

VOX IMAGO

MOZART
DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE

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DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE

DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE BY MOZART:
LISTENING GUIDE
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There are scholars who have long believed it impossible to reconcile the many different musical worlds present in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, and others, especially in recent years, who have posited instead a coherent compositional strategy for the opera. While I tend to associate myself with the latter vision, there is no doubt that Mozart incorporated an unusually wide range of musical styles in this work, from the most popular style, associated with the bird-catcher, Papageno, to a formal style imitating the music of J.S. Bach (as, for example, in the choral prelude sung by the two armed men before the temple where Tamino and Pamina will undergo their initiation). It is difficult to explain away some apparent contradictions of the plot. How, for example, does Sarastro permit the dastardly doings of his servant, Monostatos? How do the Three Boys seem at first to follow the wishes of the Queen of the Night, while then becoming altogether positive creatures, who save Papageno's life? It would be futile to attempt to explain each and every detail of the libretto. We must accept the apparent contradictions and move on from there, guided everywhere by Mozart's superb music.

The Overture, one of Mozart's finest, begins with three chords in E-flat major (I, VI, and I 6/3), the three chords long associated with Masonic rites (although David Buch would claim that they are rather to be associated with earlier musical efforts of Mozart's librettist, Emanuel Schikaneder). We will hear similar chords later in the Overture and several times in the second act. After a brief transitional passage, Mozart brings us back to the tonic and begins his contrapuntal first theme, which he presents in the traditional four statements (I, V, I, V), followed by a transition to the dominant, using the same melody. (One could easily argue that this is a monothematic Overture, since it is so dominated by the opening contrapuntal idea.) The dominant region again presents the opening melody, but now more freely developed, until the composer brings his exposition to a close on the dominant. We hear the three chords again, this time on the dominant, and then Mozart begins his extended development, freely adapting the contrapuntal theme from the exposition, including a canon at the half measure between the lower strings and bassoons and the upper strings and upper winds. The music continues into a recapitulation that presents all previous material in the tonic, but does so less formally than in the exposition. In general, what is remarkable about this Overture is Mozart's ability to join the most erudite contrapuntal procedures with a melody that seems to be even jovial.

When the curtain rises, we are far from the jovial. In the Introduction (N. 1), a prince, Tamino, is pursued by a dragon and falls in exhaustion and desperation. He cries for help ("Zu Hilfe! zu Hilfe! sonst bin ich verloren" - "Help, help, or I'm lost") in C minor and is rescued by Three Ladies, servants of the Queen of the Night, who sing of their triumph over the beast in E-flat major. They are all struck by his beauty and each wants to stay alone with him (the passage, now in A-flat major, which pits the ladies against one another, is particularly amusing), but then they decide together (first in G major, then back in the major tonic of the Introduction, C major) to tell their Queen about him and leave him alone ("Du Jüngling schön und liebevoll" - "To you, young, beautiful and lovable").

Unexpectedly, Tamino wakes up, amazed that he is still alive, and the first person he sees is the exotic Papageno, a catcher of birds for the Queen, dressed in a suit of bird feathers. Papageno sings a popular ditty about himself (N. 2.) in G major ("Der Vogelfänger bin ich ja" - "I'm the fowler, yes I am"), accompanying himself from time to time with a simple instrument, Pan's pipes. They speak together about who they are. (This opera is, after all, a so-called *Singspiel*, joining elaborate and long spoken dialogue with musical numbers, some of which incorporate formal recitative.) When Papageno lies to Tamino, telling him that he has slain the dragon, the Three Ladies reappear with gifts for each of them. For Papageno a lock for his lips so he will no longer tell lies; for Tamino a picture of the Queen's daughter, Pamina, for him to admire and fall in love with.

After the Three Ladies leave the stage, Tamino behaves just as expected and sings a beautiful, sentimental aria in which he praises her beauty, as seen in the portrait (N. 3, "Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön" - "This portrait is wonderfully beautiful"). Not only is the aria in the tonic of the opera, E-flat major, its melody will also reappear later to be played by the "magic flute" to accompany Tamino and Pamina as they undergo their trials.

When the Three Women reappear they do so to announce that the Queen has decided to allow Tamino to rescue Pamina from an evil ruler who has stolen her away. Then they announce that the Queen of the Night herself will soon appear, a rare appearance since Papageno himself claimed never before to have seen her, although he works in her service. At that very moment she does appear with a recitative (“O zittre nicht, mein lieber Sohn” - “Oh, do not tremble, my dear child”) and aria (N. 4, “Zum Leiden bin ich auserkoren” - “For sorrow I have been chosen”), in B-flat major. It is in marked contrast with all the music heard thus far: before long it becomes a coloratura aria of great beauty (ascending as high as Fa_5), to be sung by a character who is presented as an escapee from an *opera seria*, and who thus far seems to be a positive force, but will prove to be the villain of the piece, a denizen of the Night.

When the Queen disappears, she leaves Tamino ready to undertake the rescue of her daughter, but Papageno’s mouth is still locked so he can tell no more lies. The Three Ladies reappear, sent by their ruler to end his punishment. They admonish him to tell no more lies (N. 5, Quintet), another piece in B-flat major. While he agrees, there is no reason to think his attitude has changed. Tamino cannot himself do anything to help him, and for the first time he admits his weakness (“ich zu schwach zu hilfen bin” - “I am too weak to help you”), something he will continue to feel as long as he is a youth (“ein Jüngling”). Only when he becomes a Man, through Sarastro’s might and through facing the trials he must undertake does he gain the maturity to become one with his Pamina. The Queen, however, sends him a gift to help him along the way, a golden flute (“O so eine Flöte ist mehr als Gold und Kronen wert” - “Ah, such a flute is more precious than gold and crowns”), which once belonged to her dead husband, an ally of Sarastro’s. While they tell Papageno always to seek protection from the prince, they also give him a glockenspiel to play in his moment of need. Thus, two musical instruments will be used by Tamino and Papageno in their quest for Pamina and their assault on Sarastro’s realm (“Silberglöckchen, Zauberflöten sind zu eurem Schutz vernöten” - “Silver Bells, Magic Flute, are essential for your safety”). But, they ask, as the Three Ladies seem to be parting, how will we find our way to Sarastro’s realm? By following “Drei Knäbchen, jung, schön, hold und weise” (“Three boys, young, beautiful, graceful and wise”). And so they part, leaving Tamino and Papageno to their quest, led by the Three Boys.

Now the scene changes and we are in Sarastro’s realm, where we are introduced to Egyptian slaves and Monostatos, who has been assigned by Sarastro the task of guarding Pamina. She is brought in by the Slaves and Monostatos, who is in love with her, threatens her, but his evil plans are spoiled by the arrival of Papageno (N. 6, Terzetto in G major). The two of them, Monostatos and Papageno, one black, one bedecked in bird feathers, stare at each other as strange creatures (“the Devil”) and sing together “Das ist der Teufel sicherlich” (“This is surely the devil”). The Trio ends with each trying to scare the other. As we will see, they really are similar in many ways.

Pamina, left alone, asks her mother’s help, but she cannot protect her daughter. Instead, Papageno appears and after dialogue, during which Pamina learns of Tamino’s love for her, the bird-catcher admits that he, too, would like to marry. And so, they sing together of the joys of matrimony (“Mann und Weib, und Weib und Mann, reichen an die Gottheit an” - “Man and wife, wife and man, rise up to godliness”) in a stunning, very simple Duet, also in the tonic of the opera, E-flat major, “Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen” - “In people who feel love” (N. 7). The piece was a favorite of those who chose operatic excerpts for themes with variations, and even Beethoven set it as a theme and set of variations for cello and piano. It is also a piece in which the descending scale of “Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön” reappears for the first time, although perhaps in a less pronounced way than in the solo for flute that will come near the end of the opera.

Papageno and Pamina exit and the scene changes again. Now we are in front of three temples. In the middle is the Temple of Wisdom, on the sides two subsidiary temples, the Temple of Nature and the Temple of Reason (remember that Kant’s famous treatise on “Pure Reason” was published in 1781, ten years before Mozart produced *Die Zauberflöte*). The lengthy Finale of Act I begins here, in C major (N. 8), a key we have already seen in the Introduction of the first act. As with all such Finales, it consists of many parts. We are introduced first to Tamino and the Three Boys, who tell him that to succeed he (a Youth) must learn to be a Man, so that he can conquer like a man (“Dann Jüngling wirst du männlich siegen” - “Still you must, young one, win like a man”). To be a man he must obey three commands (“sei standhaft, duldsam, und verschwiegen” - “be firm, patient and be silent”). After the Three Boys have left, Tamino tries to enter the two side temples, using recitative, and is sent back each time. Then he comes to the middle temple, the Temple of Wisdom. There he is met by an elderly priest to whom he explains that he must enter in order to rescue his Pamina. But he will avoid Sarastro, who is an evil presence. How does he know this, asks the priest? From a woman, Tamino answers. But, says the priest, you must never trust a woman: “Ein Weib tut wenig, plaudert viel, du Jüngling glaubst dem Zungenspiel” (“A woman does little and chatters a lot. Do you, young man, believe this babble of words?”). Notice the priest still calls him a “Youth.” (These words are often not translated in today’s sex-equal world, just as Monostatos in America cannot be a black man, but rather a purple or green man, because we cannot say “weil ein Schwarzer hässlich ist” (“because a black man is ugly”). But when, Tamino asks, “can I see Pamina?” “Only,” answers

the priest, “when you have joined our holy community.” “And when will that be?” asks Tamino, to which the chorus responds, “soon or never” (“Bald, bald, Jüngling, oder nie”).

Hoping to have a response, he plays the magic flute, in C major, with a melody that calms the savage beasts that surround him, and he is answered by Papageno’s pipes. When Tamino exits momentarily, hoping to find Pamina, she and Papageno come in, fleeing Monostatos, “Schnelle Füße, rascher Mut” (“Quick feet and ready heart,” now in G major). Hoping to find Tamino they reveal their presence, but it is Monostatos who finds them first. To stop Monostatos and the slaves from putting her in chains again, Papageno plays his glockenspiel, and they are all so charmed by it (“Das klinget so herrlich, das klinget so schön - “It sounds so fine, it sounds so lovely”) that they forget their task and disappear.

An internal chorus, now in C major again (we know we are coming to the end of the Finale, now that the initial key has been regained), announces in festive tones the appearance of Sarastro. Although Pamina fears him, when he does appear (“Es lebe Sarastro, Sarastro soll leben” - “Long live Sarastro, may Sarastro live”), Pamina begs the ruler for her freedom, so she can rejoin her mother, but he rejects her plea, insisting that her mother is “ein stolzes Weib” - “a superb woman.” For a woman to be truly free, she must be guided by a man (“Ein Mann muß eure Herzen leiten” - “A man must guide your hearts”), but Tamino is not yet ready for the task. Monostatos enters anew, and Sarastro sentences him to have the soles of his feet whipped, yet he still separates Tamino and Pamina, since Tamino is not yet worthy of her. The chorus concludes in C major, praising his wisdom (“Wenn Tugend und Gerechtigkeit” - “When virtue and justice”).

In the second act, we follow the adventures of Tamino and Papageno, as the former seeks to be a “Man” worthy of his Pamina, while Papageno dreams only of finding a mate. We also learn the true nature of the Queen, which is much as Sarastro told us it would be in the Finale of the first act. Whereas the first act presents a relatively simple series of events, the second act is much more varied and one might even say not fully coherent, since the set must be changed again and again. The action begins with a meeting of the priests, who are ruled by Sarastro. A stately march in F major (N. 9) opens the act, as the priests take their places for the council. Sarastro assures them that Tamino is worthy of joining their fellowship, as the winds play several times the threefold chords that opened the Overture, now in B-flat major, a threefold series of chords long associated with Masonic rites. Sarastro sings his aria calling on the Egyptian gods (another element of Masonic ritual) in F major, “O Isis und Osiris,” praying the Gods to watch over the destined pair (N. 10). Sarastro is a low bass, who must descend several times during this aria to the low Fa_1 , which he must sing not only accurately, but beautifully.

The scene changes. It is night and we are on the outskirts of the Temple. Two priests accompany Tamino and Papageno and leave the pair alone. When Papageno expresses his fear, Tamino tells him to be a Man (“Sei ein Mann” - “Be a man”). The priests return, and Tamino tells them he is prepared to do everything to join them and earn Pamina’s hand. Both Tamino and Papageno will be permitted to see their beloveds, Pamina and Papagena, but they will not be allowed to speak with them. The priests sing a Duet in C major in which they warn both individuals about the falseness of women’s tongues (N. 11).

Immediately there is an opportunity to test their reactions for the Three Ladies appear and try to tempt Tamino and Papageno into breaking their vow of silence (N. 12, Quintet). Papageno falls readily, but Tamino refuses and urges his friend to be still. Realizing that they have been bettered, the Three Ladies sing of the approach of their Queen, and—in a simple melody—grant Tamino the highest of compliments, proclaiming him a Man who thinks before he speaks (“Von festem Geiste ist ein Mann, er denket was er sprechen kann” - “Strong of soul is the man who knows when he can speak”). The priests enter again to congratulate Tamino who has acted manly and to encourage Papageno, who has not.

Now again there is a change of scene, and we see Pamina, asleep, together with a contrite, yet love-born Monostatos. Although he has been punished by Sarastro for the way he has treated Pamina, he still only wants Pamina for himself. He sings a rather popular seeming ditty (N. 13) (nowhere does the affinity of Monostatos and Papageno appear more clearly) with the infamous line “weil ein Schwarzer hässlich ist,” assuring us that he wants only to kiss a beloved white woman, and that although he is black he has the same desires as all men have. The Queen of the Night appears amidst lightning and thunder. She has come to see Pamina, whom she tells that her father, now dead, had wanted her to adopt Sarastro and his wise men as councilors, but they have simply spirited Pamina away. The Queen thinks only of revenge. In her second coloratura aria of the opera (N. 14, “Der Hölle Rache,” in D minor/major), which also ascends to the Fa_5 , she sends her message clearly: Pamina must kill Sarastro with a dagger and return her mother to the power that was taken from her when her husband died. Then she departs, leaving her daughter to face the terrible truth about the mother whom until now she has loved.

Monostatos returns and woos Pamina, telling her that she can save herself only by loving him, but the maiden refuses. Sarastro then appears: he knows everything, and Monostatos, to advance his cause, must join forces with the Queen. Thus he disappears, leaving the stage so that Sarastro can sing his second, simple and strophic aria, “In diesen heil’gen Hallen” - “In these holy halls” (N. 15), where “Revenge” is

unknown, this one a half tone higher, in E major, and descending only to the *Fa* #₁, not to the *Fa*₁, as in his earlier solo, “O Isis und Osiris”: still his range is low, he must truly be a *basso profondo*.

There is another change of set. We are now in front of the doors that lead to the place where Tamino must face his final challenges. Two priests arrive with Tamino and Papageno and insist on their silence, but Papageno cannot be silenced: he will comment on the situation, even when an old woman comes up to him and tells him that she is intended for him. The Three Boys appear for the second time in Sarastro’s realm, bringing with them the magic instruments, the flute for Tamino and the glockenspiel for Papageno. They sing a Trio in A major (N. 16), in which they encourage Tamino to follow his path and ask Papageno to be “still.” They will appear again only when the trials are approaching their end.

Now it is Pamina’s time to appear, attracted by the sound of Tamino’s flute. But he will not speak to her, for he has been ordered to be silent. She takes his silence for a sign that he loves her no longer, and she sings a beautiful lament “Ach! Ich fühl’s” (“Ah! I feel it,” N. 17) in G minor. She can hope for deliverance from her pain only in death, and she exits mournfully, leaving Tamino and Papageno alone. Papageno continues chattering, but Tamino remains silent. When lions appear, he plays his magic flute and they go away. Trombones are heard announcing the imminent trials.

The chorus of priests (N. 18), in D major, again implores Isis and Osiris to defend Tamino in his hour of need. Soon he will be ready to join their fellowship. Sarastro brings in Pamina to say a last farewell to Tamino (N. 19), “Soll ich dich Teurer nicht mehr sehn” (“Should I, dearest, never see you again?”) in B-flat major, in a Trio in which the poor girl is still not allowed to share Tamino’s trials nor is he allowed to speak to her. As they sing what both of them take to be a final farewell (“Lebewohl”), Papageno also feels abandoned by Tamino and resolves to take his own life. But “what do you really want in the world,” asks a priest, and he responds with a charming little strophic aria in F major, accompanied by his magic glockenspiel, in which he says what he really wants is a woman (“Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen wünscht Papageno sich” - “A girl or a companion Papageno desires for himself,” N. 20). Responding to his prayer the old woman appears again, but after a brief dialogue she is transformed into a beautiful young maiden, dressed exactly as Papageno, his Papagena. But Papageno is not yet worthy of her, and a priest chases her away.

Now the many-sectioned Finale of Act II (N. 21), which again returns to the tonic of the opera, E-flat major, begins with the Three Boys, who here make their promised third appearance: finally the sun will appear and make earth a paradise. Pamina enters, contemplating suicide with the very dagger her mother gave her to kill Sarastro, but the Three Boys stop her hand and promise to unite her again with her Tamino.

We are now in front of the place where the trials will take place. It is guarded by two armed men, who sing a choral prelude in a very strict, contrapuntal style in C minor (“Der, welcher wandert diese Straße” - “Who travels this road”), and they warn any who attempt the trials that they must pass through the four elements, Fire, Water, Air, and Earth before reaching their goal. But Tamino insists that he does not fear death and will face the trials “like a Man.” Now Pamina reappears: they will face the trials together, a mature couple (not a pair of Youths). And the two armed men open the door so they can enter the proving ground. Tamino plays his magic flute in C major (and his melody is a variant of the opening “Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön”), as they pass unscathed through their trials, arm in arm with the magic flute as their guide, and when they have finished their trials they are greeted by the chorus from within the temple of Wisdom.

But what about poor Papageno? Having apparently lost his Papagena, he is inconsolable, and he too thinks that suicide is the answer. After waiting for a response from the Gods (or the audience) to his wish for help, Papageno decides to hang himself (“Gute Nacht, du falsche Welt!” - “Good night, false world!”). But at the very last moment, the Three Boys encourage him to play his glockenspiel to bring her to him. He does just that, in C major (“Klinget, Glöckschen, klinget, schafft mein Mädchen her” - “Ring, bells, ring! Bring my girl here!”), and when Papagena finally appears, they sing a delightful song in G major, proclaiming their happiness and thinking of all the children they will have.

We are heading back to the tonic, but before we get there, the sub-plot of the Queen of the Night, the Three Ladies, and Monostatos, who has thrown his lot in with the *Königin*, must be concluded. They approach the realm of Sarastro in C minor (“Nur stille! stille! stille! stille!” - “But hush, hush, hush, hush!”), hoping to conquer it. The Queen has promised Monostatos the hand of Pamina for his help, and they all sing her praises (she is the “große Königin der Nacht” - “Great Queen of the Night”). Instead, they are cast down into darkness. As Sarastro now pronounces (in the tonic, E-flat major), “Die Strahlen der Sonne vertreiben die Nacht.” The chorus thanks Isis for her protection and sings the final part of the second-act Finale (also in E-flat major), “Es siegte die Stärke” (“Firmness has won”) praising in particular Beauty and Wisdom, as Sarastro, along with Tamino and Pamina (now dressed in priests’ robes) bask, together, in the praise of the chorus.