

Background Notes for

A Night at the Opera:

Bastien and Bastienne by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Librettist: Friedrich Wilhelm Weiskern with possible contributions from Johann H.F. Müller and Johann Andreas Schachtner

Parody: Harny de Guerville and Charles-Simon Favart/Marie-Justine-Benoîte Favart (Les Amours de Bastien et Bastienne, 1753)

Dramatist: Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Le Devin du Village, 1752)

The Old Maid and the Thief by Gian Carlo Menotti

Co-produced by the Aberdeen Area Arts Council

About NSU's Production

The cast for NSU's production of *Bastien and Bastienne* will feature Rory K. Behrens as Bastien, Lexi Grote as Bastienne and Zered Felt as Colas the Magician. Understudies for this opera are Steve Warzaha, Bob Pore and Teresa Witteman. The cast for NSU's production of *The Old Maid and the Thief* will feature Amanda Schuldt as the maid Laetitia, Leslie Stusiak as the old maid of the title, Miss Todd, Angel Harmon as the nosy neighbor, Miss Pinkerton and faculty member Robert Glaubitz as Bob, the object of the women's interest. Understudies for this opera are Kellyanne Kirkland and Helen Biggs. The evening will be musically directed and conducted by Alexander Fokkens, NSU Orchestra Director. NSU Director of Theatre, Daniel Yurgaitis, stages the operas, while NSU Technical Director Larry Wild will do the scenic and lighting design.

A Night at the Opera will be presented for one performance, on April 24th at 7:30 pm on the mainstage of the Johnson Fine Arts Center on the campus of NSU. Tickets are \$10.00, \$9.00 for students, seniors and Aberdeen Area Arts Council members. There are group rates available for groups of 10 or more. All seats are reserved and tickets will be available in the NSU

bookstore beginning on Monday, April 11th, or by mail. Call the NSU Bookstore at 626- 2655 or the NSU Department of Theatre at 626- 2563 for additional information.

About Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (born Salzburg, 27 January 1756; died Vienna, 5 December 1791) is considered one of the best, if not the best, classical composer. By the age of three Mozart was playing the piano like a pro. He then started learning the harpsichord and violin. By four he was writing his own music. Mozart even put on a concert when he was just six. Just like breathing, music obviously came naturally to him.

Wolfgang was educated by his father Leopold Mozart, who was concertmaster in the court orchestra of the archbishop of Salzburg and a celebrated violinist, composer, and author. By the age of six, Mozart had become an accomplished performer on the clavier, violin, and organ and was highly skilled in sight-reading and improvisation. Five short piano pieces composed by Mozart when he was six years old are still frequently played.

As a child Mozart toured Europe for three years with his dad and his sister, both talented musicians. He played for the rich, for royalty and for the public. Mozart's audience loved his blond curls, his shrill voice and his polite ways. As a teenager he mastered the piano and completed his first opera, *La finta semplice* (The Simple Pretense.) Mozart played all over Europe but often

returned to his hometown of Salzburg, in Austria. As a young adult he began touring again but he was no longer a child wonder. Mozart still had talent and continued to write great music, which he played, for small audiences. He also began teaching to make ends meet. As a composer Mozart made very little money and wrote many letters to publishers, friends and even acquaintances for small loans.

At the age of 14 Mozart was commissioned to write a serious opera, this work *Mitridate rè ponto* produced under his direction at Milan completely established an already phenomenal reputation. Rejection by Weber, the neglect he suffered from the aristocrats whom he courted, made the two years from Mozart's arrival in Paris, until his return to Salzburg in 1779 one of the most difficult periods in his life. The success of Mozart's Italian opera seria *I domeneo rè di Creta* commissioned and composed in 1781, prompted the archbishop of Salzburg to invite Mozart to his palace at Vienna, a series of court intrigues and his exploitation at the hands of the court soon forced Mozart to leave. In a house in Vienna rented for him by friends, he hoped to sustain himself by teaching.

In 1782 Mozart married Constanze Weber, unfortunately unending poverty and illness persistently troubled the family until Mozart's death. *Le Nozze di Figaro* - 1786 and *Don Giovanni* - 1787, with libretti by Lorenzo Da Ponte - see picture at left, while successful in Prague, were partial failures in Vienna. From 1787 until the production of *Così fan tutte* - 1790 again with a libretto by Da Ponte, Mozart received no commissions for operas. For the coronation of Emperor Leopold II in 1791 he wrote the opera seria, *La clemenza di Tito* - 1791 with the libretto by Metastasio.

It wasn't long before his wife became ill from not eating properly. Mozart also became sick. He didn't stop writing music though. One day Mozart was found at his desk unconscious. He was taken to bed but Mozart knew he was dying. He gave one of his students precise details about how his last work, *Requiem*, was to be completed. Shortly before his last breath, Mozart tried to sing parts of his last work. On December 5, 1791, Mozart said goodbye to his family, turned to face the wall and passed away. Mozart probably died of rheumatic fever, not poisoning like some people speculate.

Mozart's body was thrown into a pauper's grave in the churchyard of St. Mark in Vienna. When his wife, Constanze, returned with flowers a week later, she couldn't find his grave. Because Mozart died a poor man, his grave

had been unmarked and his body unidentified.

The Operas of Mozart

Apollo et Hyacinthus - 1767.
Bastien und Bastienne - 1768.
La Finta Semplice - 1768.
Mitridate rè di Ponto - 1770. Opera buffa produced under his direction at Milan completely established an already phenomenal reputation.
Ascanio in Alba - 1771.
Lucio Silla - 1772.
Il Sogno di Scipione - 1772.
La Finta Giardiniera - 1775.
Il re Pastore - 1775.
Idomeneo Rè di Creta - 1781. Italian opera seria, a success.
The Abduction from the Seraglio - 1782. A singspiel which was requested by Emperor Joseph II.
Die entführung aus dem serail - 1782.
L'oca del Cairo - 1783.
Lo Sposo Deluso - 1783.
Der schauspiel direktor - 1786.
Le Nozze di Figaro - 1786
Don Giovanni - 1787
Così Fan Tutte - 1790
La Clemenza di Tito - 1791
Zauberflöte - 1791

History

Written in 1768 when Mozart was twelve, *Bastien and Bastienne* (*Bastien et Bastienne*) is based upon the *The Loves of Bastien and Bastienne* (*Les amours de Bastien et Bastienne*) by Marie-Justine-Benoîte Favart and Harny de Guerville. This in turn was a parody/adaptation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's operatic intermezzo *The Village Soothsayer* (*Le devin du village*). Mozart wrote this opera for a little theatre in the garden of Dr. Anton Messmer, a Viennese doctor and friend of the Mozart family, where amateurs first performed it as an entertainment for Dr. Messmer's guests.

Synopsis and Characters

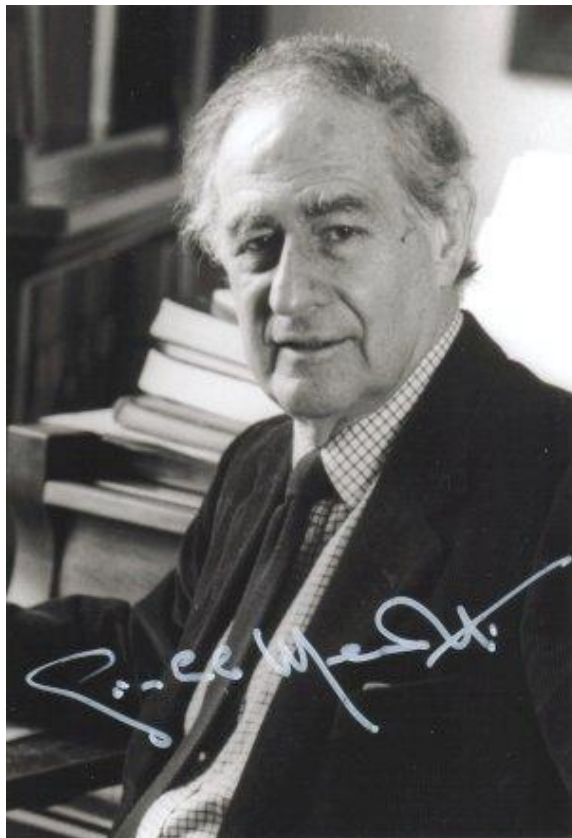
Bastienne, a shepherdess- Soprano

Bastien, her sweetheart - Tenor

Colas, a would- be magician- Bass

Bastien and Bastienne draws from the ideas of Pastoral innocence both dramatically and musically. It is composed as a one- act *singspiel* (spoken dialogue between music numbers). Bastienne pines for her sweetheart Bastien who has left for the city. While she has been tending her sheep, Bastien has been seduced by the shine and glamour of both the city and a wealthy lady. Upon the recommendation of Colas, when Bastien returns Bastienne plays hard- to- get so cruelly that the distraught and ill- loving Bastien is brought to the brink of suicide. Finally realizing their transcendent love, the two shepherders discard pretence and reaffirm their mutual love for each other.

About Gian Carlo Menotti



Gian Carlo Menotti was born to a prosperous family in the Italian town of Cadeigliano on the picturesque Lake Lugano near the border with Switzerland. He received musical training at home, composed his first opera by age 11, attended the Milan Conservatory at age 12, and soon thereafter left to study composition at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia.

Italian by birth, and with two operas already under his belt, Menotti was accepted into the Milan Conservatory at the age of 13. Later, in 1928, he entered the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, and thus began his many journeyings between the United States and Europe. His first major opera, begun in Europe, a one-act *opera buffa*, *Amelia al ballo*, received its premiere in America in 1935 as *Amelia Goes to the Ball*, and was so successful that it was soon performed at New York's Metropolitan Opera. Next came a commission from NBC for a radio opera, and this again was another *opera buffa*, *The Old Maid and the Thief* of 1939.

The first of his 18 mature operas was premiered in 1937 and was an instant success. The work's popularity led NBC to commission the first-ever radio opera in 1939, resulting in *The Old Maid and the Thief*. One of his most popular works, it was first staged in Philadelphia in 1941, and elevated the 30-year-old Menotti to celebrity status. In trying to create an American opera he turned to American subjects:

"I was in the habit of visiting the family of Samuel Barber in Westchester Pennsylvania, which was then a very sleepy town of quiet oak-lined streets. Coming as I did from a noisy Italian family, the Barber household, with its quiet Presbyterian background and its subdued dignity was quite a change for me. In fact, I was incredibly charmed by what seemed to me the exotic quaintness of that little American town.

"I soon found out, however, from the quiet gossip overheard during tea and bridge parties in Mrs. Barber's parlors, that behind those innocent eighteenth century wooden façades all sorts of secret drams took place- some grim, some coming and all of them, of course, 'scandalous.' And so, it was the deceptive innocence of Westchester which inspired the subject for my second opera."

A full-blooded Italian, Menotti is in many ways the successor to Puccini, helping to maintain the Italian tradition of melodrama, sentimentality. Both composers had a *verismo* element in most operas- realist, daily subject matter, as opposed to grand and epic legends. The two composers' melodic

style is also similar, introducing numerous small ideas in an arioso manner, and briefly but dramatically cresting in gorgeous vocal lines.

Menotti has been the target of derision from his avant-garde contemporaries. Indeed his style is always very tonal (except for a few humorous tone rows, where Menotti returns the mockery) and his forms conventional. Despite that, he was awarded multiple Pulitzer awards, the Kennedy Center honor for lifetime achievements, and many other prestigious titles. "Music history will place me somewhere," he once reflected, "but that is no concern of mine."

Menotti was also an innovator, writing his own English librettos, and in combining operatic style with Broadway, he had a hand in shaping modern musical theatre. Although on occasion he ventured into orchestral and chamber music, he deemed himself "hopelessly trapped by opera." Staying true to his natural calling, he never tried to impose modernist complications on his music; he didn't need to. Menotti has a gift for melody, humor and drama producing operas that are beautiful, artistic, and popular.

Synopsis of The Old Maid and the Thief

SCENE 1- In Miss Todd's parlor, Miss Pinkerton arrives for an afternoon of chatting. The conversation progresses from the weather, to gossip, to former loves. For Miss Pinkerton, it was a sailor, for Miss Todd, a "learned man." The two are interrupted by a knock on the door. Miss Pinkerton leaves, and Laetitia, Miss Todd's maid ushers in Bob, a stranger drenched by rain. Miss Todd is extremely generous to the stranger and invites him to stay overnight.

SCENE 2- In the kitchen, Miss Todd and Laetitia exchange impressions of their visitor and wonder what to do about the neighbors.

SCENE 3- Laetitia serves Bob with breakfast at his bed, urges him to stay for a week, but tells him that to prevent a nosy neighborhood scandal, he shall be known as a cousin from Australia. Bob agrees, "I'll be a cousin, nothing more, I hate women to the core."

SCENE 4- In the street, Miss Pinkerton warns Miss Todd that a thief has just escaped from the county jail. Miss is taken aback, when she learns that the convict's description matches Bob's.

SCENE 5- Miss Todd and Laetitia deliberate on whether to turn him in, or keep him a secret. Giving the excuse that they are worried about charges of housing a criminal, they decide to keep him, "To be killed by a man would really be much better than to live without one." They also decide that they will "borrow" from the Women's Club treasury and bribe him to stay.

SCENE 6- Mending Bob's trousers, Laetitia sings, "What a curse for a woman is a timid man, he has had plenty of chances but he makes no advances... Steal me sweet thief, for time's flight is stealing my youth and the cares of life steal fleeting time."

SCENE 7- Miss Pinkerton, panicked, announces that there have been

reports of missing items and robberies. Diverting through the topic of weather, she also sneaks in a question about the “Australian cousin”

SCENE 8- Bob, restless in the confines his room, decides to leave despite his daily stipend. When Laetitia comes in, she begs him to reconsider, and he says that things might be a little more bearable if he had a drink.

SCENE 9- Laetitia tells Miss Todd that Bob will leave unless he is given some liquor. Since Miss Todd directs the Prohibition Committee she cannot be seen buying alcohol.

SCENE 10- At two in the morning, Laetitia and Miss Todd break into the liquor store, and steal several bottles of gin.

SCENE 11- The next morning, back in the parlor, Miss Pinkerton brings news of the previous night’s theft and that a special detective has been hired. Suddenly, the drunken Bob bursts into the room, and Miss Todd quickly ushers Miss Pinkerton out.

SCENE 12- Now the Bob has been exposed, Laetitia and Miss Todd urge him to run away. But he replies, “I’m a beggar and a dreamer and a lost wind tossed leaf.” He claims to have done nothing wrong. When they confess that they have been stealing for his sake, Miss Todd asks, “Would you see me in prison?” To which he replies, “I don’t see any reason for keeping you out of it.” Outraged, Miss Todd leaves to call the police and accuse him for larceny, robbery, and rape.

SCENE 13- Left alone to guard Bob, Laetitia suggests that they steal Miss Todd’s car and run away together. They ransack the house, and escape

SCENE 14- Miss Todd returns, and upon realizing what has happened, faints.