

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

*Così fan tutte*

*ossia*

*La scuola degli amanti*

K. 588

Facsimile of the Autograph Score

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Introductory Essay by Norbert Miller

Musicological Introduction by John A. Rice

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# TOYING WITH THE EMOTIONS: DA PONTE'S AND MOZART'S SCHOOL FOR LOVERS

Norbert Miller

Unlike the two earlier operas that Mozart wrote in collaboration with his Venetian librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte, we have no detailed evidence on the genesis of *Così fan tutte o sia La scuola degli amanti*. The extant sources will easily fit on a single printed page. In December 1789 Mozart, in his autograph thematic catalogue, jotted down the words “An aria intended for the opera *Così fan tutte*, for Benucci. *Rivolgete à me lo sguardo etc.*: \_\_\_ 2 violins, viola, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 trumpets, timpani and basses.” A short while later we find the following entry: “January 1790: *Così fan tutte: ossia la scuola degli amanti*. Opera buffa in 2 acts. pieces of music. \_\_\_\_ . Actors. Signore Ferraresi del Bene, Villeneuve and Bussani. Signori Calvesi, Benucci and Bussani.” Augmenting these skeletal entries are a mere two passages from Mozart’s letters, both sent to his friend Michael Puchberg, his patient benefactor in this year of travail. The first letter invites Puchberg to join Haydn in a brief opera rehearsal on the following Thursday, 31 December 1789: “Contrary to our arrangement we cannot have any music at our house tomorrow . . . . But I invite you, you alone, to come along on Thursday at 10 o’clock in the morning to hear a short rehearsal of my opera. I am only inviting Haydn and yourself. I shall tell you when we meet about Salieri’s intrigues, which, however, have completely failed already. Adieu.” The second, dated 20 January 1790, reads: “We are having the first instrumental rehearsal in the theater tomorrow. Haydn is coming with me. If your business allows you to do so and if you care to hear the rehearsal, all you need do is to be so kind as to turn up at my quarters at 10 o’clock tomorrow morning, and then we shall all go there together.”

The première took place six days later in Vienna’s Burg Theater. Mozart conducted, and the singers, all listed in Mozart’s catalogue, were the best the Royal-Imperial National and Court Theater had to offer. Francesca Gabrielli, alias Adriana Ferrarese del Bene, who had taken the part of Susanna at the revival of *Le nozze di Figaro* on 29 August 1789, sang Fiordiligi. Her sister Louise Villeneuve, for whom Mozart had just composed several insert arias, created the role of Dorabella. The Viennese soprano Dorothea von Sardi and her husband Francesco Bussani took the parts of the two schemers, Despina and Don Alfonso. Of the two contentious male friends, Mozart (and apparently Da Ponte as well)

was especially partial to the great basso buffo Francesco Benucci, who had created the parts of Figaro and Leporello and now took on the role of Guglielmo. The tenor Vincenzo Calvesi, recently returned to Vienna, sang Ferrando. Mozart had already composed for his voice as well. Although the grave illness of Emperor Joseph II was already beginning to cast a shadow on Vienna’s cultural life, the opera was at first highly successful. *Così fan tutte* was repeated on 28 and 30 January, again on 7 and 11 February, and, after the state-ordered period of mourning for the death of the monarch on 20 February, yet again on 6 June. By 7 August the piece had been performed another five times. On the evening of the première the usually hypercritical Count Karl Johann von Zinzendorf noted in his diary: “La musique de Mozart est charmante, et le sujet assez amusant.” In Weimar’s *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* the Viennese correspondent, writing under the incorrect dateline of 17 January (instead of the 27th), reported: “I can again announce an excellent work by Mozart to you, which has been taken up by our theater. . . . The libretto is by the Herr Abbé Da Ponte, poet to the Italian Singspiel at the I. & R. Court Theater. That the music is by Mozart says, I believe, everything.”

That, then, is the full extent of the evidence in the sources. Even Da Ponte, writing thirty years later in the lively account of his adventurous life, the *Memorie* (New York, 1823–7), devoted no more than a single sentence to *La scuola degli amanti*. At that time, he recalled, he wrote two librettos on behalf of a soprano lady-friend, both for Salieri, and “*La scola degli amanti*, con musica di Mozart, dramma che tiene il terzo loco tra le sorelle nate da quel celeberrimo padre dell’armonia” (“the *Scuola degli amanti*, with music by Mozart, an opera that occupies the third place among the three sisters born of that most celebrated father of harmony”). Written in faraway America for an Italian readership that had never heard Mozart’s third opera, Da Ponte’s autobiography was not the place to delve more deeply into this particular collaboration. Still, *Così fan tutte* was at least third in the round of Mozart’s three Graces!

The late date of publication places Da Ponte’s account in the near proximity of the secondary sources, again few in number, that were generally based on hearsay and unveri-