

Saturday 19 September / 7pm

Mozart's *Così fan tutte*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Così fan tutte, or, The School for Lovers, K.588

Così fan tutte has been called Mozart and da Ponte's most personal opera. It's also been described as Mozart's most cynical work, lavishing glorious music on a heartlessly frivolous plot. Beethoven considered it "immoral". And even Lorenzo da Ponte himself, in his spicy *Memoirs*, described it as "an opera that holds third place among the three sisters born of that most celebrated father of harmony".

So which is it? And what was it - in the autumn of 1789, when Emperor Joseph II commissioned a new Italian opera from the team behind *Le nozze di Figaro* - that attracted these two artists to this particular story? Da Ponte had recently fallen in love with a star soprano, Adriana Ferrarese del Bene (known as La Ferrarese). Mozart, too, had an interest to declare. Earlier that summer, his wife Constanze's innocent flirtations at the spa in Baden had stirred him to a rare fit of jealousy. "I am glad when you're having fun, I really am", he wrote to her. "I just wish you wouldn't behave so badly, because people will talk". It's been suggested that Dorabella is directly modelled on Constanze Mozart.

Fiordiligi, meanwhile, was actually played by La Ferrarese; in fact the whole opera was tailored to quite specific singers and personalities. The first Don Alfonso was Francesco Bussani, a character-singer with a track record as a pompous old meddler. And although the evidence is sketchy, it's possible that Louise Villeneuve, the first Dorabella, was La Ferrarese's real-life sister. So when the curtain went up at the *Burgtheater*, Vienna on 26 January 1790, Viennese audiences saw a true ensemble comedy written by a pair of artists who understood both their subject, and their performers. No Mozart / da Ponte opera was more successful in Vienna.

Perhaps that's why *Così fan tutte* touches us regardless, and why the most ravishing music in the entire opera – the trio *Soave sia il vento* – comes at precisely the point where the deception is being set in motion. Mozart engages our emotions most profoundly just as the comedy requires us to be most detached. All great comedy has a hint of cruelty, but in the end it's hard not to conclude that Mozart (if not da Ponte) is on the side of the ladies. In truth, though, he's on the side of humanity. This "School for Lovers" has a lesson for anyone fortunate enough to have a heart.

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Synopsis

Act I

In a coffee-house in Naples two young officers, Guglielmo and Ferrando, are praising their girlfriends Fiordiligi and Dorabella. Listening with a sceptical ear is a philosopher, Don Alfonso. He's willing to stake 100 guineas that their girls prove no more faithful than the rest of womankind. The boys accept the bet without hesitation.

The plan begins. Arriving at the sisters' seaside villa, Don Alfonso announces that their lovers have been posted overseas. After a tearful farewell, the girls are heartbroken; to the bemusement of their maid Despina. Don Alfonso gets Despina on side with a bribe, and cues the boys, disguised as Albanians. They go straight for each other's girlfriend, and are just as swiftly rebuffed. Round one to the boys - or so they think. But under Don Alfonso's instruction, the rejected "Albanians" now knock back a draught of arsenic. Horrified, Fiordiligi and Dorabella call for help – which arrives in the form of a doctor with a suspiciously high voice. A touch of Mesmerism – the latest in medical technology – restores them to life.

Act II

The cracks are starting to show, and Despina reminds the girls that a bit of harmless flirtation is their right as women. Before long, Dorabella has given the disguised Guglielmo her portrait of her beloved, Ferrando.

Guglielmo brandishes it in triumph before his friend, but Fiordiligi, it turns out, has fallen deeper, and harder; she's actually in love with her tall, dark stranger.

Don Alfonso has won. But as he tells the boys, *così fan tutte* - all women are like that, and now that they realise it, they should take the girls off their pedestals and marry them regardless. With the aid of a "notary" (again, that high voice) the sisters prepare to wed their new Albanian lovers. Cue Ferrando and Guglielmo, now without disguises, and burning with self-righteous anger. Don Alfonso declares the moral: the only solution is for the four sweethearts to understand each other's failings – and love them, all the same.

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Dinis Sousa conductor

Dinis Sousa is Music Director of the Royal Northern Sinfonia (RNS) and Founder and Artistic Director of the award-winning Orquestra XXI. Winner of the 2023 Critics' Circle Young Talent (Conductor) Award, he has led RNS programmes with Víkingur Ólafsson, Stephen Hough, Benjamin Grosvenor, Pierre-Laurent Aimard and Kristian Bezuidenhout, a Ravel anniversary celebration, Handel's Messiah, and a special community performance of Michael Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*.

In the 2025/26 season, Sousa led programmes with Paul Lewis, Imogen Cooper, Louise Alder and Maria Włoszczowska; Haydn's *Creation*; a project juxtaposing Pierre Boulez and The Beatles; and a centenary celebration of György Kurtág.

As a guest conductor, recent and upcoming debuts include the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre National de France, Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, Bamberg Symphony Orchestra, Lucerne Symphony Orchestra, São Paulo State Symphony Orchestra, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. He has earned acclaim for performances with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and for a complete Beethoven cycle with the Monteverdi Choir and Orchestras.

His opera work includes Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* for Bergen Opera and Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* for Nevil Holt Opera. With Orquestra XXI, highlights include opening the Gulbenkian Foundation season and a celebrated tour of Mahler's Symphony No. 5.

Christina Gansch Fiordiligi

Austrian soprano Christina Gansch has built a reputation as one of Europe's most versatile and captivating young sopranos. A former winner of the prestigious Kathleen Ferrier Award, she has appeared at many of the world's leading opera houses and festivals.

In the 2026/27 season, Christina makes role debuts as Fiordiligi in staged performances of *Così fan tutte* with the Royal Northern Sinfonia/Dinis Sousa and as Helena in a revival of Deborah Warner's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino.

In the 2027/28 season she will make her role debuts as Donna Elvira (*Don Giovanni*) and Nella (*Gianni Schicchi*).

Her recent appearances have included Suor Genovieffa (*Suor Angelica*) for the Tiroler Festspiele, Erl; Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*) for the Royal Swedish Opera and Welsh National Opera; Gretel (*Hänsel und Gretel*) for the Bayerische Staatsoper, Dresden Semperoper and Opernhaus Zürich; Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*), Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*), Marzelline (*Fidelio*) and Servilia (*La clemenza di Tito*) for the Royal Ballet & Opera; Lenio (*The Greek Passion*), Servilia and Fifth Maid (*Elektra*) at the Salzburger Festspiele; Zerlina for both the San Francisco Opera and Opéra national de Paris and Pamina and Gretchen (*Szenen aus Goethes Faust*) at the Hamburgische Staatsoper.

Equally in demand on the concert platform, Christina has performed at the BBC Proms, Salzburger Festspiele, Edinburgh Festival, Verbier Festival, Göttingen Handel Festival and Innsbrucker Festwochen with conductors such as Afkham, Bolton, Bychkov, Currentzis, Fischer, Harnoncourt, Orozco-Estrada, Ottensamer, Roror and Young.

Her discography includes Mozart's *Requiem* with the Tonkünstler-Orchester Niederösterreich/Ottensamer (Deutsche Grammophon); *Don Giovanni* with MusicaAeterna/Currentzis (Sony Classical); Wolf *Lieder* with Malcolm Martineau (Vivat) and Schubert's *Der Hochzeitsbraten* (Stone Records).

Angela Brower Dorabella

Hailed by the *New York Times* for her 'plush, full sound, yet also youthful brightness', American mezzo-soprano Angela Brower is one of the most sought-after lyric mezzo-sopranos of her generation. A former member of the Bayerische Staatsoper ensemble, and alumna of their studio, she continues to bring her compelling artistry and musicianship to the world's leading opera houses and concert venues.

Engagements this season include Sesto *La clemenza di Tito* at Edinburgh International Festival, Octavian *Der Rosenkavalier* at Opernhaus Zürich, Komponist *Ariadne auf Naxos* at Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, Adalgisa *Norma* at Staatsoper unter den Linden and Dorabella *Così fan tutte* at Wiener Staatsoper. Brower also performs Berlioz's *Cléopâtre* and Mozart's *Requiem* with the Tucson Symphony Orchestra.

Recent engagements include Sesto *La clemenza di Tito* and Nicklausse *Les Contes d'Hoffman*, both at the Staatsoper Hamburg, another double appearance at the Bayerische Staatsoper as Hänsel *Hänsel und Gretel* and as the Fox in Janacek's *The Cunning Little Vixen* and Nicklausse/The Muse *Les Contes d'Hoffman* and Dorabella *Così fan tutte* at Opéra national de Paris. She also sang Dorabella *Così fan tutte* at Théâtre des Champs-Élysées with Mark Minkowski and Les Musiciens du Louvre and made her Wigmore Hall debut together with pianist James Baillieu and a programme titled 'A Little Night Music'.

Her discography includes the hugely acclaimed Deutsche Grammophon recordings of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and *Le nozze di Figaro* both conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

Jonas Hacker Ferrando

A 2016 Grand Finalist of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and former Ensemble member of the Bayerische Staatsoper, American tenor Jonas Hacker regularly receives high praise for his "attractive tenor voice," "honeyed tone and easeful delivery," and his ability to convincingly portray characters across genres from Mozart to Britten. Highlights of his upcoming 25/26 season include Hacker's debut at the Metropolitan Opera as the Shepherd in *Tristan und Isolde* and covering the Bridegroom in *Innocence*, his debut with Den Norske Oper as Tamino in *The Magic Flute*, a return to the Bayerische Staatsoper as Pedrillo in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, and as the Tanzmeister in *Ariadne auf Naxos* with the Salzburg Festival.

Recent performances include Alfredo in *La Traviata* at the Municipal Theater of Santiago, Tom Rakewell in *The Rake's Progress* with Des Moines Metro Opera, and as Kyle in *The Listeners* at the Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Hacker was a member of the Ensemble of the Bayerische Staatsoper from the fall of 2021 to the summer of 2024, where he was heard as Tamino (*Die Zauberflöte*), Walther von der Vogelweide (*Tannhäuser*), Hylas (*Les troyens*), Pedrillo (*Die Entführung aus dem Serail*), Arbace (*Idomeneo*), Jaquino (*Fidelio*), and Sladek/Pierrino in Christoph Marthaler's conceptual production of *Giuditta*.

A frequent soloist in America, Hacker has sung at the Dallas Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Washington Concert Opera, Opera San Jose, Arizona Opera, and Des Moines Metro Opera, among others. Role highlights include Tom Rakewell in *The Rake's Progress*, Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*, Tamino in *The Magic Flute*, Fenton in *Falstaff*, Count Almaviva in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Tebaldo in *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, Mercury in Rameau's *Platée*, and Laertes in Ambroise Thomas' rarely performed operatic version of *Hamlet*.

Cody Quattlebaum Guglielmo

Equally in demand for both operatic and concert repertoire – ranging from the Baroque to contemporary, American baritone Cody Quattlebaum will debut at Theatre Bonn in a world premier composed by Param Vir called *Awakening*. Quattlebaum will perform the role of Prince Gautam in this Vasily Barkhatov production. He will perform Bach's *St Matthew Passion* with Riccardo Minasi at the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia before making his house debut at La Fenice as Vulcano in Sciarrino's *Venere e Adone*.

Last season saw Quattlebaum star in several exciting projects: a newly imagined trilogy of Carl Orff's works entitled *Trionfi* conducted by Kent Nagano and staged at the Staatsoper Hamburg by acclaimed director Calixto Bieito; his highly anticipated debut at English National Opera as the Count in *The Marriage of Figaro*; Handel's *Messiah* with the Academy of Ancient Music at The Barbican and in Las Palmas; Bach's *St Matthew Passion* with the Concertgebouw Orchestra and Riccardo Minasi; and Zebul Jephtha with Il pomo d'oro.

Other recent highlights include Don Giovanni in Simon Steen-Andersen's new production and opera *Don Giovanni's Inferno* for his company debut at the Royal Danish Theatre; Kurwenal *Tristan und Isolde* at the Opéra de Rouen; Venere *Venere e Adone* at Staatsoper Hamburg; Bhishma in the world premiere of Thierry Pécou's *Until The Lions* and Ratefreund in the French premiere of *Braunfels' Die Vögel*, both with Opéra National du Rhin; Il Conte in *Le nozze di Figaro* with The Handel and Haydn Society conducted by Raphaël Pichon; his debut at the Israeli Opera as Figaro *Le nozze di Figaro* and with San Francisco Opera as Masetto *Don Giovanni*. Highlights on the concert platform include Georg Muffat's *Missa in labore* requies with Philharmonia Baroque; Beethoven *Missa Solemnis* with the Oslo Philharmonic conducted by Klaus Mäkelä; Hanns Eisler's *Deutsche Sinfonie* with the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra under the baton of Carlos Miguel Prieto and a concert version of *Don Giovanni* at Tanglewood Festival with Boston Symphony Orchestra conducted by Andris Nelsons.

Rebecca Evans Despina

Rebecca Evans was awarded a CBE in the 2020 Queen's Birthday Honours.

In the 26/27 season she returns to Welsh National Opera to sing Y Fon Hon in the Welsh language opera Hedd Wyn: Eisteddfod Atomig and sings Despina Così fan tutte with Dinis Sousa and Royal Northern Sinfonia.

Other recent highlights include the title role in Rodelinda for the English National Opera, Marcellina in Le nozze di Figaro for both the Royal Ballet and Opera and the English National Opera in London, Marschallin Der Rosenkavalier for the Welsh National Opera, Alice Ford Falstaff for the Teatro Real in Madrid and Hécube in a European tour of Berlioz' Les Troyens with the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique under Dinis Sousa.

Career highlights have included Contessa Le nozze di Figaro, Despina, Mimì La bohème and Pamina Die Zauberflöte for the Royal Opera; Governess The Turn of the Screw, Romilda Xerxes and Ginevra Ariodante for the English National Opera and Mimì, Contessa, Pamina, Ilia Idomeneo, Liu Turandot, Gretel Hänsel und Gretel and Angelica Orlando for the Welsh National Opera. Her Metropolitan Opera appearances include Susanna Le nozze di Figaro and Zerlina Don Giovanni; at the Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich she has sung Ginevra, Despina and Ilia and, at the Deutsche Staatsoper, Berlin, she has sung Despina.

Concert appearances include the Salzburg, Edinburgh, Tanglewood and Ravinia festivals and she is a regular guest at the BBC Proms. A Grammy Award-winning artist, she has recorded prolifically.

Rebecca is a Trustee of the Colwinston Charitable Trust and patron of several charities, among them Shelter Cymru, Ty Hapus and Music in Hospitals Cymru/Wales.

Neil Davies Don Alfonso

Neal Davies is a British bass-baritone. Recent operatic engagements include performances of *Jephtha* (Zebul) with Music of the Baroque and Jane Glover, *Yeoman of the Guard* (Sergeant) and Don Alfonso *Così fan tutte* for the English National Opera, and Papageno in the Welsh National Opera's production of *The Magic Flute*.

This season Neal sings concerts of *Saul* with Jonathan Cohen and the Handel & Haydn Society and will return to the English National Opera as Sir Joseph in *HMS Pinafore*. Notable concerts last season included Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ* at the Festival Berlioz La Côte Saint André with Paul McCreesh and the NFM Wroclaw Philharmonic, Mozart's *Requiem Mass in D minor* with Bernard Labadie and the Kansas City Symphony, Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* with Ryan Wigglesworth and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and joined Jonathan Cohen and the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra for Bach's *St Matthew Passion*. Neal also sang Dr Bartolo in the English National Opera's production of *The Marriage of Figaro*.

Notable collaborations include concerts with the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra under Mariss Jansons, BBC Symphony Orchestra under Pierre Boulez, The Cleveland and Philharmonia orchestras under Christoph von Dohnányi, Chamber Orchestra of Europe under Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment under Frans Brüggen, English Concert with Harry Bicket, Gabrieli Consort under Paul McCreesh, Hallé Orchestra with Sir Mark Elder, Concerto Koeln under Ivor Bolton, Scottish Chamber Orchestra with Adam Fischer, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra with Edward Gardner, Deutsches Symphonie Orchester Berlin with David Zinman, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra with Sir Andrew Davis, and the London Symphony and Vienna Philharmonic orchestras under Daniel Harding. He has been a regular guest of the Edinburgh Festival and BBC Proms.

Neal Davies studied at King's College, London, and the Royal Academy of Music, and won the Lieder Prize at the 1991 Cardiff Singer of the World Competition.

Chorus of Royal Northern Sinfonia

Chorus of Royal Northern Sinfonia is a vital part of the Royal Northern Sinfonia musical family, based at The Glasshouse International Centre for Music in Gateshead. They shine in the great choral masterpieces by Handel, Haydn and Mozart, excel with contemporary classical music by today's brightest composers, and bring film scores to life at screenings of Hollywood blockbusters such as *Home Alone*, *Hocus Pocus* and *Star Wars*.

In 2023, they celebrated their 50th anniversary with Mozart's *Requiem* and five contemporary pieces from the last five years. Recent highlights include Mendelssohn's *Lobesang* at the BBC Proms, Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* directed by Bjarte Eike, and Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* with hundreds of musicians from across the North East in The Glasshouse's latest Share the Stage concert.

As well as traditional classical music, the Chorus also enjoy new contemporary music, giving the world premiere of *All My Ships Are White* by Sarah Lianne Lewis in July 2022, commissioning *A blue and tender flower* by Kerensa Briggs to mark their 50th anniversary in October 2023 and including Eleanor Cully-Boehringer's *Snow on Snow* in festive concert tour A Choral Nativity.

Beyond the concert hall, the Chorus regularly perform on their own across the North East and Cumbria – popping up in parks, churches and community venues on their summer tours and spreading festive joy at Christmas. They often collaborate with other choirs in the region, including Gateshead Care Home Choir, Durham University Choral Society, Voices of the River's Edge and Huddersfield Choral Society.

Founded in 1973 by Royal Northern Sinfonia's timpanist Alan Fearon, the Chorus currently has over 90 members and has built a brilliant reputation for musical excellence over its 50-year history. The future is bright, with exciting opportunities growing every year, and new members are welcome at any time.

Royal Northern Sinfonia

Internationally renowned, calling Gateshead home.

37 musicians at the top of their game. Electrifying music, old and new. All the talent, determination, and creativity of the North East on a worldwide stage. From their home at The Glasshouse International Centre for Music, Royal Northern Sinfonia share the joy and wonder of orchestral music with thousands of people across the North of England - and beyond - every year.

From symphonies to string quartets, film soundtracks to choral masses, and original performances with awesome artists from Sheku Kanneh-Mason and Víkingur Ólafsson to Sam Fender and Self Esteem, the orchestra's members have got one of the most varied jobs there is. They're always looking for fresh new sounds from up-and-coming composers, inviting local communities to share a stage, and doing everything they can to inspire and prepare the musicians of tomorrow to one day take their place.

They're also working hard to smash the barriers that can stop brilliant people getting into classical music. They've teamed up with national partners to support women conductors to develop their careers, to help global majority musicians get vital experience in the orchestra world, and to celebrate disabled and non-disabled musicians breaking new ground together in inclusive ensemble RNS Moves. And they bring new musical opportunities to the region, headlining the first-ever BBC Proms weekend outside London.

Because they whole-heartedly believe orchestral music is for anyone - big cities and rural villages, tiny babies and life-long listeners, die-hard fans and curious minds - they travel far and wide to make sure there's top-notch classical music on offer in as many places as possible. You'll find them in churches, castles, and community venues across the North, as well as leading the charge in Carlisle, Kendal, Middlesbrough, and Sunderland.

With 65 years of success to build on, they've signed a dynamic artistic leadership – Music Director Dinis Sousa, Artistic Partner Maria Włoszczowska, Principal Guest Conductor Nil Venditti and Associate Conductor Ellie Slorach – to lead the way into a bold, bright future.

Wherever the orchestra play and whoever they share a stage with, every performance is a chance to see, hear and feel the music.