Le Nozze di Figaro was the first opera in which Mozart collaborated with Lorenzo Da Ponte; it has been conjectured that the two men previously worked for a time on an opera buffa, Lo Spasò deluso, but only a handful of numbers were completed and proof of Da Ponte’s authorship of the text is in any case lacking. It is probable that the suggestion of an operatic adaptation of Beaumarchais’ Le Marriage de Figaro came originally from Mozart himself; the work had been first produced in Paris in 1784 and its anti-feudal theme would certainly have appealed to the composer after his own experiences in the service of the Archbishop of Salzburg. Da Ponte responded favourably to the idea, and the opera was completed in six weeks and was first performed at the Burg Theatre, Vienna on May 1, 1786.

Beaumarchais’ Le Mariage de Figaro was of course a sequel to his earlier play Le Barbier de Séville, which included the same principal characters. Mozart never made an opera of Le Barbier de Séville, probably because Paisiello’s setting had become famous during the 1780’s, and the earlier Figaro comedy had to wait until 1816 for its definitive operatic treatment, at the hands of Rossini. Some knowledge of the main events of Le Barbier de Séville is necessary to the understanding of the later work. The elderly Doctor Bartolo plans to marry his youthful ward Almaviva, who is courting her secretly. He is assisted in his efforts to outwit Bartolo and gain Rosina’s hand by Figaro, the Seville barber and general factotum, and the play ends with the success of their plans.

The interval between the conclusion of Le Barbier de Séville and the opening of Le Mariage de Figaro is never exactly specified, but the situation in the later work is very different from that at the close of the earlier. The drama is set in Count Almaviva’s castle and grounds. The Count has grown tired of his consort, and has his eye on her lady’s maid Susanna who is betrothed to Figaro, now the Count’s valet; and the latter’s talent for intrigue now has to be turned against his master. The change in the characters can be gathered by comparing the types of voice for which Rossini and Mozart cast them. Rosina, a frivolous coloratura contralto in Il Barbiere, becomes a soprano in Mozart; the Count changes from a lyric tenor to a bass-baritone, Figaro from a high baritone to a bass-baritone; Don Basilio, a less formidable figure in Mozart than in Rossini, is transformed from a dramatic bass into a Spieltenor; and the only two characters who have the same type of voice in both dramas are the basso buffo Doctor Bartolo and his mezzo-soprano housekeeper Marcellina. In Figaro two delightful lyric soprano roles are added to the dramatis personae, those of Susanna and the page Cherubino.

The overture to Le Nozze di Figaro is one of Mozart’s most economical, having neither introduction nor development section. It quotes no themes from the opera, but its bubbling high spirits ideally create the atmosphere of the drama which is to follow.

ACT 1

A half-furnished room in Count Almaviva’s castle near Seville

The first act is set in a room in the castle which the Count has allotted to Figaro and Susanna, to be occupied by them after their marriage. The curtain rises to show Figaro taking the measurements of the room (“Cinque, dieci”) and Susanna trying on a new hat before the mirror. He wonders where their bed should stand, but Susanna announces that she has no intention of sleeping in the room, despite its convenient proximity to the apartments of their master and mistress, since this would give the Count an ideal opportunity of satisfying the designs which she knows he has against her (“Se a caso Madama”). She has heard from the music-master Don Basilio, who gives her singing lessons, that although the Count has abolished the droit de seigneur, which allowed him to take his pleasure with any girl married on his estate, he regrets this liberal measure, and wants to buy back Susanna’s favour with the dowry he has paid her. Susanna leaves the room, and Figaro reflects on the situation. He realizes now why the Count, when appointed ambassador to London, settled to take him as courier and Susanna as confidential attaché. The drama of intrigue (“Se vuol ballare, signor Contino”).

He goes out, and Doctor Bartolo enters, with his housekeeper and ex-mistress Marcellina. The latter has some claims on Figaro, for he once received a loan from her, contracting to marry her if he should be unable to repay it. He has not done so, and the housekeeper plans to encourage Susanna to reject the Count’s advances so that he will be angry with the maid and will take Marcellina’s part when she claims Figaro’s hand in marriage. Bartolo warmly supports this plan to saddle the valet with his former mistress, for it was Figaro who frustrated his plans to marry the present Countess Almaviva. He sings a vengeance aria (“La vendetta”) and then departs.

Susanna returns, and Marcellina begins her campaign of insinuation about the maid’s relations with the Count. Susanna repays the housekeeper’s spiteful sallies in kind, and after a duet full of sharp interchanges (“Via resti servita”) Marcellina flounces out indignantly.

SIDE No. 2

The page Cherubino enters. He is a youth of good family who is receiving an education in manners at the castle, and, extremely susceptible by nature, is accustomed to fall in love with every woman he sees. At present he is broken-hearted because the Count has discovered his affair with Barbarina, the gardener’s daughter, and is sending him away from the castle as a punishment. He is equally distressed at the prospect of losing the Countess and Susanna, and sings of his chronic lovesickness (“Non so piu, cosa son”).

The Count enters, and Cherubino quickly hides behind a large armchair. After the Count has started making love to Susanna, the voice of Don Basilio is heard outside. It is now the Count’s turn to hide behind the chair, while Cherubino (unseen by his master) scrambles round and sits in it, Susanna covering him with a dress. Don Basilio enters, as usual full of malicious slander, and makes insinuations about Cherubino and the Countess. At this the Count comes forth angrily, and there is a trio between the three characters (“Cosa sento”) in the course of which Almaviva, while demonstrating how he found Cherubino with Barbarina, lifts the dress out of the armchair and discovers the page in yet another compromising situation.

Susanna tries to explain that Cherubino had only come to plead for the remission of his sentence of banishment, but the Count, furious that the page should have overheard (continued on inside of back album cover)
Cherubino now pleads for pardon, and Figaro and Susanna support his prayers. The Count agrees not to dismiss him and instead makes him an officer in his regiment. The act ends with Figaro good humouredly pointing out the contrast the page will find between army life and his present soft existence at the castle ("Non più andrai").

ACT 2

The Countess's room in the castle

At the start of the act the Countess is found lamenting the loss of her husband's love ("Porgi amor"). Susanna enters and tells her of the Count's attempts to seduce her. Figaro then appears and outlines a plan he has made to defeat the Count's designs. First, he has aroused his master's anger by sending him an anonymous letter revealing that the Countess is to meet an admirer in the garden that evening; then Susanna is to grant the Count a nocturnal assignation, also in the garden, which Cherubino is to keep, dressed as a woman. The Countess is to catch the two red-handed, and the Count, in his embarrassment, will be forced to give his consent to the marriage of Figaro and Susanna.

Cherubino enters and sings the Countess a love-song he has just composed ("Voi, che sapete"). Susanna proceeds to dress him in feminine clothes for the evening's intrigue ("Venite inginocchiatevi"). In the final stages of the operation, the Count's voice is heard outside demanding admittance to the room, and Cherubino has to hide in an inner chamber. The Countess then unlocks her door and admits her husband who angrily asks why she has kept him waiting. Cherubino knocks over a chair in the inner mittance to the room, and Cherubino has to hide in an inner chamber and locking herself in.

ACT 3

A large hall in the castle

The Count is puzzling over the events of the previous act. Susanna enters, and he begins to make love to her ("Crudel! perché finora"). She agrees to a nocturnal assignation in the garden, but as she goes out, the Count overhears her say something to Figaro which makes it obvious that the maid has been playing with him. He immediately begins to ponder how her marriage with Figaro can be frustrated; perhaps the valet will not be able to pay off Marcellina, or Antonio, who is Susanna's uncle, will refuse his consent on the grounds that Figaro is a foundling. The Count then expresses his rage that his servant should gain his heart's desire, while he, a nobleman, should be baulked ("Vedro, mentr'io sospiro").

Figaro enters with Marcellina, Doctor Bartolo, and a lawyer, Don Curzio. The latter states the legal position: Figaro, since he cannot repay Marcellina the money he owes, will have to marry her. Figaro replies that he is a gentleman, stolen in infancy, and cannot marry without his parent's consent. Asked for proof of his statement, he says he has a strawberry mark on his right arm; and from this Marcellina identifies him as Rafaello, her long-lost son by Doctor Bartolo. At this point the sextet, "Riconosci in questo ampesso", begins. The parents rejoice at finding their son again. Susanna enters with the money to repay Marcellina, and seeing her betrothed embracing the housekeeper, she boxes his ears. Matters are soon explained, however, and the sextet ends with serene phrases from the two couples and dark threats from the Count and Don Curzio. The Count and the lawyer then depart, and the others follow, after Figaro has been loaded with wedding gifts.

Barbarina now leads in Cherubino. The latter, whom the Count believes to be in Seville, intends to be present at Figaro's wedding, disguised as a girl.

ACT 4

The castle garden at night

Barbarina enters, looking for a pin which the Count instructed her to convey to Susanna and which she has dropped ("L'ho perduta"). Figaro appears, with Marcellina, and Barbarina naively tells him her position of messenger between the Count and Susanna. The valet at once concludes that Susanna is betraying him, and swears to be avenged. Marcellina, who does not share Figaro's suspicions, laments the lot of woman with unreasonable men ("Il capro e la capretta").

Figaro fetches Bartolo and Basilio to witness Susanna's perfidy, and the music master sings an aria describing his own more prudent tactics in affairs of the heart ("In quegl' anni, in cui val poco"). He and Bartolo go to a nearby arbour, and Figaro, after inveighing against the female sex ("Aprite un po' quegl' occhi"), hides among the trees.

ACT 5

Susanna and the Countess enter, dressed in each other's clothes and followed by Marcellina. Susanna awaits the Count and the other two retire. The maid is quite aware that Figaro is watching her and thinks she is betraying him, but she decides to prolong his suspense as a punishment for suspecting her, and sings in joyful anticipation of the arrival of her lover ("Deh vieni, non tardar").

Cherubino appears, on his way to an amorous assignation with Barbarina. He catches sight of the Countess, whom he mistakes for Susanna, and begins to make love to her ("Pian, pianin le andro piu presso"). As he is about to kiss her, the Count arrives and, stepping between them, receives the kiss. He aims a blow at the page, but the latter runs off, and the buffet is stopped by Figaro, who has come forward to see what is happening.

The Count now begins his love-making with the supposed Susanna. They are going towards an arbour together when the Count sees Figaro again approaching them and is forced to retreat behind the trees. The valet finds the disguised Susanna, and addresses her amorously. The maid, thinking that he takes her for the Countess, loses her temper and rains blows upon him, and Figaro, who has known the truth all along, is delighted by these proofs of her affection. At length he admits that he recognized her all the time, and the two are reconciled.

Meanwhile, the Count is trying to find Susanna again; and Figaro, to vex him, continues his love-making with the real Susanna, who is still of course disguised as the Countess. The Count, thinking his wife is betraying him, seizes the valet furiously and summons his creatures, Basilio, Curzio, Bartolo and Antonio. He goes to the arbour, whither his supposed wife has retired, and finds her with Cherubino, Barbarina and Marcellina. Everyone begs forgiveness for her, but the Count is implacable until the real Countess comes out of another arbour and the true state of affairs is revealed. The Count, realizing that he has been pursuing his own wife all along, collapses like a pricked bubble and asks her pardon. The opera ends with a brisk tutti.
LE NOZZE DI FIGARO
(The Marriage of Figaro)  (Mozart)
Overture  ACT I (P. 1) C’tume, disc—Cosa stai misurando—
Se a caso Madame—O’ ben, accosta—Se vuol ballare—Ed
aspettano—La vendetta—Tutto ancor non ho perso—
Via resti servito

CESARE SIEPI, HILDE GUEDEN, FERNANDO
CORENA, HILDE ROESSEL-MAJDAN
with THE VIENNA PHILHARMONIC
ORCHESTRA
conducted by ERICH KLEIBER

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MADE IN ENGLAND
LE NOZZE DI FIGARO
(The Marriage of Figaro) (Mozart)
ACT I (Concl.) Va la vecchia palanca—Non so più—Taci, rien giusi—Cosa senso!—Il basill, in traccia tosto—Giovanni, mio—
Con questa commedia—Giovanni, mio—Ervev! Ervev!
Evviva!—Non più andrai
HILDE GUEDEN, SUZANNE DANCIO, ALFRED POELL, MURRAY DICKIE, CESARE SIEPI
with THE VIENNA STATE OPERA CHORUS
and THE VIENNA PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA conducted by
ERICH KLEIBER
MADE IN ENGLAND
LE NOZZE DI FIGARO
(The Marriage of Figaro) (Mozart)
ACT 2 (Pt. 1) Porgi amor—Voi, cara Susanna—Voi, che saper—Bravo, che bella voce—Voi, la virtù—Susanna, o via torto—Donna, non vieni aperta—Aprile, presto aperte—O aprite, o damigella

Lisa della Casa, Hilde Güden, Cesare Siepi, Suzanne Danco, Alfred Poell
with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra
conducted by Erich Kleiber

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Le Nozze di Figaro
(The Marriage of Figaro — Mozart)
ACT 2 (Concl.) Tutti è come io lascio—Esci omai, garzon malmato
(Franko)
ALFRED POELL, LISA DELLA CASA, HILDE GUEDEN, CESARE SIEPI, HARALD PROGLHOF,
HILDE ROESSEL-MAJDAN, MURRAY DICKIE, FERNANDO CORENA
with THE VIENNA PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
conducted by ERICH KLEIBER
MADE IN ENGLAND
LE NOZZE DI FIGARO
(The Marriage of Figaro) (Mozart)

ACT 3 (Pt. 1) Che imbarazzo è mai questo—Crudel! perché finora—
E perché fosti meco—Hai gia vinto la causa—Vedr6é, mentr'io sospiro
—E decisa la lite—Riconosci in questo amplesso—Eccovi, 0 caro amico

ALFRED POELL, LISA DELLA CASA, HILDE GUEDEN, CESARE SIEPI, HUGO MEYER-
WELFING, HILDE ROESSEL-MAJDAN, FERNANDO CORENA, ANNY FELBERMAYER

with THE VIENNA PHILHARMONIC

ORCHESTRA

conducted by

ERICH KLEIBER

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(The Marriage of Figaro) (Mozart)
ACT 3 (Concl.) E Susanna non vieni!—Dove sei no? Io vi dico Signor—Sull’aria (Largo Danza)—Prendetela a filo—Riconosci—padroncina—Questo sono, Madama—Ecco la marcia

LISA DELLA CASA, HARALD PROGLHOF,
ALFRED POELL—HILDE GUEDEN, ANNY
FELBERMAYER, SUZANNE DANCO,
CESARE SIEPI &
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(The Marriage of Figaro) (Mozart)
ACT 4 (Pt. 1) L'ho perduta—Barbarina, cos'è tu?—il coreo a la capretta—Nel padiglione a un cuoco—In quegl'anni—Tutto è disposto—Aprite un po' quegli' cocchi

ANNY FELBERMAYER, CESARE SIEPI, HILDE MAJDAN, FERNANDO CORENA
with THE VIENNA PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA conducted by ERICH KLEIBER

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