



## LA Opera: **THE MAGIC FLUTE**

Wednesday, February 24, 2016

Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, Los Angeles

### **THE MAGIC FLUTE**

*The Magic Flute* (in German, *Die Zauberflöte*) is an opera in two acts by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart with a German libretto by Emanuel Schikaneder. It was Mozart's last opera, premiering in Vienna in September 1791, just months before his death.

The story, adapted from a tale by eighteenth-century German poet and writer Christoph Martin Wieland, operates on two levels: as a simple damsel-in-distress fairy tale, and as an allegory of the quest for enlightenment, laden with symbols of Freemasonry. (Schikaneder and Mozart were both Masons.)

The number three is a core Masonic symbol that recurs throughout *The Magic Flute*, in the form of three boys, three ladies, three slaves, three temples, and musical passages marked by three chords or three stanzas. Much of the score is written in the key of E flat major, which has three flats. The Queen of the Night character is said to represent obscurantism (as opposed to enlightenment) or, according to some interpretations, the anti-Masonic Roman Catholic Church. Her antagonist, Sarastro, is said to represent rationalistic enlightenment. The story follows human progress from chaos through superstition to enlightenment.

The different characters' actions are scored by different kinds of music, for example the Italianate coloratura (ornamentation) of the dramatic Queen of the Night and the folksy melodies of the bird catcher and his beloved. The role of the Queen of the Night, which Mozart wrote for his sister-in-law Josepha Hofer, is one of the highest-ranging and most difficult roles in all of opera. Notice the light, fast singing (coloratura) and the large intervals from one note to the next.

*The Magic Flute* has been popular from its premiere through to the present day.

### **WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART**

The composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) is one of the towering figures of Western classical music. Born in Salzburg, Austria, Mozart showed extraordinary musical talent from early childhood.

By the age of five, he was playing the keyboard and violin, composing music, and performing for royalty. He became a court musician as a teenager, but a rebelliousness and impulse toward freedom that would endure throughout his life led to the loss of this position.

Mozart spent much of his adult life in Vienna, composing hundreds of works, many of which still represent the highest achievements of symphonic, chamber, operatic, and choral music. The prolific and versatile composer is one of the most—if not the most—influential and popular composers of classical music the world has known.

Throughout his life and despite his immense talents and fame, Mozart struggled financially. The year he composed *The Magic Flute*, he owed money to several of his brothers at the Benevolence Masonic Lodge, and his annual income had dropped significantly. It was in this position that Mozart agreed to collaborate on a singspiel (see below) with Schikaneder, who ran a theater for what Mozart considered a “lowbrow” audience. (Mozart's prior operas had been written for royal court theatres.) The result was *The Magic Flute*, an immediate and enduring success.

Mozart died at the age of 35 on December 5, 1791, just months after *The Magic Flute* premiered.

### **FREEMASONRY**

The Free Masons are the largest worldwide secret society, stemming from guilds of the Middle Ages. The body of fraternal organizations, or lodges, was a significant part of the eighteenth-century Age of Enlightenment. Free Masons promoted rationality, equality, tolerance, and reason; in practice, members must be adult males, and individual lodges have been accused of anti-Semitism, anti-Catholic sentiment, and racism. Freemasonry spread around the world largely via British colonialism.

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The practice of Freemasonry involves symbol-heavy rituals. Yet Freemasonry is not a religion and in fact has faced consistent opposition from organized religions; in 1738, the Free Masons were condemned by the Catholic Church. However, atheists and agnostics cannot become Freemasons.

Today's Shriners, while not an official Free Mason organization, are made up entirely of Free Mason members. They are known for their charitable work.

Mozart was admitted to the Benevolence Masonic Lodge in Vienna in 1784, and was shortly promoted to the highest rank, Master Mason.

## **SINGSPIEL**

*The Magic Flute* is a type of opera called singspiel: an eighteenth-century German opera that includes spoken dialogue between the musical numbers and a variety of musical forms, including folk-inspired music. Singspiel finds parallels in the English ballad opera, the French opéra-comique, and the Italian opera buffa.

*The Magic Flute* is the best-known and, in the eyes of many critics, most artful realization of the singspiel.

## **BARRIE KOSKY AND 1927**

LA Opera's 2016 production of *The Magic Flute* is an imaginative reinvention of the classic work, by renowned Australian director Barrie Kosky and British theatre troupe 1927.

1927 was founded in 2005 by animator and illustrator Paul Barritt and writer and performer Suzanne Andrade. They were later joined by Esme Appleton, who suggested a merger of animation and live performance, and composer and pianist Lillian Henley. In 2012, they reimagined *The Magic Flute* with director Barrie Kosky for Komische Oper Berlin, of which Kosky is the celebrated artistic director. This is the second time the production has been staged at LA Opera.

## **LA OPERA**

LA Opera is the fourth-largest opera company in the United States.

For much of the twentieth century, the Music Center brought opera to Los Angeles by presenting productions by out-of-town companies. In 1984, the Music Center Opera Association wanted Los Angeles to have its own opera company, and gave British impresario Peter Hemmings the challenge of creating one. LA Opera was born, and in 1986 offered its inaugural performance: *Otello* starring Plácido Domingo.

LA Opera offers productions of canonical operas as well as new and rarely staged works. In 2006, the company initiated the Recovered Voices project, a multi-year endeavor dedicated to presenting little-known operas by composers whose lives and careers were destroyed by the Nazi regime.

Spanish tenor Plácido Domingo has been the general director of the company since 2003, and conductor James Conlon has been the music director since 2006.

## **DOROTHY CHANDLER PAVILION**

The Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, one of four venues at the Los Angeles Music Center, is the home of LA Opera and Gloriana Kaufman Presents Dance at the Music Center. It is located across the street from Walt Disney Concert Hall (home of the Los Angeles Philharmonic) and shares a plaza with the Ahmanson Theatre, which offers large-scale theatrical productions, and the smaller Mark Taper Forum, where more intimate and edgy theatre pieces are featured.

Built from 1962 to 1964, the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion was the first and is the largest of the Music Center venues. It was designed by the important Los Angeles architect Welton Becket under the aesthetic principal of "total design"—meaning that everything from the building's structure and engineering to its interior design were overseen by a single designer to create a unified look. Becket also designed L.A. landmarks such as the Capitol Records building and the Beverly Hilton Hotel.

The interior of the five-story Dorothy Chandler Pavilion features 78 crystal light fixtures, including three chandeliers each made with 24,000 pieces of hand-polished crystal from Munich. Prior to the construction of Disney Hall, the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion was the longtime home of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Between 1969 and 1999, numerous Academy Awards ceremonies were held here.

The building is named for Dorothy Buffum Chandler (1901–1997), a fundraiser passionate about cultural life in Los Angeles who helped save the Hollywood Bowl from financial crisis and led an almost decade-long campaign that raised the majority of the funds to build the Los Angeles Music Center, one of the largest performing-arts venues in the United States. Her husband, Norman Chandler, was the publisher of the *Los Angeles Times* from 1945 to 1960, when he was succeeded by the couple's son, Otis.