

VICTORIAN
OPERA

MOZART'S
ABDUCTION

WRITTEN RESOURCE

Compiled & Created by Katherine Norman

Victorian Opera respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia.

We recognise their continuing connection to lands, waterways and communities through song, dance and storytelling.

We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their Elders past and present.

Always was, always will be.

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Victorian Opera believes passionately in life long learning. This resource is intended to provide further information to anyone wishing to know more. Designated Curriculum activities can be found in the Appendix A.

ABOUT US

Victorian Opera is the state opera company of Victoria. Your state company. We make creative, accessible and relevant work for everyone while acknowledging the traditions and evolving our artform.

Recognised for our unique contribution to the country's operatic landscape, Victorian Opera joined the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework in 2021. Alongside other companies, Victorian Opera holds its rightful position in the national performing arts arena.

Commitment to the development and presentation of new Australian opera and musical theatre is forefront to our mission. We identify relative and topical material, commission and workshop new scores and librettos, and ultimately produce new productions. Victorian Opera premieres at least one new Australian opera or music theatre work each year, and have commissioned 36 new works since the company's formation.

The next generation of talent is developed from the ground up through our Emerging Artists Programs – The Victorian Opera Youth Chorus Ensemble (VOYCE), our VO Emerges project and our Emerging Artists Opera Prize scholarship. Creating future pathways for artists, artisans and technicians has become a driving focus for our organisation. We employ hundreds of people across the creative industries, recruit some of the finest local and national singers, and collaborate with Australia's leading companies, venues and learning institutions.

We embrace the new normal and continue to perform in exceptional theatres and concert halls to give you the best and safest experience. Join us to experience the human voice, the indefinable power of music and storytelling at its finest.

And please, come as you are.



MEET THE CREATIVE TEAM



CHAD KELLY

Conductor



CONSTANTINE COSTI

Director & Reimagined Script



NATHAN BURMEISTER

Set & Costume Designer



MATILDA WOODROFFE

Set & Costume Designer



PAUL JACKSON

Lighting Designer



SHANNON BURNS

Movement Director

MEET THE CAST



CLEO LEE-MCGOWAN

Konstanze

A woman engaged to Belmonte



KYLE STEGALL

Belmonte

A man engaged to Konstanze



KATHERINE ALLEN

Blonde

A woman engaged to Pedrillo



DOUGLAS KELLY

Pedrillo

A man engaged to Blonde



LUKE STOKER

Osmin

Pasha's right-hand man



LYNDON WATTS

The Pasha

Reclusive and mysterious host

BRIEF HISTORY OF OPERA AND OPERA SINGING

Opera is a complex European art form that has been around since about 1600. It was very popular in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Today there are many styles of opera performance, but simply, an opera is a

play that is sung. Technically '*Abduction*' is a '*Singspiel*' which means sung play. This variation is noteworthy, as instead of '*Recitatives*' dialogue is actually spoken.

The countries in which European opera first developed are Italy, France, Germany

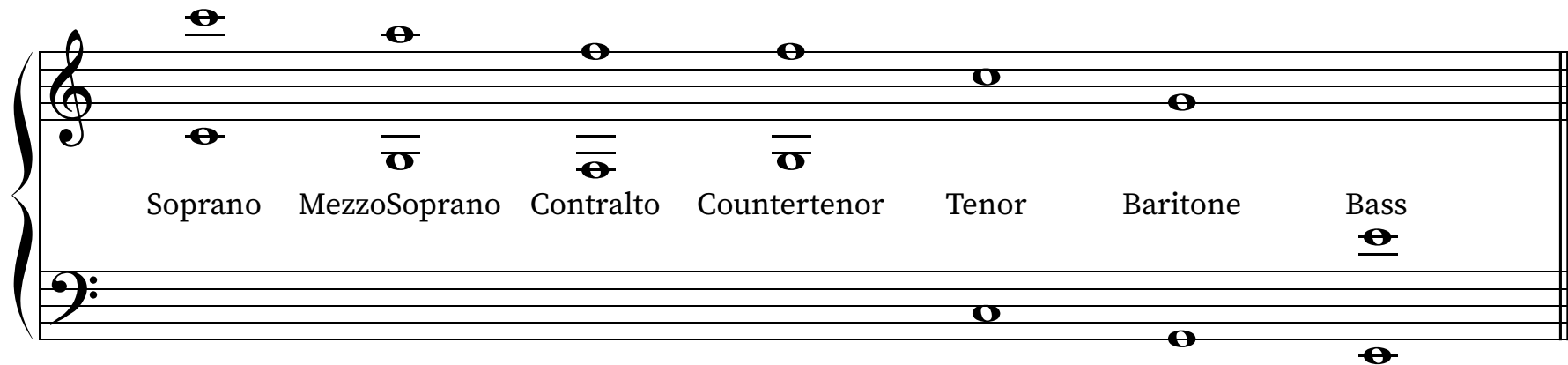
and England. Therefore the main four languages of European Opera are Italian, French, German and English. Other countries have become significant in the opera world since.

WHAT ARE THE COMMON VOICES AND VOICE TYPES IN OPERA?

There are seven types of voices in opera/music theatre. These are defined by the range of notes they can sing and a vocal quality. There are three female opera voices, although most operas only have soprano and mezzo soprano roles. There are four male voices although the countertenor voice is usually only used in Baroque operas.

- Soprano, the highest sounding female voice
- Mezzo-Soprano, the lower sounding female voice
- Contralto, the lowest sounding female voice, but not common in opera
- Countertenor, the highest sounding male voice
- Tenor, a high sounding male voice
- Baritone, the middle sounding male voice
- Bass, the lowest sounding male voice

VOICE TYPES AND RANGES



The composer will often choose voice types to highlight the different characters. There are further categories of voice defining the kind of voice quality and the type of music they can sing. A few of these are:

- **Coloratura** – a very high range with the ability to sing with agility, complicated parts
- **Dramatic** – a heavy sounding, powerful voice
- **Lyric** – an average sized voice with the ability to sing long beautiful phrases
- **Heldentenor** – this is often seen as the heroic tenor, a very big role that requires a powerful sound

Here are some examples of what these voices sound like.



Classical Female Voices – [youtube.com/watch?v=AIPFAww8X-U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIPFAww8X-U)



Classical Male Voices – [youtube.com/watch?v=gRL7shs23Wc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRL7shs23Wc)

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

VIENNA: THE EARLY YEARS (1782~1783)

Fresh from his triumphs in Munich, where he had mixed freely with noblemen, Mozart now found himself placed much further down the pecking order. His patron, the archbishop refused him permission to play at concerts (including one attended by the emperor at which Mozart could have earned half a year's salary in an evening). He was resentful and insulted. Matters came to a head at an interview with Archbishop Colloredo, who, according to Mozart, used unecclesiastical language; Mozart requested his discharge, which was eventually granted at a stormy meeting with the court [steward](#) on June 9, 1781.



[Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Die Entführung aus dem Serail \(The Abduction from the Seraglio\)](#) Konstanze's aria "Märtern aller Arten" from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*), K 384; from a 1946 recording featuring soprano Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and the Vienna Symphony Orchestra conducted by Josef Krips. [12 second snippet]

Mozart, who now went to live with his old friends the Webers, set about earning a living in [Vienna](#). Although eager for a court appointment, he for the moment was concerned to take on some pupils, to write [music](#) for publication, and to play in concerts (which in Vienna were more often in noblemen's houses than in public). He also embarked on an opera, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* ([The Abduction from the Seraglio](#)). ([Joseph II](#) currently required that German opera, rather than the traditional Italian, be given at the court theatre).

In the summer of 1781, rumours began to circulate, as far as [Salzburg](#), that Mozart was [contemplating](#) marriage with the third of the Weber daughters, Constanze; but he hotly denied them in a letter to his father: "I have never thought less of getting married...besides, I am not in love with her." He moved lodgings to scotch the gossip. But by December he was asking for his father's blessing on a marriage with Constanze, with whom he was now in love. Because Constanze later destroyed Leopold's letters, for reasons that are easy to imagine, only one side of the correspondence exists; Leopold's reactions can, however, be readily inferred, and it would seem that this period marked a low point in the relationship between father and son.

Musically, Mozart's main preoccupation was with *Die Entführung* in the early part of 1782. The opera, after various delays, reached the Burgtheater stage on July 16. The story of the emperor's saying "very many notes, my dear Mozart" may not be literally true, but the tale is symptomatic: the work does have far more notes than any other then in the German repertory, with fuller textures, more elaboration, and longer arias. Mozart's letters to his father give insight into his approach to dramatic [composition](#), explaining, for example, his use of accompanying figures and key relationships to embody meaning. He also had the original text substantially modified to strengthen its drama and allow better opportunities for music. Noteworthy features are the Turkish colouring, created by "exotic" turns of phrase and chromaticism's as well as [janissary](#) instruments (e.g. triangle, cymbals and bass drum); the extended Act 2 finale, along the lines of those in [opera buffa](#) but lacking the dramatic propulsion of the Italian type; the expressive and powerful arias for the heroine (coincidentally called Constanze).

Die Entführung enjoyed immediate and continuing success; it was quickly taken up by traveling and provincial companies — and carried Mozart's reputation widely around the German-speaking countries.

Source

www.britannica.com/biography/Wolfgang-Amadeus-Mozart/Mannheim-and-Paris



Image source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_compositions_by_Wolfgang_Amadeus_Mozart

THOMAS BAUMAN'S BOOK SUMMARY

EDUCATION MANAGER KATHERINE NORMAN

Die Entführung aus dem Serail / *The Abduction from the Seraglio* is one of Mozart's best documented operas. He'd just moved from Salzburg to Vienna and wrote many letters back to his father, Leopold.

A comprehensive book has been published for Cambridge Opera Handbooks by Thomas Bauman titled "*W.A. Mozart: Die Entführung aus dem Serail*" [ISBN 9780521310604 / 0521310601]. Here is a small precis of key elements from that text – if you'd prefer some extended, further reading, this book is recommended.

Here are some highlights:

KEY

LIBRETTO

LISTEN

MUSIC

HISTORY

QUOTE

DRAMA

DATE

ICON



KEY DATES




16 July 1782 - World premiere of *Abduction* at Burgtheater, Vienna





8 August 1782 - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart marries Constanze Weber


‘ORIGINAL LIBRETTO’

 ‘Original Libretto’: “The oriental harem was a popular subject for drama in the mid-eighteenth century. Gottlieb Stephanie’s libretto, *Bellmont und Konstanze oder die Entführung aus dem Serail*, was no original production. It derived immediately from a libretto of the same name written in 1780 by Christoph Friedrich Bretzner (1748 – 1807), a Leipzig merchant who was later to write an opera based on Hogarth’s cycle of paintings *The Rake’s Progress* (1787). Bretzner protested bitterly against Mozart’s pilfering of his work. But Bretzner himself had drawn considerably on earlier dramas, notably *La schiava liberata* (*The freed slave*), whose setting by Schuster he had seen at Leipzig in 1777, and the English libretto *The Sultan or A Peep into the Seraglio* by Isaac Bickerstaffe (1769) which Bretzner also knew. It is to this English work that we owe the idea of Blonde as a high-spirited and independent English servant enslaved in a Turkish harem. But plays (and comic operas) about Turks and harems and foreigners enslaved and rescued were rife in Europe at the time of the Turkish wars.” In short:

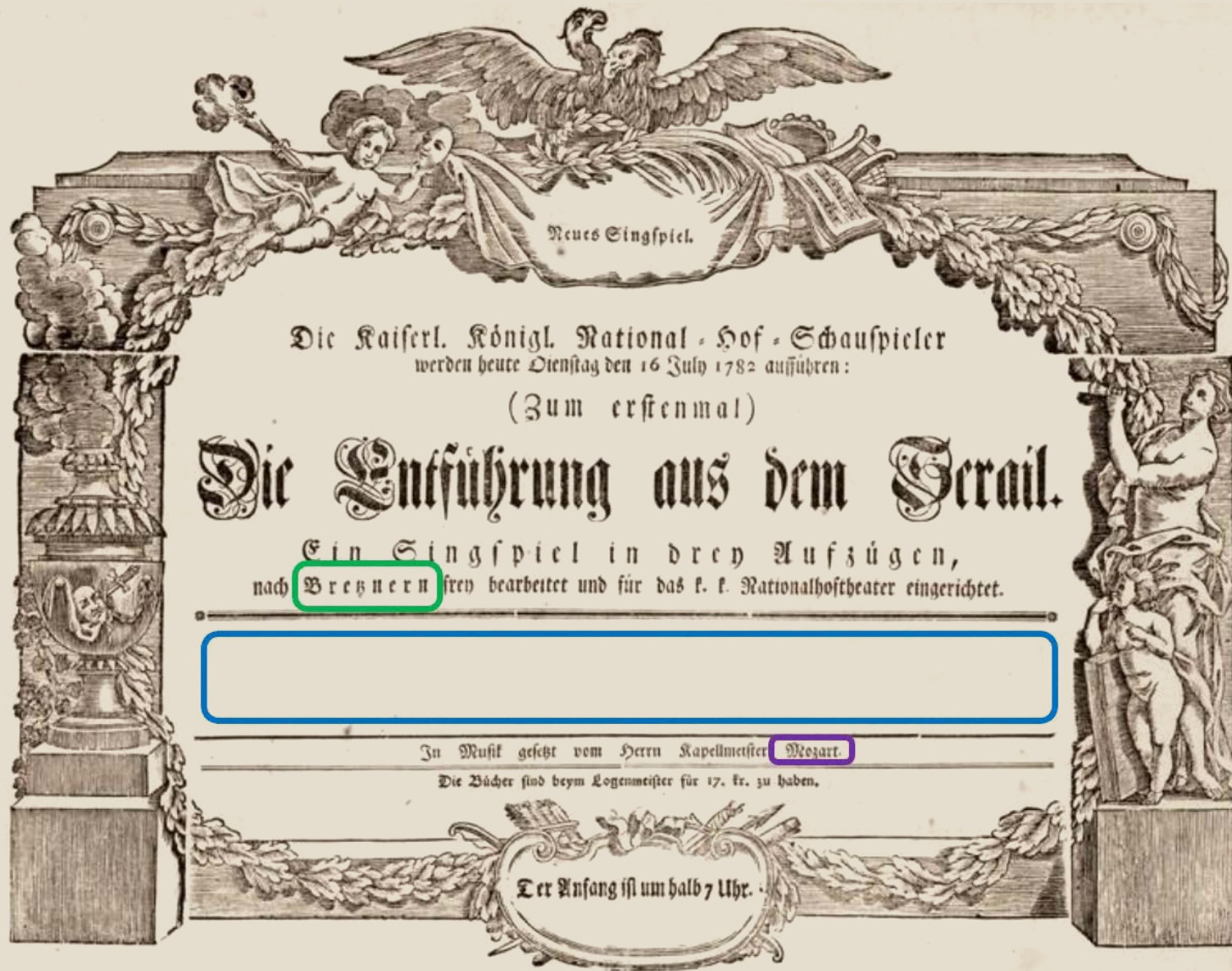
- 1768 Martinelli’s *La schiava liberata*
- 1769 Bickerstaffe’s *The Sultan or A Peep into the Seraglio*
- 1780 Bretzner’s *Bellmont und Konstanze oder die Entführung aus dem Serail*
- 1782 Stephanie’s *Bellmont und Konstanze oder die Entführung aus dem Serail*

 Plagiarism was fairly common and speaks to the distinct lack of German content/material. German Opera was still very much in its infancy. Sense of nationalism was important – the home-grown Vs Italian Opera

 The playbills went up for *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* on the day of its premiere 16 July 1782, but they provided Viennese theatre-goers with less than the usual information about the new production. An empty space stood where the casting normally appeared. Mozart’s name was included, albeit inconspicuously, but Stephanie’s was omitted entirely. Not so that of the fashionable Bretzner.

 Bretzner’s response was none too flattering. Reported quote from Bretzner in 1782 “ A certain man in Vienna by the name of Mozart has had the audacity to misuse my drama *Bellmont und Konstanze* as an opera text” . This speaks to how nascent Mozart was as a composer at the time / in 1782.

ORIGINAL PLAYBILL FOR *DIE ENTFÜHRUNG AUS DEM SERAIL*, BURGTHEATER VIENNA 16 JULY 1782





Librettist:
Brezner not Stephanie


Casting Section:
Completely blank

Mozart present,
but obscure



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

-  1783 – 100-year anniversary of 'The Battle of Vienna' (more info at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Vienna). Immense pride in Vienna at defeating the Turks
-  There was a general European fascination with 'The Oriental' at the time

MOZART'S AMBITION / AVANT GARDE / PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

-  Mozart was 25 and arrived in Vienna full of enthusiasm, delighted to have escaped the 'cultural backwater' of Salzburg. He was determined to make an impression and make his name
- ” In a letter to his father Leopold in March 1781, Mozart states:





“My main goal right now is to meet the Emperor (Joseph II) in some agreeable fashion, I am absolutely determined he should get to know me. I would be so happy if I could whip through my opera for him and then play a fugue or two, for that's what he likes”

-  'Compared with other German Opera's of its' day, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* set new standards of musical ambition'.
-  'Belmonte's (Tenor) part is revolutionary in one way. He is the first tenor heroic lover after the almost two-centuries-old unnatural monopoly of castrati, and pants roles (women singers dressed as men). This tenor part – which of course means not only a different register, but also a different personality as well! – was without precedent in operatic literature.

MOZART'S GENIUS

- ” Bauman states: “Nobody in the history of Opera, not even Verdi, has ever expressed grief so convincingly and affectionately in music as Mozart. But in the main, it is music which expresses as only music can, that sorrow which lies too deep for tears”
- ” Mozart: “I long to rush to my desk and I am always delighted to remain there” – Within 36 hours of receiving the libretto, Mozart had composed Belmonte’s Aria ‘O wie ängstlich’, Konstanze’s ‘Ach ich liebte’ and trio ‘Marsch! Marsch! Marsch!’. Within another week Act 1 was almost complete (except the opening aria and duet).

MOZART'S DEVELOPMENT / COMING OF AGE

-  The success of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, nearly everywhere was unprecedented for a German Opera from Vienna, and played a decisive role in the foundation of Mozart’s reputation beyond the imperial capital
-  *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* was Mozart’s most famous opera during his lifetime
-  *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* had 39 ‘First Performances’ during Mozart’s lifetime from 16 July 1782 to 7 January 1789
-  The Bonn National Theatre production of 22 June 1783 was most likely to be young Beethoven’s earliest experience of Mozart’s dramatic genius. Beethoven then spent several weeks in Vienna in 1787, hoping to study under Mozart. It’s unknown whether they ever met
- ” Carl Maria von Weber stated: “He saw in the *Entführung* not only a unique repository of Mozart’s youthful vigour, but also the watershed in the composer’s artistic coming of age and the basis for everything that followed in his later operatic masterpieces”
- ” “*Die Entführung aus dem Serail* – Suffused with youthful confidence in its creators maturing dramatic powers, this opera more than any other work carried Mozart’s name over the next decade to every corner of the German-speaking world. ”

– Contrast this to Bretzner’s response to hearing that a ‘Certain Mozart’ (implying unknown) had set an opera to his libretto


LIST OF FIRST PERFORMANCE OF *ENTFÜHRUNG AUS DEM SERAIL* DURING MOZART'S LIFETIME

Table 5 First performances of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* during Mozart's lifetime

Date	Place	Company
16 Jul 1782	Vienna (Burgtheater)	National Singspiel
autumn 1782	Prague	Karl Wahr
8 May 1783	Warsaw (in German)	Lubomirski
22 Jun 1783	Bonn	National Theatre (Grossmann)
2 Aug 1783	Frankfurt am Main	Grossmann
25 Sep 1783	Leipzig	Bondini
25 Nov 1783	Warsaw (in Polish)	National Theatre
18 Apr 1784	Mannheim	National Theatre
16 Oct 1784	Karlsruhe	Appelt
24 Oct 1784	Cologne	Grossmann
5 Nov 1784	Vienna (Kärntnerthor)	E. Shikaneder-H. Kumpf
17 Nov 1784	Salzburg	Johann Ludwig Schmidt
1784	Schwedt	Court Theatre
12 Jan 1785	Dresden	Bondini
1 Mar 1785	Riga	Court Theatre (Brandes)
1 Apr 1785	Munich	National Theatre
4 Apr 1785	Weimar	Bellomo
24 Apr 1785	Aachen	Johann Heinrich Böhm
26 May 1785	Kassel	Grossmann
13 Jun 1785	Pressburg	Count Erdödy
Jul 1785	Erlangen	Johann Ludwig Schmidt
1 Aug 1785	Nuremberg	Johann Ludwig Schmidt
19 Aug 1785	Augsburg	
25 Nov 1785	Vienna (Kärntnerthor)	German Court Opera
3 Dec 1785	Mainz	Grossmann
5 Jul 1786	Rostock	Johann Tilly
17 Jul 1786	Altona	Johann Tilly
summer 1786	Pyrmont	Johann Heinrich Böhm
12 Apr 1787	Hanover	Grossmann
18 Jun 1787	Hamburg	Friedrich Ludwig Schröder
24 Aug 1787	Breslau	Barbara Wäser
23 Nov 1787	Koblenz	Johann Heinrich Böhm
15 Jun 1788	Graz	Waizhofer
16 Oct 1788	Berlin	National Theatre
early 1788	Budapest	Heinrich Bulla
1788	Brunswick	Grossmann
1788	Hildesheim	Grossmann
1788	Königsberg	Schuch-Ackermann
7 Jan 1789	Lübeck	Grossmann

MOZART'S MUSIC

” It is far from being an easy opera to sing. In fact, it is extremely difficult, and in consequence it is not performed so often that we can get to know it as intimately as it deserves, or encounter sufficient opportunities to remind ourselves once having heard it, how really good it is.

 For nowhere in Mozart's entire output for the stage is there to be found quite the same charm, high spirits and spontaneous good humour that characterises *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*.

” The famous line from the Movie 'Amadeus': As portrayed – immediately after the world premiere performance of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* Joseph II said: “Too beautiful for our ears my dear Mozart, and monstrous too many notes”. In a wonderful insight into Mozart's genius, conviction and attitude, he responded: “Exactly as many are necessary Your Majesty”.

SPOTLIGHT ON MUSIC – ARIA AND HIGHLIGHTS

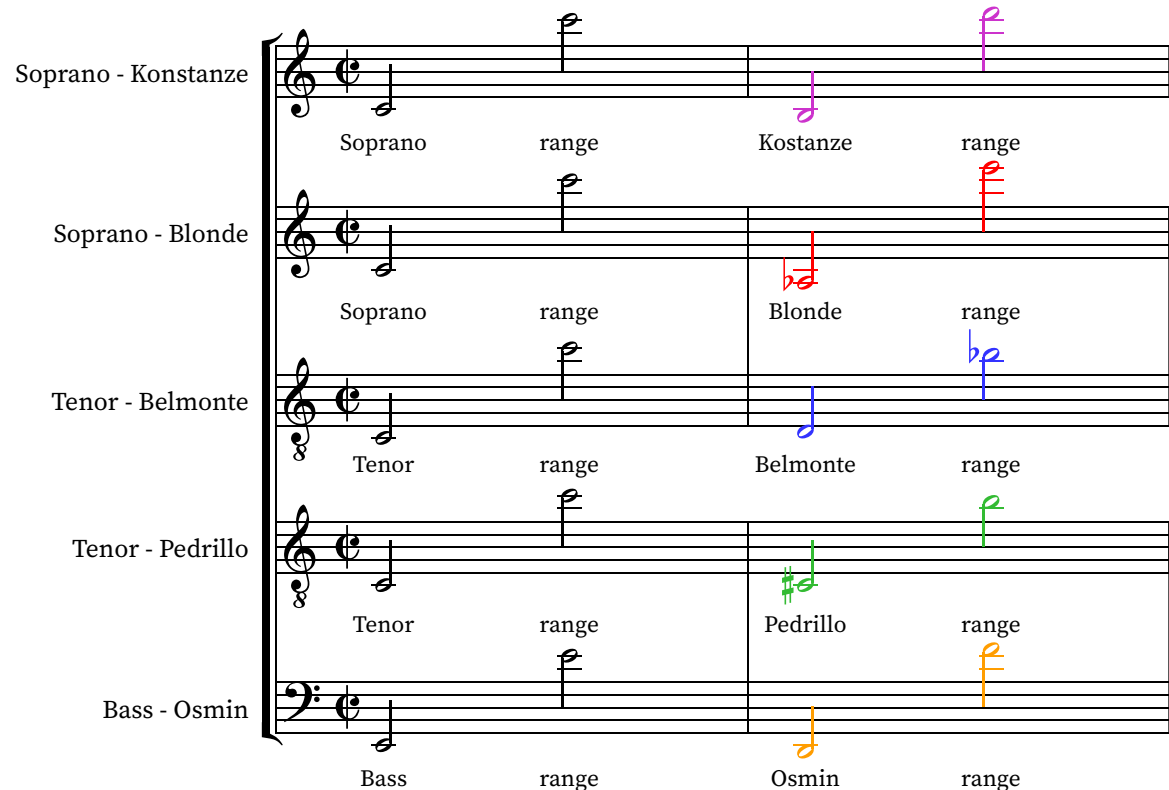
KATHERINE NORMAN

Abduction is an extremely difficult opera. We've described it as musical fireworks. Mozart was also exceptionally demanding on the singers, not only in their vocal ranges – which as demonstrated below exceed 'the standard range' (especially in Blonde's case – which stretches the range by a third in each direction), but also the 'vocal gymnastics' – long florid runs and exceptionally detailed 'ornamentation'.

Standard Vs Abduction Vocal Ranges

Standard Left | Abduction Right

Mozart



One of Mozart's geniuses, was in expertly integrating elements of 'Turkish' music, in such a beautiful way. Military music of the Janissary band, was characterised by 7 elements, which are well demonstrated in the Overture.

1. Repeated thirds in the melody, sometimes alternating with fifths
2. Escaped notes or upper thirds decorating a descending scales
3. Repeated notes in both the melody and especially the accompaniment
4. 2/4 metre
5. Long initial note values followed by quicker ones
6. Preference for harmonic relations of a third
7. Modal scalar inflections, most often raised a fourth (e.g. in C Maj, F -> F#)

Die Entführung aus dem Serail

Ouverture

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Klavierauszug: Eugen Epplée

Flauto piccolo
Oboi
Clarineti
Fagotti
Corni
Clarini
Timpani
Triangoli
Piatti
Tamburo grande
Archi

Presto

Archi *p*

5

9 *f* Tutti

13 Clar. VI. *p*

O WIE ÄNGSTLICH EXTRACT

Mozart was a prolific letter writer. The letter below is from Mozart to his father and concerns Mozart's composition process:

"Let me now turn to Belmonte's aria in A major, 'O wie ängstlich, o wie feurig'. Would you like to know how I have expressed it - and even indicated his throbbing heart? By the two violins playing in octaves. This is the favourite aria of all who have heard it, and it is mine also. I wrote it expressly to suit Adamberger's voice. You see the trembling, the faltering, you see how his throbbing breast begins to swell; this I have expressed by a crescendo. You hear the whispering and the sighing - which I have indicated by the first violins with mutes and a flute playing in unison."

The image shows a musical score for the aria 'O wie ängstlich, o wie feurig' from Mozart's opera 'Die Entführung aus dem Serail'. The score is for the first act, scene 1, and is in A major. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 8/8. The score is for the following instruments: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Bassoon (Fag.), Cor Anglais (in La), Violin I (V. I.), Violin II (V. II.), Viola (Va.), Belmonte (Belm.), and Violoncello and Bass (Vc. e B.). The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 70 and 8 indicated. The Flute part has a dynamic marking of 'p' (piano) and a crescendo. The Violin I and II parts play in octaves, with a dynamic marking of 'pp' (pianissimo) and a crescendo. The Viola part has a dynamic marking of 'p' and a crescendo. The Belmonte part has a dynamic marking of 'p' and a crescendo. The Violoncello and Bass part has a dynamic marking of 'p' and a crescendo. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Martern aller arten – Perhaps the most famous aria in the opera is the long and elaborate “Martern aller Arten” (“Tortures of all kinds”) for Konstanze, an outstanding challenge for sopranos. Konstanze sings in a kind of [sinfonia concertante](#) with four solo players from the orchestra; the strikingly long orchestral introduction.

Soprano Cleo Lee- McGowan who plays Konstanze describes this aria as: “It’s like trying to do cartwheels & run a marathon at the same time”

Emotional Depth: Despite its technical difficulty, the aria is not just a display of vocal prowess. It conveys Konstanze’s inner strength, her unwavering loyalty, and her willingness to endure any torment rather than betray her love and honour.

The aria is considered one of Mozart’s most famous and challenging soprano arias, and it remains a favourite among singers and audiences alike. It is frequently performed and recorded, showcasing the brilliance of Mozart’s vocal writing and the virtuosity of the soprano.

GERMAN

Martern aller Arten
Mögen meiner warten,
Ich verlache Qual und Pein.
Nichts soll mich erschüttern,
Nur dann würd’ ich zittern,
Wenn ich untreu könnte seyn.

Lass dich bewegen,
Verschone mich!
Des Himmels Segen
Belohne dich!

Doch du bist entschlossen.
Willig, unverdrossen
Wähl’ ich jede Pein und Noth.
Ordne nur, gebiethe,
Lärme, tobe, wüthe,
Zuletzt befreyt mich doch der Tod.

ENGLISH

Tortures of every kind
May await me,
I scorn agony and pain.
Nothing will shake me,
Only one thing might make me tremble:
If I were to be unfaithful.

I implore you,
Spare me!
The blessings of heaven
Shall be your reward.

But you are determined.
Willingly, unflinchingly
I choose every pain and grief.
Well then, command, coerce me,
Roar, fulminate, rage,
Death will liberate me in the end.

- Observe the florid / very quick semiquaver runs and very high range in the 'Konst.' excerpt below:

The musical score consists of seven staves. The first two staves are for solo instruments: *V. solo* (Violin) and *Vc. solo* (Viola). The next three staves are for a string quartet: *V. I* (Violin I), *V. II* (Violin II), and *Va.* (Viola). The sixth staff is for the vocal soloist, *Konst.*, and the seventh staff is for the string ensemble, *Vc. e B.* (Violoncello and Bass). The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The vocal line begins with the lyrics "mich doch der Tod,". The string parts include dynamic markings of *crescendo* and *f* (forte). The solo instruments also feature *f* markings. The vocal line is characterized by rapid semiquaver runs, particularly in the first half of the excerpt.

SYNOPSIS

Director Constantine Costi has been tasked with modernising this production and has elected to set it in the present day.

Konstanze and Blonde, two women engaged to be married, arrive at the mansion of a mysterious figure known only as The Pasha. They've heard rumours of wild parties inside and long for a night of freedom from their day-to-day routine. Their fiancés, Belmonte and Pedrillo, follow them in secret, concerned for their safety and confused by their sudden distance.

Inside the mansion, Konstanze and Blonde are swept into a world unlike any they've known: decadent, strange and alluring. The Pasha takes a special interest in Konstanze, urging her to question the life she has committed to. Meanwhile, Blonde flirts with and confounds Osmin, the Pasha's controlling right-hand man. Belmonte and Pedrillo attempt to rescue Konstanze and Blonde, but they are quickly overpowered.

When, finally, Belmonte and Pedrillo reunite with their fiancés, their assumptions about love and control are turned on their heads. They confront the possibility that the women may not want to leave.

In the final act, the couples face an emotional reckoning, where past misunderstandings, insecurities and betrayals surface. Konstanze and Blonde choose their own paths, not out of obligation, but clarity. When The Pasha chooses mercy over revenge for the intruders, all four characters must decide what freedom means to them and whether love can survive change.

The opera ends with a tentative reconciliation, and the two couples decide to return to the world of The Pasha.

MORE ON THIS OPERA

DIRECTOR CONSTANTINE COSTI

At the time of writing *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*), Mozart was no longer a child prodigy. His wunderkind years of travelling across Europe in a dizzying whirlwind, playing for royalty and aristocracy, were long gone. At 25 years old, he arrived from the artistic backwater of Salzburg in Vienna after years of limbo and creative stagnation. He had to make his name as a mature composer of repute.

Vienna was under the reign of Joseph II, Holy Roman Emperor. A radical Enlightenment reformer, Joseph II was on a mission to create a nationalistic German-language opera form called *Singspiel*. This new form was a combination of unaccompanied spoken text and opera sung in German (as opposed to the standard Italian).

The traditions of *opera seria* (serious and dramatic opera) and *opera buffa* (comedic opera) dominated the European landscape. Both were mostly sung in Italian and conformed to a strict set of formalistic rules and genre conventions.

A letter from Mozart to his father Leopold at the time reads: "Should I write an *opera buffa* in the same style as an *opera seria*?"

In his letters, Mozart quickly began to express a desire to compose opera in what he called a *mezzo carattere* (middle character style). This was new — something between comic and serious, blurring the boundaries between *seria* and *buffa*. Today, we might call this a dark comedy or a dramedy.

In Vienna, Mozart was presented with a libretto that captivated him. It was taken from a play initially entitled *Belmont und Konstanze oder die Verführung aus dem Serail* (*Belmont and Konstanze, or the Seduction from the Seraglio*). The initial idea of seduction, sexual predicament and the dangerous allure of the taboo was not lost in the DNA of the project, even as it was renamed *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*).

MORE ON THIS OPERA

(CONTINUED)

DIRECTOR CONSTANTINE COSTI

The exotic setting of a harem played into the current Viennese obsession with all-things Turkish — fashion, military uniforms and music were all in vogue. Not to mention the upcoming 100th anniversary of the defeat of the Ottomans outside Vienna in 1683.

Mozart worked with the finest singers available to ensure the necessary vocal fireworks. The premiere was a complete smash hit, despite interruptions from cabals paid by rival composers to heckle and cause a general ruckus. It was such a success that subsequent composers writing *Singspiel* could not achieve anywhere near the popularity or success of *Die Entführung*.

The public grew weary of *Singspiel* that could not reach the heights of Mozart's compositional prowess. Soon Italian opera was back in demand in Vienna. Despite the creative heights of the Da Ponte trilogy and *The Magic Flute*, none of these operas would be as popularly received as *Die Entführung*.

At its heart, it is a sex comedy. This wasn't unusual or radical within most *opera buffa* — but it was Mozart's ability to compose rich and full characters and to examine what torn sexual desires can do to an individual that makes this a

compelling psychological study. Yet, this maturity is always offset by his cheekiness, sex-obsessed letter writing, and irreverent in-jokes both on and off the stage.

His idea of *mezzo carattere* can be most felt in the fact that much of the sad music in *Abduction* is in major keys — perhaps this adds a touch of brightness to the sorrow. Despite its darkness and threats of violence, this is, after all, a comedy — no one is going to die, and the lovers will win the day.

Abduction also begins a trend that will continue throughout Mozart's remaining operas: the canny and complicated heroine.

Both Blonde and Konstanze are strong, sharp and wise in the ways of men. The moral quandary of Konstanze (*Do I actually enjoy the world of Pasha?*) is a deliciously complicated quandary with no clear answers. She grapples with her dilemma with all the longing, rage and tumultuousness that opera does best.

Constantine Costi,
Director of Victorian Opera's *Abduction*

Compiled by Anthea Batsakis

Source:

www.victorianopera.com.au/abduction-how-mozarts-pioneering-sex-comedy-altered-opera-history/

IN DEPTH MUSICAL ANALYSIS

CONDUCTOR CHAD KELLY

Conductor Chad Kelly delves into the music's complexity and "vocal fireworks" that were tailor-made for only the most talented singers.

Let me now turn to Belmonte's aria [...] Would you like to know how I have expressed it – and even indicated his throbbing heart? By the two violins playing in octaves. This is the favourite aria of all who have heard it, and it is mine also.

I wrote it expressly to suit Adamberger's voice. You see the trembling, the faltering, you see how his throbbing breast begins to swell; this I have expressed by a crescendo. You hear the whispering and the sighing – which I have indicated by the first violins with mutes and a flute playing in unison.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart penned these words to his father, revealing careful details in composing his dark comedy, *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. The opera premiered in the summer of 1782 in Vienna's Burgtheater, captivating an audience of powdered-wig aristocracy with its nimble score.

As this fragment of Mozart's letter lays out, he composed the music with specific singers in mind. And he certainly gave them a challenge: for example, a character must plunge to one of the lowest notes written in opera, others rise rapidly to soaring high notes, and all must articulate an early form of patter (rapidly sung script).

Chad Kelly is the Conductor for Victorian Opera's take on the opera, *Abduction*. He says Mozart packed his arias with "vocal fireworks" to platform the mind-blowing extremes of the singers' agility.

"Who was Mozart writing for and who was he collaborating with? In the case of *Entführung* [*Abduction*], we know there was a stellar cast of people Mozart knew, including his friends. And he wrote this music bespoke for these characters in his life," Chad says.

One particularly difficult role to cast is Osmin, the henchman of Pasha Selim, Chad explains. Mozart wrote this role specifically for a renowned German singer, Ludwig Fischer.

"Ludwig Fischer reportedly had this ridiculous, almost superhuman range, almost like he has three voices in one. We're blessed to have Luke Stoker, an Australian singer who's returned from working in Germany, to sing this role."



Mozart's manuscript of the beginning of the overture for *The Abduction from the Seraglio*
Photo: Wikimedia

So how might audiences react to such complex music? Chad says that unlike *Idomeneo* – Mozart's cerebral, high-brow opera written a year earlier – *The Abduction from the Seraglio* is immediately engaging and, like fireworks, a pleasure to behold.

"Even though Entführung is very difficult to sing, it's not actually complex in the way *Idomeneo* is. It's quite direct and accessible, and in a weird way it's quite simple," Chad says. "You can have simple music with extreme virtuosity."

Our version of *Abduction* has taken creative liberties with the original libretto (script) and structure.

Under the leadership of Director Constantine Costi, we've swapped a Seraglio for a lavish, velvet-draped club – think *The Great Gatsby* meets *Rocky Horror*. Throw in thigh-high boots and sexually frustrated heroes, and our *Abduction* is a boldly unique staging for a 21st century audience.

"The story we're telling is very much the one we want to tell, rather than us trying to transport a story from 200 years ago to today's audience".

Yet, Chad's approach to Mozart's music is steadfastly true to its history. He contemplates every note, beat and bar, every shape of musical phrase, to ensure it's as close to an 18th century performance as possible.

"Whenever you're performing music of the 18th century, I believe it's imperative to engage with the way people would have played back then. It's a style of playing which is different to the way most orchestra's play Mozart. It sounds different, it feels different to what you hear today."

In the past 250 years, the way we interpret orchestral scores has changed. For example, when an 18th century musician would read a slur (notes played without breaks) on a musical score, it usually implied a diminuendo (softening of sound). A 21st century musician reading the same music today might well do the opposite, Chad says.

"If you play on the page, it's not enough, you have to play with all the awareness of back then. There's a lot that's implied and not written. "My mission will be to bring that out."

Compiled by **Anthea Batsakis**

Source

www.victorianopera.com.au/abduction-mozarts-opera-was-made-for-superhuman-voices/

DESIGN ELEMENTS



CONCEPT: PASHA ENTRANCE



CONCEPT: OSMINS' POSSE



CONCEPT: PASHA'S POSSE

With leather chaps, gold braids, cowboy hats, thigh-high boots and velvet for days, the design for *Abduction*, our adaptation of Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, is a masterpiece in its own right.

Set and costume designers [Matilda Woodroffe](#) and [Nathan Burmeister](#) reveal the iconic pop culture moments, fashion runways and artists who inspired them. They describe navigating the challenges unique to opera, compared to other theatrical works.

Nathan's favourite costume, for instance, is the lead henchman Osmin: "a sexually ambiguous, highly flirtatious cowboy MC with a homoerotic fashion sense".

Where did you seek inspiration for the *Abduction* designs?

Matilda and Nathan: From a very early stage, director Constantine Costi welcomed and encouraged a lot of dialogue regarding what direction to take the show. After reading the script and listening to the music, we agreed it was crucial to update the show with a contemporary and progressive lens.

We spoke a lot about the power structures within the different groups and pairings of characters, and how changing the leaders and hierarchy affected the design.

We discussed the allure and seduction of cults and cult leaders, bouncing around references such as *Midsommer* and *Once Upon A Time In Hollywood*. We spoke about the maximalism and overtness of movies like *Saltburn* and *Mulholland Drive*. The classical painting [The Garden of Earthly Delight](#) by Hieronymus Bosch brought in a classical grandeur and deeply absurd reference point.

There are also pop culture references in the design's textural qualities and stylings. These have come from Lady Gaga's *Mayhem Ball*, as well as a very silly, while exceedingly impressive, costume maker/personality/artist called Greedy Peasant – a self-described "Queer Medieval Fever Dream".

We have always talked about incorporating design elements of glitzy, old-school Hollywood glamour with a fun, frivolous camp quality, but mixed with dark and dangerous undertones that's equally enticing and thrilling.

What do you hope people will take away or remember about the designs for *Abduction*?

Matilda and Nathan: We hope they remember the fun, the grandeur, the lusciousness, and the excitement of it. We hope they either get to see themselves reflected on stage or perhaps see an exciting world they might not usually think about.

What are some challenges you've faced in opera set design, and how did you overcome them?

Matilda and Nathan: A unique challenge in set designing for an opera is, well, the opera of it all. The performers are typically singing unassisted (without microphones) over a full orchestra, and this is a substantial acoustic consideration. There really aren't many perfectly acoustic venues set up around the world, and when you add a large, over-the-top set and structure around the performers, it makes it harder again.

The sound needs to be able to bounce and resonate into the audience. The performers need to be able to hear the orchestra and hear themselves, and it all needs to balance and sit comfortably in the audience.

We have used a couple of tricks within the set design to assist this acoustic challenge. For example, even though we have lush, floor-to-ceiling curtains, which absorbs sound, we have placed solid walls behind them to help the sound bounce back into the auditorium.

What advice would you give budding designers looking to enter Australia's theatre industry?

Matilda: It's been a real delight getting to work with Nathan on this show and it's a collaboration that has come about from sharing advice as younger, up-and-coming designers.

So, my advice is to be open and to ask for help and advice when you need it. Make as many connections with other designers, directors, writers – anyone in the industry – as possible. It's nice to be able to share collective knowledge. Someone has always faced a similar problem before, or has some great advice drawn from their own experience.

Designing can be quite a solitary job with a lot of time spent by yourself and with your own ideas. It's lovely to have someone to bounce off of, and to build on your ideas.

Compiled by **Anthea Batsakis**

Source

www.victorianopera.com.au/from-lady-gaga-to-saltburn-the-inspirations-behind-abductions-designs/

GLOSSARY

Cabal – A **cabal** is a group of people who are united in some close design, usually to promote their private views or interests in an ideology, a [state](#), or another community, often by [intrigue](#) and usually without the knowledge of those who are outside their group. The use of this term usually carries negative connotations of political purpose, [conspiracy](#) and [secrecy](#).^{[1][2]}

Castrati – A **castrato** (Italian; pl.: **castrati**) is a male singer who underwent [castration](#) before [puberty](#) in order to retain a [singing voice](#) equivalent to that of a [soprano](#), [mezzo-soprano](#), or [contralto](#).

Coloratura – **Coloratura** (lit. 'material that has been coloured')^[1] is [a passage of music](#) where the melody has been altered to contain flourishes, such as: [runs](#), [trills](#), wide [leaps](#) or other [virtuoso](#) material.^{[1][2]} This typically obscures the melody within the passage. The term is mostly used in vocal music; in instrumental music such passages are called [ornamentation](#).

Janissary – A **janissary** (lit. 'new soldier') was a member of the elite [infantry](#) units that formed the [Ottoman sultan](#)'s household troops. They were the first modern [standing army](#), and perhaps the first infantry force in the world to be equipped with [firearms](#), adopted during the reign of [Murad II](#) (r. 1421–1444, 1446–1451)

Juxtaposition – Juxtaposition is an act or instance of placing two opposing elements close together or side by side. This is often done in order to [compare](#)/contrast the two, to show similarities or differences, etc.

Pants role – In [opera](#), a breeches role refers to any male character that is sung and acted by a female singer. Most often the character is an adolescent or a very young man, sung by a [mezzo-soprano](#) or [contralto](#).^[1] The operatic concept assumes that the character is male, and the audience accepts him as such, even knowing that the actor is not.

Recitative – **Recitative** is a style of delivery (much used in [operas](#), [oratorios](#), and [cantatas](#)) in which a singer is allowed to adopt the rhythms and delivery of ordinary speech. It resembles sung ordinary speech more than a formal musical composition.

Singspiel – A **Singspiel** or 'sing-play' is a form of German-language music drama, now regarded as a genre of [opera](#). It is characterized by spoken [dialogue](#), which is alternated with [songs](#), and [arias](#) which were often [strophic](#), or folk-like.

APPENDIX A:

EDUCATION ACTIVITIES / CURRICULUM LINKAGES

Episode 1 – Activities

- [Opera is timeless](#) – What themes are important to you – what story would you choose to tell and why?
- [Intercultural Capability](#) - Juxtaposition – Stuart Maunder (Artistic Director of Victorian Opera) discussed the rationale for programming [Mozart's Abduction](#) alongside [Janáček's Katya Kabanova](#) – such a diversity of perspective and offering is important – why? Consider how diverse cultures, influence one another in a range of context and how this impacts identity and a sense of belonging and inclusion [VC2CI10CO1]
- [Critical & Creative Thinking Capability](#): Reflect on movie/TV show/play you didn't like and why? Consider the importance of critical analysis of thinking processes and consider factors such as cognitive biases [VC2CC10M02]

Episode 2 – Activities

- Opera has been described as the world's greatest art form – reflect on the benefits and necessities of collaboration in such a complex artform
- Modernisation is a key theme in this production of Abduction. Some great examples include: *Clueless (Emma)*, *West Side Story (Romeo & Juliet)*, *10 Things I Hate About You (The Taming of the Shrew)*
 - Pick a favourite story / play / movie / TV Show of your own.
 - How would you modernise it?
- [Drama](#) – Investigate ways in which elements of drama and conventions of theatres styles are used to communicate ideas, perspectives and meaning in drama that is created and performed across contexts and cultures [VC2ADR8E01]

[Critical & Creative Thinking Capability](#): Consider strategies for generating new ideas and possibilities including identifying links and patterns across multiple information sources and perspectives [VC2CC10Q03]

APPENDIX A (CONTINUED):

EDUCATION ACTIVITIES / [CURRICULUM LINKAGES](#)

Episode 3 – Activities

- [Design](#) – Either redesign the Playbill / hero art for this modern re-take on Abduction or design a costume. Experiment with visual conventions, visual arts processes and materials to develop and refine skills and personal expression to create artworks that communicate ideas, perspectives and meaning [VCAVA10D01]
- [Drama](#) – How would you apply design areas to both devised and scripted works to enhance meaning for an intended audience [VC2ADR10C02]

Episode 4 – Activities

- [German](#) – Review the text & translation for Martern aller Arten – How does this convey Konstanze's emotion state? Interpret this information and respond appropriately to context, purpose and audience [VCA2LG8C03]
- [Personal & Social Capability](#): Analyse Konstanze's emotional state and complexity – consider its causes and consequences [VC2CP8S01]
- [Music](#) – Review Belmonte's aria *O wie ängstlich* – listen to the aria and consider the style applied to both the Tenor and instrumental parts and to communicate expressive effects [VC2MU10D01]

APPENDIX B:

BEHIND THE SCENES / REHEARSAL FOOTAGE



APPENDIX B (CONTINUED):

BEHIND THE SCENES / REHEARSAL FOOTAGE



REFERENCES/FURTHER READING:

Britannica : <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Wolfgang-Amadeus-Mozart/Mannheim-and-Paris>

Cambridge Opera Handbooks by Thomas Bauman titled "W.A. Mozart: Die Entführung aus dem Serail" [ISBN 9780521310604 / 0521310601]

San Francisco Opera: <https://www.sfopera.com/learn/about-opera/a-timeline-of-opera-history/>

Scottish Chamber Orchestra: <https://www.sco.org.uk/news/janissary-music>

Victorian Opera Behind the Scenes: <https://www.victorianopera.com.au/behind-the-scenes/>

Wikipedia: Die Entführung aus dem Serail

[https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die_Entf%C3%BChrung_aus_dem_Serail#:~:text=Die%20Entf%C3%BChrung%20aus%20dem%20Serail%20\(in%20English%3A%20The%20Abduction%20from,Flute%20is%20also%20a%20Singspiel.](https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die_Entf%C3%BChrung_aus_dem_Serail#:~:text=Die%20Entf%C3%BChrung%20aus%20dem%20Serail%20(in%20English%3A%20The%20Abduction%20from,Flute%20is%20also%20a%20Singspiel.)

YouTube: as referenced throughout

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