HIDING IN CLOSETS, JUMPING OUT WINDOWS, MISTAKEN IDENTITIES, long-lost children—Mozart's profound comedy *Le Nozze di Figaro* has it all and more. Focusing on a single chaotic day in Count Almaviva's Sevillian manor, the work is widely regarded as the pinnacle of the opera buffa genre and an audience favorite for its instantly recognizable melodies, virtuosic ensemble writing, motley cast of characters, and biting social critique. Indeed, whereas the play upon which Lorenzo Da Ponte based his libretto, Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais's *La Folle Journée, ou Le Mariage de Figaro* (*The Mad Day, or the Marriage of Figaro*), caused a scandal upon its premiere, Mozart's opera continues to entertain audiences nearly 250 years after its premiere, thanks to its timelessly thorough exploration of pure human emotion—pain, deception, love and infatuation, vengeance, forgiveness, and remorse.

The Met's production by Richard Eyre, which opened the company's 2014–15 season, updates the 18th-century setting to a manor house in 1930s Seville. With sets evoking the Moorish design influence glimpsed throughout southern Spain—for example, through carved wood paneling and lantern lights that illuminate the stage just enough to hide and to spy—and rotating on the stage's turntable, the audience can follow the farcical action from room to room without missing a beat.

This guide approaches *Le Nozze di Figaro* as a classic, lighthearted situational comedy that explores fundamental human drives and desires—for love, revenge, dignity, and connection. The following pages provide musical analyses of some of the opera's most exciting moments as well as crucial contextual information about the work's creation and reception. Along the way, students will gain insights enabling them to confront the chaos and complexity of the opera's plot by relishing the elegance, wit, and pure joy of Mozart's musical genius.

WHO'S WHO IN *LE NOZZE DI FIGARO*

CHARACTER	PRONUNCIATION	VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
Figaro A servant to the Count	FEE-ga-ro	bass	Good-humored if occasionally quick to anger, Figaro hopes to thwart the Count's efforts to seduce Susanna. Amid his schemes, however, Figaro also falls prey to—and returns—his fiancée's playful trickery.
Susanna A servant to the Countess	soo-ZAHN-na	soprano	Susanna is somebody to everybody: Figaro's betrothed, the Countess's ally, Cherubino's confidante, Marcellina's nemesis, and the Count's target. She is resourceful, intelligent, and lively.
Count Almaviva Lord of the manor	ahl-mah-VEE-vah	baritone	Arrogant and elegant, Count Almaviva will stop at nothing to get what he wants, though his stubbornness is more a weakness than a strength. Despite his exacting attitude, he is yet capable of moral clarity and even remorse.
Countess Almaviva Wife of the Count	ahl-mah-VEE-vah	soprano	Unlike her maidservant, the Countess is often melancholic and serious—caught in a loveless marriage. Despite her elevated class status, she joins Susanna and Figaro's efforts to entrap the Count.
Cherubino A page to the Count	keh-roo-BEE-no	mezzo-soprano	An adolescent rapscallion, Cherubino can hardly contain his deep desire for the Countess—or for any other woman in his orbit. When he gets conscripted into the Count's military regiment, the others in the manor find better use for him as a pawn in their schemes.
Dr. Bartolo A lawyer	BAR-toh-loh	bass	A doctor and lawyer in service to the Count, Dr. Bartolo aids Marcellina in her efforts to force Figaro to fulfill a contractual obligation and marry her.
Marcellina Dr. Bartolo's housekeeper	mar-chel-LEE-nah	soprano	Intelligent and lively, Marcellina hopes to marry Figaro—and spars with Susanna in the process—before making a life-changing discovery about her past.

Synopsis

ACT I: *A manor house near Seville, the 1930s.* In a storeroom that they have been allocated, Figaro and Susanna, servants to the Count and Countess, are preparing for their wedding. Figaro is furious when he learns from his bride that the Count has tried to seduce her. He's determined to have revenge on his lord. Dr. Bartolo appears with his former housekeeper, Marcellina, who is equally determined to marry Figaro. She has a contract: Figaro must marry her or repay the money he borrowed from her. When Marcellina runs into Susanna, the two rivals exchange insults. Susanna returns to her room, and the Count's young page Cherubino rushes in. Finding Susanna alone, he speaks of his love for all the women in the house, particularly the Countess. When the Count appears, again trying to seduce Susanna, Cherubino hides. The Count then conceals himself when Basilio, the music teacher, approaches. Basilio tells Susanna that everyone knows Cherubino has a crush on the Countess. Outraged, the Count steps forward, but he becomes even more enraged when he discovers Cherubino and realizes that the boy has overheard his attempts to seduce Susanna. He chases Cherubino into the great hall, encountering Figaro, who has assembled the entire household to sing the praises of their lord. Put on the spot, the Count is forced to bless the marriage of Figaro and Susanna. To spite them and to silence Cherubino, he orders the boy to join the army without delay. Figaro sarcastically sends Cherubino off into battle.

ACT II: In her bedroom, the Countess mourns the loss of love in her life. Encouraged by Figaro and Susanna, she agrees to set a trap for her husband: They will send Cherubino, disguised as Susanna, to a rendezvous with the Count that night. At the same time, Figaro will send the Count an anonymous note suggesting that the Countess is having an assignation with another man. Cherubino arrives, and the two women lock the door before dressing him in women's clothes. When Susanna steps into an adjoining room, the Count knocks and is annoyed to find the door locked. Cherubino hides himself in a closet, and the Countess lets her husband in. When there's a sudden noise from behind the door, the Count is skeptical of his wife's story that Susanna is in there. Taking his wife with him, he leaves to get tools to force the door. Meanwhile, Susanna, who has reentered the room unseen and observed everything, helps Cherubino escape through the window before taking his place in the closet. When the Count and Countess return, both are astonished when Susanna emerges. Figaro arrives to begin the wedding festivities, but the Count questions him about the note he received. Figaro successfully eludes questioning until the gardener, Antonio, bursts in, complaining that someone has jumped from the window. Figaro improvises quickly, feigning a limp and pretending that it was he who jumped. As soon as Antonio leaves, Bartolo, Marcellina, and Basilio appear, putting their case to the Count and holding the contract that obliges Figaro to marry Marcellina. Delighted, the Count declares that Figaro must honor his agreement and that his wedding to Susanna will be postponed.

ACT III: Later that day in the great hall, Susanna leads on the Count with promises of a rendezvous that night. He is overjoyed but then overhears Susanna conspiring with Figaro. In a rage, he declares that he will have revenge. The Countess, alone, recalls her past happiness. Marcellina, accompanied by a lawyer, Don Curzio, demands that Figaro pay his debt or marry her at once. Figaro replies that he can't marry without the consent of his parents for whom he's been searching for years, having been abducted as a baby. When he reveals a birthmark on his arm, Marcellina realizes that he is her long-lost son, fathered by Bartolo. Arriving to see Figaro and Marcellina embracing, Susanna thinks her fiancé has betrayed her, but she is pacified when she learns the truth. The Countess is determined to go through with the conspiracy against her husband, and she and Susanna compose a letter to him confirming the meeting with Susanna that evening in the garden. Cherubino, now dressed as a girl, appears with his sweetheart, Barbarina, the daughter of Antonio. Antonio, who has found Cherubino's cap, also arrives and reveals the young man. The Count is furious to discover that Cherubino has disobeyed him and is still in the house. Barbarina punctures his anger, explaining that the Count, when he attempted to seduce her, promised her anything she desired. Now, she wants to marry Cherubino, and the Count reluctantly agrees.

The household assembles for Figaro and Susanna's wedding. While dancing with the Count, Susanna hands him the note, sealed with a pin, confirming their tryst that evening.

ACT IV: At night in the garden, Barbarina despairs that she has lost the pin the Count has asked her to take back to Susanna as a sign that he's received her letter. When Figaro and Marcellina appear, Barbarina tells them about the planned rendezvous between the Count and Susanna. Thinking that his bride is unfaithful, Figaro curses all women. He hides when Susanna and the Countess arrive, dressed in each other's clothes. Alone, Susanna sings of love. She knows that Figaro is listening and enjoys making him think that she's about to betray him with the Count. She then conceals herself—just in time to see Cherubino try to seduce the disguised Countess. When the Count arrives looking for Susanna, he chases the boy away. Figaro, by now realizing what is going on, joins in the joke and declares his passion for Susanna in her Countess disguise. The Count returns to discover Figaro with his wife, or so he thinks, and explodes with rage. At that moment, the real Countess steps forward and reveals her identity. Ashamed, the Count asks her pardon. Ultimately, she forgives him, and the entire household celebrates the day's happy ending.

The Play *La Folle Journée, ou Le Mariage de Figaro* by Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais

Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais did not intend to complete a second play about Count Almaviva and the peasants under his reign. In his preface to *Le Barbier de Seville* (1773), the first play in his Figaro trilogy and the prequel to *La Folle Journée, ou Le Mariage de Figaro*, Beaumarchais freely imagined what might have occurred if the comedy continued into a sixth act, with Dr. Bartolo and Marcellina discovering—upon the revelation of Figaro's spatula-shaped birthmark—that the titular barber is indeed their long-lost son kidnapped by "gypsies" as a child. According to the playwright himself, the French nobleman Prince de Conti was so taken by this suggestion that he urged Beaumarchais to continue Figaro's story in another play. Thus, *Le Mariage de Figaro* was born.

But it was a notoriously difficult pregnancy. In 1782, Beaumarchais presented a manuscript of the play to King Louis XVI, who refused to let it be performed publicly. Soon thereafter, the intrepid playwright went about organizing a series of private readings of the play throughout Paris. In response to the work's popularity, Louis XVI conceded to a private performance at the palace of Versailles in the summer of 1783. Three hours before curtain, however, the show was canceled. A few months later, the king did ultimately allow another private performance at the country house of another French nobleman, the Comte de Vaudreuil.

Not satisfied with this result, the ever-enterprising Beaumarchais set up a series of semi-public meetings with official censors, defending the play and incorporating their suggestions into a revised version. Finally, the play had its premiere at the Comédie-Française in Paris in 1784. The work caused such an uproar that three audience members were crushed to death by the crowd of 5,000 spectators, many of whom arrived at 8AM and entered the auditorium at noon for an evening performance. Public stagings of the play were subsequently banned in Vienna—where Mozart's opera ultimately premiered—by the direction of Emperor Joseph II.

Lorenzo Da Ponte significantly condensed Beaumarchais's five-act comedy to create the libretto for *Le Nozze di Figaro*, going so far as to refer to his work as an "extract." He reduced the cast from 16 to 11 characters, two of which were doubled in the premiere staging (representing four characters total). Due to the controversy surrounding the play, Da Ponte trimmed much of the overtly political content, including several pointed philosophical speeches by Figaro and a heated exchange between him and the Count in Act III. Elsewhere, the librettist removed an entire trial scene where Marcellina's contract obliging Figaro to marry her is adjudicated (with the verdict in her favor).

Le Mariage de Figaro does, however, include several musical scenes. In Act IV, the leadup to the wedding has a fandango (a type of Spanish dance) and a duet; the play concludes with a popular vaudeville song; and Cherubino's performance for the Countess, immortalized by Mozart as the aria *"Voi che sapete,"* occurs in Act II of the play.

FUN FACT

One of the most famous arias in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *"Non più andrai,"* is sung by Figaro at the end of Act I as Cherubino is sent off to military service. The aria also holds a special place in cinematic history. In the film *Amadeus* (1984), which fictionalizes the rivalry between Mozart and Italian composer Antonio Salieri, the upstart composer sits at the piano to play a march by Salieri while members of the Viennese court look on. Bored by the repetitiveness of the piece ("The rest is just the same, isn't it?"), Mozart begins to improvise—ultimately landing on the main melodic refrain from Figaro's aria.

First Dibs - jus primae noctis

The premise of the central conflict in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* is frequently alluded to but never explained outright. Shrouded by intentional vagueness, euphemism, and innuendo, the motivation for the Count's attempted seduction of Susanna is largely left to the audience to decipher. His prerogative is the so-called "droit de seigneur," French for "right of the lord." In common parlance, this phrase refers to the feudal lord's right or privilege to have sexual relations with any of his women vassals, especially on the night of her wedding. The practice has thus also been called "jus primae noctis," Latin for "right of the first night."

The opera's dramatic and narrative action is sparked when the Count, who has recently abolished or relinquished the privilege on his lands, intends to reclaim it. Susanna reveals as much in the first scene of the opera, when she tells Figaro that the Count has been pursuing her, aided by the music teacher Don Basilio:

SUSANNA E tu credevi che fosse la mia dote merto del tuo bel muso?	Did you suppose then my lord gave me a dowry just to reward your pretty face?
FIGARO Me n'ero lusingato.	I had flattered myself so.
SUSANNA Ei la destina Per ottener da me certe mezz'ore … che il diritto feudale …	He uses it to obtain from me certain half hours … for the feudal right …
FIGARO Come? Ne' feudi suoi Non l'ha il Conte abolito?	Privilege? Has not my lord himself abolished it in his fiefs?
SUSANNA Ebben; ora è pentito, e par che tenti riscattarlo da me.	Well; now he regrets it, and it seems he is trying to redeem it from me.

Here, "the feudal right" is the droit de seigneur. All ensuing hijinks result from this initial reversal, the Count's intention to "redeem" the feudal right he has previously abolished. The relinquishment of his privilege does not, however, merely concern Susanna. The entire manor, and all its women, have essentially been liberated from the threat of the Count's sexual advances. (And the men of the manor are no longer in danger of having their marriages violated by their lord.) Toward the end of Act I, a chorus of peasants arrives and sings the Count's praises:

Giovani liete, fiori spargete davanti al nobile nostro signor. Il suo gran core vi serba intatto d'un più bel fiore l'almo candor.	Come lads and lasses, flowers humbly strewing, and praise with thankful hearts our gracious lord. Fairer than all is that flower of virtue, which to our land of love he has restored.

The feminine perspective on this question is further explored first in a duet sung by two peasant women and then by the entire chorus at the end of Act III, when Figaro and Susanna finally have their marriage blessed by the Count. From the audience's perspective, these choruses are shot through with irony, as the Count has no intention to honor his "gracious" decision to restore virtue to his subjects.

Amanti costanti, seguaci d'onor, cantate, lodate sì saggio signor.	Faithful and honorable girls, sing praises to our wise lord.
A un dritto cedendo, che oltraggia, che offende, ei caste vi rende ai vostri amator.	By renouncing a right which outraged and offended, he leaves you pure for your lovers.

Although the droit de seigneur forms the basis of the opera's plot, there is little evidence that any such formal law existed. The first appearance of the French phrase dates to 1762—about two decades before Beaumarchais would write the play ultimately adapted into *Le Nozze di Figaro*—when Voltaire used it in his five-act comedy *Le Droit du Seigneur ou l'Écueil du Sage*. The writer and philosopher had previously referred to the practice in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (1764), and it is also mentioned in Montesquieu's *De l'Esprit des Lois* (*The Spirit of Law*) (1748).

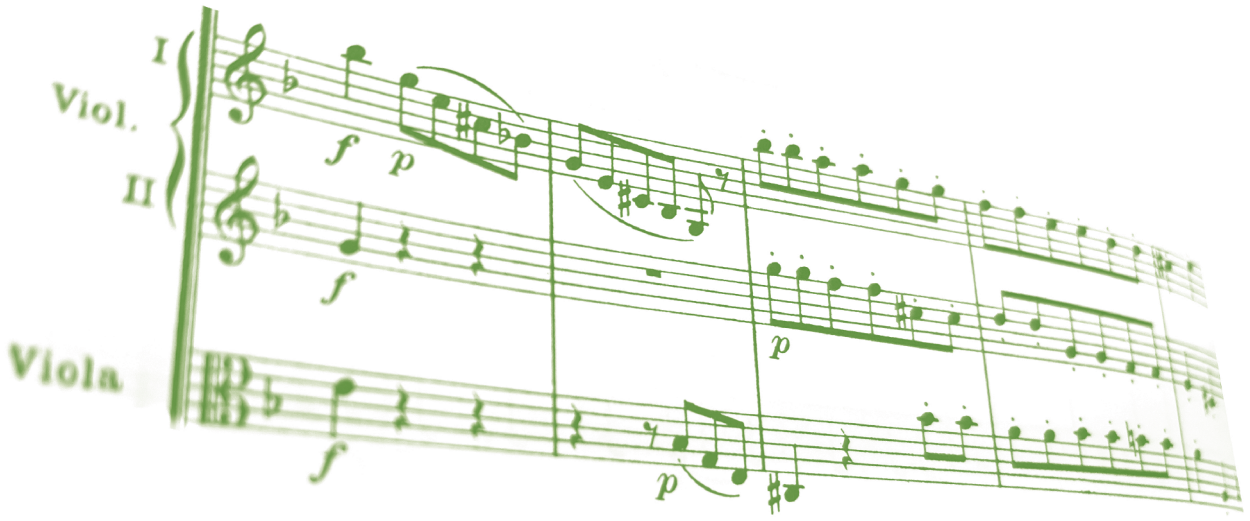
In feudal Europe, it seems that the custom was more likely exercised as a tax or fee to be paid by the vassal in exchange for the right to be waived. In medieval England, this payment was called the "merchet." In late medieval Spain, the practice was outlawed by Ferdinand II of Aragon in the *Sentencia Arbitral de Guadelupe* in 1486, which set limits on the obligations of serfs to their lords.

Though the droit de seigneur seems not to have been codified in law, it is easy enough to understand how nobles were able to wield power over those who not only worked for them but were also dependent upon—and often indebted to—them. In that sense, the privilege the Count hopes to reclaim is all the more pernicious for its customary continuation outside the formal real of the law. What Beaumarchais, and Da Ponte and Mozart after him, hoped to unveil was not a legal problem but a moral one: the unchecked power of the lord of the manor to do whatever, with whomever, he pleases.

Shall We Dance?

"Se vuol ballare" (**Track 1**), Figaro's Act I aria, arguably sets the whole opera in motion. In the preceding scene, he and Susanna are happily planning their wedding when she reveals that the Count may have ulterior motives for putting the newlywed couple's bedroom so close to his own—namely, easy access to Susanna, whom he hopes to seduce. Figaro is understandably perturbed by this revelation and sets out to seek vengeance against the Count.

One of the few true soliloquy arias in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *"Se vuol ballare"* takes the form of a cavatina in 3/4 meter, or waltz time—fitting for an aria whose title challenges the Count to a dance. The opening of the song is melodically simple, consisting largely of stepwise motion, and the orchestral accompaniment almost uniformly follows a quarter-note rhythm to solidify its dancelike quality. Immediately after the first statement of the primary theme, however, the violins enter with trilled sixteenth notes that lend an air of mischief. These gestures return as Figaro considers how precisely he should get back at the Count, repeating aloud to himself, "I know … I know … I know." Here Mozart inserts a not-so-subtle musical joke. As Figaro cautions himself to act "carefully," or *"piano"* in Italian, the strings suddenly soften from *forte* (loud) to *piano* (soft).



The second section of the aria quickens and changes to 2/4 meter, introducing a sense of frenzy as Figaro announces his intention to "make defense an art, and upset [the Count's] schemes." Just as the servant aims to throw a wrench in his lord's plan, so, too, does Mozart disrupt the stately waltz with a frantic metrical change. This passage, marked *presto* (very quickly), also features rapid dynamic shifts and exceedingly wordy lines with consecutive multisyllabic words (*"L'arte schermendo, l'arte adoprando, di qua pungendo, di là scherzando"*)—all of which suggest the havoc Figaro hopes to wreak upon his foe.

This switch from 3/4 to 2/4 meter also bears social implications. The stately minuet or waltz is the dance of the Count, and Figaro's usurpation of the form is inherently ironic. This reversal is further exacerbated by Figaro's use of the phrase, *"Signor contino,"* using the diminutive form to mean "little count," a rebuttal of the Count's superiority and Figaro's sense of his own powerlessness. The middle section is, conversely, a contredanse, a form associated with lower classes. Mozart's juxtaposition of meter thus encapsulates the class conflict at the heart of the opera (and Figaro's schemes).

The aria concludes with a return to the delicate waltz of the first section, but this time it takes on a different aspect. Whereas the opening of the aria has a playful sense of daring, the recapitulation of the waltz sounds more defiant. When Figaro remarks again, "I'll call the tune," he says it not as a threat but as a guarantee.

Teenage Dream

Cherubino's Act II aria, *"Voi che sapete"* (**Track 6**), contains one of Mozart's most memorable—and singable—melodies. It is also an example par excellence of diegetic music, as well as a witty instance of dramatic irony. The scene takes place at the top of Act II, just after the Countess has lamented her loveless marriage to the Count in her own aria, *"Porgi, amor."* The Countess summons Cherubino to her room, where she, Susanna, and Figaro have just agreed on a plan to disguise the young pageboy in Susanna's clothing to ensnare the Count. Once he arrives, the Countess urges him to sing the "little song" he composed and offered to Susanna in exchange for a blue ribbon worn by the Countess.

Cherubino's aria is thus one of several examples of diegetic music in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, whereby music is performed within the narrative world of the opera. When he sings *"Voi che sapete,"* the character Cherubino is literally singing to the Countess and Susanna, who accompanies him on guitar (as mimicked by soft pizzicato arpeggios in the strings). Mozart's score and the action of the scene thus merge in a single musical gesture.

A fidgety, impish adolescent who confesses deep romantic love for the Countess—and pure physical infatuation for every other woman he lays eyes on—Cherubino

expresses two contrasting emotions in this aria. The song's tone, on the one hand, is philosophical, reflective, and sentimental, all aspects conveyed by its elegant and almost restrained primary theme. On the other hand, the performer is a mere teenager of low status who has been compelled to perform a love song in front of the very person to whom it is dedicated. This circumstance endows the aria with a persistent sense of nervousness, often evoked through staccato lines in the oboe and flute punctuating the end of vocal phrases.

Mozart's score also brilliantly conveys Da Ponte's text setting. Structured in conventional A–B–A form, the aria's extended second section—twice the length of the first and third sections, respectively—illustrates Cherubino's emotional confusion through multiple and unexpected modulations. Whereas the A section sits squarely in the key of B-flat major, the B section moves to F minor and then, using C major as a pivot chord, A-flat major. It is over this harmonic movement that Cherubino sings, "I have a feeling full of desire, which now is pleasure, now is torment."

In the next line, "I freeze, then I feel my spirit all ablaze" (*"Gelo e poi sento l'alma avvampar"*), Mozart musically freezes the orchestral accompaniment in the new key of A-flat major as the woodwinds hold tied whole notes across multiple measures. At the conclusion of the B section, Cherubino's emotional torment ("I sigh without meaning to. I tremble but don't know why") is further enacted through repeated, sputtering sixteenth-note groupings—a clear contrast to the simple, stately vocal lines found elsewhere throughout the aria. The trills in the flute and oboe at the song's conclusion evoke the quickened heartbeat of a teenage boy hopelessly in love with an older woman.

"Voi che sapete" is, finally, a brilliant musical example of dramatic irony in an opera rife with surprises, conspiracies, and reversals. When Cherubino sings to the Countess, the audience already knows he is in love with her—but she is none the wiser (though she may have an inkling). At the same time, the audience has been privy to the Countess's complaint about a life devoid of love in *"Porgi, amor."* Cherubino, however, has little knowledge of her romantic distress. This aria, then, brings together two characters who seem not yet to know just how much they share, nor what might ensue when they ultimately realize it.

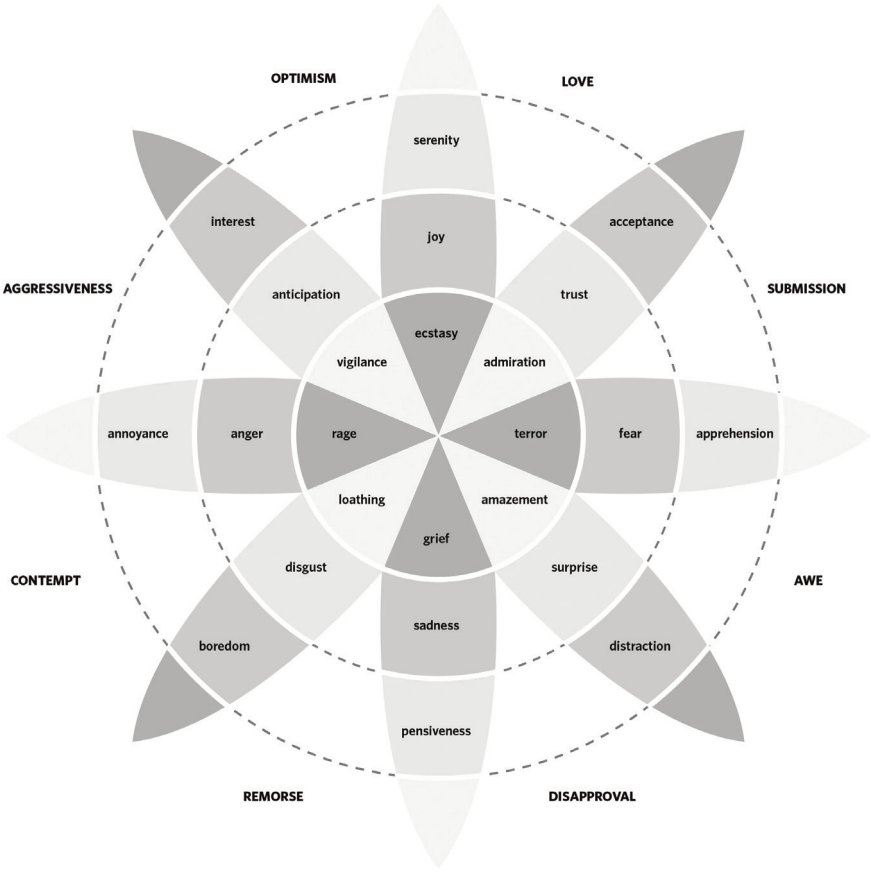
Figaro's Feelings

It's the day of Figaro's marriage to Susanna! A whirlwind of mistaken identities, disguises, and general pandemonium only heightens the excitement of the event. This chaos leads to an explosion of emotions from all involved: jealousy, rage, joy, fear, shame, longing, happiness, greed—the full gamut of feelings is on display as the characters in the opera's Seville manor prepare for the upcoming wedding (or try to stop it from happening in the first place).

In this activity, students will explore *Le Nozze di Figaro* by examining several key arias from the work in tandem with psychologist Robert Plutchik's "Wheel of Emotions" to decipher how each character is feeling—and how Mozart's score and Da Ponte's libretto further convey that sentiment. Students will also be able to draw connections between Mozart's depiction of the characters in the opera and their own emotional experiences.

STEP 1. REVIEW

At first glance, the popular and well-known music from *Le Nozze di Figaro* is elegant and moving, abounding in simple, singable melodies. Spend a little more time with



the opera, however, and you'll discover that Mozart's score is as emotionally complex as it is lovely. Each character in *Le Nozze di Figaro* has a distinct guiding motive, which can often be deduced from the vocal and instrumental lines. Every character has something to gain and something to hide: Susanna tries to avoid the Count's advances as her wedding night approaches; the randy adolescent Cherubino confesses his love for the Countess; Marcellina searches for her lost child while trying to force Figaro to marry her (big mistake!); and the Countess works alongside Figaro and Susanna to catch her unfaithful husband in the act—just to name a few.

Since the opera's plot can be quite complicated, review the synopsis and the "Who's Who in *Le Nozze di Figaro*" breakdown included with this guide before delving into the activity. For younger students, the illustrated synopsis (**metopera.org/figaro-illustrated**) might be a better and more succinct overview of the story. You can either have students read and review the synopsis in pairs or small groups or read it aloud as a class. Write down key plot points and conflicts on the board or a piece of chart paper, if necessary.

Before moving on, remind students that in an opera, characters' emotions can be suggested in several ways: through the text; through the singing, or vocal line; or through the instrumental accompaniment, or orchestral line. Sometimes, all three happen at once! And they might not even convey the same thing: By using instrumental underscoring as a view into the hearts of his characters, Mozart intentionally gives the audience a window into their true feelings—even if the characters are unaware of those feelings themselves. (The composer even uses specific instruments to communicate certain emotional characteristics. The bassoon, for example, can represent a character telling a joke or a character having a joke played on them.)

FUN FACT

For the premiere of *Le Nozze di Figaro* in Vienna in 1786, the role of Barbarina was sung by Austrian soprano Anna Gottlieb, who had turned 12 years old just two days prior. Five years later, Gottlieb went on to create the role of Pamina in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*.

STEP 2. EXPLORE

Next, introduce Robert Plutchik's "Wheel of Emotions" as a key to understanding the depth of meaning each Figaro character experiences. This model provides a simple way to make sense of feelings. It comprises eight primary emotions: joy, trust, fear, surprise, sadness, disgust, anger, and anticipation. Radiating toward the outer edges are less intense variants of these core emotions while the core contains the most intense form. When you feel annoyance, for example, it's a milder form of rage, whereas ecstasy is the severe version of joy. The wheel also presents the bipolarity of the eight primary emotions: joy versus sadness, anger versus fear, trust versus disgust, and surprise versus anticipation.

Distribute the handout included with this guide and prompt students to consider the following questions:

- Which two emotions mix to make love? What about aggressiveness?
- Which emotions on the wheel do you think are positive? Which are negative?
- Can you think of a time your emotions intensified? What happened?
- Do you agree with Plutchik's organization of the "Wheel of Emotions?" Why or why not?

STEP 3. LISTEN

Next, harness this knowledge of Plutchik's "Wheel of Emotions" to examine key dramatic moments in *Le Nozze di Figaro*. You can divide the class into small groups or pairs or ask students to work individually. Each student, pair, or group should select an aria from the list below.

Figaro, Act I: *"Se vuol ballare"* (**Track 1 or MOoD clip 7**)
Cherubino, Act I: *"Non so più"* (**Track 2 or MOoD clip 11**)
Countess, Act II: *"Porgi, amor"* (**Track 3 or MOoD clip 16**)
Count, Act III: *"Hai già vinta la causa"* (**Track 4 or MOoD clip 31**)
Barbarina, Act IV: *"L'ho perduta"* (**Track 5 or MOoD clip 41**)

Distribute the "Text and Translations" handout included with this guide. Have students listen to their chosen aria while reading along with the text. Ask them to focus on the words the character is singing, as well as the vocal line of the aria. Then, they should select one core feeling from Plutchik's "Wheel of Emotions" that best expresses the emotion conveyed by the text and vocal line.

Next, students will listen to the aria again. This time, they should focus on the instrumental line. Consider:

- What do you hear?
- What kinds of instruments are present?
- How would you describe the instrumental line?

Have them select one or two nonprimary feelings (that is, further away from the center) from the "Wheel of Emotions" to represent the instrumental line. Remind students that the emotion(s) they select for the instrumental line might be entirely different from the emotion they selected for the vocal line.

Now, students should listen to their aria for a third and final time, focusing on the piece as a whole. Ask them to focus on the interplay between the voice and the orchestra.

- Are they expressing the same emotions or mood?
- Does the orchestra ever overpower or steal the show from the voice? How does that affect the emotional content of the piece?

Taking both the vocal and instrumental lines into consideration, students should select one more emotion from the wheel to summarize the emotional content of the aria.

STEP 4. SHARE

To conclude the activity, have students share their responses with the class. If you had multiple students or groups work on the same aria, have them share with each other and then present the similarities and differences between their respective "Wheels of Emotions" to the broader group. Before students share their reflections with the class, it might be helpful to listen to each aria together at least once while having students follow along with the included texts and translations. That way, when students see the opera, they will already know at least one aria in each act!

If there are disagreements as to where any aria—or aspect of an aria, like the text or vocal line—belongs on the "Wheel of Emotions," put it up to a vote! Have students make teams and set up a formal debate where each side must provide evidence for why their placement is correct.

Piece of Cake

On the one hand, the plot of *Le Nozze di Figaro* is exceedingly simple: Two servants plan their wedding and, four hours later, they get married. On the other hand, each scene is filled with such hijinks and trickery that it can be immensely difficult to keep track of what is happening when (and why). And while the opera is one of the best situational comedies ever composed, it can also be complex and multilayered, so understanding the intricacies of each scene is crucial to discovering the humor in it all.

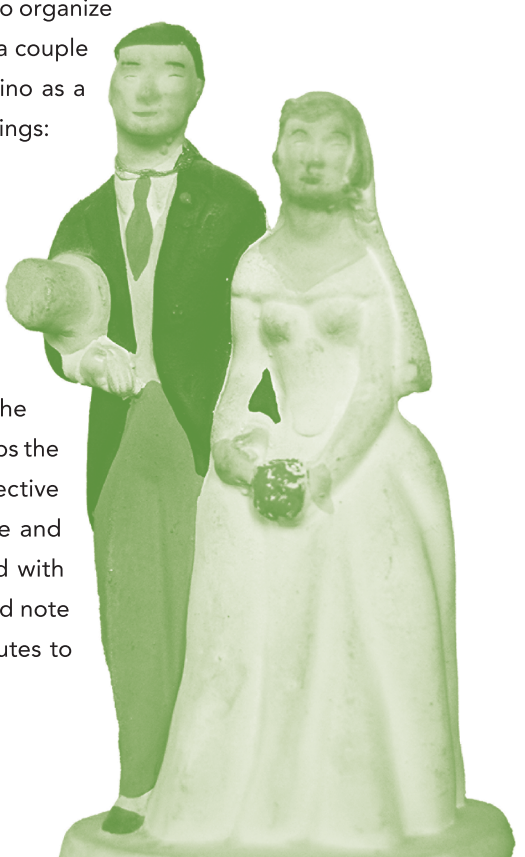
In this activity, students will work together to identify the layers of comedy and conflict in select scenes from *Le Nozze di Figaro*. Then, they will use their analysis to build multitiered "cakes" representing the dramatic structure of each scene. When all is said and done, they will have prepared a dessert banquet befitting Susanna and Figaro's wedding.

STEP 1. REVIEW

Since the plot of the opera is so complex, begin by distributing the synopsis included with this guide. Younger students might find it more helpful to read through the illustrated synopsis (**metopera.org/figaro-illustrated**). As students work through either synopsis, ask them to complete the "Character Organizer" handout included with this guide. This worksheet will help them grasp the identity of each character, their goals, and their conflicts. If they need some additional support, you can also distribute the "Who's Who in *Le Nozze di Figaro*" chart included with this guide.

This part of the activity can also be done in pairs or groups, with each assigned to a particular character in the opera. Another way to organize this exercise is to give each group of students a couple from the characters listed below, with Cherubino as a wildcard that can be added to any of the couplings:

- Figaro and Susanna
- Count and Countess Almaviva
- Dr. Bartolo and Marcellina
- Cherubino



STEP 2. WATCH

Now students should be ready to dive into the opera. Divide the class into small groups (perhaps the same groups as the previous step). In their respective groups, students will study an assigned scene and complete the "Scene Tiers" handout included with this guide. As the scene progresses, they should note how each "tier" of situational comedy contributes to the dramatic structure of the scene.

Figaro's Feelings | Text and Translations

TRACK 1 (MOoD CLIP 7)

Figaro, Act I: "Se vuol ballare"

Se vuol ballare, signor contino,
il chitarrino le suonerò.

Se vuol venire nella mia scuola
la capriole le insegnerò.

Saprò... ma, piano:
Meglio ogni arcano,
dissimulando scoprir potrò!

L'arte schermendo, l'arte adoprando,
di qua pungendo, di là scherzando
tutte le macchine rovescerò.

Se vuol ballare, signor contino,
il chitarrino le suonerò.

You want to dance, my little count?
Well, I'll call the tune!

Come to my school,
and I'll teach you to dance.

I know how! But, carefully:
I'll uncover his plans
while concealing my own.

I'll make defense an art
and upset his schemes.
I'll upset all his schemes.

You want to dance, my little count?
Well, I'll call the tune!

TRACK 2 (MOoD CLIP 11)

Cherubino, Act I: "Non so più"

Non so più cosa son, cosa faccio,
or di foco, ora sono di ghiaccio
ogni donna cangiar di colore,
ogni donna mi fa palpitar.
Solo ai nomi d'amor, di diletto,
mi si turba, mi s'altera il petto
e a parlare mi sforza d'amore
un desio ch'io non posso spiegar!

Parlo d'amor vegliando,
parlo d'amor sognando:
All'acqua, all'ombre, ai monti,
ai fiori, all'erbe, ai fonti,
all'eco, all'aria, ai venti
che il suon de' vani accenti
portano via con sé.

E se non ho chi m'oda,
parlo d'amor con me.

I don't know who I am, what I'm doing.
First I'm burning, then turning to ice.
Every woman makes my temperature soar
and my heart pound.
The idea of love and pleasure
makes my heart skip a beat.
Even the mention of love fills me
with a desire I can't explain.

I talk about love,
whether awake or dreaming:
I talk to rivers and mountains,
to flowers and fountains,
to my echo, and to the wind,
and they carry away the sound
of my useless sighs.

And if, sometimes, there's no one to listen to me,
then I just talk about love to myself.

Figaro's Feelings | Text and Translations (CONTINUED)

TRACK 3 (MOoD CLIP 16)

Countess Almaviva, Act II: "Porgi, amor"

Porgi, amor, qualche ristoro
al mio duolo, a' miei sospir.
O mi rendi il mio tesoro,
o mi lascia almen morir.

Oh love, ease my pain.
Console me in my sorrow and end my sighs.
Give my beloved back to me,
or else let me die.

TRACK 4 (MOoD CLIP 31)

Count Almaviva, Act III: "Hai già vinta la causa"

Hai già vinta la causa! Cosa sento!
In qual laccio io cadea!
Perfidi! Io voglio di tal modo punirvi.
A piacer mio la sentenza sarà.

"We've won our case!"
I've been fooled again!
The traitors! They'll pay for this!
I'll decide their punishment!

Ma s'ei pagasse
la vecchia pretendente?
Pagarla! In qual maniera?
E poi v'è Antonio
che a un incognito Figaro ricusa
si dare una nipote in matrimonio.

But what if Figaro
already paid off Marcellina?
But with what?
Susanna's uncle, the gardener,
won't let her marry
a nobody like Figaro.

Coltivando l'orgoglio si questo mentecatto.
Tutto giova a un raggiro.
Il colpo è fatto.

I'll flatter that drunken idiot.
And everything will go my way.
The die is cast!

Vedrò mentre io sospiro,
felice un servo mio?
E un ben che invan desio,
ei posseder dovrà?
Vedrò per man d'amore
unita a un vile oggetto
chi in me destò un affetto
che per me poi non ha?

Must I languish while my servant
wins his heart's desire?
While he possesses
the treasure I long for?
The woman I yearn for
will marry a nobody
while she arouses in me
a passion she doesn't return!

Ah no! Lasciarti in pace,
non vo' questo contento!
Tu non nascesti, audace!
Per dare a me tormento,
e forse ancor per ridere di mia infelicità.

No! I won't let you
have that satisfaction.
That's not what you were born for, you lout!
To cause me torment,
to laugh at my despair.

Già la speranza sola
delle vendette mie
quest'anima consola,
e giubilar mi fa.

Now my only hope
is the thought of revenge.
That's my only
comfort.

Figaro's Feelings | Text and Translations (CONTINUED)

TRACK 5 (MOoD CLIP 41)

Barbarina, Act IV: "L'ho perduta"

L'ho perduta … me meschina! …
Ah, chi sa dove sarà?
Non la trovo … e mia cugina …
e il padron, cosa dirà?

I lost it. How unlucky I am.
Oh, where can it be?
I can't find it anywhere. What will my cousin
Susanna say? And his lordship?