



Pearson

Mozart: *The Magic Flute*, excerpts from Act I no. 4 (Queen of the Night), 5 (Quintet) (For component 3: Appraising)

Background information and performance circumstances

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91), one of the world’s best-loved composers, helped establish the **Classical style** at the end of the 18th century. Notice the use of the capital letter for the style and period. This is to distinguish the term from ‘classical music’. The Classical period saw the development of the symphony, the piano sonata and the piano concerto. New structures such as sonata form were used in compositions. There was at first a decline in the use of complex counterpoint.

Mozart was a contemporary and friend of Haydn. He also knew Beethoven and may have given the young composer some lessons in Vienna. Mozart was a child prodigy who toured the capitals of Europe when he was very young, giving performances on the piano. His first important employment was at Salzburg, where he worked for the Archbishop. As a young man he moved to Vienna, the capital of Austria. There he became known as a solo pianist, especially in the performance of his own concertos.

He was also a composer of opera and was one of the first to write in the **vernacular** (language of the people). Most operas at the time had Italian words and almost all of the best-known composers were Italians. Opera had been invented in Italy at the beginning of the 17th century and operas of the Baroque period were written in the Italian language, including those by the German composer Handel. In Germany and England the audience often had booklets containing the *libretto* (in Italian and in the local language).

Mozart’s opera *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Abduction from the Harem*) was one of the first Classical operas to be written in German. Despite this apparent breakthrough, Mozart’s later operas were almost all written in the Italian language – including works such as *Le Nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*).

Opera in the Baroque period had been very static, with a series of solo recitatives and da capo arias and very few ensembles (music for groups of singers). In Classical opera there was more variation of mood within arias. Duets and larger ensembles became an essential ingredient of the style.

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Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute)

The Magic Flute was written in 1791, the last year of Mozart's short life. It was first performed on 30 September. By 5 December Mozart was dead after a short illness. The work was immediately successful and there were hundreds of performances in the 1790s. It was soon being performed in opera houses throughout Europe and has remained in the repertoire of the major opera venues to this day.

Technically, the work is a **singspiel** (literally 'sing-play' or 'play with singing'). Most operas have sung dialogue throughout; a *singspiel*, on the other hand, is more like a modern musical in its incorporation of the spoken word. The style featured stories with magic and comedy, often with an exaggerated sense of good and evil. It contained simple ballads and songs and was considered an entertainment for the middle classes. Operas, on the other hand, were usually performed to the nobility and other rich members of society.

With *The Magic Flute* Mozart took the *singspiel* style to a new level. It includes hilarious comedy and a hefty dose of magic, but also contains some of the most moving, passionate and exciting music in the history of opera. The work is strongly connected with the **Freemason** movement. This was (and is) a partially secret society with lofty, moral aims. Joining the Freemasons involves a complex initiation ceremony, which is mirrored in Mozart's opera. The masonic relevance of the number '3' is also clearly displayed in the music.

The hero, Tamino, has to undergo a series of masonic-style tests or trials to prove he is worthy of marrying the heroine, Pamina. It is his magic flute that enables him to survive the ordeal. The Queen of the Night is Pamina's sorceress mother. She defies all, but in the end her magic fails her and she is sent into everlasting darkness, allowing the hero and heroine to marry. Meanwhile, there is a comic sub-plot involving a bird-catcher, Papageno, played at the first performances by the manager of the opera troupe and author of the libretto, Emanuel Schikaneder.

No. 4, Recit. and aria (Queen of the Night): 'O zittre nicht, mein lieber Sohn!'

This is the first appearance of the Queen of the Night. She is announced by majestic music for orchestra, including strings, two horns and two oboes. Her first words attempt to soothe Tamino and encourage him to rescue her daughter, Pamina, from the supposedly evil clutches of the High Priest Sarastro. Tamino has just seen a portrait of Pamina and fallen instantly in love with her.

- After the orchestral introduction there is a short passage of **accompanied recitative** as the Queen calms and praises the hero. A recitative is like sung speech. It uses the natural rhythms of the spoken word and contains few repetitions of lyrics. The key is B \flat major.
- The next section begins in G minor (bar 21) and is a moderate paced **legato** (smoothly flowing) **aria** in **simple triple** time. The Queen complains of her suffering as a result of the abduction of her daughter. She conjures up an image of the trembling fear of Pamina as she is taken away. The trembling is represented by **word-painting** (musical description of the actual words) as the violins have 'shivering' repeated semiquavers.

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- In the final *allegro moderato* (moderately fast - bar 61) section in B \flat major the Queen starts to display all her power. The music is now loud and forceful as she orders the hero into action to save her daughter. The soprano rises to dizzying heights with **virtuoso coloratura** music at the highest **tessitura**, rising to **top F**, an octave above the treble clef staff. This showpiece section has no fewer than 13 bars on the same syllable (**melisma**). The word 'coloratura' describes virtuosic music (mostly in operatic vocal music) with many fast notes, often with rapid scales, arpeggios and ornaments.

Vocal/melodic style

- Written for coloratura soprano.
- The opening **recitative** is **syllabic** and like all recitative has elements of **free tempo**, though an accompanied recitative is not as free as a *secco* recitative, which has only continuo accompaniment.
- The *largetto* is **legato** and begins in lyrical **conjunct** (stepwise) manner. A loud, long high F emphasises her anger. The **tessitura** becomes wider ranging, especially in the 'trembling' passage (bars 37–40).
- There are now passages of **descending chromatic music (bars 41-43)** and occasional ornamentation with **grace notes** (bar 51).
- The *allegro moderato* begins with an emphatic statement of the notes of the tonic chord of B \flat major (bars 64–65).
- There are ornaments such as **turns** (bar 67).
- There are occasional **chromatic appoggiaturas** (bar 76).
- The famous **coloratura** passage is largely **conjunct** to start with, though the highest notes contain **triadic** passages (bars 84–92).
- Rising sequence (bar 81).

Rhythm and metre

- The orchestral introduction begins with **continuous repeated crotchet tonic pedal notes** in the bass, with **syncopated repeated quavers** in the violins.
- The **simple triple time** second section contains dotted rhythm, as well as smoothly flowing quaver passages.
- The anger is represented by **demisemi-quaver scalic** passages in the strings (bars 32 and 34).
- We've already mentioned the 'shivering' **repeated semiquavers** in the violins.
- The virtuoso, showpiece section, in simple quadruple time has many passages of **continuous semiquavers** (bars 80-82).
- As the music builds to a climax, the upper strings have **tremolo-like** passages of fast repeated semiquavers.
- There is some use of **triplets** in the accompaniment (bars 62-63).

Tonality and harmony

- The key is **B \flat major** and most of the music is **diatonic** in that key.
- The key is typically shaped and strengthened by perfect cadences.

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- As in all Mozart, however, **chromaticism** is never far away. The bassoons and violas descend by chromatic steps at the beginning of the first section (bars 3-5).
- Neapolitan 6th is used in bar 19, in the approach to a G minor perfect cadence
- There are simple **tonic** and **dominant seventh** harmonies.
- For contrast, the *largo* middle section is in the **relative minor key** of **G minor**.
- At moments of anguish there are **diminished seventh** harmonies, e.g. on 'Ach helfft!' (bar 47).
- The final section returns to the tonic B \flat major and again emphasises tonic and dominant harmonies to start.
- There are suggestions of the **subdominant** key (**E \flat major**) early in the virtuoso section.
- The highest music in the coloratura section is **diatonic** in the key (b83-89).
- The aria ends with repeated, emphatic perfect cadences.

Texture

The music is mainly simple **melody-dominated homophony** (melody and chords). There is little use of contrapuntal devices. A brief exception occurs at the beginning of the *largo* where the bass instruments imitate the opening vocal phrase a bar later, down an octave.

No. 5, Quintet: *Hm! Hm! Hm! Hm!*

The comic character Papageno has lied about his part in saving the prince from a serpent. In fact he'd done nothing and as a punishment has had a padlock fitted to his mouth. All he can manage vocally are curious humming noises.

- His opening complaining music has simple **diatonic** phrases in **B \flat major** with **repeated notes and leaps**. He has a **dialogue** with Tamino, who says he can do nothing to help him. They alternate with each other in increasingly shorter phrases, before a short passage in two-part **counterpoint**.
- The Queen's three ladies then take pity on him and release the padlock as the music **modulates** to the **dominant F major**. To start with, the ladies have separate phrases answered by Papageno before changing to a **three-part homophonic** texture.
- The texture increases to **five part** in simple **homophonic** style as the three ladies, Tamino and Papageno join together singing **sotto voce** (quietly, in an undertone). They warn Papageno to tell the truth in the future. They all issue loud instructions about the value of truth – **in unison and octaves** (bar 61⁴), in a stern **G minor**. Loud then quiet vocal music alternates, with short descending scales in the oboe separating them. After a **perfect cadence** in **F major** the music moves back to the **tonic B \flat major**.

A new section then begins in the tonic key (bar 80):

- First there is a longer passage for the First Lady as she presents the prince with a golden magic flute that he can use to protect himself from danger. Again the music is in simple **diatonic** style. Notice the typical Classical **feminine cadences** (Ic–V, strong to weak – bar 84), as well as the numerous standard **perfect cadences**, usually with a dominant seventh (V7–I, bars 90–91). The three ladies then join together in simple three-part homophonic style.

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- All five voices join together again *sotto voce* as they express their wonder at the magic flute. There is a new descending scale figure in the violins (bar 109) over a tonic pedal. The music occasionally becomes more **contrapuntal** in style (separate **polyphonic** lines – from bar 117) including imitation between the First and Third ladies.
- Papageno then decides he can't face the task set for him and the prince, and tries to get out of it. The music modulates to the **relative minor** (G minor). The ladies dismiss his complaints. The main harmonic feature here is the use of **augmented sixth** harmonies, for instance bars 150–151 (vi⁶–V in D minor). There is then the first use of **chromaticism** in the rising phrase in **octaves** in bar 158 as Papageno continues to show his fear for what is in store.
- The music becomes more diatonic again and moves to the subdominant key of E \flat major (b 173) as the ladies attempt to quell Papageno's terrors. They show him the magic glockenspiel that he can use to protect himself. The cadence harmonies here use **dominant seventh** instead of the previous augmented sixths.
- There is more *sotto voce* as all five singers express their admiration for the magic flute and glockenspiel in a detached homophonic and homorhythmic style. Tamino and Papageno meanwhile spot a flaw. How will they find their way to the castle where Pamina is kept as a 'prisoner'?

This is the cue for one of the most magical moments in all music as the three ladies announce their third special trick. Three young, angelic boys will guide Tamino and Papageno. Three is a magic Masonic number.

- The music returns to the tonic B \flat major (bar 214) as the soft tone of **clarinets** is introduced for the first time in the movement. The music is marked **dolce** (sweetly). The tempo changes to a slower **andante** (walking pace) – compared to the previous **allegro**. The bass line is supplied not by cellos, but by violins playing **pizzicato**, so the instrumental texture is completely new in the piece. The 'bass' descends down the tonic scale at half bar intervals. The harmony changes with it, with alternating **root** and **first inversion chords**: I–V \flat –vi–iii \flat –IV–I \flat –vii \flat –I–V (a simple four-bar phrase ending with an **imperfect cadence**). The ladies use the, by now familiar, *sotto voce* technique as they reproduce exactly the same harmonies as the clarinets and violins.
- The two men then have their turn at the same phrases (bar 226), before all five singers sing their farewells with simple harmonies.
- Chromaticism is then used to convey the pang of leaving (the chromatic descending phrase in bar 242). The music seems to fade away at the end, leaving 3 quiet tonic chords of B \flat .

The orchestra takes on various roles throughout the quintet, either as an accompanying texture, doubling the voices or displaying independent melodic material. Often playful instrumental responses colour the ends of vocal lines, helping to keep the mood light and entertaining (bars 136, 141 and 185).

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