

# OPERA WALKTHROUGH

## Le Nozze Di Figaro (1786)

### W. A. Mozart (1756 – 1791)

<u>Characters</u>	<u>Voice</u>	<u>Description</u>
Count Almaviva	Baritone	An 18th Century nobleman ruling a castle near Seville
Countess Almaviva	Soprano	The neglected wife of Count Almaviva
Susanna	Soprano	The Countesses chambermaid and Figaro's fiancée'
Figaro	Bass	Servant who once helped the Count win the Countess' hand
Cherubino	Soprano	A young page boy in the Count's service
Bartolo	Bass	A doctor in Seville who was once outwitted by Figaro
Marcellina	Soprano	Dr. Bartolo's former housekeeper, now in the Count's service
Basilio	Tenor	The household's music teacher and court gossip
Antonio	Bass	The Count's gardener, and Susanna's uncle
Barbarina	Soprano	Antonio's daughter
Don Curzio	Tenor	A lawyer with a tendency to stutter

### Overture

The semitone motif that begins the overture is a “musical snicker” which will be used in the more comedic parts of the opera. The fast tempo and frenzy of notes represent the hectic wedding day. The loud chords and fanfares portray the festive mood of the upcoming wedding event.

### Act I (Morning)

#### **In Figaro and Susanna's Room**

**1) Duet - Figaro and Susanna** - On their wedding day Figaro is measuring the floor in their bedroom while Susanna tries on her bridal veil.

Towards the end of the duet, Figaro adopts Susanna's tune indicating that she is the dominant half of their relationship.

**Recitative** - Susanna tells Figaro she does not want their room to be next to the Count.

**2) Duet - Figaro and Susanna** - Figaro tries to convince Susanna that the location is excellent because they have quick access to their duties.

**Recitative** - Susanna tells Figaro that the Count lusts for her and has an arrangement with Basilio to use her singing lesson time for claiming feudal privilege (which the Count had abolished but now wants to reinstate). Susanna is suddenly summoned by the Countess.

**3) Cavatina - Figaro** - Figaro plots to trick the Count and thwart his plans.

Figaro's aria is borderline scandalous for the time because it features a servant plotting against his master. The opera premiered only three years before the beginning of the French Revolution.

**Recitative** - Dr. Bartolo and Marcellina enter. Marcellina has a contract in which Figaro borrowed money and promised to marry her if he could not repay the debt. They plan to work with the Count to thwart Figaro's marriage to Susanna.

**4) Aria - Bartolo** - Bartolo plots revenge on Figaro by searching for legal ways to enforce the marriage contract.

**Recitative** - Bartolo leaves and Susanna returns to find Marcellina.

**5) Duet - Susanna and Marcellina** - The two engage in a verbal catfight with exquisite politeness. Susanna wins by delivering a below-the-belt reference to Marcellina's age.

**Recitative** - Cherubino enters and tells Susanna he has been dismissed by the Count for being found alone with Barbarina. Cherubino wants to ask the Countess for help and confesses his infatuation for her. Susanna teases him with one of the Countesses' ribbons. Cherubino snatches the ribbon and give Susanna a song he wrote in return.

Although Cherubino is a boy, the part is usually sung by a woman so that the voice range is more correct.

**6) Aria - Cherubino** - Cherubino sings about being a young boy discovering what to do with all these new feelings of love.

**Recitative** - Cherubino hides as the Count enters to make a pass at Susanna. The Count hides as Basilio enters to tell Susanna the latest gossip. Basilio suggests that Susanna has been having affairs with Cherubino and warns that the young boy is actually lusting for the Countess. Hearing this, the angry Count reveals himself.

**7) Trio - Susanna, Basilio, and the Count** - Susanna faints as she realizes Basilio now thinks she is having relations with the Count. The Count decrees that Cherubino must be sent away and relays the story in which the boy was found in Barbarina's room. He discovers Cherubino hiding in the chair and now the Count and Basilio accuse Susanna of poor virtue with Cherubino.

**Recitative** - The Count tells Basilio to get Figaro but stops when he realizes that Cherubino overheard his pass at Susanna.

**8) Chorus** - Suddenly, Figaro enters with the villagers praising the Count for abolishing feudal privilege and asks the Count to perform the marriage ceremony. The Count postpones the ceremony until later that day to give Marcellina and Bartolo time to act.

**Recitative** - The Count forgives Cherubino to keep him quiet and sends him off to the army as a regimental officer to get him away from the castle. Figaro tells Cherubino that he has a plan and wants to speak to him in private later.

**9) Aria - Figaro** - Figaro sings tongue in cheek to Cherubino about the glories of army life.

## **Act II (Afternoon)** **In the Countess' Room**

**10) Cavatina - Countess** - Countess sings of the love the Count once had for her but now fears it is gone.

Act II begins with more focus on the female characters. This is a large contrast to the end of Act I, which is more masculine.

**Recitative** - Susanna and Figaro tell the Countess that the Count intends to favor Marcellina in her plans to marry Figaro. Figaro says he has sent a decoy letter to the Count warning him that the Countess has arranged a rendezvous with a lover in the garden at the evening ball. The Count will then be jealous and confront her in the garden. However, Cherubino will be dressed as a woman and substituted for the Countess, thereby embarrassing the Count when the real Countess confronts him. The Count will then only be forgiven by the Countess if he allows Figaro and Susanna to marry. Figaro then leaves, sending Cherubino in. The Countess gets Cherubino to sing the song he wrote for her before dressing him as a girl.

**11) Aria - Cherubino** - Cherubino sings about yearning for love.

**Recitative** - The Countess and Susanna get female clothes to dress Cherubino. The Countess finds Cherubino's army commission papers in his jacket and notices they do not yet have a seal.

**12) Aria - Susanna** - Susanna sings about dressing Cherubino up as a girl.

Slightly confusingly, a female singer will usually play Cherubino, a male character who is now disguised as a female.

**Recitative** - The Countess and Susanna find the ribbon Cherubino took earlier tied around his arm to heal a cut. While Susanna goes to fetch a proper bandage, the Count knocks on the door. The Countess locks Cherubino in the closet as the Count enters and shows the Countess the decoy letter about the garden rendezvous. He accuses the Countess of hiding a lover in the closet. The Countess claims that it is Susanna in the closet. Meanwhile, Susanna returns but hides in the alcove.

**13) Trio - Susanna, the Countess, and the Count** - The three sing their different viewpoints on opening the locked door and the potential of a scandal.

**Recitative** - The Count locks all the doors and takes the Countess to get a crowbar to force the closet open.

**14) Duet - Susanna and Cherubino** - Susanna lets Cherubino out of the closet. Frantically, Cherubino jumps out the window to escape while Susanna hides in the closet.

**Recitative** - The Count and Countess return. The Countess admits that Cherubino is in the closet.

**15) Ensemble Finale - Count, Countess, Susanna, Figaro, Antonio, Marcellina, Bartolo, and Basilio** - The Countess insists that nothing was going on between her and Cherubino. The Count refuses to believe her and unlocks the door to reveal Susanna (who whispers to the Countess that Cherubino jumped out the window into the garden). The Countess claims that she was merely testing the Count's jealousy and reveals

that the decoy letter was written by Figaro. As the Count asks to be forgiven, Figaro enters and says all is ready for the wedding. The Count shows the letter to Figaro who pretends not to know who wrote it. Antonio the gardener enters claiming that he saw Cherubino jump out the window onto his flowers. Figaro claims it was him and pretends he has an injured foot. Antonio produces Cherubino's commission papers that were dropped by the jumper and the Count asks Figaro to identify them. With the help of Susanna and the Countess making gestures behind the Count's back, Figaro claims that Cherubino gave the papers to him because they were lacking a seal. Just as the Count's plans seemed to be foiled, Marcellina, Bartolo, and Basilio enter with the marriage contract. The Count delays the wedding ceremony until he can review the contract.

The Act II Finale is one of the most perfectly composed achievements in the history of opera. The presence of continuous music without recitatives from various combinations of eight characters composed in such a way that does not sacrifice the clarity of the words is a massive musical achievement.

### **Act III (Evening)** **In the Banquet Hall**

**Recitative** - The Count has sent Basilio to see if Cherubino has left for the army. The Countess talks Susanna into arranging a rendezvous in the garden with the Count. The Countess will then switch clothes with Susanna and catch the Count red-handed. Susanna puts the plan in motion by telling the Count she will pay Figaro's debt with the dowry promised to her by the Count in exchange for sex in the garden that night.

**16) Duet - Susanna and the Count** - Susanna convinces the Count that she will keep her appointment in the garden.

**Recitative** - Susanna convinces the Count that she refused him earlier to be discreet in front of Basilio and Cherubino. She leaves, meeting Figaro at the door and tells him they have won their case without a lawyer. The Count overhears this and is angered.

**17) Aria - Count** - The Count sings of revenge and vows that he will not be beaten by a mere servant.

**Recitative** - Barbarina convinces Cherubino that she can hide him dressed as a woman at her house.

**18) Aria - Countess** - The Countess sings about the Count's lost love for her and hopes that her plan with Susanna will change his heart.

**Recitative** - The Count, Don Curzio, Bartolo, Marcellina, and Figaro are debating the legality of the marriage contract. Don Curzio rules that the contract is legal. Figaro claims he was stolen as a child, that his parents are missing and that he cannot marry without their consent. Marcellina discovers Figaro has a spatula on his arm and is therefore her long lost son. She then reveals that Bartolo is Figaro's father.

**19) Sextet - Don Curzio, Count, Bartolo, Marcellina, Figaro, and Susanna** - Figaro, Marcellina, and Bartolo sing about their happiness. Susanna enters with money from the Countess to pay off the debt but sees Figaro embracing Marcellina and fears she is too late. Susanna slaps Figaro but is soon pacified when

she learns that Marcellina and Bartolo are his parents. The four sing of their happiness while the Count is foiled once again.

The Act III Sextet is another example of perfect ensemble writing.

**Recitative** - Marcellina and Bartolo decide to marry each other, destroy the contract and give Figaro a dowry. Susanna gives Figaro the money given to her by the Countess and the two couples go to tell her the good news. Meanwhile, Antonio informs the Count that Cherubino is hiding at his house.

**20) Duet - Susanna and the Countess** - The Countess dictates a letter to Susanna arranging the garden rendezvous with the Count.

**Recitative** - The Countess gives a pin to Susanna to use as a seal, stating in the letter that the Count should return the pin as his reply.

**21) Chorus** - The village girls enter to present flowers to the Countess. Among them are Barbarina and Cherubino (dressed as one of the girls).

**Recitative** - Antonio and the Count enter and expose Cherubino. Barbarina blackmails the Count by vowing to keep their affair quiet if he allows Cherubino to marry her. Figaro enters to announce that the ball is ready to begin. As the Count begins to question Figaro about why Cherubino has not left, they are interrupted by the wedding procession.

**22) Finale - Susanna, Figaro, Count, and Countess** - During the ceremony Susanna slips the letter to the Count. He takes the pin and reads the letter as Figaro notices from a distance. The Count ends the ceremony and promises further celebrations that night.

## **Act IV (Night)** **In the Garden**

**23) Cavatina - Barbarina** - The Count has given the pin to Barbarina to return to Susanna. Barbarina, however, has dropped the pin in the garden and cannot find it.

**Recitative** - Figaro and Marcellina enter and help Barbarina search for the pin. He angrily guesses at the purpose of the pin and concludes that Susanna being unfaithful. He gives Barbarina one of Marcellina's pins, claiming that it belongs to Susanna. Barbarina leaves as Marcellina enters and defends Susanna's honor. Figaro won't listen and goes to the meeting place to see for himself, while Marcellina goes to warn Susanna.

**24) Aria - Marcellina** - Marcellina sings that women have to stick together.

**Recitative** - Barbarina arrives at the pavilion to wait for Cherubino but must hide when Figaro approaches with Basilio and Bartolo whom he has enlisted to help him catch Susanna and the Count together. Figaro leaves as Basilio informs Bartolo of the Count's lust for Susanna.

**25) Aria - Basilio** - Basilio sings about the benefits of being older and wiser unlike the foolish Figaro.

**Recitative** - Figaro expresses his anger at what he thinks is Susanna's betrayal. He hides as Susanna enters with the Countess and Marcellina. Knowing that Figaro is watching nearby, Marcellina and the Countess to hide in the pavilion while Susanna stays in the garden to tease Figaro by pretending to be waiting for a lover.

**26) Aria - Susanna** - Susanna sings for her lover to come to her swiftly.

**Recitative** - Figaro is crushed and angry at Susanna's actions and claims that all women cannot be trusted.

**27) Aria - Figaro** - Figaro warns all men everywhere about being deceived by women.

Usually, this aria is sung to the audience.

**Recitative** - Figaro hides as he hears Cherubino enter looking for Barbarina. He spots who he thinks is Susanna but who is actually the Countess wearing Susanna's dress.

**28) Finale - Cherubino, Countess, Count, Susanna, Figaro, Basilio, Antonio, Barbarina, Marcellina, and Bartolo** - Cherubino tries to kiss the Countess (who he thinks is Susanna). The Count enters to rescue who he also thinks is Susanna by taking a swing at Cherubino. The punch misses Cherubino and instead hits an approaching Figaro. The Count declares his love to the Countess (who he thinks is Susanna). The Count gives her a ring and suggests they make love in the pavilion. Figaro makes a noise, alarming the Count, who hides the Countess in the pavilion and leaves, promising to return soon. Susanna comes out of hiding (dressed as the Countess). Figaro, however, recognizes his bride's voice and decides to turn the tables on Susanna by pretending to think she is the Countess and profess his love for her. Angered by Figaro's supposed betrayal, Susanna slaps Figaro repeatedly as he rejoices that her love for him is real. Figaro admits to recognizing Susanna's voice and the couple are happy once again. The Count then enters looking for Susanna and sees Figaro with whom he thinks is the Countess. Susanna hides in the pavilion as the Count restrains Figaro. At Figaro's signal, Basilio, Bartolo, and Antonio come out of hiding. The Count accuses Figaro of betraying him and goes to the pavilion to fetch who he thinks is the Countess. Instead he finds Cherubino, Barbarina, Marcellina, and Susanna (still pretending to be the Countess). The Count refuses to forgive who he thinks is his wife. The real Countess then enters and presents the ring given to her by the Count earlier. The Count realizes he has completely been in the wrong and asks for forgiveness. The Countess is forgiving and reconciles with her husband. The Count announces for everyone to proceed to the celebrations.