

La clemenza di Tito

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756 - 1791)



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Cover: Charlotte Dobbs as Servilia in Chicago Opera Theater's production of *La clemenza di Tito*, 2009. Photo: Rich Hein

Above: Andrew Funk as Publio and Renata Pokupić as Sesto in Chicago Opera Theater's production of *La clemenza di Tito*, 2009. Photo: Rich Hein

Welcome

The Canadian Opera Company returns in 2012/2013 with the ultimate season of drama, mischief, love, horror and sacrifice. In the fall, hear Verdi's famous and raucous "Anvil Chorus" performed live in *Il Trovatore*, or escape to a fantasy world of madcap lunacy in Johann Strauss II's popular operetta *Die Fledermaus*. Ring in the new year with legendary director Peter Sellars and Ben Heppner, one of the world's leading tenors, in a poignant production of the greatest love story of all time, *Tristan und Isolde*, or experience *La clemenza di Tito* – the final operatic work of classical music's uncontested rock star, W. A. Mozart. End the year with people losing their heads: hear Lucia hit the high notes of madness with Donizetti's luscious cascading melodies in the dark and Gothic *Lucia di Lammermoor*; explore the biblical story of *Salome* in a celebrated production by Canadian film director Atom Egoyan; and witness the ultimate sacrifice by an order of Carmelite nuns during the French Revolution in director Robert Carsen's staging of Francis Poulenc's riveting *Dialogues des Carmélites*. The season is sure to inspire, shock and ignite the creativity of your students!

An evening at the opera is more than a night of entertainment. Opera provides many avenues for thought-provoking discussions and can be explored through many subjects beyond the arts, including history, social studies,

media literacy, and yes, even science (think acoustics and sound!). The COC's Study Guides help enhance your students' visit to the COC by giving them a glimpse into the history, music, themes and stories of the operas, while suggesting ways of putting their learning into practice.

Thank you for choosing to introduce your students to the thrilling and vibrant world of opera. It takes a creative and courageous educator to expose students to innovative subjects beyond the traditional curriculum, and I hope that the COC's Study Guides become a valuable educational resource for your efforts.

Katherine Semcesen
Associate Director, Education and Outreach

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at any stage of life!
The COC runs over 20
programs for school groups,
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New this season:
Careers in Opera Spotlight
This season each Study Guide features
a spotlight on an individual working at the
COC. Learn about the many careers in opera
and discover how the COC connects to
Canada's cultural landscape.

Opera 101

WHAT IS OPERA?

The term “opera” comes from the Italian word for “work” or “piece,” and it is usually applied to the European tradition of grand opera. Opera is a form of storytelling which incorporates music, drama and design.

Though its origins date back to ancient Greece, the form of opera we are familiar with today started in the late 16th century in Florence, Italy. Count Giovanni de’ Bardi was a patron and host to a group of intellectuals, poets, artists, scientists and humanists including Giulio Caccini and Vincenzo Galilei (father to the astronomer and scientist, Galileo Galilei, who was most famous for his improvements to the telescope). These individuals explored trends in the arts, focusing on music and drama in particular. They were unified in their belief that the arts had become over-embellished and that returning to the transparency of the music of the ancient Greeks, which incorporated both speech and song, and a chorus to further the plot and provide commentary on the action, would present a more pure, natural and powerful way to tell stories and express emotions.

The first opera, *Dafne*, about a nymph who fled from Apollo and was subsequently transformed by the gods into a laurel tree, was composed by Jacopo Peri in 1597. From then on the early operas recreated Greek tragedies with mythological themes. During the 17th and 18th centuries, topics expanded to include stories about royalty, and everyday or common people. Some operas were of serious nature (called *opera seria*) and some light-hearted (called *opera buffa*). Since then operas have been written on a wide variety of topics such as cultural clashes (*Madama Butterfly*), comedic farce (*The Barber of Seville*), politicians on foreign visits (*Nixon in China*), the celebration of Canadian heroes (*Louis Riel*), and children’s stories (*The Little Prince*), to name a few.

The COC presents works in the western European tradition but musical equivalents to European opera can be found in Japan, at the Peking Opera in China, and in Africa where it is called Epic Storytelling.

What are the differences between operas, musicals and plays?

Traditionally operas are through-sung, meaning they are sung from beginning to end with no dialogue in between. Singers must have powerful voices in order to be heard over the orchestra (the ensemble of instrumental musicians that accompanies the dramatic action on stage during an opera). Remember: opera singers don’t use microphones!

Musicals are a combination of dialogue and sung pieces and often include choreographed numbers. The singers often use microphones and are accompanied by a pit band which includes more modern instruments like a drum kit, guitar and electronic instruments.

Plays are primarily spoken works of theatre with minimal singing or music.

There are always exceptions to the rule: though *Les Misérables* is through-sung it is still classified as a piece of musical theatre because of its style of music. By the same token, some operas, like Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, have spoken dialogue in addition to singing.

What does opera feel like?

Take five minutes out of the school day and instead of using regular voices to converse, ask the class to commit to singing **everything**. Make an agreement with the students that it’s not about judging people’s voices but about freeing our natural sounds. Make up the melodies on the spot and don’t worry about singing “correctly.” Did the musical lines help express or emphasize certain emotions? If so, how?

Attending the Opera: Make the most of your experience

WELCOME TO THE FOUR SEASONS CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS



So you're headed to the opera, and there are a few questions on your mind. What do I wear? Can I take photos of the performance? How will I understand it – isn't opera in another language?! Relax! Here are a few tips on how to get the most out of your opera experience.

First, there's the question of **what to wear**. Some people think of the opera and imagine the entire audience decked out in ballgowns and tuxes, but that's just not the case! People wear all sorts of things to the opera – jeans, dress pants, cocktail dresses, suits, etc. The important thing is to be comfortable and show personal flair. Wear something that makes you feel good, whether it be jeans or your nicest tie, and grab a sweater before you leave home – the air conditioning can be a bit chilly! Additionally, skip that spritz of perfume or cologne before you go out; the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts is scent-free. Many fellow patrons are allergic to strong scents.

Once you're dressed, it's important to **arrive on time** for the show. Late patrons cannot be admitted to the theatre, and you may have to watch the first act from a screen in the lobby rather than your seat. If you need to buy or pick up a

ticket, arrive as early as possible, as sometimes the line-up for the box office can be quite long before a performance! The main doors open one hour before the performance starts. Line up there and have your ticket ready to present to the usher. If you have any questions about the performance, drop by the Welcome Desk to ask a member of the COC staff, who are full of useful information not only about the opera, but about COC programs in general. A **pre-performance chat** takes place in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre (Ring 3 of the lobby) about 45 minutes before the show. These chats, given by members of our **COC Volunteer Speakers Bureau**, offer valuable insight into both the opera and the specific production that you'll be seeing.

Before the opera starts, take the opportunity to **explore the lobby**, known as the Isadore and Rosalie Sharp City Room. The Four Seasons Centre is Canada's first purpose-built opera house, engineered with state-of-the-art design and technology for the best possible acoustics. Notice that the sound of traffic, streetcars and the general bustle of the city barely reaches the lobby, even though an airy glass wall looks out onto one of the busiest intersections in Toronto.

Stop by one of the bars and **order a beverage for intermission or grab a snack**. Browse the **Opera Shop** to pick up a memento of your experience at the opera. (Note: the Opera Shop is not open at dress rehearsals.) Walk up the stairs, passing a sculpture by Canadian artist Sorel Etrog as you go, and note the floating glass staircase – the longest free-standing glass staircase in the world! On the third floor, you'll see the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre, home to our Free Concert Series. You'll also see a mobile by artist Alexander Calder, adding some colour and whimsy to the space.

Chimes ring throughout the lobby starting **ten minutes** before the performance, reminding everyone to get to their seats. Head towards the door noted on your ticket, grab a program from the usher, and find your designated seat. It's best to use this time to open any candies or cough drops you might have and turn off your cell phone – the hall is built to carry sound, so small sounds travel further than you may think! If you'd like to get a picture of you and your friends at the opera, do so now – **photography is not permitted** once the performance begins. A camera flash is very distracting to the performers, who are working hard to stay focused and in character.

As the lights go down and the audience quiets, **listen carefully**. Whatever little bit of outdoor sound you might have heard in the lobby (a siren passing, a rumbling streetcar) has been virtually eliminated here. Not a peep! That's because the auditorium is physically separated from

the outside and the ground below, making for the best acoustic experience possible.

Now it's time to sit back and **enjoy the opera**! But wait – you forgot your Italian-to-English translator! Don't worry about it. **SURTITLES™** are projected on a horizontal screen above the stage. SURTITLES™ originate from the idea of “subtitles,” which are most commonly used in foreign films to make them more accessible outside of their country of origin. The COC was the first opera company to adapt this concept for the operatic stage. Slides containing the English translation of the *libretto* (text for the opera) are projected in a more visible place for the audience: *above* the stage. SURTITLES™ were first used by the COC at the premiere of the opera *Elektra* in 1983. Only the name could be trademarked, as the technology for the projections was already in existence. Opera companies from around the world have adopted this audience initiative under different names, and it has revolutionized opera stages around the world.

Make sure to show your **appreciation to the performers** by laughing at humorous bits or applauding after a well-performed aria. If a performer has pulled off some particularly impressive vocal fireworks, it's absolutely acceptable to yell out your appreciation in addition to applause. You may hear your fellow audience members shouting “bravo!” for a man, “brava!” for a woman, or “bravi!” for a group of performers. Feel free to join in!

La clemenza di Tito lasts approximately two hours and 35 minutes, including one intermission. The opera will be sung in Italian with English SURTITLES™.

R. Fraser Elliott Hall.
Photo: Tim Griffith



Characters and Synopsis

MAIN CHARACTERS

Name	Description	Voice Type	Pronunciation
Tito	Roman Emperor	Tenor	TEE-toh
Vitellia	Daughter of the Emperor Vitellius	Soprano	vee-TEH-lee-yah
Sesto	Young Roman patrician	Mezzo-soprano	SESS-toh
Servilia	Sister of Sesto	Soprano	ser-VEE-lee-yah
Annio	Young Roman patrician	Mezzo-soprano	AHN-nee-yoh
Publio	Captain of the Praetorian Guard	Bass-baritone	POOH-blee-yoh



Renata Pokupić as Sesto in Chicago Opera Theater's production of *La clemenza di Tito*, 2009. Photo: Rich Hein

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

Vitellia is furious that the emperor, Tito, is planning to wed Berenice (a foreign woman) instead of her. She plots to have the Capitol burned and Tito murdered. She asks Sesto, who is infatuated with her, to carry out the assassination. Sesto thinks the emperor is a good man, but his love for Vitellia is overpowering and so he agrees.

When Annio informs Sesto and Vitellia that Tito is not marrying Berenice and has sent her away, Vitellia tells Sesto to postpone carrying out her plan. She leaves and Annio reminds Sesto of his promise to ask the emperor to give him the hand of Servilia, Sesto's sister.

A crowd of citizens and dignitaries is gathering in the Capitol square. Alone with Sesto and Annio, Tito reveals that he must marry a Roman due to political reasons and has chosen Servilia. Annio is heartbroken but hides his feelings.

Annio tells Servilia about Tito's decision and they reaffirm their love for each other. Afterwards, Servilia approaches Tito and agrees to marry him, but informs him of her feelings for Annio. Touched by Annio's sacrifice and Servilia's honesty, Tito tells her he will step aside to ensure their happiness.

Vitellia urges Sesto to action, promising herself to him if he carries out her plan. Sesto rushes away to follow through on the plot. However, Publio and Annio soon arrive to inform Vitellia that Tito has now chosen her for his wife. Vitellia is desperate to stop Sesto before she's too late.

Meanwhile, Sesto battles with his conscience but finally goes on to carry out Vitellia's plan. With the Capitol burning, the crowd enters and Sesto appears, telling them that Tito is dead, without revealing his or Vitellia's part in the plot.

ACT II

Annio informs Sesto that Tito is unharmed. Relieved, Sesto confesses his guilt to Annio, who is stunned and urges Sesto to confess to Tito. Alone with Sesto, Vitellia begs him to go into exile. Publio enters and arrests Sesto, telling him that it was not Tito he harmed, but another conspirator who has betrayed Sesto. Vitellia is stricken with remorse.

Tito is stunned to learn that Sesto has confessed to the assassination attempt and that the Senate has condemned him to death. He calls for Sesto who declares his guilt and pleads for death.

Servilia and Annio tell Vitellia that her wedding preparations to Tito are still going ahead. She realizes that Sesto has not betrayed her and decides to confess all to Tito.

Sesto is brought before Tito in front of a large crowd. Vitellia rushes in and takes sole responsibility for the plot. Tito forgives everyone, who in turn rejoice and praise their emperor.

Genesis of the Opera

CHILD PRODIGY AND EARLY CAREER

Born on January 27, 1756 in Salzburg, Austria, composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was the only son of Leopold and Anna Maria Mozart. His father, an eminent musician in his own right, began teaching him the harpsichord when he was only four years old. It was evident early on that Mozart was a musical prodigy – he wrote minuets when he was five, a sonata at seven, a symphony at eight, and, at the suggestion of the Holy Roman Emperor, an opera (*La finta semplice*) at the age of 11.

He travelled throughout Europe for most of his childhood but, much to his dismay, often found himself back in Salzburg. The first hint of his true powers as a composer for the stage came with the premiere of *Idomeneo* in 1781. He left Salzburg for good in 1782, after a rocky relationship with the archbishop led to his dismissal, and from then on Mozart resided in Vienna.

While in Vienna, the Holy Roman Emperor commissioned a new opera from him. This became *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, a triumph which is still performed today. Flush with this success, Mozart expected to receive a profitable position at court, but although the Emperor continued to praise him and give him commissions, but no permanent position materialized. Mozart taught music lessons to earn a meagre living. He continued to write, however, and some of his greatest operas were written with the poet of the Viennese court, Lorenzo da Ponte.

Mozart finally received a permanent post as court composer and chamber musician in 1791, but the salary was so small that it did not pay off his debts or provide necessities. It was in this state that he found himself when he wrote *La clemenza di Tito*.



Portrait of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart by Barbara Kraft (1819).

Along with *The Magic Flute*, *La clemenza di Tito* is one of Mozart's final works written before his death in December 1791.

TIGHT DEADLINE

Mozart was working on an opera called *The Magic Flute* and his *Requiem Mass in D minor* when he was approached by impresario Domenico Guardasoni to compose an *opera seria* (tragic opera) for the coronation of Leopold II, King of Bohemia.

Guardasoni had first asked another composer, Antonio Salieri, to create the opera, but Salieri was too busy to take on the commission and declined. Mozart had previously worked with Guardasoni on *Don Giovanni* and when he was offered *La clemenza di Tito* he accepted the project and set to work.

However, because Guardasoni's contract was signed in early June and the coronation was scheduled for early September, *La clemenza di Tito* needed to be composed extremely quickly. Remarkably, the opera premiered at the National Theatre in Prague on September 6, 1791 – less than two months after it was originally commissioned!

COMPOSING LA CLEMENZA DI TITO

To save time, Guardasoni (who had been entrusted not only to commission but also co-ordinate the new opera's creation) selected an existing *libretto** by Pietro Metastasio, that was over 50 years old and had been already used in nearly 40 different opera settings by different composers. The subject matter, having as its title character a wise, just and beloved monarch, was especially appropriate for a coronation.

Mozart worked with Caterino Mazzolà to compress the existing libretto by Metastasio. Mazzolà was a well-known poet and librettist in Venetian society at this time. His friends included Casanova, the famous ladies' man, and fellow poet and librettist Lorenzo da Ponte, who frequently collaborated with Mozart. In order to keep the plot moving, Mazzolà and Mozart cut Metastasio's libretto down by a third, keeping the opera relatively condensed with only 11 arias.

Additionally Mozart pushed the project along by subcontracting out the composition of the *recitatives** to a music student of his named Franz Xaver Süssmayr. (Süssmayr is well-known for his completion of Mozart's *Requiem*, which he took over after Mozart's death.)

*Libretto:

The words or text of the opera set to the composer's music. Libretto is the diminutive of the Italian word *libro*, meaning book.

While Mazzolà was well-known for his *opera buffa* (comic operas), *Tito* is an *opera seria* (serious opera).

*Recitative:

a type of singing unique to opera when words are sung in a way that imitates speech. It has no recognizable melody and is meant to carry the action forward rather than express the emotions of the character.

A STORY FIT FOR A KING

The story is based on the real-life Roman Emperor Titus Vespasianus, who was famous for the noble and forgiving qualities he demonstrated during his short reign from 79 to 81 AD. Austria's Leopold II was often likened to a latter-day Titus, and thus the choice of material was as appropriate as it was flattering to the ruler.

Titus (or Tito, in Italian), however, is the only real historical figure to play a part in the opera. The other characters are either creations of Metastasio's or taken from other works of music or literature. For example, Vitellia is thought to be based on Hermione from the play *Andromaque*, written by Jean Racine. Both Vitellia and Hermione use a man who loves them to lash out at a ruler, and both are vivid, strong female characters.

PREMIERE AND RECEPTION

At the opera's premiere in September of 1791, *La clemenza di Tito* was received poorly by the audience and was almost seen as a failure. Within a month, however, the audiences picked up and its success became apparent.

The piece remained a mainstay of operatic repertoire for the next 30 years, becoming the first Mozart opera to be performed in London, in 1806. But as the Romantic era came to a close, the opera's reputation declined and for most of the 19th and 20th centuries it was considered second-rate amongst Mozart's other works. It is now beginning to see a resurgence and is much more frequently performed.



Painting: *The Triumph of Titus and Vespasian* by Giulio Romano (1537).

La clemenza di Tito: Listening Guide

Legend has it that Mozart completed the score for *La clemenza di Tito* in 18 days, but most scholars now believe this to be unlikely. (For more on the composition history of the opera and the speed with which it moved from conception to premiere, see Genesis of the Opera on page 9.) Some commentators also find evidence of hasty work in the score; one of Vitellia's arias is placed in a distinctly lower range than the rest of the part, and some of the recitatives end in the "wrong" key. Some have found the overture to be strangely disconnected from the rest of the score; opinions differ as to whether or not this constitutes a flaw.

Yet *La clemenza di Tito* remains an undeniable example of Mozart's musical genius: the delicate, sublime beauty of the orchestral writing delivers the kind of emotional immediacy that only great art work possesses, and the complex characters are depicted with both realism and powerful drama.

Recording: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *La clemenza di Tito*. The English Baroque Soloists and the Monteverdi Choir under John Eliot Gardiner, conductor. With Anthony Rolfe Johnson, Anne Sofie von Otter, Sylvia McNair, Julie Varady, Catherine Robbin, Cornelius Hauptmann. Archiv, 431 8062. 1990.



MUSICAL EXCERPT

Act I, recitative and duet: "Ma che? Sempre l'istesso, Sesto... Come ti piace, imponi" ("What then? Will you forever come Sextus... Command me as you will")

CONNECTION TO THE STORY

In Vitellia's residence, she and Sesto discuss her plot to assassinate Emperor Tito.

MUSICAL ELEMENTS AND SIGNIFICANCE

After the overture, the opera begins unusually in that two of its principal characters, Vitellia and Sesto, are introduced singing *recitative* (sung dialogue) rather than an *aria* (solo) or duet. Mozart termed the type of music we hear in the first part of this excerpt *recitativo semplice* ("simple recitative"), which by the 19th century became known as "dry" recitative (*recitative secco*), making it sound as it were dull and lifeless. But the intention with this type of vocal writing, usually accompanied very sparsely with only a *basso continuo* (double bass) or piano, was to focus the audience's attention on the words, their poetry and on the passion and conviction with which the singer-actor delivered the text.

In the second part of this excerpt (2:10), the recitative turns into a duet with orchestral accompaniment. Vitellia goes into full manipulative, vengeful mode here, which Mozart illustrates with large intervals and a jagged vocal line (2:45).

Vitellia's music is very challenging, and requires a singer with a very wide range, with the ability to sing tender, *legato* (smooth) melody as well as complex *coloratura* (vocal passages in which the singer must move quickly through many notes). Many of these vocal gestures are taken from the *opera seria* tradition and the long line of evil goddess/evil sorceress roles from which Vitellia's character descends.



2

MUSICAL EXCERPT

Act I, duet: “Ah, perdona al primo affetto” (“Ah, forgive my former love”)

CONNECTION TO THE STORY

Annio tries to tell Servilia of Tito’s decision to marry her but, in the process, confesses his own love for her. She reassures him that she will never love anyone but him.

MUSICAL ELEMENTS AND SIGNIFICANCE

This duet contains some of the most achingly beautiful, memorable music in the score and it stands as the only real love duet in the opera. Once we get beyond the more grand arias and duets written for the main characters, the music composed for secondary roles such as Annio and Servilia (the *secondo uomo* and *seconda donna* – literally, secondary man and woman) is written on a simpler level and in many ways reflects the *singspiel* (German opera with sung and spoken text) influence of *The Magic Flute* which Mozart was composing at the same time. Their music is deeply sincere and reflects the relatively straightforward emotions of their relationship in contrast to, for example, the unhealthy, manipulative situation between *prima donna* and *primo uomo* (the principal female and male roles), Vitellia and Sesto.



3

MUSICAL EXCERPT

Act I, trio: “Vengo... aspettate... Sesto!” (“I am coming... Wait... Sesto!”)

CONNECTION TO THE STORY

Scarcely has Vitellia set her plot to kill Tito in motion when she learns that the Emperor has yet again chosen a bride: Vitellia herself. She attempts to recall Sesto but it is too late.

MUSICAL ELEMENTS AND SIGNIFICANCE

This trio occurs at an intensely dramatic moment as Vitellia is beset with conflicting emotions: joy over regaining her rightful place on the throne beside Tito and horror at realizing it is too late to put a stop to her plan to have the Emperor killed by Sesto. From the start of the trio, listen to the agitated, percussive musical gesture played by the violins which tell us all we need to know about Vitellia’s unstable mental state. Annio and Publio (Tito’s right-hand man) function as back-up singers, commenting “O how great happiness can confuse a heart!” and demonstrating they have no idea what is really troubling Vitellia! Listen from 1:34 on as Mozart challenges the technique of the soprano with high notes and quick *staccati* (short, quick notes sung in rapid succession) all of which point to the extreme circumstances in which Vitellia finds herself.

4

MUSICAL EXCERPT

Act II, rondo: “Deh, per questo istante solo” (“Ah, for this single moment”)

CONNECTION TO THE STORY

Tito has survived the attempted assassination and Sesto has been implicated in the plot. He is brought before Tito who addresses his friend with kindness, asking him to explain why he committed such a crime. Faced with the choice of lying to his friend or betraying the woman he loves, Sesto asks instead for death.

MUSICAL ELEMENTS AND SIGNIFICANCE

Sesto’s second aria is a *rondo*: a musical form in which a theme is introduced and then repeated, giving the audience a chance to become familiar with the tune and providing the singer with the opportunity to ornament the vocal line. An important part of the *opera seria* tradition, from which *La clemenza di Tito* descends, is the expectation that singers have the skill and creativity necessary to add decorations to their vocal lines. In *La clemenza di Tito*, more than in any of his other mature operas, Mozart left room for vocal improvisation, partly because he knew that a singer such as the *castrato** Domenico Bedini (who first sang Sesto) had the talent and good taste needed to “invent” refined variations.

The aria’s first theme consists of a simple melodic line which contains much passion conveyed with the simplest of means. It is repeated beginning at 2:28 with the singer adding subtle improvisations on the original tune. Then, a second theme is introduced at 3:30, in which the more energized vocal line expertly expresses the text: “I go to die in despair but death does not frighten me.” Sesto was probably imagined to be the same age as one of Mozart’s other treble-voiced youths, Cherubino from *The Marriage of Figaro* (also a “pants” role, meaning a male role that in modern times is sung by a woman). Initially, the composer had ideas about writing Sesto for the tenor voice, but ultimately composed it for a young castrato – the voice type which in Mozart’s time was most associated with a young man.

*A castrato was a male singer whose high vocal register was preserved by castration before the onset of puberty. They were a common presence on European opera stages in the 17th and 18th centuries. Even as late as the early 20th century there were castrati performing in the Vatican chapel and Roman churches.

5

MUSICAL EXCERPT

Act II, aria: “Se all’impero, amici Dei” (“If to a ruler, ye benevolent gods”)

CONNECTION TO THE STORY

Faced with the decision to either pardon or execute Sesto for his treason, Tito opts to be generous, saying that it is better to be accused of being too lenient than too harsh.

MUSICAL ELEMENTS AND SIGNIFICANCE

This *da capo* aria (also called “ABA” form, since the opening melody of the A section is repeated after a contrasting B section) is a throwback to the *opera seria* tradition. As with other older, Baroque period conventions utilized in this opera, Mozart plays with the form, giving it a new shortened and more concentrated identity. Still, it contains many elements one would associate with an aria for a title character in a standard baroque opera: virtuosity (listen for the demanding coloratura at 1:20); lyrical singing in the more reflective middle section (1:45); and improvisational skill in the repeat of the opening section (2:57).

What to Look For

Christopher Alden's production of *La clemenza di Tito* was first performed at the Chicago Opera Theater in the 2009 spring season. Alden's focus is on the relationship between the characters, especially how the other characters relate to Tito. They are all operating within his power structure, something Mozart himself was quite familiar with. Mozart spent his entire life pleasing and placating the kings, emperors, and archbishops who commissioned his operas, constantly striving to impress them. In Alden's view, *La clemenza di Tito* is Mozart's personal statement on his own dealings with these powerful men. While you're watching the opera, look for how the direction emphasizes these relationships.

The costumes are based on Roman garb (such as togas), but the designer Terese Wadden considered how those traditional items would look had they come through resurgences in fashion – in other words, she considered what a “modern” toga would look like. The clothes resonate across history, with classic images from the Roman Empire given a modern edge.

The set is a modern civic space, based on venues like the Lincoln Center or Kennedy Center. It has a “modern,” 60s or 70s feel with a classic shape. A lot of the sets grew out of the costumes and therefore carry complementary fashion influences – look out for the chandeliers and other fashionable touches on the set while you're watching the opera.



Renata Pokupić as Sesto and Dominic Armstrong as Tito in Chicago Opera Theater's production of *La clemenza di Tito*, 2009. Photo: Rich Hein



Dominic Armstrong as Tito and the chorus in Chicago Opera Theater's production of La clemenza di Tito, 2009. Photo: Rich Hein

COC Spotlight: Cecily Carver

Not everyone at the COC is an opera singer... take a peek behind the scenes and learn about the many diverse careers available in the arts! In this edition, we interview Cecily Carver – Associate Manager, Digital Marketing.

Cecily works to keep the COC's website running smoothly as well as working on other social media and digital marketing initiatives. We asked Cecily a few questions to see what led her down this career path.



Cecily Carver
(Associate Manager,
Digital Marketing)

Position: Associate Manager, Digital Marketing

Name: Cecily Carver

Role in the Company: I manage a lot of the COC's online marketing and communications, including Twitter and Facebook, our blog Parlando, our e-mail newsletter eOpera, and generally make sure the website stays up-to-date.

Hometown: Rossland, British Columbia

Education: I have a bachelor's degree in Computer Science from the University of Alberta, as well as an ARCT in piano performance from the Royal Conservatory of Music. Neither of these things is really required for my job, but aspects of them definitely help.

First became interested in opera: I first became interested in opera as a teenager, when I got high enough in my piano grades that I needed to start doing exams in Music History as well. The first time I listened to Puccini, I was hooked, and I became a subscriber at Edmonton Opera (where I was living at the time).

What made you decide to pursue this career path? I love opera very much – it's definitely one of my top passions – and the idea of writing about it on the internet for a living sounded like a perfect fit for my interests. I also liked that I could translate some of my tech skills to the online sphere. Although to be honest, I didn't really imagine it as a possibility until I saw that the COC needed a social media person and decided to go for it. I recently moved from a social media-oriented role into one that encompasses the website and e-mail as well.

If someone was interested in working in digital marketing, what would you recommend they have in terms of skills or experience?

Make sure you're web-savvy and comfortable with technology – a basic knowledge of HTML is essential, as well as knowing the ins and outs of social media tools like Twitter, Facebook, blogs and photo-sharing sites. If you have a website, you should know how to dig into the analytics and traffic statistics to get a sense of what's working and what's not. An eye for design and familiarity with Photoshop and video-editing tools will also serve you well.

But equally important is being able to write well and communicate your ideas in a clear, compelling and thoughtful way. Being knowledgeable about the field you'll be working in (in my case, opera) also helps a lot. Starting and maintaining a high-quality blog in that field and building up a social media presence around it is a good way to demonstrate your expertise as a writer, marketer, technologist, and arts professional.

What do you love most about this career? I love the chance to be close to the art form I love and learning about its inner workings. I also love writing copy and thinking about what makes each production unique.

What do you enjoy the least about this career? It has some mundane tasks like resizing photos and fixing e-mail bugs that aren't especially exciting.

What surprises you most about this career? The sheer variety of people who are interested in interacting with the COC on social media. Opera lovers come in many forms and it's been interesting to hear from so many of them.

Favourite part about this production: I'm really looking forward to hearing Isabel Leonard sing. She's a real rising star!

What do you enjoy outside of opera? I enjoy books and video games a lot, and I run a group for women interested in making their own games.



@cecilycarver



<http://cecilycarver.tumblr.com>

Active Learning

DISCUSSION

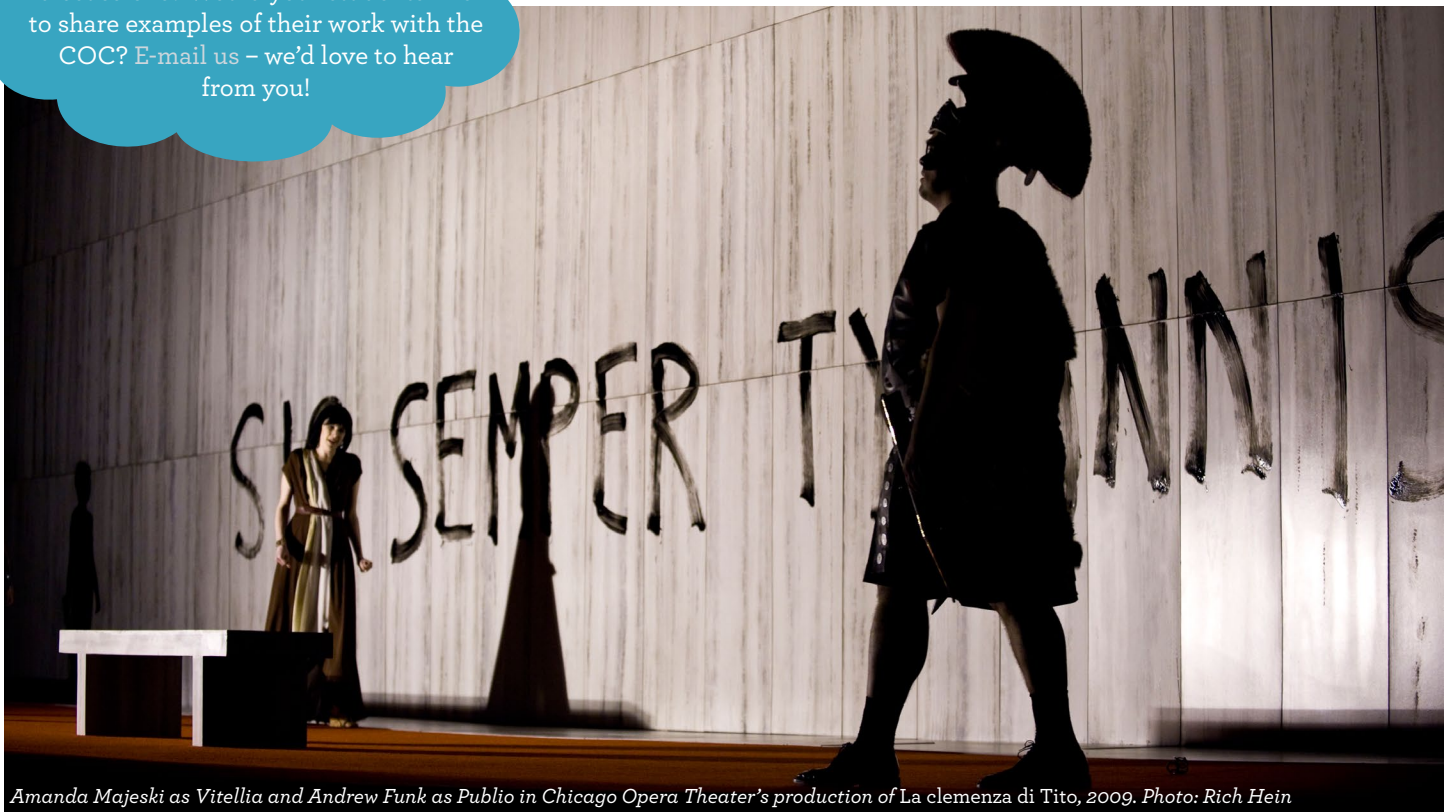
After seeing the opera:

- ♦ Was Tito's clemency valid? Should he have punished Sesto and Vitellia? Why or why not?
- ♦ What would happen to Sesto and Vitellia should this have happened in the modern day, say, to a prime minister or president rather than a Roman emperor?

Did viewing the opera spark some scintillating debates or discussions? Would your students like to share examples of their work with the COC? E-mail us – we'd love to hear from you!

FURTHER EXPLORATION

- ♦ Mozart wrote this opera from a libretto that had already been used in other operas almost 40 times. This is much like the current practice of basing movies on already-existing books, comics, and video games. If you were a librettist or composer, which would you find more difficult to write – an opera based on an already-existing text, or a brand new one? In small groups, write your own short libretto or opera based on your favourite book or movie.
- ♦ Explore the historical truth behind Emperor Titus and discuss how the libretto could be made more historically accurate. Would it still be as dramatic and exciting?



Amanda Majeski as Vitellia and Andrew Funk as Publio in Chicago Opera Theater's production of *La clemenza di Tito*, 2009. Photo: Rich Hein

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Chicago Opera Theater's production of La clemenza di Tito, 2009. Photo: Rich Hein

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La clemenza di Tito Study Guide

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