

OPERA WALKTHROUGH
Così fan tutte (1789)
W. A. Mozart (1756 – 1791)

<u>Characters</u>	<u>Voice</u>	<u>Description</u>
Fiordiligi	Soprano	Lady from Ferrara, sister to Dorabella, living in Naples
Dorabella	Mezzo-Soprano	Lady from Ferrara, sister to Fiordiligi, living in Naples
Guglielmo	Baritone	A soldier, Fiordiligi's lover
Ferrando	Tenor	A soldier, Dorabella's lover
Despina	Soprano	Maid to Fiordiligi and Dorabella
Don Alfonso	Baritone/Bass	An old philosopher friend of Ferrando and Guglielmo

Overture

Opening measures describe the two couples with masculine and feminine phrases alternating.

Final measures of introduction are the musical motif of the title (Così fan tutte).

Woodwind alternations of main melody represent the gossip chatter throughout the opera of the women.

Brass dominated second theme represents the male characters with a martial style.

Act I

SCENE 1 (Morning in a coffeehouse in Naples)

1) Trio - Ferrando, Guglielmo, and Don Alfonso - Ferrando and Guglielmo claim that their fiancées will be eternally faithful. Don Alfonso claims the soldiers are naive about the ways of women.

Recitative - The boys threaten to fight the Don over his comments, who is amused and maintains that all women are untrustworthy.

All three men are wearing swords which marks them as men of the noble classes.

2) Trio - Ferrando, Guglielmo, and Don Alfonso - Don Alfonso compares the constancy of women to an Arabian Phoenix (who everyone swears exists but no one knows where). The boys each maintain that their lovers are faithful.

Recitative - Don Alfonso makes a bet for 100 gold pieces that if the boys follow his instructions without question for 24 hours, he can prove the girls will switch partners.

3) Trio - Ferrando, Guglielmo, and Don Alfonso - Confident in winning the bet, the boys plan on using the 100 gold pieces to hold a banquet in celebration.

The end of the trio is musically written as a drinking song as the men celebrate their confidence in winning the bet.

SCENE 2 (In the sisters' vacation rental overlooking the shore)

4) Duet - Fiordiligi and Dorabella - The girls sing of their love for their soldiers as they gaze upon their portraits.

Fiordiligi's name means "Lily of the Valley" (the white flower of loyalty). The music for Fiordiligi is pastoral. Dorabella's name means "Beautiful Gold". Music for her is more passionate to go with her personality.

Recitative - The sisters discuss marriage. Fiordiligi reads Dorabella's palm and sees marriage in the future. The girls wonder why the boys are so late.

5) Aria - Don Alfonso - Don Alfonso enters suddenly, pretending to be distraught, and tells the girls he brings awful news about their lovers.

Recitative - Don Alfonso tells the girls that their boys have been called to battle and must leave at once. The boys enter in traveling clothes to say their farewells.

6) Quintet - Ferrando and Guglielmo enter. The couples express their grief for having to say goodbye as the Don hold the boys to their promise not to give away the plan.

Recitative - Don Alfonso sees the boat approaching while the girls maintain that they will die of grief. The couples confirm their trust in each other.

7) Duet - Ferrando and Guglielmo - The boys promise that the gods will protect the girls until they return. Both men are confident at winning the bet.

Recitative - Don Alfonso finds the farce amusing as drums are heard from the approaching soldiers.

8) Chorus - A group of soldiers and townspeople march in singing about the glories of soldier life.

Recitative - Don Alfonso tells the boys to say their goodbyes and get on the boat.

9) Quintet - The couples promise to write each other and say goodbye as Don Alfonso tries to contain himself from bursting out in laughter. Ferrando and Guglielmo leave with the soldiers reprising the march.

Recitative - The Don Alfonso and the girls watch from the shore as the boys sail away in their boat, waving goodbye to each other.

10) Trio - Don Alfonso, Fiordiligi and Dorabella - The girls and Don Alfonso wish for the sea to be calm and deliver the boys safely home again.

Gentle strings depict the wind and waves carrying the boat as it sails away.

Recitative - Don Alfonso remains on the shore as the girls leave. He explains that its time to put the next part of the plan into action and comments that the boys are foolish for betting on the fidelity of their girls.

10a) Arioso - Don Alfonso - The Don compares trusting a woman's heart to navigating a stormy sea.

SCENE 3 (In another room of the villa)

Recitative - Despina is making chocolate and complaining about how miserable it is to be a maid. The sisters enter distraught, tearing off their jewelry and closing the windows. Dorabella tells Despina to leave her alone with her misery.

Standard comic opera practice has servants complaining about their lot in life. Despina is a character type from the Italian Commedia dell'Arte (Columbina). Columbina is a clever, lower class servant who uses disguise, flirtatious behavior, and craftiness to help bring about a happy ending for the lovers in the drama while at the same time looking after her own interests.

11) Aria - Dorabella - Dorabella sings of how miserable she is without her love.

Recitative - The sisters inform Despina of what has happened. Despina maintains that should the boys be killed there are more fish in the sea. She suggests that they go have some fun while their lovers are away.

12) Aria - Despina - Despina tells the girls they are naive to think that their soldiers will be faithful to them and that all men are liars. She encourages the sisters to enjoy themselves while the boys are gone.

Despina's advice to the girls mirrors Don Alfonso's earlier advice to the boys.
The rustic lyrical style of the music reflects Despina's working class status.

Recitative - Don Alfonso enters after the girls leave. He decides to recruit Despina's help in the scheme. After some general flirting, the Don offers Despina money for her assistance in setting the girls up with two foreign suitors. She agrees and the Don brings in the boys disguised as Turkish soldiers from Albania.

Emperor Joseph II, who suggested this libretto to Mozart, had recently been campaigning in Turkey. On his return trip the Emperor passed through Albania. Thus, this reference is an inside joke for the Emperor.

13) Sextet - Don Alfonso introduces the boys to Despina (who does not recognize them). The Don hides as the sisters enter, angry to find that Despina has men in the house. The boys profess their love for the girls (opposite of their original lover). The sisters are outraged which secretly pleases the boys, however, the Don and Despina are suspicious that the sisters are protesting too much to be totally convincing.

The sextet ends with the three different viewpoints being sung simultaneously.

Recitative - Don Alfonso enters and pretends the boys are old friends. The boys claim they were brought to the house by their love for the sisters. The girls are aghast and maintain that they will remain forever faithful to their lovers.

14) Aria - Fiordiligi – Fiordiligi claims that her heart can never be swayed by another man.

The aria begins with a accompanied recitative (only used for very important moments or royal characters). The large leaps show Fiordiligi in control of her emotions (from top to bottom).

Recitative – Ferrando and Guglielmo convince the girls to stay. Don Alfonso asks the girls to be nice to his friends as they are gentlemen.

The fact that Ferrando and Guglielmo keep the girls in the room is evidence that the boys are also interested in displaying their machismo by competing with each other to bed the other person's lover.

15) Aria – Guglielmo – Guglielmo claims that he and Ferrando have excellent physical qualities and would make great lovers. The girls leave in a huff, but Dorabella seems to be considering her growing desire.

16) Trio - Ferrando, Guglielmo, and Don Alfonso - After they are alone the boys laugh at the situation and at Don Alfonso whom they think has failed in the wager.

Recitative – Don Alfonso reminds the boys of their promise of obedience for the rest of the day. The boys state that their celebratory feast will taste better for the wait.

17) Aria – Ferrando – According to Ferrando, love is the most delicious form of nourishment.

Recitative – Don Alfonso and Despina discuss whether or not the girls can be swayed from their lovers. Despina assures Don Alfonso that she can make it happen if he goes along with her idea.

SCENE 4 (Afternoon in the Villa Garden)

18) Finale (7 parts)

A standard finale for an opera buffa has continuous singing (no recitatives) and the appearance of all the main characters on stage. The scene should be a “mini” story within the larger plot.

PART 1 – DUET - Fiordiligi and Dorabella consider how quickly their lives have changed.

Musical mood is care free (not grief-stricken) to depict the peaked interest of the girls in the Albanian men.

PART 2 – QUINTET – Ferrando and Guglielmo enter carrying arsenic to kill themselves over being rejected by the girls. Don Alfonso is pretends as if he is trying to stop them. The boys pretend to take the poison.

PART 3 – QUARTET – Don Alfonso encourages the girls to have pity and comfort the boys. The girls call for Despina. She and Don Alfonso go to get a doctor, telling the girls to comfort the boys by holding them.

PART 4 – QUARTET – The girls whisper to each other what a disaster the situation has become while the boys comment on their enjoyment. The girls touch the boys heads and hands to comfort them. The boys wonder if this compassion could possibly turn into love.

PART 5 – SEXTET – Don Alfonso and Despina return (Despina is disguised as a doctor). Using magnets, Despina pretends to cure the boys of their poison.

The magnets are a reference to Dr. Mesmer's invention of the circular magnet. Mesmer was a friend of the Mozart family and the reference is an inside joke. The trills depict the waving of the magnets and the responsive twitches of the boys.

PART 6 – SEXTET – The boys recover and profess their love for the girls. Don Alfonso asks the girls to show the guys sympathy and tenderness. The boys attempt to kiss the hands of the girls, who pull away. Despina claims the men’s behavior is the lingering effect of the poison. The girls confide in each other that they don’t know how long they can keep resisting.

PART 7 – SEXTET - The guys attempt to kiss the girls. They refuse but it is unclear how much they actually want to refuse. Don Alfonso and Despina are entertained by all the drama and the rage of the girls. The boys comment that they are no longer sure whether the rage is real or feigned.

Act II

SCENE 1 (Early evening in the sisters’ bedroom)

Recitative – Despina encourages the girls to take the guys as their lovers because their current lovers are off at sea and most likely having affairs of their own. She states her philosophy of love and the need to find new lovers promptly, adding that the Turks are actually gentle and well bred.

19) Aria – Despina – Despina tells the girls that they should use their feminine wiles to get what they want and that it is okay to take the Turks as lovers.

[This opening scene to Act II is a perfect contrast to the opening scene of Act I which features a similar conversation by the male characters.](#)

Recitative – Despina leaves and the girls discuss taking the maid’s advice. Dorabella is ready to commit but Fiordiligi will only fantasize about the possibility.

20) Duet - Fiordiligi and Dorabella – The girls girlishly fantasize about which of the Turks they would choose for themselves. They choose the opposite of their actual lover.

Recitative – Don Alfonso enters and tells the girls to come out to the garden.

SCENE 2 (In the Garden)

21) Duet with Chorus – Ferrando and Guglielmo – The boys have arranged an alfresco dinner in the garden and serenade the women accompanied by a chorus and instrumentalists.

Recitative – Due to conflicting emotions, the boys are tongue-tied at the moment where they are supposed to woo the girls.

22) Quartet – Ferrando, Guglielmo, Don Alfonso, Despina – Don Alfonso and Despina help get the two couples together.

Recitative – After some awkward small talk, the couples manage to go off in separate walks in the garden. When alone, Guglielmo gives Dorabella a heart pendant. Dorabella tries to resist but eventually gives in and accepts the heart.

23) Duet – Guglielmo and Dorabella – The pendant is accepted by Dorabella. Guglielmo removes the locket containing Ferrando's portrait and replaces it with the heart pendant.

The gift of the heart pendant is symbolic of Dorabella's love and affection being exchanged. The short-long rhythms used when the two place their hands on each other's chests represent heartbeats. Each sing their line separately and then together (for the first time in the opera) musically uniting them.

Recitative – In another part of the garden, Fiordiligi runs from Ferrando, telling him she saw an asp in the garden. Ferrando tells her she ran because of him. She tells him to stop pursuing her because it is cruel to pursue a woman who is committed to another.

24) Aria – Ferrando – Thinking that Fiordiligi is weakening, Ferrando sings that her gentle nature cannot resist his charms. Upon realizing he cannot woo her, he leaves her in the garden alone.

Recitative – After several attempts Ferrando abandons his courtship of Fiordiligi. Fiordiligi, now alone, rages against her conflicting emotions.

Passion is growing in Fiordiligi for the first time, threatening her self control.

25) Aria – Fiordiligi – Fiordiligi petulantly begs her absent fiancée to forgive her.

Recitative – Ferrando recounts in detail his lack of success with Fiordiligi. Guglielmo is happy that Fiordiligi has been faithful to him. When Ferrando asks how Dorabella behaved, Guglielmo tries to soften the news but angers Ferrando when he produces the locket from Dorabella with Ferrando's portrait inside. Ferrando collapses and is devastated. Guglielmo does not know how to comfort Ferrando. Both are astonished that love was forgotten in just a few hours.

For the first time in the opera Ferrando is seen as a sympathetic character.

26) Aria (Rondo) – Guglielmo – Guglielmo rants over the fickleness and deceptive behavior of women.

Ironically, Guglielmo rants about deceptive behavior while wearing Albanian clothing to deceive the girls.

Recitative – Ferrando does not know how to escape the conflict of emotions tormenting him.

27) Cavatina – Ferrando – Ferrando is feeling both love and desire for revenge.

Recitative – Don Alfonso enters and is informed of events. In an attempt to light a fire under Ferrando, Don Alfonso gets Guglielmo to boast about his manhood and asks Don Alfonso for his half of the wager. Don Alfonso reminds the guys that they are still pledged to follow his instructions and states it is unwise to claim the wager yet.

SCENE 3 (In another room of the villa)

Recitative – Despina congratulates Dorabella for becoming a woman of the world and enjoying herself. Fiordiligi enters and admits to falling in love with Ferrando and that she feels guilty for having those emotions. Dorabella proposes that they marry the Albanians. Fiordiligi is horrified by the idea that their hearts could change so quickly. Dorabella excuses the behavior with the statement “we’re women”.

Fiordiligi is the conscience of the opera and she is disappointed in herself for falling in love with Ferrando.

28) Aria (Rondo) – Dorabella – Dorabella recalls how Cupid rewards those who surrender to love with joy and punishes those who resist love with torment.

Dorabella is revealed for the lusty remorseless party girl that she is.

This aria mirrors Guglielmo’s aria (#26) by also being a rondo, suggesting that they may be better paired.

Recitative – Fiordiligi is left alone in the room while Ferrando and Don Alfonso watch from hiding. Fiordiligi plans to dress as a soldier and follow her fiancée to the battlefield and revive her love for him. She also hopes that Dorabella will witness her fidelity and join her. Ferrando enters to make one more attempt to seduce Fiordiligi.

29) Duet – Fiordiligi and Ferrando – Fiordiligi gives in to Ferrando and falls into his arms.

When Fiordiligi succumbs, both she and Ferrando sing in unison rhythms symbolizing joining of hearts.

Recitative – Fiordiligi and Ferrando leave while Guglielmo and Don Alfonso enter. When Ferrando returns, Guglielmo is distraught while Ferrando turns Guglielmo's earlier gloating back on him. Don Alfonso suggests the best way to punish the girls is to marry them. Don Alfonso has the men admit that they still love the girls and informs them that they must accept them as they are.

30) Aria – Don Alfonso – Don Alfonso, winner of the wager, tells the men to forgive their fiancées because all women behave this way.

Recitative – Despina enters and announces that the girls are ready to marry the Albanians and have asked for her to get a notary.

SCENE 4 (Night in the main room of the villa)

31) Finale (12 parts)

PART 1 – DUET WITH CHORUS – Despina is putting the final touches on the wedding table. Don Alfonso enters and approves of the preparation. They both exit to observe from a distance.

PART 2 – CHORUS AND QUARTET – The villagers sing a wedding hymn to the couples. The two couples enter. The girls wish to thank Despina for showing them the path they should take. The men are not happy with Despina because her help was needed for Don Alfonso to win the wager. The couples ask the chorus

to sing the wedding hymn again while they sit at the table and listen. After singing, the chorus exits. The couples say sweet nothings to each other, clink glasses, and drink a toast.

PART 3 – QUARTET – Dorabella, Fiordiligi, and Ferrando toast forgetting the past. Guglielmo, on the other hand, refuses to toast and wishes the others were drinking poison.

Musically, part 3 is a canon which resembles a toast.

The tempos Mozart chooses for the first three parts are slower with each part.

This tempo pattern reverses to create a large scale forward momentum for the finale.

PART 4 – SEXTET WITH CHORUS – Don Alfonso announces the arrival of the notary (Despina in disguise). As the couples sign the contract, the military chorus can be heard arriving.

The notary's name "Beccavivi" means "Mr. Annoying Nitpicker".

PART 5 – SEXTET – Don Alfonso informs the couples that their former lovers are returning from the battlefield. The girls tell the Albanians to hide. They leave as the girls panic. Despina hides under the table.

PART 6 – QUINTET – Ferrando and Guglielmo enter as themselves. Don Alfonso welcomes them as the girls are struck speechless. Guglielmo finds the "lawyer" Despina under the table.

PART 7 – SEXTET – Despina claims that she has returned from a fancy dress ball and hadn't changed out of her outfit. The girls are surprised to see Despina as the lawyer. Don Alfonso "accidentally" drops the marriage contract and Ferrando picks it up, pretending to be outraged.

PART 8 – SEXTET – Ferrando and Guglielmo accuse Fiordiligi and Dorabella of betrayal, threatening to find and kill the new lovers.

PART 9 – SEXTET – Fiordiligi and Dorabella say they do not deserve to live and blame Don Alfonso for the incident. Don Alfonso admits to instigating the drama and claims the Albanians are in the next room. All three women are stunned that Don Alfonso gave away the location of the Albanians.

PART 10 – SEXTET – Ferrando and Guglielmo re-enter wearing the Albanian clothing but not their mustaches. They reveal themselves to their original fiancées and then tease Despina for her involvement in the plot as the doctor. The girls, realizing they have been duped, accuse Don Alfonso of being the cause of their pain. Don Alfonso says he only did it to educate the guys and now they will be wiser. He encourages everyone to laugh about it and say no more.

PART 11 – SEXTET – The girls promise their original lovers to be faithful to them and the men assure the girls they believe them. Despina realizes she has been fooled as well and is ashamed.

PART 12 – SEXTET – All is ultimately forgiven, as the entire group praises the ability to accept life's unavoidable good times and bad times.

It is unclear at the conclusion of the opera whether the two couples reunite with their original lovers or if they embrace the altered pairings, which appear to be the better combination.