

FORBES CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY.

School of Music

presents

Così fan tutte
(The School for Lovers)

featuring the JMU Opera Theater

Don Rierson, Director

Foster Beyers, Conductor

Bryce Hayes, Chorus Master and Music Director

Friday-Sunday,
November 10-12
Mainstage Theatre



There will be a 15-minute intermission
between Acts I and II.

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Director's Note

Così fan tutte is often translated "so are they all"; *tutte* is feminine plural, so by implication, "women are like that." For this reason, the opera has endured criticism during the era of "political correctness" for its denigration of feminine sensibility. However, those who make such an assumption usually don't consider the intellectual environment or the theatrical conventions of the late 18th century. *Così* was written during the Enlightenment, when intellectuals such as Jefferson, Madison, and Voltaire debated the idea of "natural law" and whether or not one's "nature" had anything to do with one's destiny. The key to understanding Mozart's opera comes in the statement that Don Alfonso makes to the young soldiers just before the Act II finale: "you can't expect women to act in a certain way just because you want them to." He's implying that Fiordiligi and Dorabella fell victim to their new lovers' rhetoric because of their more empathic feminine natures; and by that point in the plot, we have seen that they have actually been more sympathetic, and at least initially, more faithful (especially Fiordiligi) to their original commitments than their male counterparts. By comparison, from the male perspective, the relationship was ego-based. In the first number, both men sing about the unassailable faithfulness of "my Fiordiligi ... my Dorabella," and later, they are both furious when their friend succeeds in winning their original girlfriend. This jealousy motivates Ferrando's final assault on Fiordiligi's rock-solid commitment, and the plot turns out exactly as Don Alfonso predicted. He wins.

That being said, the title could just as easily be construed to mean "so are they all" young people in love - so the opera is just as much about the contrast between immature and mature perspectives with regard to the virtue of fidelity. It is also important to remember that all three of the "Da Ponte operas" were composed when the European intelligentsia was still in conflict over the demise of the detestable *droit du seigneur*, which entitled a male aristocrat to the virginity of any non-noble in the manor. *Figaro*, *Giovanni*, and *Così* are all dialogues about fidelity. How ironic that Da Ponte had been banished from Venice for managing a brothel!

Despina's enactment of the "medico" is a clear reference to Franz Mesmer's theories relating to "animal magnetism" and hypnotic suggestion. The young men's success in changing the women has much to do with the language they use and what I call "The Handsome Stranger" or "Gigolo" Effect - get what you want by telling your victims what you know they want to hear. Play on their projections and your exoticism. Mozart had already demonstrated these techniques quite clearly in *Don Giovanni*.

Finally, the Da Ponte operas were an entirely new genre - more like what we expect from *Saturday Night Live*. Da Ponte based the plot on topical issues and used epithetical material throughout the libretto to drive the sociopsychological points home. If we translate *Così fan tutte* as "women are like that," we should put this motto in parentheses, because the opera clearly demonstrates that it is not only the women who are vulnerable and changeable in love, but the young officers as well. The worldly Don Alfonso, Da Ponte's mouthpiece, is responding to a popular male attitude and teaches his lesson by responding with ironic comic situations and epithets, much like the quotations in *Frazier* episodes. In the end, we get it and laugh at ourselves. This opera is brilliant. Enjoy the show!

- Don Rierson

Setting

A Bayside Quay, Villa, and Garden in Naples - Summer, 1790

The Cast

Fiordiligi.....Susan Gouthro (11/10 and 11/12);
Yvette Rodriguez (11/11)
Dorabella.....Darby Clinard (11/10 and 11/12);
Leah Shewmaker (11/11)
Guglielmo.....Kyle Knappenberger (11/10 and 11/12);
Joel Clemens (11/11)
Ferrando.....Jian Chou Gou (11/10 and 11/12);
David Bogaev (11/11)
Despina.....Melissa McCann (11/10 and 11/12);
Amanda Mason (11/11)
Don Alfonso.....Peter Barber (11/10 and 11/12);
Raiquan Thomas (11/11)
Townspeople and soldiers.....Kathryn Bentley, Mary Galvin,
Natalie Harris, Brenna McFarland, Cecilia McKinley, Megan O'Brien,
Anastasia Ross, Monica Slater, Reva Thompson, Isabella Valdes,
Ammad Akbari, Scott Clark, Aidan Everett, Leif Jomaud,
Justin Long, Dian Rene, Sterling Webster

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personal computers, and any other electronic devices.

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Synopsis

Act I

Ferrando and Guglielmo, two young soldiers, brag about the fidelity of their lovers, the sisters Fiordiligi and Dorabella. An old friend, the wiser and more experienced Don Alfonso, challenges their bravado, proposing a wager: if they'll give him one day and do everything he asks, he will demonstrate that the sisters are potentially unfaithful. Amused, and overly arrogant, the young men agree.

Fiordiligi and Dorabella muse about their lovers, imagining that they will soon be married. Alfonso sets his plan in motion when he arrives with terrible news: the officers have been called away to their regiment. Ferrando and Guglielmo appear, apparently heartbroken, and the four make tearful farewells. As the soldiers leave, the two women and Alfonso sadly wish them a safe journey.

Later, the sisters' maid, Despina, complains about how much work she has to do. The girls enter and Dorabella vents her despair. The bawdy maid refuses to take them seriously—they should simply find new lovers, since most men are unworthy of a woman's fidelity. The less experienced sisters are shocked. Alfonso arrives and bribes Despina to assist him, without revealing his plot. Ferrando and Guglielmo enter, disguised as "Albanians," and declare their love for the ladies, each pursuing the other's girlfriend. The sisters firmly reject their advances; Fiordiligi angrily compares her constancy to a rock in a storm. The men are confident of winning the bet. Ferrando then expresses his love for Dorabella.

As the sisters continue to lament the absence of their lovers, the "foreigners" return, pretending to have poisoned themselves in despair. Despina and Alfonso go off to fetch help, leaving the two girls to care for the strangers who find the situation highly amusing. Despina reappears disguised as a doctor and pretends to draw out the poison with a magnet. When Ferrando and Guglielmo request kisses in order to fully recover, the sisters again reject them, but clearly, they are beginning to have feelings for the exotic strangers.

Act II

Despina lectures her mistresses on how to handle men, and the sisters agree that there can be no harm in a little flirtation. They decide on their partners, each picking the other's suitor. Guglielmo, flirting with Dorabella, succeeds in replacing her portrait of Ferrando with his own. Ferrando has less luck with Fiordiligi, but after he leaves, she struggles with her feelings for him.

Ferrando is certain that they have won the wager. Guglielmo is happy to hear that Fiordiligi has been faithful to him, but when he shows his friend the portrait he took from Dorabella, Ferrando is furious. Guglielmo, beginning to understand Alfonso's perspective, blames it on the women. He asks Alfonso to pay him his half of the winnings, but Alfonso reminds him that the day is not yet over.

Synopsis (cont'd)

To avoid further temptation evoked by her new suitor, Fiordiligi plans to disguise herself and join Guglielmo at the front when suddenly Ferrando appears. He tries one last time to seduce her and succeeds. Of course, Guglielmo is furious, and again, Alfonso declares that this is the way women are. A man who allows himself to be deceived can blame only himself.

The sisters finally agree to marry the "foreigners." The wedding banquet is ready and Alfonso arrives with the notary—Despina in another disguise. As Fiordiligi and Dorabella sign the contract, military music announces the return of their former lovers. In panic, they hide their intended husbands, who return as their real selves, first pretending surprise at their reception and then upon rediscovering the marriage contract, blaming the girls and threatening revenge. Finally, the men reveal their disguised identities, and Fiordiligi and Dorabella ask forgiveness. Alfonso succeeds in teaching the lovers a lesson about the true nature of fidelity in "the school for lovers."

Opera Staff

Assistant Conductor/Conductor (11/11).....	Dianna Fiore
Staff Accompanist.....	Clement Acevedo
Reserve Accompanist.....	Alan Tunucci
Assistant to the Director for Diction and Movement.....	Cynthia Wohlschlager
Assistant to the Director for Communications and Choreography.....	Nora Winsler
Assistant Vocal and Dramatic Coach.....	Susan Gouthro
Special Guest Advisor for Italian Diction and Rhetoric	Dr. Giuliana Fazzion
Office Assistants.....	Judy Sager, Kim Velazquez, Donna Wampler

Production Staff

Stage Manager.....	Rachel Walsh
Lighting Design.....	Kaitlin Tinsley*
Master Electrician.....	Bradley Monahan
Set Designer.....	Daniel Carter for TriCities Opera
TriCities Opera Technical Director.....	Shawn Shevlin
Wardrobe.....	Grace Eldred
Stage Crew.....	Emma Miller, Leya Quinones, Sarah Christenson, Paola Losada, Mary Minns, Sydney Smith, Katherine Murphy

* denotes JMU alumna

Special Thanks

JMU School of Theatre and Dance

Upcoming Opera Events

FEBRUARY

Opera Spotlight: An Eveing in Strauss' Vienna

Feb. 15-
Feb. 16

APRIL

Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore*
Featuring the JMU Opera Theater

Apr. 11-
Apr. 12

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Aquila Theatre

Nov. 14

Jane Austen's *Sense & Sensibility*

Nobuntu*

Nov. 16

Catalyst Quartet

Nov. 28

DECEMBER

Holidayfest

Dec. 2-3

JMU Jazz Ensemble and Jazz Band

Dec. 5

JMU Treble Chamber Choir and University Choruses

Dec. 6

Dancescapes

Dec. 7-10

Featuring JMU's Virginia Repertory Dance Company

JMU Wind Symphony and Symphonic Band

Dec. 8

JMU Symphony Orchestra

Dec. 9

JMU Brass Band

Dec. 10

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* denotes a Forbes Family Fun event

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF THEATRE AND DANCE
AND
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PARADE

Book By **ALFRED UHRY**
Music & Lyrics by **JASON ROBERT BROWN**
Co-Conceived and Directed on Broadway by **HAROLD PRINCE**

Mainstage Theatre
Forbes Center for the Performing Arts

Tuesday, Friday, February 20-23, 2018 at 3p.m.

Saturday, February 24, 2018 at 3p.m. & 8p.m.

Sunday, February 25, 2018 at 2p.m.

Regular Admission - \$20

JMU Faculty/Staff & Senior (62+) - \$18

JMU Students - \$13

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