

Synopsis: The Magic Flute (*Die Zauberflöte*)

Composer: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Libretto: Emanuel Schikaneder

First Performance: Theater auf der Wieden, Vienna, September 30, 1791

Original Language: German

Act I.

A mythical land between the sun and the moon. Three ladies in the service of the Queen of the Night save the fainting Prince Tamino from a serpent. When they have left, the birdcatcher Papageno bounces in. He tells Tamino that he is given food and drink in return for his birds and boasts that it was he who killed the serpent. The ladies return to give Tamino a portrait of the queen's daughter, Pamina, who they say is enslaved by the evil Sarastro. Then they padlock Papageno's mouth for lying. Tamino immediately falls in love with Pamina's face in the portrait ("Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön"). The queen, appearing in a burst of thunder, grieves over the loss of her daughter and asks Tamino to rescue her ("Zum Leiden bin ich auserkoren"). The ladies hand Tamino a magic flute to ensure his safety on the journey. Papageno, who is to accompany him, is given magic silver bells. Three spirits are appointed to guide the travelers.

In Sarastro's palace, the slave Monostatos pursues Pamina. He is frightened away by the feather-covered Papageno, who tells Pamina that Tamino loves her and is on his way to save her (Duet: "Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen").

Led to the temple of Sarastro, Tamino learns from a high priest that it is the queen who is evil, not Sarastro, and that Pamina is safe. He plays on his flute, charming the animals with the music and hoping that it will lead Pamina to him. When he hears the sound of Papageno's pipes, he rushes off to follow it. Monostatos and his men chase Papageno and Pamina but are rendered helpless by Papageno's magic bells. Sarastro, entering in ceremony, promises Pamina eventual freedom and punishes Monostatos. Pamina is enchanted by a glimpse of Tamino, who is led into the temple with Papageno.

Act II.

Sarastro tells the priests that Tamino will undergo initiation rites ("O Isis und Osiris"). Papageno and Tamino are sworn to silence. The three ladies appear and have no trouble derailing Papageno from his course of virtue, but Tamino remains firm.

Monostatos tries to kiss the sleeping Pamina ("Alles fühlt der Liebe Freuden") but is chased away by the arrival of the Queen of the Night. She gives her daughter a dagger and orders her to murder Sarastro ("Der Hölle Rache"). Left alone, the weeping Pamina is confronted and consoled by Sarastro ("In diesen heil'gen Hallen").

Papageno is quick to break a new oath of fasting and jokes with a flirtatious old lady, who vanishes when he asks for her name. Tamino remains steadfast, breaking Pamina's heart: she cannot understand his silence ("Ach, ich fühl's, es ist verschwunden").

The priests inform Tamino that he has only two more trials to complete his initiation. Papageno, who has broken his oath, is eliminated from the trials, but after pleading for a cuddly wife (“Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen”) settles for the old lady. When he promises to be faithful she turns into a young Papagena and disappears.

The spirits save the despairing Pamina from suicide. She finds Tamino and walks with him through the ordeals of water and fire, protected by the magic flute.

Papageno also is saved from attempted suicide by the spirits, who remind him that if he uses his magic bells he will find true happiness. When he plays the bells, Papagena appears (Duet: “Pa-pa-pa-pagena! Pa-pa-pa-pageno!”).

The Queen of the Night, her three ladies, and Monostatos attack the temple but are defeated and banished. Sarastro joins Pamina and Tamino as everybody praises Isis, Osiris, and the triumph of courage, virtue, and wisdom.

- - Courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera