

# METROPOLITAN OPERA



BROADCAST OF JANUARY 28, 2006, 1:30 P.M.

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## COSÌ FAN TUTTE

Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart  
Libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte



The "Doctor" is called in to treat the "Albanians" (Barbara Frittoli as Fiordiligi, Matthew Polenzani as Ferrando, Nuccia Focile as Despina, Thomas Allen as Don Alfonso, Mariusz Kwiecien as Guglielmo, Magdalena Kožená as Dorabella)





Clockwise from top left: Guglielmo and Dorabella (Kwiecien, Kožená); Despina in disguise (Focile); Ferrando and Fiordiligi (Polenzani, Frittoli); the "Albanians" serenade the sisters; the sisters and their officers (Kwiecien, Kožená, Polenzani, Frittoli)



# COSÌ FAN TUTTE

## THE CAST (in order of vocal appearance)

Ferrando tenor, MATTHEW POLENZANI  
 Guglielmo baritone, MARIUSZ KWIECIEN  
 Don Alfonso baritone, THOMAS ALLEN  
 Fiordiligi sop., ALEXANDRA DESHORTIES  
 Dorabella mezzo, MAGDALENA KOŽENÁ  
 Despina soprano, NUCCIA FOCILE

Conducted by JAMES LEVINE

Production: Lesley Koenig  
 Set and costume designer: Michael Yeagan  
 Lighting designer: Duane Schuler  
 Stage director: Robin Guarino  
 Chorus master: Raymond Hughes  
 Musical preparation: Kevin Murphy,  
 Kathleen Kelly, Kazem Abdullah,  
 Justina Lee  
 Assistant stage director: Gregory Keller  
 Harpsichord continuo: Kevin Murphy  
 Italian diction coach: Nico Castel  
 Prompter: Kathleen Kelly

Continuo: Kevin Murphy, harpsichord  
 David Heiss, cello

Production a gift of Alberto Vilar  
 Additional funding from The Metropolitan  
 Opera Club, the Denenberg Foundation  
 in honor of Dan Denenberg, The DuBose  
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 Club

## THE SCENES Timings (ET)

(Naples, 18th c.)

ACT I 1:30–3:03

Sc. 1 A piazza  
 Sc. 2 A terrace overlooking the sea  
 Sc. 3 Fiordiligi and Dorabella's home and  
 garden

ACT II 3:34–5:06

Fiordiligi and Dorabella's home and  
 garden, later that day

Announcer: Margaret Juntwait  
 Audio director: Jay David Saks

## INTERMISSION FEATURE

Producer: Michael Bronson Timings  
 Toll Brothers–Metropolitan  
 Opera Quiz\* 3:03–3:34

Thor Eckert questions Phillip Gainsley,  
 Paul Thomason, Cori Ellison

\*Send quiz questions to *Opera Quiz, Box 805,*  
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*or log on to [www.operainfo.org](http://www.operainfo.org).*

## THE STORY

**ACT I.** In eighteenth-century Naples, the cynical Don Alfonso discusses women with two young officers, Ferrando and Guglielmo. The gallants insist their sweethearts are paragons of virtue (“La mia Dorabella”) and accept Alfonso’s bet that he can prove the ladies fickle if they do as he says for twenty-four hours.

The sisters Fiordiligi and Dorabella compare the merits of their respective beaux, Guglielmo and Ferrando, showing pictures they carry in their lockets (“Ah, guarda, sorella”). Alfonso brings sad news: the young men have been called to their regiment. They appear, and the five make elaborate farewells (“Sento, o Dio”). As soldiers march by, Ferrando and Guglielmo fall in; Fiordiligi, Dorabella and Alfonso sorrowfully wish them a prosperous journey (“Soave sia il vento”). Alfonso, alone, delivers one last jeer at women’s inconstancy.

The maid, Despina, advises her mistress to forget old lovers with the help of new ones (“In uomini, in soldati”), but Dorabella is outraged at her capricious approach to love (“Smanie implacabili”). When the sisters leave, Alfonso comes to bribe Despina to introduce two foreign friends of his to the ladies. Fiordiligi and Dorabel-

la, returning, are scandalized to see the strangers, whom they do not recognize as their lovers, heavily disguised as Albanians. The newcomers declare their admiration for the ladies, but both repulse them, and Fiordiligi likens her fidelity to a rock (“Come scoglio”). The men are thrilled, but Alfonso warns that the bet isn’t won yet. Ferrando blissfully looks forward to victory and reunion with his love (“Un’aura amorosa”). When he is gone, Despina suggests a plan to Alfonso to win the ladies’ sympathy.

Alone in their garden, the sisters lament the absence of their lovers. Suddenly the “Albanians” stagger in, pretending to have poisoned themselves in despair over their rejection. Alfonso and Despina run for a doctor. Meanwhile, the ladies begin to waver; pity for the strangers will be their undoing. Despina returns, disguised as a doctor using Dr. Mesmer’s invention, the magnet, to draw out the poison, and urging the sisters to nurse the patients as they recover. The men revive (“Dove son?”), but their increased ardor alarms the women, who angrily refuse their demands for a kiss.

**ACT II.** Attending her mistresses, Despina lectures them on how to handle men (“Una donna a quindici anni”). Dorabella is easily persuaded that there is

no harm in a little flirtation, and surprisingly, Fiordiligi agrees. They decide who will pair off with whom (“Prenderò quel brunettino”).

The young men have arranged a serenade in the garden. Seeing their wager through, Guglielmo ardently pursues Dorabella (“Il core vi dono”), while Ferrando woos Fiordiligi (“Ah, lo veggio quell’anima bella”); when he leaves, she admits he has touched her heart (“Per pietà”), hoping her absent lover will forgive her. When the men compare notes, Guglielmo is glad to see Fiordiligi apparently standing fast but Ferrando is dismayed that Dorabella has given Guglielmo the locket containing his portrait. Guglielmo decries the waywardness of the fair sex (“Donne mie, la fate a tanti”). Left alone, Ferrando sighs that he still loves Dorabella, though he feels betrayed (“Tradito, schernito”).

Fiordiligi rebukes Dorabella for being fickle, although she admits that in her heart she has succumbed to the stranger. Dorabella coaxes her to give away, saying love is a thief and people get robbed every day (“È amore un ladroncello”). Alone, Fiordiligi decides to drag her sister off to join their sweethearts at the front, but when Ferrando, pursuing the wager, enters and threatens suicide, Fiordiligi gives in. Now Guglielmo is furious, but Alfonso counsels forgiveness; that’s the way women are, he claims (“Tutti accusan le donne”).

A double wedding is arranged between the sisters and the “Albanians.” Alfonso brings in the notary — Despina in another disguise. Just as the ladies have signed the marriage contract, familiar martial strains outside herald the return of the former lovers’ regiment. In panic, the sisters push their intended husbands from the room and go more or less to pieces when the men reappear without their “Albanian” mufti. Ferrando and Guglielmo storm at the ladies when the marriage contract is discovered. But Alfonso explains the deception, reasoning that true happiness lies not in romantic illusion but in accepting things as they are. Agreeing a trick can work both ways, the lovers are reconciled.



## THE BACKGROUND

The fifteenth of Mozart's operas, *Così Fan Tutte* dates from the final period of his life. If his alacrity in writing *Così* is explainable in terms of his hectic activity during this period, the score's sparkle and technical and expressive virtuosity seem more remarkable in view of his failing health and many distractions. He used manuscript abbreviations — unusual for him — and adapted music to the specific vocal strengths and weaknesses of the soloists.

Legend has it that an actual Viennese scandal prompted Austrian Emperor Joseph II to commission *Così Fan Tutte*. To turn the story into a libretto, he chose Lorenzo da Ponte, peripatetic scholar, entrepreneur and erstwhile crony of Casanova. Da Ponte had supplied Mozart with texts for *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*.

Probably no opera has been subjected to such revision as *Così Fan Tutte*, for the nineteenth century found the story and libretto unacceptable. Beethoven lamented that Mozart should have squandered his genius on such a trivial, immoral subject.

One day before Mozart's thirty-fourth birthday, *Così Fan Tutte* had its premiere at the Burgtheater in Vienna, January 26, 1790. The work enjoyed repetitions through August and then was dropped, not to be revived in Vienna during the composer's lifetime. He did witness it in Prague, and it soon reached Leipzig and Dresden. The Metropolitan first performed it on March 24, 1922. The present production was unveiled on February 8, 1996.

## WHAT TO READ AND HEAR

For suggested reading on Mozart, see *Die Zauberflöte* What to Read and Hear, page 39. Other valuable books include Edmund J. Goehring's *Three Modes of Perception in Mozart* (Cambridge) and the *Così* entry in the Cambridge Opera Handbook series. Jane Glover's *Mozart's Women* (HarperCollins) offers fascinating background on the ladies who were

important in the composer's onstage and offstage lives.

On CD, James Levine leads the Vienna Philharmonic in a fleet, elegant performance of an opera that is one of his specialties (DG); his responsive cast includes Kiri Te Kanawa, Ann Murray and Thomas Hampson. The Met's current *Così* principals available on disc are Thomas Allen, Don Alfonso on Simon Rattle's reading for EMI, and Nuccia Focile, who sings Despina on Charles Mackerras's Telarc *Così*.

*Così* is unusually well represented on disc, especially when one considers its long lack of currency in international houses. An outstanding *Così* of recent vintage is led by René Jacobs (Harmonia Mundi), who captures the opera's bittersweet flavor to perfection. The Glyndebourne Festival's happy association with *Così* is well documented on CD; Fritz Busch's 1935 (Lyrica) and 1951 (Guild) recordings preserve the vivid Fiordiligi of Ina Souez and Sena Jurinac, respectively. Karl Böhm's enduring affection for *Così* is well demonstrated by his 1954 Salzburg performance (Orfeo d'Or) and his 1962 studio recording (EMI). Herbert von Karajan's dark-edged 1954 *Così* (EMI) has an especially splendid quartet of lovers: Léopold Simoneau, Rolando Panerai, Nan Merriman and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, caught at her vocal peak. Arnold Östman's period-instrument performance from Drottningholm is available in a mid-price set of all three da Ponte operas (Decca).

On DVD, Allen is Guglielmo in Adrian Slack's 1975 Glyndebourne *Così* (Arthaus), conducted by John Pritchard. Nikolaus Harnoncourt paces Cecilia Bartoli's Fiordiligi at Zurich Opera (Arthaus). Peter Sellars's eye-catching staging, which sets the action in an American diner, is available from Universal. John Eliot Gardiner leads the English Baroque Soloists in a lean, spicy *Così* from Théâtre du Châtelet (Universal); those who want more Italianate flavor will be happier with Riccardo Muti's La Scala performance (Image). □

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