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Mozart Comedy of the Heart Shines Anew

Vienna State Opera, 25.10.2025 [ENA]

From the very moment the overture began in Vienna, this production of Mozart's "Così fan tutte" announced itself as a triumph of musical finesse, theatrical intelligence and emotional subtlety. Conducted by Adam Fischer, the orchestra struck just the right balance between transparent lightness and dramatic thrust, allowing Mozart's intricate ensemble textures and clever vocal interplay to shine.

It is also sustaining the underlying emotional arc of the story. The pit playing was crisp and stylish, the winds and strings articulate, the pacing of the number sequences deft and theatrical. Fischer's reading respected the score's form while subtly highlighting its modern-relevant undercurrents of fidelity, disguise and self-knowledge. On the Vienna stage under the inventive direction of Barrie Kosky, this production delivered a vibrant, witty and humane "Così" that felt both authentic to Mozart-Da Ponte's dramma giocoso tradition and freshly alive for present-day audiences.

Kosky's staging avoided parody or pastiche, instead allowing the characters real emotional shifts amidst the comedy. The set and costumes (by Gianluca Falaschi) blended elegant period reference with a timeless aesthetic: each scene looked glamorous yet plausible, imbued with human scale, so that the gambit of Don Alfonso's wager felt immediate and poignant. The cast delivered extraordinary individual contributions and seamless ensemble cohesion. As Fiordiligi, Ruzan Mantashyan offered a soprano of luminous beauty and expressive depth; her "Come scoglio" was both technically secure and emotionally resonant, capturing the character's inner resistance and eventual awakening with compelling nuance.

In the role of Dorabella, Alma Neuhaus brought warmth, agility and clear dramatic instinct; her chemistry with Mattashyan was one of the evening's quietly moving elements, their sisterly tension and mutual support compellingly rendered. In their male counterparts, Markus Werba (Guglielmo) and Dovlet Nurgeldiyev (Ferrando) combined handsome vocal timbre with credible character arcs. Werba's Guglielmo conveyed both confidence and, as the plot evolves, vulnerability; Nurgeldiyev's Ferrando brought lyrical grace and a touching sense of confusion and remorse. Their duets in Act II, especially the moment of recognition and the reprise of "Al fato" were quietly gripping, carried by a supple vocal line and musical empathy rather than flashy bravura

As the manipulate orchestrator of the plot, Don Alfonso was rendered by the formidable Luca Pisaroni, whose bass-baritone combined worldly cynicism and a sly theatrical pose—he never undercut the humanity

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of his character, even as he set the game in motion. Musical and dramatic transitions were polished to a high standard: nothing felt abrupt, and each transformation in scene or mood resolved organically.

isually, the production impressed from first to last. Kosky's staging created fluid movement between rooms, disguises, social games and emotional revelation—each disguise sequence was staged with clarity and wit, the transitions between the lovers' tests and ultimate reckoning smoothly handled. The lighting by Franck Evin was subtle and evocative, shifting mood from playful moon-lit gardens to the interior spaces of seduction, then to the final ensemble's somber resolution without ever feeling contrived. Notably, the final scene—often treated quasi-farce in lesser productions—was given proper weight here. The music's penultimate lament and the repeated ensemble passages found full dramatic volume; the moments of remorse and forgiveness.

A highlight of the evening was the way moments of comedy and farce were allowed to breathe without undermining the emotional stakes. The quartet's "Soave sia il vento" in Act II was a model of lyric elegance—here Mantashyan, Neuhaus, Werba and Nurgeldiyev attained a glow of collective vocal unity, each voice distinct yet together shimmering. Immediately thereafter, the seduction sequences proceeded with pace and intelligence: the witty timing of Dorabella's "Smanie implacabili" and Fiordiligi's resistance (and eventual yielding) were treated with respect for Mozart's irony and humanity. One sensed the stakes of loyalty, identity, and the trajectory of youthful innocence shifting, rather than mere comedic reversal.

In terms of orchestral and musical detail, Fischer's tempi were judicious: the faster ensemble numbers never felt rushed, and the slower arias never dragged. The strings were warm and articulate, the woodwind solos – such as the clarinet in Guglielmo's first aria – beautifully shaped and integrated. The continuo (harpsichord/cello) underpinned recitatives with clarity, giving the scene shifts weight. The balance in the pit was exquisite; the singers were clearly audible even in full ensemble numbers, and the orchestra retained sparkle and propulsion. It is worth noting that in many houses the orchestral support in Mozart can be either overly smooth (lacking sparkle) or too heavy.

Beyond the purely musical and dramatic, what this staging achieved was a reaffirmation of Mozart-Da Ponte's genius and the continued vitality of "Così fan tutte" as not simply a divertimento but a work of psychological insight and social relevance. In this Vienna production one sensed a belief in the text's integrity, but also a willingness to allow its themes of loyalty, deception and human foibles to speak with freshness. Kosky avoided gimmicks and instead let character and music carry the evening. The production's modest design elements—no overwhelming video projections or gimmicky reinterpretations—allowed voices and ensemble to be at the foreground of theatre.

The result was an opera that entertained fully yet left the audience with richer reflections on the nature of

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promise, betrayal and forgiveness. In conclusion, this “Così fan tutte” at the Vienna State Opera is a triumph in every sense: musically assured, dramatically subtle, theatrically intelligent and emotionally resonant. The cast was superb, the orchestra and conductor exemplary, the staging engaging without distraction. It stands as a reminder that Mozart’s work remains as fresh, witty and profound today as ever. For the devotee of opera, and especially of Mozart, this performance must be listed among the standout evenings of the season.

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