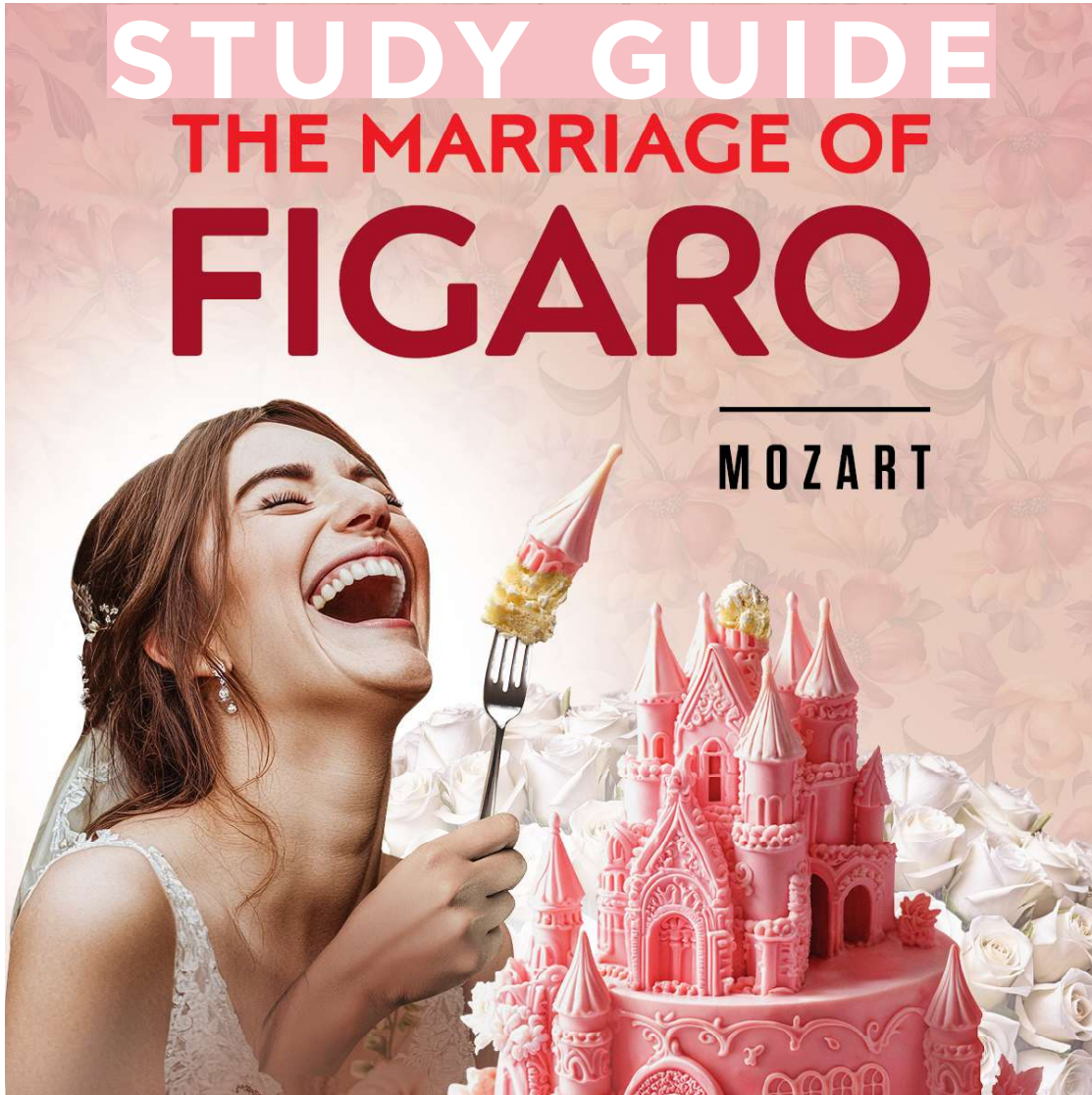


2025/26 SEASON PRESENTED BY



STUDY GUIDE
THE MARRIAGE OF
FIGARO

—
MOZART



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2025/26 STUDY GUIDE

THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

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FAST FACTS

- *The Marriage of Figaro* is the best-known opera by Mozart and is the most-performed comic opera of all time.
- *The Marriage of Figaro* is the first of three operas composed by Mozart with a libretto written by Lorenzo Da Ponte. The two also famously collaborated on *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte*. Da Ponte wrote the libretto for *The Marriage of Figaro* in just six weeks.
- There were so many encores called for during the earliest performances of the opera that Roman Emperor Joseph II decreed that no ensemble numbers (songs featuring more than one singer) were to be repeated.
- Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* is based on *Le mariage de Figaro*, a scathing satire of privilege and power by playwright Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais. The opera, like the play, was the target of censorship by European rulers who found its themes too subversive.
- The role of the young page Cherubino was written to be played by a female mezzo-soprano. Roles of this kind are often referred to as “pants” or “trouser” roles.
- The overture to *The Marriage of Figaro* is one of the pieces of classical music most represented in pop culture. It is used frequently in media including movies, television, and advertising.



Daniel Okulitch (Count Almaviva) and Lara Ciekiewicz (Countess Almaviva) in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Manitoba Opera, 2015. Photo: R. Tinker.

THE PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

April 18, 22, 24

Dress Rehearsal / Student Night: April 16

Centennial Concert Hall

Music composed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte

Based on the play *Le Mariage de Figaro* (1784) by Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais.

Approximately 3 hours

(including one 20-minute intermission)

Premiere Performance: Burgtheater, Vienna, May 1, 1786

Sung in Italian with projected English translations

Conducted by Gordon Gerrard

Directed by Rob Herriot

PRINCIPAL CAST

Count Almaviva	Baritone	PHILLIP ADDIS
Countess Almaviva	Soprano	MIRIAM KHALIL
Figaro	Bass	ROBERT MELLON
Susanna	Soprano	CAITLIN WOOD
Cherubino	Mezzo-soprano	PASCALE SPINNEY
Marcellina	Soprano	KRISZTINA SZABO
Bartolo	Bass	PETER MCGILLIVRAY
Curzio/Basilio	Tenor	JAMES MCLENNAN
Antonio	Bass	DAVID WATSON
Barbarina	Soprano	GRACE BUDOLOSKI

**MANITOBA OPERA CHORUS
WINNIPEG SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**



Gordon Bintner (Figaro) and Andriana Chuchman (Susanna). *The Marriage of Figaro*, Manitoba Opera, 2015. Photo: R. Tinker.

THE PRODUCTION

THE SET

This production was originally created by Pacific Opera Victoria for presentation in April 2024.

Stage Director

Morris Panych

Set Designer

Ken MacDonald

Costume Designer

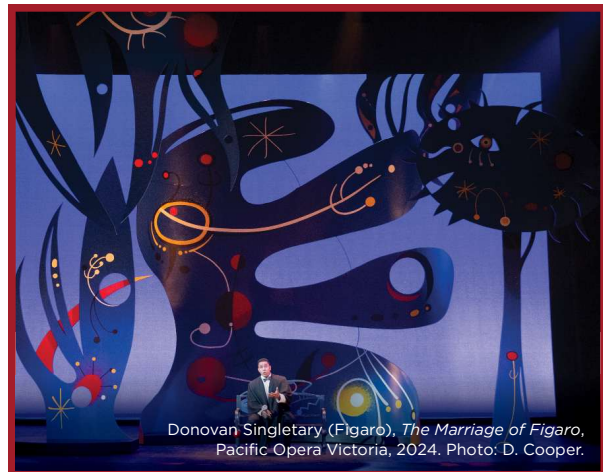
Nancy Bryant

“Mozart’s opera buffa — among the most popular in the repertoire — is originally set in a Spanish chateau during the 18th century. Canadian designer Ken McDonald has said ‘fie on that,’ opting instead for a wild Fellini-esque fantasy that takes a minute or two to get used to.

The audience is greeted by giant sculptural set pieces that might have been crowbarred from Joan Miró’s greatest canvases. These vast, organic structures are decorated with the sort of whimsical, surrealistic shapes that made the Spanish artist a towering titan of 20th-century art.

An atomic-age aesthetic endeavours to whisk this *Marriage of Figaro* from fusty tradition to retro-cool grooviness. Figaro’s fiancé Susanna boasts a B-52 hairstyle; meanwhile, Countess Almaviva rocks a cool beehive of her own. Singers cavort around an Arne Jacobsen egg chair. And Cherubino the page prances about in the kind of canary-yellow bellhop uniform you’d see in a Wes Anderson flick.”

- Adrian Chamberlain, *Times Colonist*, April 5, 2024.



SYNOPSIS

SYNOPSIS

ACT I.

(A room in the castle of Count Almaviva near Seville, Spain)

It is the wedding day of Figaro, the Count's servant, and Susanna, maid to the Countess. While preparing their room, Susanna worries it is too close to the Count's chambers and reveals that the Count has been making advances toward her. Figaro vows to outwit him. Dr. Bartolo and his housekeeper Marcellina arrive; Figaro owes Marcellina money and has promised to marry her if he cannot repay the debt, giving Bartolo hope for revenge against Figaro. Cherubino,

the Count's flirtatious page, rushes in after being discovered with the gardener's daughter, Barbarina. He confesses his love for the Countess and hides when the Count approaches. The Count attempts to flirt with Susanna but is interrupted by Don Basilio. When the Count reveals himself, he discovers Cherubino hiding and angrily orders him to join his regiment and leave immediately. Figaro arrives with villagers praising the Count for abolishing the feudal right to a bride's first night. The Count reluctantly agrees to the wedding but insists it be postponed..

ACT II.

(In the bedroom of the Countess)

The Countess laments her husband's fading affection. Figaro and Susanna explain the Count's pursuit of Susanna and propose a plan: send the Count an anonymous note suggesting the Countess has a lover, while Cherubino—disguised as Susanna—arranges a meeting with him. As Cherubino tries on his disguise, the Count arrives. Cherubino hides in the dressing room while Susanna hides behind a screen. Suspicious after receiving the anonymous letter, the Count demands to know who is inside. When he leaves with the Countess to fetch tools to break down the door, Cherubino escapes through the window and Susanna takes his place. The Count returns, opens the door, and is embarrassed to find only Susanna. The gardener Antonio bursts in, complaining someone jumped from the window and damaged his flowers. Figaro claims it was him. Marcellina, Bartolo, and Basilio then arrive to press Marcellina's legal claim that Figaro must either repay his debt or marry her.



Andriana Chuchman (Susanna) and Daniel Okulitch (Count Almaviva)
The Marriage of Figaro, 2015. Manitoba Opera. Photo: R. Tinker.

THE PRODUCTION

ACT III. (A hall in the castle)

The Count grows suspicious as Susanna agrees to meet him later in the garden if he provides a dowry that will allow her to repay Marcellina and marry Figaro. During the legal hearing, Figaro refuses to marry Marcellina, claiming he needs his parents' consent because he was kidnapped as a child. Marcellina suddenly recognizes Figaro as her long-lost son with Dr. Bartolo. The conflict resolves happily: Marcellina will marry Bartolo, and Figaro will marry Susanna. Meanwhile, Susanna and the Countess plan another trick, sending the Count a letter inviting him to meet "Susanna" in the garden that evening. At the wedding celebration, Susanna secretly passes the letter to the Count, sealed with a pin.

ACT IV. (The garden of the castle)

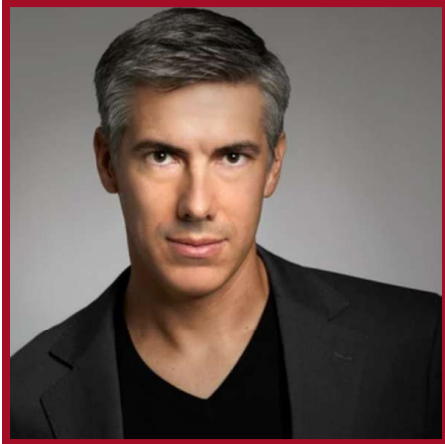
Barbarina searches for the pin the Count asked her to return to Susanna. Figaro realizes Susanna sent the letter and believes she plans to betray him, so he prepares to expose her. In the garden, Susanna and the Countess have exchanged clothes. The Count begins courting the disguised Countess, believing she is Susanna. Meanwhile, Figaro encounters the disguised Susanna (dressed as the Countess) and eventually realizes the trick. Playing along, he declares his love for the "Countess," enraging Susanna until she reveals herself. When the Count discovers what he thinks is his wife with Figaro, he angrily denounces her, but the real Countess appears and exposes the confusion. Realizing he has been outwitted, the Count begs forgiveness. The Countess pardons him, and the opera ends with general celebration.



THE PRODUCTION

THE PRINCIPAL ARTISTS & ROLES

*denotes Manitoba Opera debut



PHILLIP ADDIS* COUNT ALMAVIVA

Canadian-born baritone Phillip Addis is renowned as the ideal Pelléas (*Pelléas et Mélisande*) of his generation, a role he has sung internationally. He is also acclaimed for his portrayal of the count in *Le Nozze di Figaro* and has sung this role in over a dozen productions worldwide.

Recent season highlights include Sharpless (*Madama Butterfly*); the title role of *Don Giovanni*, Malatesta (*Don Pasquale*) and Marco (*Gianni Schicci*) at Calgary Opera; Zurga (*Les pêcheurs de perles*) with Vancouver Opera; and his role debut as Don Alfonso (*Così fan tutte*) with Pacific Opera Victoria.

Orchestral engagements include *Carmina Burana* at Calgary Philharmonic and *The Messiah* with Orchestre Classique de Montréal, Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, and Newfoundland Symphony Orchestra. With a passion for art song repertoire, Phillip has given recitals with Emily Hamper across Canada and at international music festivals.



MIRIAM KHALIL* COUNTESSA ALMAVIVA

Soprano Miriam Khalil has established herself as one of Canada's most versatile and expressive performers, sought after for her interpretation of the works of Golijov, Puccini and Mozart, among others.

Recent highlights include the world premiere of Karim Al-Zand's *Al Hakawati* with the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, which she then reprised with WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln, and her Los Angeles Opera debut for Kouyoumdjian's *Adoration*, whose recording with Beth Morrison Projects landed Miriam a 2025 Grammy nomination.

Other recent engagements include Golijov's *Ayre* (Edmonton Opera, *Against the Grain*), *Ainadamar* (Pacific Opera Victoria), Mozart's *Don Giovanni* as Donna Elvira (National Arts Centre Orchestra, Opera Tampa), and Puccini's *La bohème* as Mimi (Calgary Opera, Edmonton Opera, Canadian Opera Company, Minnesota Opera).

THE PRINCIPAL ARTISTS & ROLES



ROBERT MELLON*
FIGARO

American baritone Robert Mellon has garnered acclaim for his "glorious voice that burst out brimming with life and vigor" and "immense skill as an actor." His performances are praised for their comic timing, dramatic nuance, and robust vocal presence. Robert's opera credits include leading roles with prominent U.S. companies such as Detroit Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, Florida Grand Opera, Opera Philadelphia, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, San Diego Opera, New York City Opera, and Tulsa Opera.

His repertoire spans title roles in Verdi's *Falstaff* and Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* to the Major General in *The Pirates of Penzance*, Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly*, Tonio in *Pagliacci*, and Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte*.

A recipient of the Sullivan Foundation career grant and the St. Louis Theater Circle Award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera, Robert Mellon is also a sought-after concert artist, performing works like Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle*, Mozart's *Requiem*, and Duruflé's *Requiem*.



CAITLIN WOOD*
SUSANNA

Alberta-born soprano Caitlin Wood was "absolutely vibrant" and showed "great comic flair" in her 2017 debut as Susanna in Vancouver Opera (VO)'s *The Marriage of Figaro* and won praise as the godlike Controller in VO's recent *Flight*, "effectively navigates the dizzyingly stratospheric vocal writing."

Caitlin began her 2025 season in B.C. touring *The Music of the Night*, a showcase of musical favourites from Andrew Lloyd Webber's musicals. Caitlin appears as Ava on the Juno-nominated CD of *Missing* (Current/Clements) which confronts the crisis of missing Indigenous women and girls.

Recent and upcoming concert appearances include *Messiah* with Chorus Niagara and Vancouver Bach Choir, Bach's *St. John Passion* with Regina Symphony Orchestra as well as *Carmina Burana* with Ottawa Choral Society.

Caitlin starred in the title role in *The Coronation of Poppea* in her debut with Washington D.C.'s INSeries Opera and was a sparkling Despina in *Così fan tutte* with both Edmonton Opera and Opera Kelowna.

THE PRINCIPAL ARTISTS & ROLES



PASCALE SPINNEY*
CHERUBINO

In 2024/25, Canadian mezzo-soprano Pascale Spinney made several significant debuts. She premiered the role of Ebba in *La Reine-Garçon* with Opéra de Montréal, returned to White Snake Projects in Boston as Donna Elvira in *Domme + Giovanni*, and reprised her role as Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* at Opéra de Montréal followed by the title role in *Pinocchio* with St. Petersburg Opera. She also premiered the birth of her beautiful daughter Jacqueline with husband and tenor Matthew White.

The previous season Pascale stood by for the role of Sally in *The Hours* with the Philadelphia Orchestra. She also filmed the aria “O God That I Were a Man” from Joseph Summers’ iconic opera, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and delivered standout performances as Carmen with the Glacier Symphony and Dorabella in *Così! Men are Like That* with White Snake Projects. Pascale was critically reviewed for her successful debut as Jane in the Canadian premiere of Laura Kaminsky’s new opera *FEBRUARY* at Opera on the Avalon.



KRISZTINA SZABO*
MARCELLINA

Lauded for her “supple, pliant” voice and “considerable emotional range” (*Opera Canada*), Hungarian-Canadian mezzo-soprano Krisztina Szabó is celebrated for her exceptional musicianship and compelling stage presence.

This season, she makes her debut with Manitoba Opera as Marcellina in Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro*. She also returned to Tafelmusik for Handel’s *Messiah* and premieres works by Jeffrey Ryan with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra and Vancouver Bach Choir. A graduate of the Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio, she has performed widely across North America and Europe and now serves as Assistant Professor of Voice and Opera at the University of British

Columbia School of Music.

THE PRINCIPAL ARTISTS & ROLES



PETER MCGILLIVRAY BARTOLO

Born in Saskatchewan and now based in northern Ontario, baritone Peter McGillivray has been described in the national press as “a gifted comic actor,” with a “rich, flexible and strong voice.” In recent seasons he has been seen on opera and concert stages from coast to coast, specializing in comic roles such as Dr. Bartolo in *The Barber of Seville*, Don Magnifico in *La Cenerentola*, Schaunard in *La Bohème*, and Falke in *Die Fledermaus*. He also excels in interpreting more dramatic fare such as Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly*, and concert performances of Handel’s *Messiah*, Mahler’s *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, Haydn’s *Creation* and Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*. He has performed lead roles with the Canadian Opera Company as well as opera companies in Dallas, Victoria,

Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon, Manitoba, Hamilton, Ottawa and Quebec City. Additionally he spent the 2010/11 season on the roster of the Metropolitan Opera in New York in productions of *La Bohème* and Strauss’ *Capriccio*.

Peter most recently appeared with Manitoba Opera in *Tosca* playing the roles of Sacristan and Jailor.



JAMES MCLENNAN CURZIO/BASILIO

James McLennan has appeared on opera and concert stages across Canada in a wide range of leading and supporting roles.

In 2023, James debuted the roles of Jacques LaCrosse and The Englishman in the world premiere of *Li Keur: Riel’s Heart of the North* with Manitoba Opera. He had recently made his role debut as Little Bat in *Susannah* with the company (2019). Additional recent credits include Gastone in *La Traviata* with Pacific Opera Victoria and Edmonton Opera, Handel’s *Messiah* with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, and a company debut with Dry Cold Productions as the “coldly sadistic prison warden” (CBC) in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*.

James is also sought after as an adjudicator, most recently for the Southeastern Manitoba Festival and Opera Idol.

An alumnus of the Second City Training Centre in Toronto, he is also a certified French translator and a board member of the Association of Translators, Interpreters and Terminologists of Manitoba.

James most recently appeared with Manitoba Opera in *Tosca* the role of Spoletta.

THE PRINCIPAL ARTISTS & ROLES



GRACE BUDOLOSKI*
BARBARINA

Winnipeg-born soprano Grace Budoloski has been praised for her “crystal clear soprano” and “effortless coloratura” (*Opera Canada*). A versatile singer, Grace is making her Manitoba Opera debut as Barbarina.

Recent credits include Countess Adèle in Manitoba Underground Opera’s *Le Comte Ory* and as a soloist in Zelenka’s *Miserere Mass* with the Victoria Symphony Orchestra.

Grace holds a master’s degree in voice performance from the University of Victoria and has recently completed an artist diploma with the Desautels Faculty of Music.



DAVID WATSON
ANTONIO

David Watson’s operatic career began here in Winnipeg when he appeared in Manitoba Opera’s 1979 production of *La Traviata*. He has since performed on concert and operatic stages throughout Canada, including over 50 roles with Manitoba Opera.

David most recently appeared with Manitoba Opera in *Tosca* this past November in the role of Angelotti.

THE ARTISTIC TEAM



ROB HERRIOT DIRECTOR

Winnipeg-born stage director Rob Herriot has directed productions all across North America. He recently made his Vancouver Opera debut directing *Così fan tutte* (Manitoba Opera's 2023 concept and set design) which he directed for MO.

Rob has directed many productions in Winnipeg including *La Cenerentola*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *La Bohème*, *Carmen*, *Rigoletto*, *Don Pasquale* and *Madama Butterfly* for Manitoba Opera; *Three Decembers*, *The Walk From The Garden* and *The House Without a Christmas Tree* for The Little Opera Company; and *Beauty and the Beast*, *Cinderella*, and *The Wizard of Oz* for Rainbow Stage.

He has directed several productions with both Calgary Opera and Edmonton Opera, as well as Livermore Valley Opera in the San Francisco Bay area where he directed productions of *Don Pasquale*, *The Barber of Seville*, *The Elixir of Love*, and *Don Giovanni*.

He is thrilled to be directing Manitoba Opera's production of *The Marriage of Figaro*.



GORDON GERRARD* CONDUCTOR

For Canadian conductor Gordon Gerrard, music is an animating life force. He's guest-conducted major Canadian orchestras (Vancouver, Quebec, Toronto, Victoria, London, Kitchener-Waterloo) and opera companies (Calgary, Hamilton, Edmonton). *The Marriage of Figaro* marks his MO debut.

Gordon loves working with emerging artists (Calgary Opera, the Atelier Lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal, the Banff Centre, Montréal's Opera McGill, Toronto's Glenn Gould School.) Since 2016, he's been the music director of the Regina Symphony Orchestra and the artistic director of City Opera Vancouver since 2023.

All rather unlikely for a kid who grew up on a farm just outside Brandon, Manitoba. Piano lessons began at seven; at 17, Gordon left the farm to study at the University of Manitoba, which was followed by a master's at the Manhattan School of Music. He loved collaborating with singers, which led to a fascination with opera and the world of conducting.

THE COMPOSER



WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

was born January 27, 1756 in Salzburg, Austria, son of Leopold Mozart, a violinist and composer in the service of the Prince-Archbishop

of Salzburg. He started music lessons when he was three. By the time he was five years old, Mozart was already composing his own music and playing for empresses, electors, and royal families. A child prodigy, Mozart was especially gifted in playing the piano, the harpsichord, and the organ, all the while composing for voice and other instruments. He was fluent in Italian and French, as well as his native German. There is no evidence of his formal schooling and it appears that his father was his tutor in all subjects. His father recognized his son's exceptional talent and was determined to make him famous. A relatively poor family had much to gain financially with a child prodigy among its members. Mozart's older sister, Maria Anna (Marianne), was also an exceptionally gifted musician. When she and Wolfgang were young, their father took them on tours of many cities to show off their musical talents, but Marianne was forced to abandon her performing career when she was old enough marry.

At the age of 12, Mozart had composed his

first true opera, *La finta semplice* (*The Fake Innocent*). The singers refused to perform in a piece conducted by a little boy and there were accusations that the piece was written by his father. The theatre cancelled the contract and refused to pay Mozart his fee. During his teenage years, Mozart toured Europe before returning home to Salzburg in 1774. In 1777, his parents thought it would be best for Mozart to find work elsewhere. Mozart and his mother moved to Munich, and then to Mannheim before settling in Paris. He returned to Salzburg in 1779 after the death of his mother. During this time, Mozart wrote many sonatas, operas, sacred works, symphonies, concertos, serenades, and dramatic music. In 1781, the success of his opera seria, *Idomeneo* prompted the young composer to take permanent residence in Vienna.

Soon after his next operatic success, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*) in 1782, Mozart married a young woman by the name of Constanze Weber and they lived in Vienna for the rest of their lives. The couple would have six children, only two of which survived infancy.

Mozart was one of the first self-employed musicians in Vienna. A typical day for Mozart during his early years in Vienna would entail arising at six, composing until nine or 10, giving lessons until about one, giving concerts in the evening, and then composing for a few more hours. He would sleep only five or six hours a night.

THE COMPOSER

The musical scene in Vienna was intense. Mozart was in demand as a guest artist and accompanist. The public also continually craved new compositions, thus Mozart was constantly composing. He would often compose a whole piece in his mind before committing it to paper. He would also carry scraps of paper so he could jot down ideas at any time. Although he had a steady income from new works, ticket sales from concerts, royalties from publishers and fees from lessons, he did not know how to manage his money properly. Mozart and his wife spent lavishly. He dressed like nobility, as he felt his image was essential to his success. He also gave generously to his friends and charity. He never saved money and when emergencies occurred like the illness of wife Constanze, he had to borrow money.

While Mozart had composed several operas over the years, it wasn't until his collaboration with librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte that his operatic career really took off. First, in 1786 when *The Marriage of Figaro* was a great success in its Viennese premiere, and then in 1787 the pair collaborated again on *Don Giovanni*, an opera based on the famous character of Don Juan, an immoral lothario who ruins hearts and lives, and pays the ultimate price.

In 1787, Mozart became the chamber composer of Emperor Joseph II. This was a part-time appointment, but the Emperor hoped it would keep the composer and his talents in

Vienna. That same year, Ludwig van Beethoven came to Vienna in the hopes of studying with Mozart, though that unfortunately never came to fruition.

In 1791, Mozart was very productive. In this year he composed some of his greatest works – the opera *The Magic Flute*, for instance, or his great clarinet concerto, his string quartets, and most notably, his unfinished *Requiem*. And then, Mozart became ill and was soon bedridden. On December 5th, 1791, Mozart passed away from his illness at the age of 35. Recent research suggests that Mozart died of rheumatic fever, an illness he had suffered many times in the past.

In his lifetime, Mozart composed over 600 works.



The young Mozart at the keyboard, his sister Maria Anna singing, and his father Leopold playing violin.

THE LIBRETTIST



LORENZO DA PONTE

was born March 10, 1749, in Ceneda, in the Republic of Venice (now Vittorio Veneto, Italy). Young Lorenzo took to schooling and, in 1770 took Minor Orders and became

a Professor of Literature, and then became an ordained priest in 1773. At this point, Da Ponte began to write poetry, and moved to Venice to live as a teacher of languages. Although Da Ponte was a priest, he was not a very chaste man, and in 1779 was banished from Venice for (allegedly) living in and arranging the entertainments of a brothel.

Leaving Venice, Da Ponte then moved to Gorizia, Austria, where his work as court poet and librettist connected him with well-known composers of the time including Antonio Salieri and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Most of the librettist's works were adaptations of pre-existing plots, with the exception of a few such as *Così fan tutte*. Many, such as *The Marriage of Figaro*, were adapted and molded to suit the purposes of the composer, occasion and casting needs.

After the death of Austrian Emperor Joseph II in 1790, Da

Ponte was dismissed from the Imperial Service. As he could still not return to Venice, Da Ponte travelled to London where he became librettist at the King's Theatre in 1803, then fled to the United States in 1805 due to debt and bankruptcy. In America, Da Ponte lived in New York, where he eventually became the first professor of Italian literature at Columbia College. He was instrumental in introducing opera to New York, founding the New York Opera Company, which was the predecessor of both the New York Academy of Music and the Metropolitan Opera.

Da Ponte died August 17, 1838, in New York, and an enormous funeral was held for him in St. Patrick's Cathedral.

WHAT IS A LIBRETTO?

Libretto means "little book" in Italian. It refers to the written text of an opera set to music by the composer. Today, we commonly refer to an opera as being "by" the composer of the music, but the text is a vital component and is normally written first. In earlier times it was often regarded as more important than the music, and it was common for audience members to purchase the libretto to read.

Early composers were usually contracted to set music to a pre-existing text. Only later did composers (such as Mozart and Verdi) work in close collaboration with their librettists. A few composers - notably Wagner - wrote their own texts.



MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS

OVERTURE (Act 1)

The overture to Act 1 of *The Marriage of Figaro* is so widely used in movies and television that most students have probably heard it without even knowing. The energetic opening buzzes to life with a fleeting theme in the winds and strings that forecasts the charm and wit of the opera. Listen closely- it starts very quietly!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pb1tlh9xn38>



SULL'ARIA (Act 3)

This duettino (a short duet) features the Countess dictating a letter while to her maid Susanna. The pair conspires to lure the Count to a tryst in the garden, plotting to expose his infidelity.

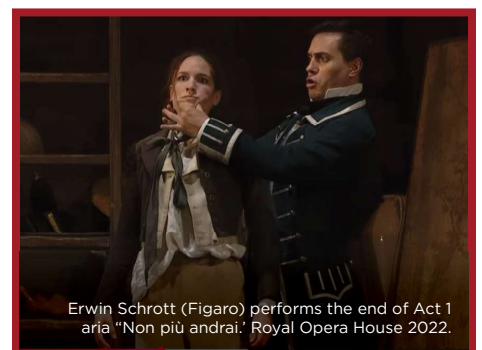
<https://youtu.be/iN9zDBKswB4?si=k-VOY9LL2Tv9nVv3&t=40>



NON PIU ANDRAI (Act 1)

After the Count decides to exile Cherubino to the military, Figaro teases the young page about his future as a soldier, as he trades the comforts of the noble household for the spartan life and erstwhile glory of a soldier.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKvjFAxXsa4>



“TROUSER ROLES”

Opera often requires its audiences to suspend disbelief, to accept what is presented on stage at face value. Opera audiences will believe that two complete strangers will meet in a drafty tenement and fall instantly in love. They will believe that music played on a magic flute can charm wild beasts. And when in Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* the youthful Cherubino struts across the stage with all the impatience, bravado, and curiosity about love that a lad can muster, the audience pays little attention to the fact that the character of the page is performed by a mezzo-soprano. Cherubino is an example of a trouser role – also called a pants role – a male character with a high voice (often a boy or young man) sung by a female performer. Such roles are quite common in opera, with over 70 pants roles in the repertoire.¹

The history of women playing male roles in opera coincides with the evolution of operatic voice types and the kinds of characters associated with them. In the Baroque era, many composers wrote their

leading male characters to be sung by castrati (a castrato is male singer who was castrated before undergoing puberty in order to preserve his soprano voice – a dangerous and barbaric practice that fell out of favour in the Classical era before becoming rightfully banned). Examples of such characters are found in Handel’s *Giulio Cesare*, *Ariodante*, and *Rinaldo*, and in Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice* and *Paride ed Elena* (although Handel did write the first intentional pants role in opera – the role of Sextus in *Giulio Cesare* was intended by the composer to be sung by a female soprano). When the practice of castrati was abandoned in the early 19th century, there was suddenly a void that needed to be filled. The solution was obvious – these roles that were once sung by high male voices could be filled by mezzo-sopranos and contraltos. Now women were appearing on stage singing the roles of emperors, heroes, and princes – roles previously intended for male singers. Through stagecraft, costume, and vocal nuance, female performers presented



Alicia Woynarski (Cherubino) and Lara Ciekiewicz (Countess Almaviva).
The Marriage of Figaro, Manitoba Opera, 2015. Photo: R. Tinker.

“TROUSER ROLES”

these roles to audiences that had no trouble believing the characters to be male.²

The aesthetics of opera continued to evolve, and leading roles became primarily the domain of the heroic tenor and the optimistic coloratura soprano. Mezzo-sopranos continued to sing pants roles, but these were typically supporting comedic characters, immature boys whose problems were laughably insignificant. Take Cherubino, for example. The young page is in the throes of adolescence, discovering a newly kindled interest in romance and love that he single-mindedly pursues, to his own detriment and the irritation of women and men in the Count's household. The playwright Beaumarchais, upon whose play the opera is based, insisted that Cherubino "... can only be played by a young and very pretty woman" complaining that there are "no very young men who are at the same time sufficiently mature to appreciate the fine points of the part."³ The character is intentionally subversive, adding a layer of suggestive nuance rooted in Mozart's bawdy sense of humour that juxtaposes Cherubino

somewhere between plot-relevance and double-entendre.

From Mozart's Cherubino (*The Marriage of Figaro*) and Humperdinck's Hansel (*Hansel and Gretel*), to Strauss's Octavian (*Der Rosenkavalier*), audiences tend to be fascinated by these characters who defy audience expectations by deliver the unexpected combination of boyish exuberance with the beauty of a female voice. British mezzo-soprano Alice Coote writes of her own experience performing pants roles, suggesting that it is perhaps "the biggest challenge an actor can take" to "assume the opposite gender and be something they are not."⁴

Works Consulted

¹ Simeonov, Jenna. "Breeches, Trousers, and Pants", *Schmopera*, June, 2015

² Seikaly, Kristen. "A Brief History of Pants Roles", *Operaversity: Education in the Vocal Arts*. January, 2016.

³ Strohmeier, Sophie Gertrude. "Pants Roles: Gender Fluidity and Queer Undertones in Opera." *New York Public Radio WQXR Features*. June, 2022.

⁴ Coote, Alice. "My Life as a Man." *The Guardian*, May, 2015.



Helène Fortin sings the role of Oscar the page in Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera*, Manitoba Opera, 1992. Photo: G. Kopelow.

A SUBVERSIVE SATIRE

“*The Marriage of Figaro* is already the revolution in action.” - Napoleon

A Dramatic Dramatist

Pierre Beaumarchais, the author of the play *Le Mariage de Figaro*, was an 18th Century polymath, i.e. someone who mastered several different trades and professions. In his time, he was a watchmaker, an inventor, a musician, a diplomat, a spy, an arms dealer and a participant in the French Revolution.

Beaumarchais also wielded tremendous influence as an unofficial minister. During France’s colonial wars with Britain, Beaumarchais intervened in international politics, resulting in Britain making significant concessions to France. It comes as no surprise, then, that King Louis XVI was a fan of the playwright.

Power Responds

However, when he read the manuscript to the *The Marriage of Figaro* in 1782, his reaction was unfavorable. The king stated that “[we] should have to destroy the Bastille if a performance of this play was not to be a dangerous blunder. This man mocks everything that must be respected in a government.”¹ The play was banned from public performance.

The Marriage of Figaro was the first play to frankly display reformist rhetoric, promoting the idea “that the time had come to make France a constitutional monarchy based on the people, and to abolish privileges.”²

It is easy to see a parallel between Figaro and Beaumarchais:

“Almaviva can’t fire Figaro because he is indispensable – the master is more vulnerable than the valet. Figaro, knowing his strength, however fragile it may be, can do as he pleases. The same goes for Beaumarchais. How could Louis XVI have dismissed a man



Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais. Oil on canvas. Jean-Marc Nattier, 1755.

who had made him king, by enabling him to beat Britain – the one and only triumph of his reign?”³

And so, the play was not produced, but it was read, far and famously. Catherine the Great of Russia had even heard of it, sending the Grand Duke of Russia to France to hear “the play that was the talk of Europe.”⁴

A Controversial Message

The Marriage of Figaro offers a lesson about power dynamics. A man with social dominance, in this case a feudal lord, can get away with things that a woman of comparable status cannot. The Count is free to fiddle with the servants, but the valet cannot fiddle with the Countess.

This message was highly controversial on the eve of the French Revolution. Beaumarchais endured several rounds with the official censors before the play opened to critical and popular acclaim at the Comédie Française in 1784. It was also popular among French Revolutionaries such as Georges Danton, who said it “killed off the nobility.”⁵ Mozart experienced the same political difficulties when the opera opened in Vienna two years later.

Works Consulted

^{1, 2, 3, 4} Grendel, Frédéric. *Beaumarchais*. Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York. 1977.

⁵ Bonfils, Marie. “The Marriage of Figaro- Social Subversion in the 18th Century”.

ACTIVITY #1 USING THE FIVE C'S

HAVE YOUR STUDENTS ANALYZE THE OPERA AS DRAMA

CHARACTERS

Are they interesting? Believable? Are their actions, words, thoughts consistent?

CONFLICT

What conflicts are established? How are they resolved?

CLIMAX

To what climax does the conflict lead?

CONCLUSION

How well does the conclusion work? Is it consistent? Satisfying? Believable?

CONTEXT

What are the historical, physical, and emotional settings? Sets and costumes?

DIRECTIONS

- Give students the synopsis to read and have them re-tell the story after they have read it.
- Ask comprehensive questions.
- Present and discuss the composer and librettists.
- Listen to excerpts from the opera. Watch a video of the opera. Have students identify and recognize recurring themes.
- Discuss the historical background, emphasizing the visual and performing arts and history-social science frameworks. Discuss the results of certain events. Whom did they affect? How? Why? Did any changes occur as a result?
- Review the glossary of terms.
- Have the students watch for references to themes in the opera in their everyday lives. The internet, radio, TV, magazines, and movies often refer back to classics.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.2.1; 2.1.2; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M2; DR-C1; DR-R3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-M2; M-C2; M-R1

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Curriculum Connections to the Manitoba Curriculum Frameworks for Grade 9 - 12 are provided below each activity. For a more in-depth look at the connections, view our Manitoba Curriculum Connections documents at <http://mbopera.ca/school-programs/study-guides/>

ACTIVITY #2 CREATE A PRODUCTION

- Choose a time and place to set your production.
- Have the students design a poster for *The Marriage of Figaro* including such details as the date, the time, and the people involved.
- Have them draw a set for a production of the opera.
- They might also sketch a costume, wig, and makeup for a character in *The Marriage of Figaro*.
- Have the students write a media release about *The Marriage of Figaro* including the date, the time, the people involved, and why it would be exciting or fun to attend.
- Have the students create an ad for the opera. Include whatever you feel is the biggest “selling point” of the opera - what makes it exciting? Why should people come to see it?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.3.5; 2.3.4; 4.1.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-C2; DR-C3

ACTIVITY #3 A REVIEW

STEP 1 THINK-GROUP-SHARE

Individually, students will write, in point-form, the answers to the following questions:

- What did you like about the opera? What did you dislike?
- What did you think about the sets, props, and costumes?
- If you were the stage director, would you have done something differently? Why?
- What were you expecting? Did it live up to your expectations?
- What did you think of the singers' portrayal of their characters?

Break the students into groups to discuss their feelings and reactions to the production. Have the students write on poster papers their answers or important points of their discussion. Encourage the students to go beyond the questions posed.

STEP 2 CLASS DISCUSSION

Have the whole class examine the poster papers and discuss the different ideas from each group.

STUDENT RESOURCES

STEP 3 OUTLINING YOUR REVIEW

Go over the essential aspects of a review including a clearly stated purpose, a coherent comparison/contrast organizational pattern, a summary paragraph capturing the interest of the reader, precise nouns, and revision for consistency of ideas. You might give your students a few samples of reviews for arts events – or ask them to bring in some reviews they find themselves. Have the students fill out the review outline, then complete a rough draft.

- Purpose (why are you writing this and who is your audience?)
- Paragraph 2 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
- Plot Synopsis (including who sang what role, etc.)
- Paragraph 3 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
- Paragraph 1 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
- Summary/Closing Paragraph

STEP 4 PEER CONFERENCING

Students will exchange reviews to critique and edit. Encourage the students to focus on effective coordination of ideas in sentences and the correct use of grammar and punctuation.

STEP 5 CREATING THE FINAL DRAFT

Have students make the appropriate adjustments to their reviews. You could also have the students type the pieces and organize them into a newspaper.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections:

1.1.1; 1.1.2; 1.2.2; 3.1.3; 3.3.1; 4.1.3; 4.3.1; 4.3.2; 4.3.3; 4.4.1; 4.2.2; 5.2.1; 5.1.1

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-R1; DR-R2; DR-R3; DR-R4

Music Curriculum Connections: M-R1; M-R2; M-R3; M-R4

ACTIVITY #4 ACT OUT THE STORY

Have students consider the characters and the role they play in the story. Choose one of the following:

FIGARO / SUSANNA / THE COUNT / THE COUNTESS / CHERUBINO

If you were going to play this character, you would have to discover, create, and imagine background, personality, and physical qualities. Some clues are provided in the story and the music and some you need to make up yourself.

PRETEND YOU ARE THAT CHARACTER AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- What motivates you? How does this affect your actions? What obstacles stand in your way?
- What steps in the opera do you take to achieve your objectives? What are the results?
- What obstacles are beyond your control (laws, social status, others' actions)?
- What are your (character's) greatest strengths? Greatest weaknesses?
- What is your relationship to the other characters?
- How is your character's personality expressed through the music of the opera?
- Can you think of a modern-day character who has similar characteristics and traits?
- If your character were alive today, how would s/he be more or less successful?
- What different steps would s/he take to achieve an objective?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.1; 2.1.2; 3.3.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M1; DR-M2; DR-M3

ACTIVITY #5 WRITE A LETTER

Have the students choose a moment in the story and have one character write a letter to another. Explore how they would be feeling about the events of the day.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.2; 1.1.3; 2.3.5; 4.2.2; 4.1.2; 4.1.3; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-R3

ACTIVITY #6 *CAST THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO*

Have the students cast modern-day singers or actors as the performers in *The Marriage of Figaro*. Who did you choose? What are their costumes like? What did you base your decisions on?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.3.1; 2.2.1; 2.2.2; 4.1.2; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M1; DR-C3; DR-R3

ACTIVITY #7 RESEARCH AND REPORT

Have the students study the history and politics of Vienna at the time that Mozart was writing *The Marriage of Figaro*. What authors were popular? What scientific discoveries were being made? How did the social and political life in Italy compare to that in Canada at the time?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections:

2.2.1; 2.2.2; 3.3.1; 3.3.3; 3.2.2; 3.2.3; 4.3.1; 4.3.2; 4.3.3; 4.2.2; 4.2.3; 5.2.2

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-C2

Music Curriculum Connections: M-C2

ACTIVITY #8 *THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO MOOD BOARD*

Often before artists and designers create their work, they make a mood board to set the tone for the piece. This is usually a poster-sized piece of paper covered in images and words, usually from the pages of magazines and newspapers, that together communicates the complex mood of the piece in a way that words can't. It's the same as making a collage, except a mood board is for the purpose of communicating a focused concept.

Have your students go through a stack of old magazines and newspapers to create a mood board for *The Marriage of Figaro*. They can create one each or work together on a large one for the class. Consider elements like colours, textures, phrases, faces, patterns, and images that represent the opera.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 2.3.5; 2.3.4; 2.2.3; 4.1.1; 4.1.2; 4.1.3; 4.4.1; 5.1.1

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-M3; DR-R3

Music Curriculum Connections: M-R2

ACTIVITY #9 MUSICAL INTERPRETATION OF LITERATURE**STEP 1 PREPARE A MUSICAL OUTLINE**

Working in small groups, have your students choose a play, novel, or story that they've read and think about how they'd go about adapting it into an opera. Have them write out an outline and try to structure the beginnings of the opera. Which parts of the drama would be highlighted with which types of music? Would they have a large chorus to back up the principal singers or would the opera be more intimate? Which singing voices (soprano, baritone, tenor, etc.) would best suit each character?

STEP 2 COMPOSE AND PERFORM AN OVERTURE

How could the elements of music (ie., rhythm, pitch, dynamics, etc.) be used to communicate the mood of the piece within the overture? Which instruments would be used? Allow students some time to work on composing their overture based on their answers to these questions. Students can then perform their overture for the class either as a composed and rehearsed piece or improvised. Alternatively, they may choose to present their overture by describing the characteristics of the elements of the music within their piece.

Language Arts Curriculum Connections:

1.1.2; 2.3.5; 2.2.1; 3.1.2; 3.1.3; 4.1.2; 4.4.3; 4.4.2; 4.2.5; 5.1.1; 5.1.2; 5;1;4

Drama Curriculum Connections: DR-CR2; DR-M1; DR-M2**Music Curriculum Connections:** M-CR2; M-CR3; M-M3**ACTIVITY #10** ACTIVE LISTENING

Play the first few minutes of *The Marriage of Figaro*. Ask your students to listen closely to the music and jot down their thoughts, feelings, and first impressions. Then have your students share their reactions with the classroom. Ask them to listen again and pay close attention to the elements of music (rhythm, pitch, dynamics, etc.) then explore questions such as the following:

- What are the instruments used to make the music?
- How does this music make me feel?
- What is the mood of the piece?
- What type of emotions do the singers bring forth?
- Does the music have a steady beat or pulse?
- What is the size of the ensemble?
- What do the singing voices tell us about those characters?

Language Arts Curriculum Connections: 1.1.1; 1.1.2; 1.2.2; 2.3.1; 2.2.3; 4.4.3; 5.2.1**Drama Curriculum Connections:** DR-R1

ACTIVITY #11 OPERA POP QUIZ

- 1 _____ A theatrical production incorporating both vocal and instrumental music, drama, and sometimes dance.
- 2 _____ The lowest male vocal range.
- 3 _____ An instrument introduction to an opera.
- 4 _____ The area where the orchestra is seated.
- 5 _____ Considered the first opera.
- 6 _____ A song for solo voice in an opera.
- 7 _____ The highest female vocal range.
- 8 _____ A song for two voices.
- 9 _____ The lowest female vocal range.
- 10 _____ The Italian word meaning “little book.”
- 11 _____ The middle male vocal range.
- 12 _____ The person who is in charge of all the action on stage.

ACTIVITY #12 *THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO* POP QUIZ

- 1 Who is the composer? _____
- 2 Who wrote the libretto? _____
- 3 In what year did the premiere performance take place? _____
- 4 In what language is the opera performed? _____
- 5 In what theatre did the opera premiere? _____
- 6 Where and when is the opera set? _____
- 7 What is Figaro's role in the Count's household? _____
- 8 What character is engaged to marry Figaro? _____
- 9 What character is portrayed as a "trouser" role? _____
- 10 What is the Count's solution to his anger at Cherubino? _____
- 11 How do the Countess and Susanna trick the Count? _____
- 12 What is the name of Mozart's sister? _____

ANSWER KEY POP QUIZ #11 & #12

OPERA

1. Opera
2. Bass
3. Overture
4. Orchestra Pit or “The Pit”
5. Daphne
6. Aria
7. Soprano
8. Duet
9. Contralto
10. Libretto
11. Baritone
12. Stage Director

THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

1. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
2. Lorenzo Da Ponte
3. 1786
4. Italian
5. Burgtheater, Vienna
6. Seville, 1778
7. Valet
8. Susanna
9. Cherubino
10. Sends Cherubino away to the military
11. With a letter
12. Maria Anna / Marianne

Manitoba Opera would be pleased to receive a copy of any work related to this opera produced by your students. Please forward to:

Scott Miller

Education and Community Engagement Coordinator
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or
smiller@mbopera.ca

WINNIPEG PUBLIC LIBRARY

BOOKS

Le nozze di Figaro: an opera in four acts

Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, 1756-1791.
G. Schirmer/Hal Leonard [1957]
Call Number:
SCORE 782.1 MOZ

CDS

The Marriage of Figaro

[sound recording]
Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, 1756-1791.
Decca [2009]
Call Number:
CD OPERA MOZART OPE

ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

Mozart: The Marriage of Figaro

Smillie, Thomson.
Hoopla
HOOPLA AUDIO BOOK

The Marriage of Figaro

De Beaumarchais, Pierre-Augustin Caron
Hoopla
HOOPLA AUDIO BOOK

Mozart in Words and Music

Caddy, Davinia
Hoopla
HOOPLA AUDIO BOOK

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Mozart in Vienna

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Famous Mozart Operas

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Daily Life in the Vienna of Mozart and Schubert

Marcel Brion

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Marcia Davenport

Mozart: A Meditation on his Life and Mysterious Death

Stefan Carter

Lorenzo Da Ponte: The Life and Times of Mozart's Librettist

Sheila Hodges

Beaumarchais

Frédéric Grendel

CDS

The Marriage of Figaro

Choeur de Chambre de Namur, La Petite Bande
Featuring Werner van Mechelen, Christiane Oelze, Huub Claessens

If you need recommendations for additional resources, contact:

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Bizet

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Based on the classic Brothers Grimm fairy tale, Humperdinck's musical retelling of the story of two mischievous children who discover a delicious gingerbread house hiding a wicked secret combines fantasy, adventure, catchy folk-type songs, and beautiful music.

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Mozart

A fanciful fairytale about a prince out to win his princess with the help of a merry bird catcher.

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ABOUT MANITOBA OPERA

Manitoba Opera was founded in 1969 by a group of individuals dedicated to presenting the great works of opera to Manitoba audiences. Manitoba Opera is the province's only full-time professional opera company. The company attracts internationally renowned artists, highlights the best local talent, and features the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra.

CHORUS

The Manitoba Opera Chorus, under the direction of Chorus Master Tadeusz Biernacki, is hailed for their excellent singing and acting abilities. The chorus boasts a core of skilled singers who give generously of their time and talents. Some are voice majors at university, a few are singing teachers, but most work in jobs that aren't music related.

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