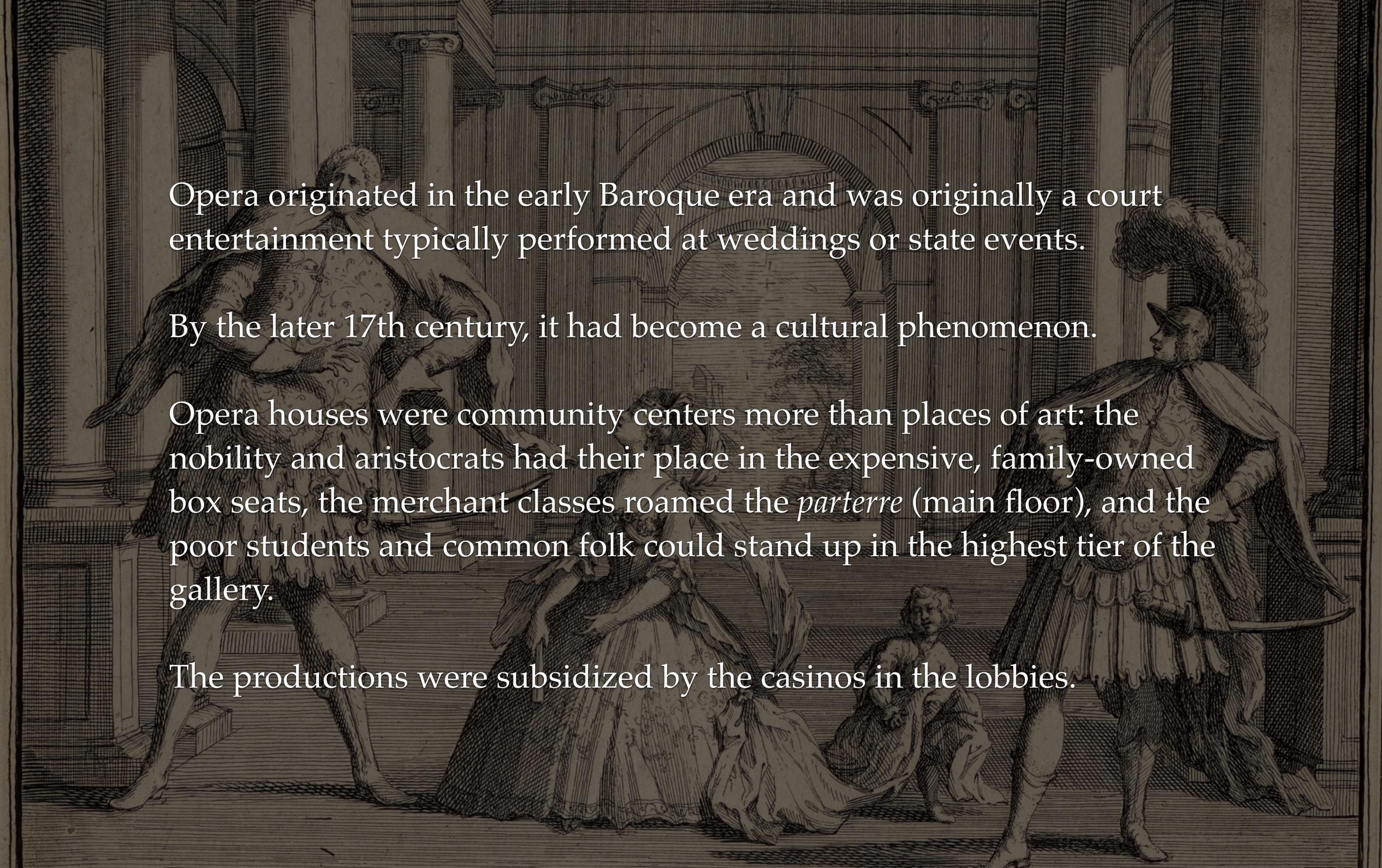


The Classical Style

Opera

Fission, Fusion, and Reform

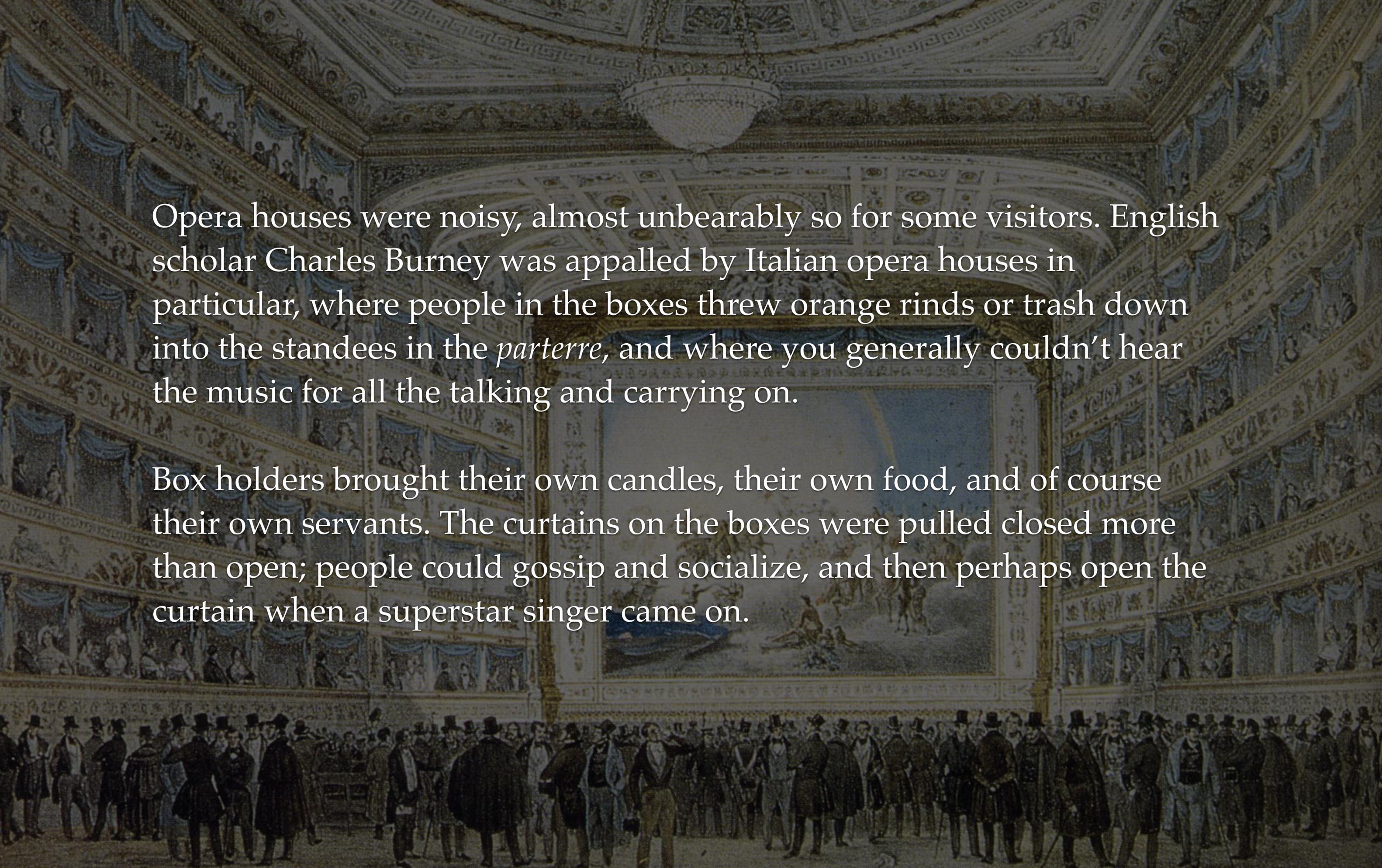


Opera originated in the early Baroque era and was originally a court entertainment typically performed at weddings or state events.

By the later 17th century, it had become a cultural phenomenon.

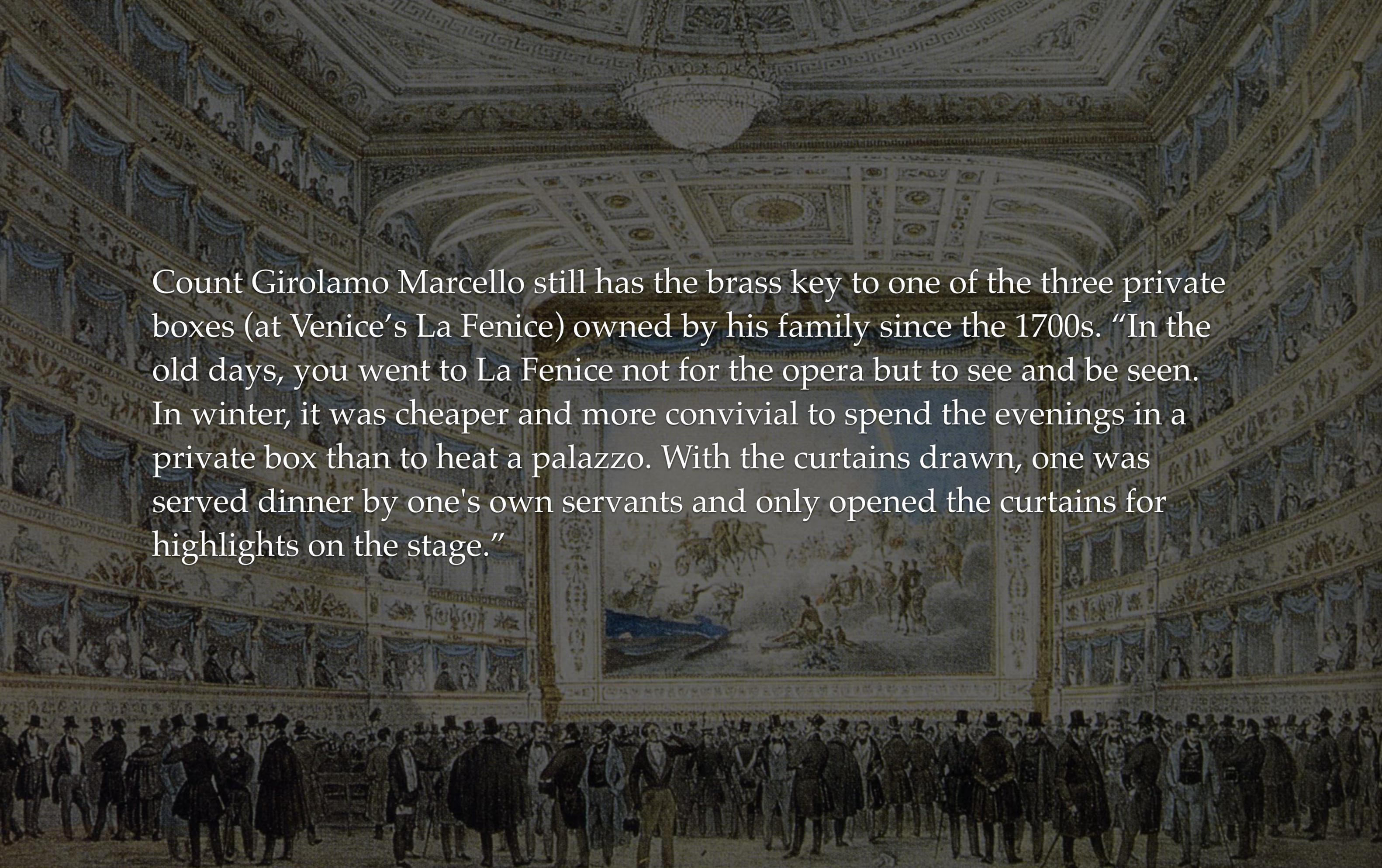
Opera houses were community centers more than places of art: the nobility and aristocrats had their place in the expensive, family-owned box seats, the merchant classes roamed the *parterre* (main floor), and the poor students and common folk could stand up in the highest tier of the gallery.

The productions were subsidized by the casinos in the lobbies.

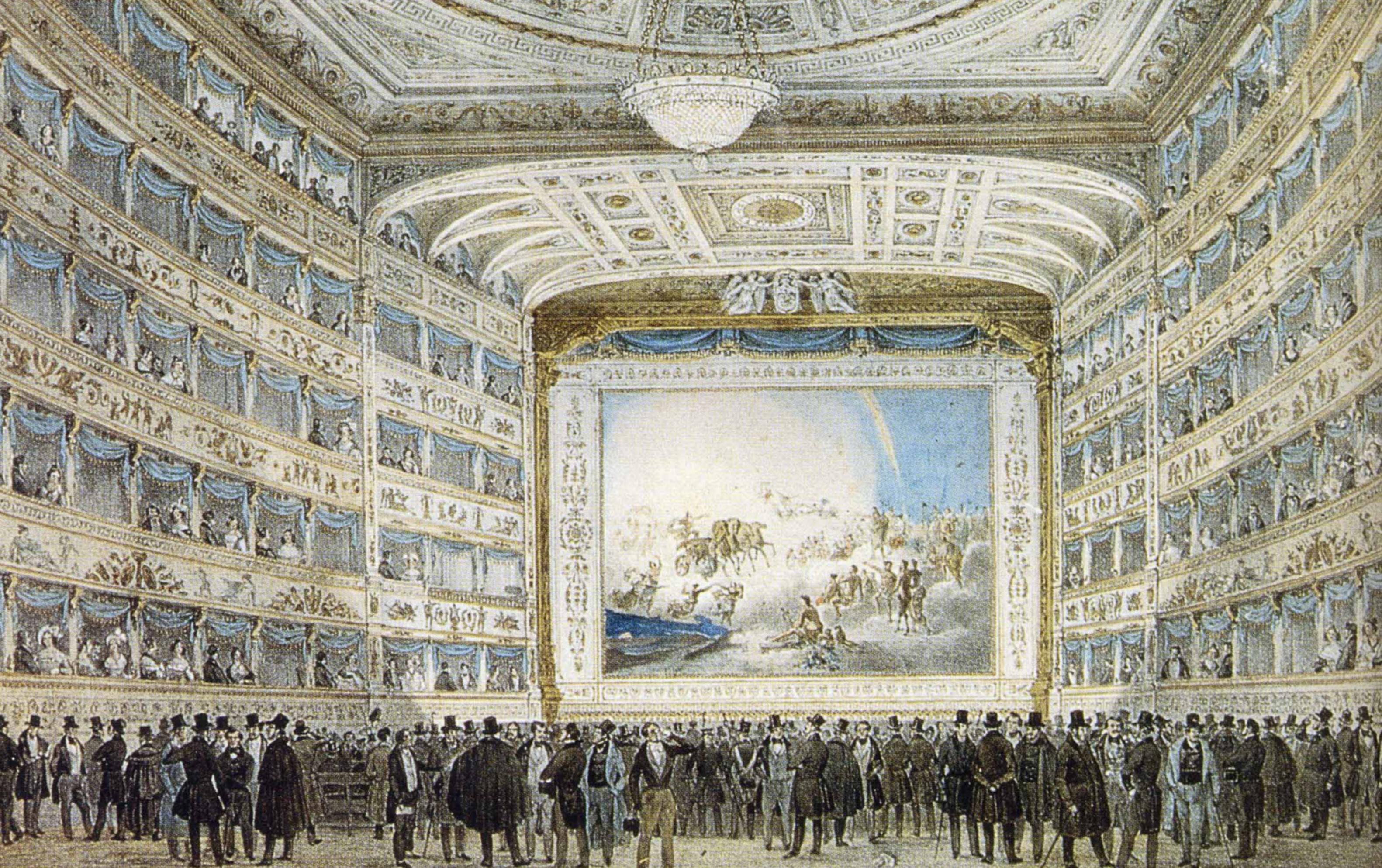


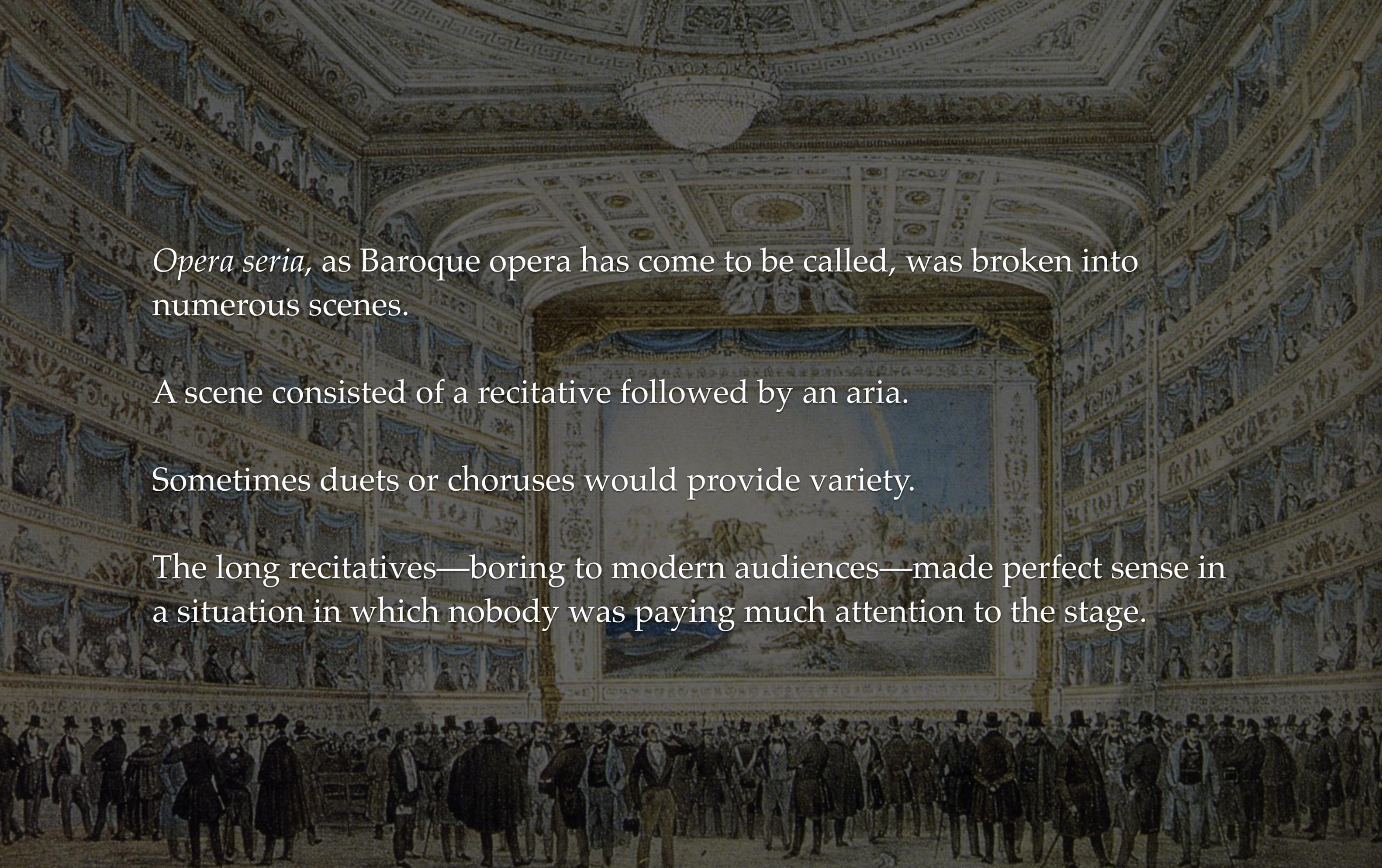
Opera houses were noisy, almost unbearably so for some visitors. English scholar Charles Burney was appalled by Italian opera houses in particular, where people in the boxes threw orange rinds or trash down into the standees in the *parterre*, and where you generally couldn't hear the music for all the talking and carrying on.

Box holders brought their own candles, their own food, and of course their own servants. The curtains on the boxes were pulled closed more than open; people could gossip and socialize, and then perhaps open the curtain when a superstar singer came on.



Count Girolamo Marcello still has the brass key to one of the three private boxes (at Venice's La Fenice) owned by his family since the 1700s. "In the old days, you went to La Fenice not for the opera but to see and be seen. In winter, it was cheaper and more convivial to spend the evenings in a private box than to heat a palazzo. With the curtains drawn, one was served dinner by one's own servants and only opened the curtains for highlights on the stage."





Opera seria, as Baroque opera has come to be called, was broken into numerous scenes.

A scene consisted of a recitative followed by an aria.

Sometimes duets or choruses would provide variety.

The long recitatives—boring to modern audiences—made perfect sense in a situation in which nobody was paying much attention to the stage.

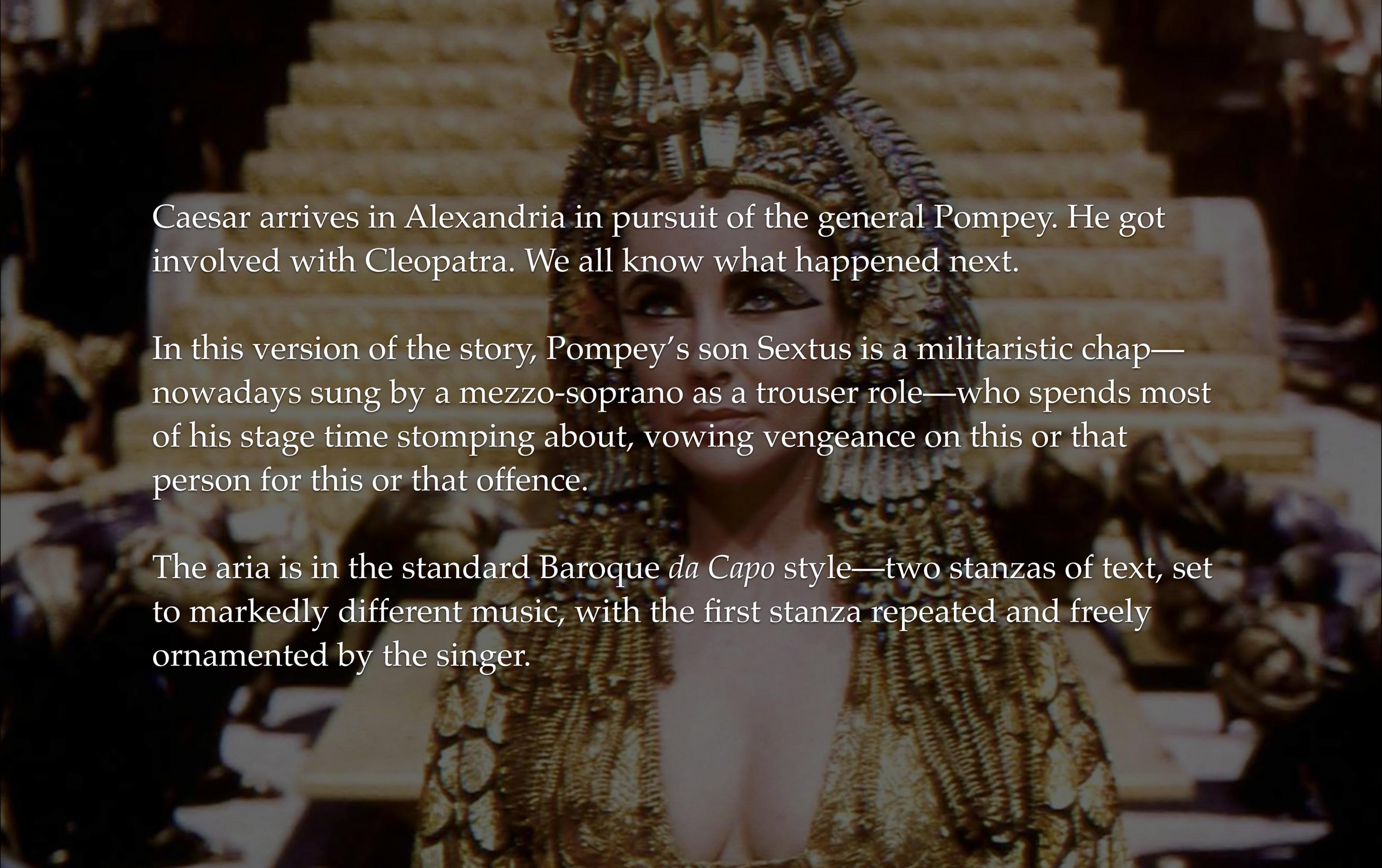


George Frideric Handel

Giulio Cesare in Egitto

“La Giustizia”

Lorraine Hunt Lieberson
Nicholas McGegan
Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra



Caesar arrives in Alexandria in pursuit of the general Pompey. He got involved with Cleopatra. We all know what happened next.

In this version of the story, Pompey's son Sextus is a militaristic chap—nowadays sung by a mezzo-soprano as a trouser role—who spends most of his stage time stomping about, vowing vengeance on this or that person for this or that offence.

The aria is in the standard Baroque *da Capo* style—two stanzas of text, set to markedly different music, with the first stanza repeated and freely ornamented by the singer.



~ Structure of this *da Capo* aria:

~ Stanza 1 is sung three times, each time with a slightly different melody.

~ Stanza 2 is sung once.

~ Ritornelli (instrumental) separate each section.

~ The *da Capo* opens with an abbreviated ritornello.

R

1

1

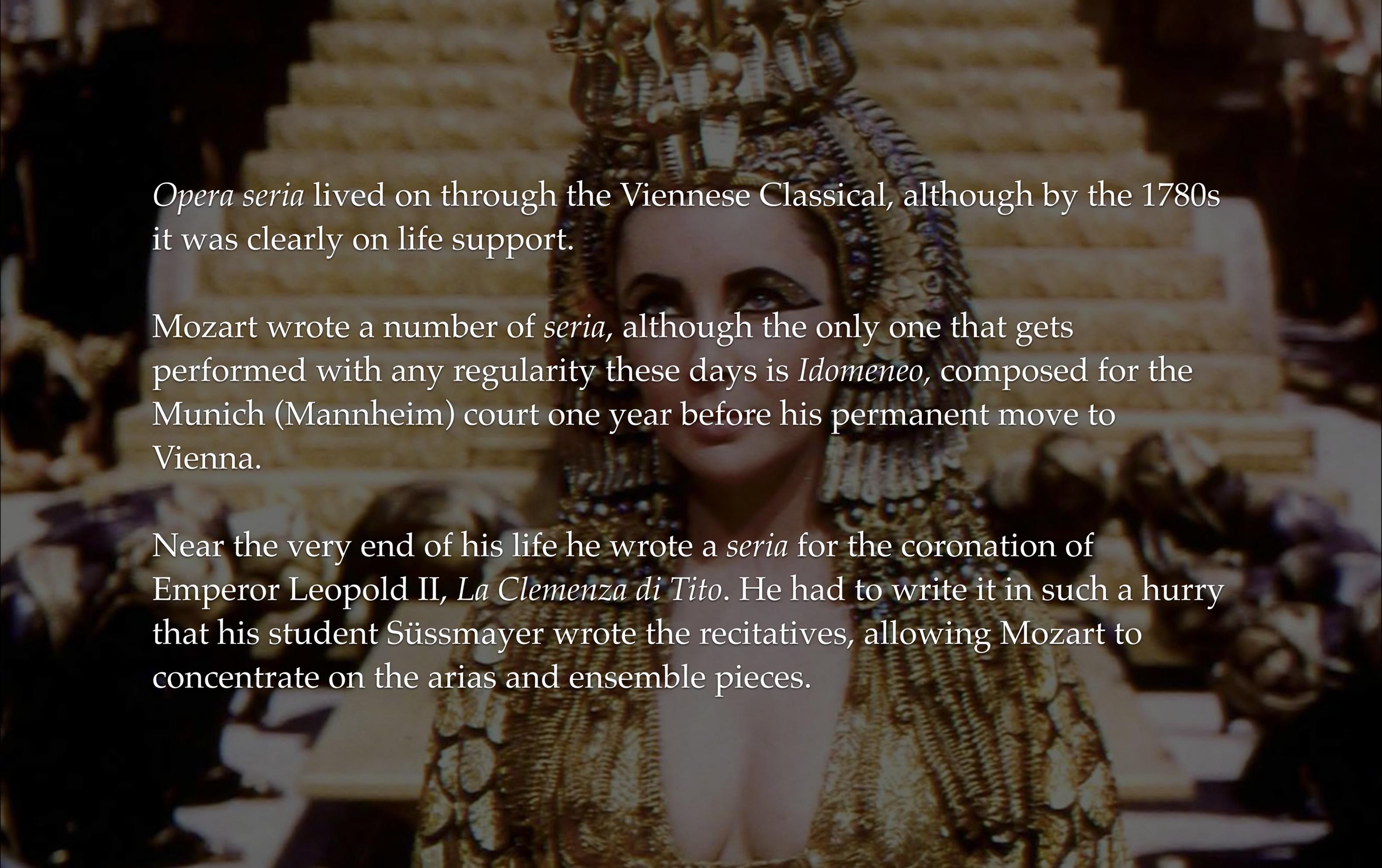
1

R

2

da Capo

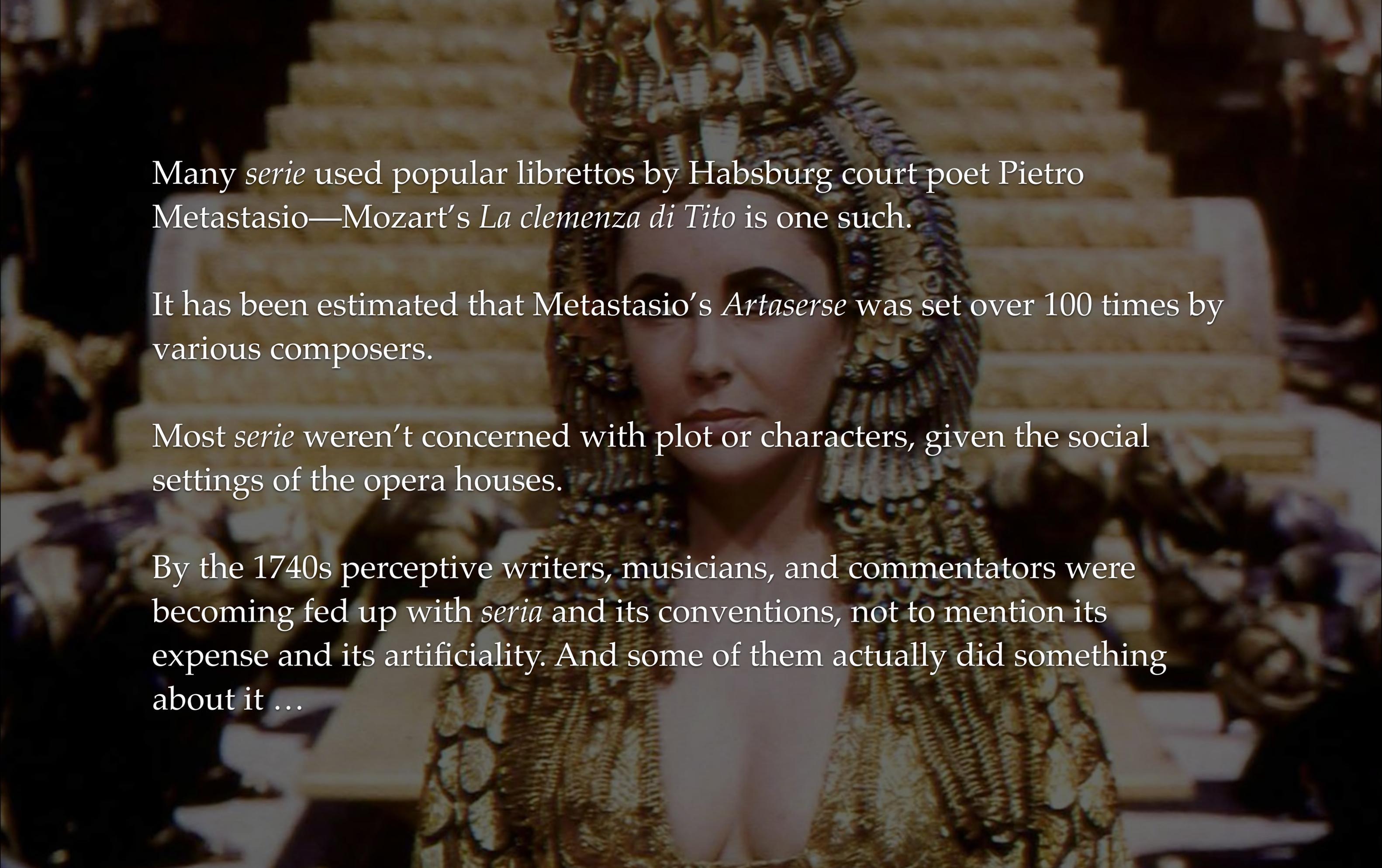
Ritornello



Opera seria lived on through the Viennese Classical, although by the 1780s it was clearly on life support.

Mozart wrote a number of *seria*, although the only one that gets performed with any regularity these days is *Idomeneo*, composed for the Munich (Mannheim) court one year before his permanent move to Vienna.

Near the very end of his life he wrote a *seria* for the coronation of Emperor Leopold II, *La Clemenza di Tito*. He had to write it in such a hurry that his student Süßmayer wrote the recitatives, allowing Mozart to concentrate on the arias and ensemble pieces.



Many *serie* used popular librettos by Habsburg court poet Pietro Metastasio—Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito* is one such.

It has been estimated that Metastasio's *Artaserse* was set over 100 times by various composers.

Most *serie* weren't concerned with plot or characters, given the social settings of the opera houses.

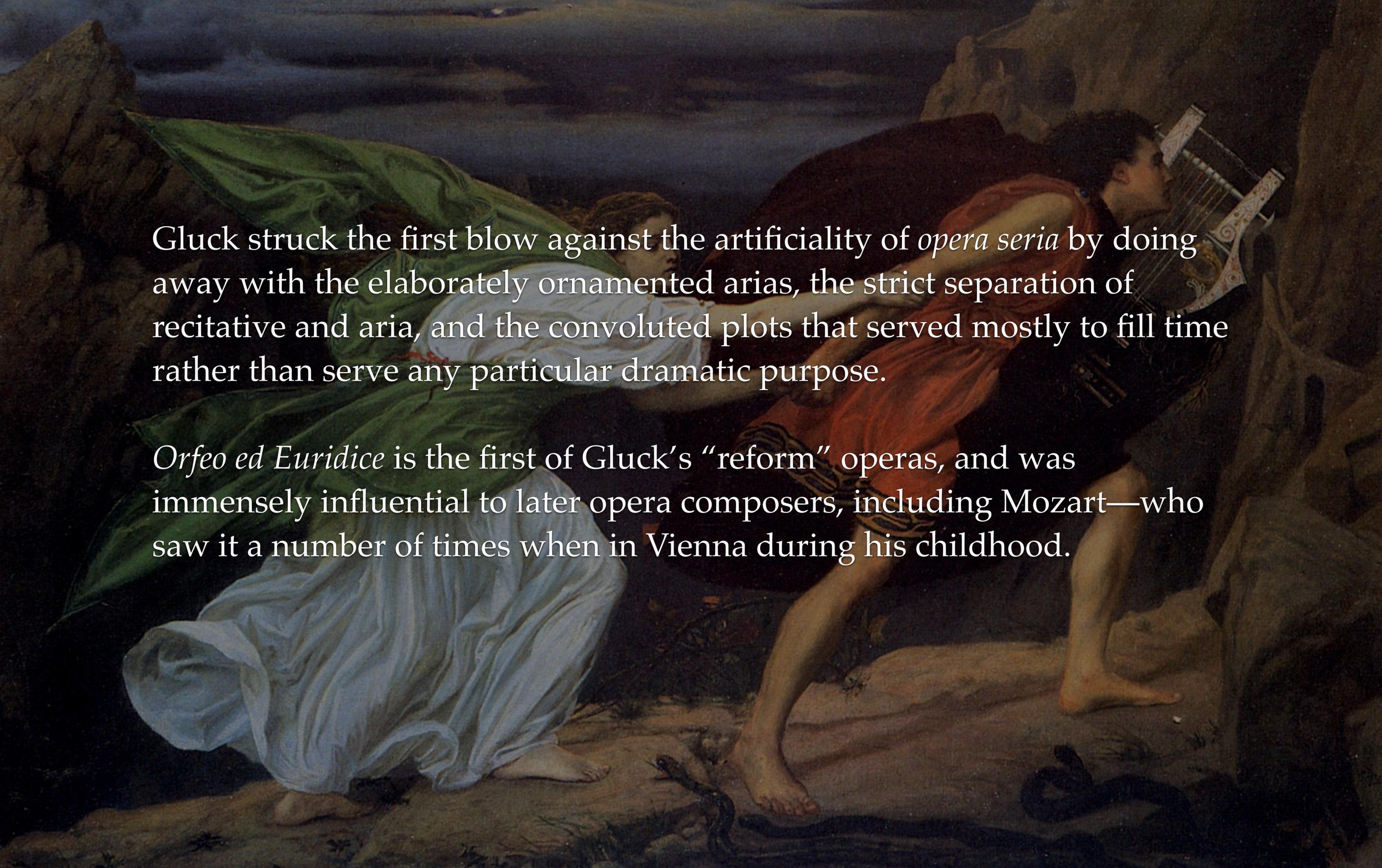
By the 1740s perceptive writers, musicians, and commentators were becoming fed up with *seria* and its conventions, not to mention its expense and its artificiality. And some of them actually did something about it ...



Christoph Willibald Gluck

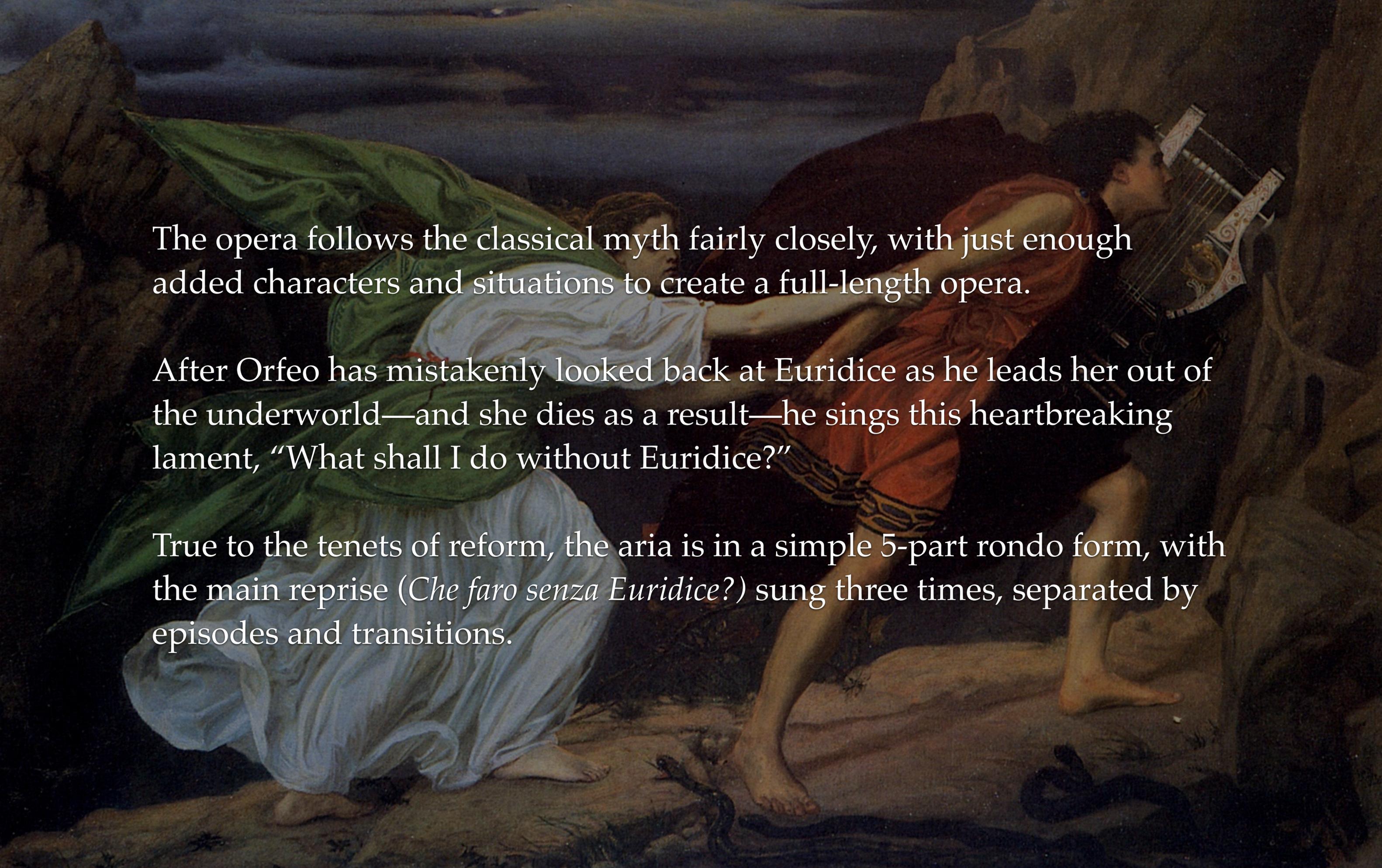
Orfeo ed Euridice:
Che faro senza Euridice?

Bernarda Fink
René Jacobs
Freiburg Baroque Orchestra



Gluck struck the first blow against the artificiality of *opera seria* by doing away with the elaborately ornamented arias, the strict separation of recitative and aria, and the convoluted plots that served mostly to fill time rather than serve any particular dramatic purpose.

Orfeo ed Euridice is the first of Gluck's "reform" operas, and was immensely influential to later opera composers, including Mozart—who saw it a number of times when in Vienna during his childhood.



The opera follows the classical myth fairly closely, with just enough added characters and situations to create a full-length opera.

After Orfeo has mistakenly looked back at Euridice as he leads her out of the underworld—and she dies as a result—he sings this heartbreaking lament, “What shall I do without Euridice?”

True to the tenets of reform, the aria is in a simple 5-part rondo form, with the main reprise (*Che farò senza Euridice?*) sung three times, separated by episodes and transitions.

Ritornello

A	I	Che farò senza Euridice? Dove andrò senza il mio ben? Che farò? Dove andrò? Che farò senza il mio ben? Dove andrò senza il mio ben?	What shall I do without Eurydice? Where shall I wander, What shall I do? Where shall I wander? What shall I do without her? Where shall I wander without her?
	PAC		

B	V	Euridice! Euridice! Oh dio! Rispondi! Rispondi! Io son pure il tuo fedel.	Eurydice! Eurydice! Oh please answer! Answer! I am ever faithful to you.
	PAC		

A	I	Che farò senza Euridice? Dove andrò senza il mio ben? Che farò? Dove andrò? Che farò senza il mio ben? Dove andrò senza il mio ben?	What shall I do without Eurydice? Where shall I wander, What shall I do? Where shall I wander? What shall I do without her? Where shall I wander without her?
	PAC		

<i>Transition</i>		Euridice! Euridice!	Eurydice! Eurydice!
C	V ped.	Ah! Non m'avanza più soccorso, più speranza, né dal monto, né dal ciel!	No hope, or succour, are now left to me from mortals or from Gods.
	HC		

A	I	Che farò senza...etc.	What shall I do without...etc.
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Ritornello

Ritornello

A I Che farò senza Euridice?
Dove andrò senza il mio ben?
Che farò? Dove andrò?
Che farò senza il mio ben?
Dove andrò senza il mio ben?
PAC

What shall I do without Eurydice?
Where shall I wander,
What shall I do? Where shall I wander?
What shall I do without her?
Where shall I wander without her?

B V Euridice! Euridice!
Oh dio! Rispondi! Rispondi!
Io son pure il tuo fedel.
PAC

Eurydice! Eurydice!
Oh please answer! Answer!
I am ever faithful to you.

A I Che farò senza Euridice?
Dove andrò senza il mio ben?
Che farò? Dove andrò?
Che farò senza il mio ben?
Dove andrò senza il mio ben?
PAC

What shall I do without Eurydice?
Where shall I wander,
What shall I do? Where shall I wander?
What shall I do without her?
Where shall I wander without her?

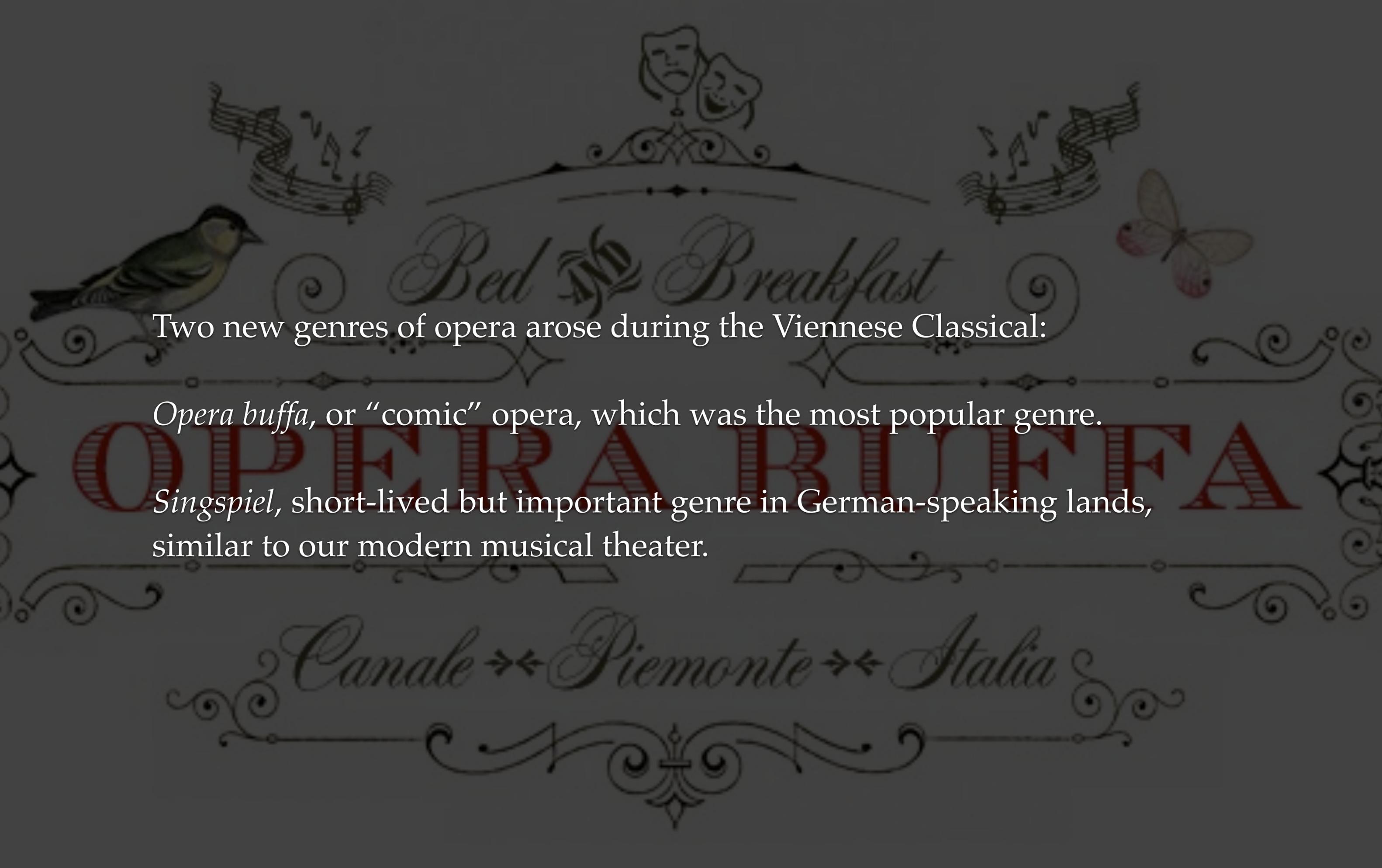
Transition
C V ped. Euridice! Euridice!
Ah! Non m'avanza
più soccorso, più speranza,
né dal monto, né dal ciel!
HC

Eurydice! Eurydice!
No hope, or succour,
are now left to me
from mortals or from Gods.

A I Che farò senza...*etc.*

What shall I do without...*etc.*

Ritornello



Two new genres of opera arose during the Viennese Classical:

Opera buffa, or “comic” opera, which was the most popular genre.

Singspiel, short-lived but important genre in German-speaking lands, similar to our modern musical theater.

Canale ⇄ Piemonte ⇄ Italia

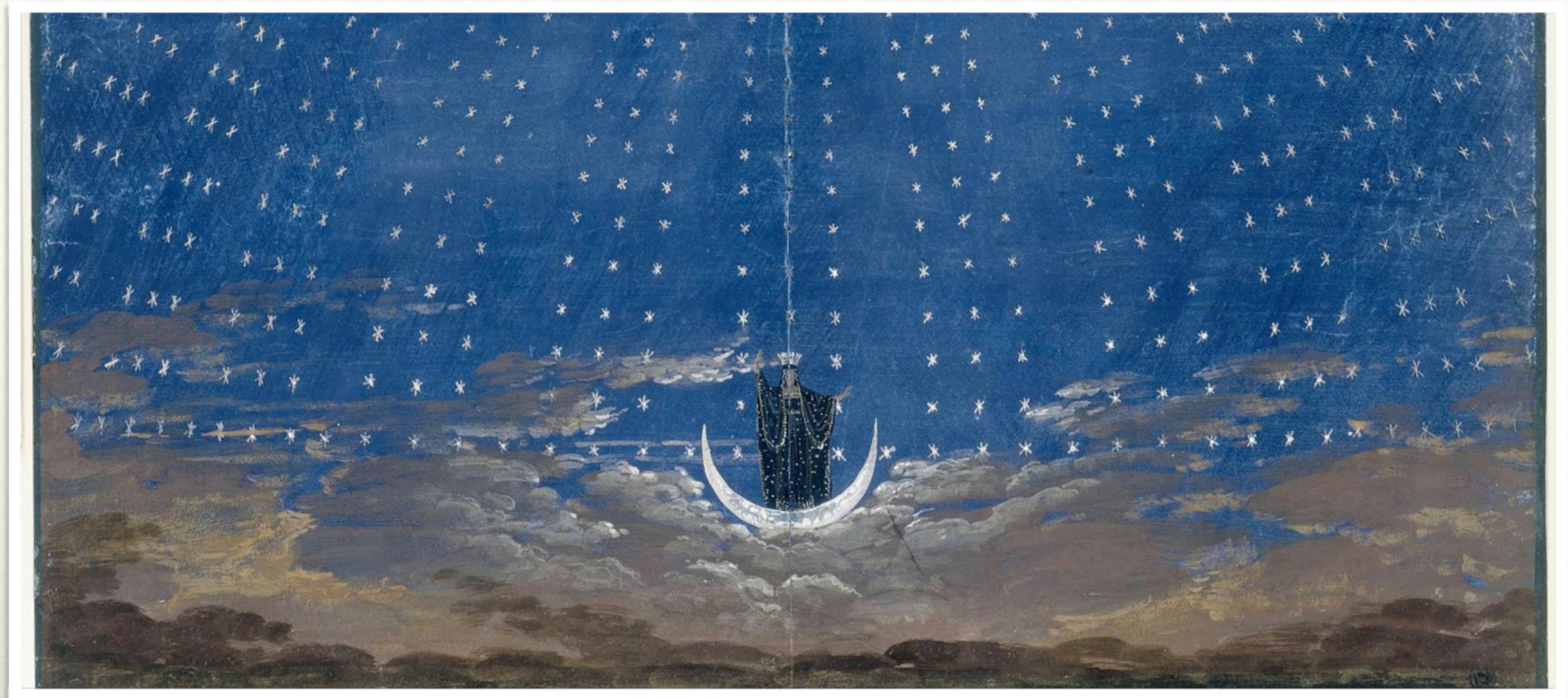


Opera composers also flourished. The Viennese Classical era was a time of operatic munificence, with literally dozens of top-ranking composers all over Europe (and increasingly, in the Americas), all making a fine living writing operas.

OPERA BUFFA

The following montage, set to the overture to *Le stravaganze del conte* by the popular *opera buffa* composer Domenico Cimarosa, gives the names of just some of the most prolific opera composers of the era—leaving out Gluck and Mozart, each of whom resides in a category of his own.

Canale ⇌ Piemonte ⇌ Italia

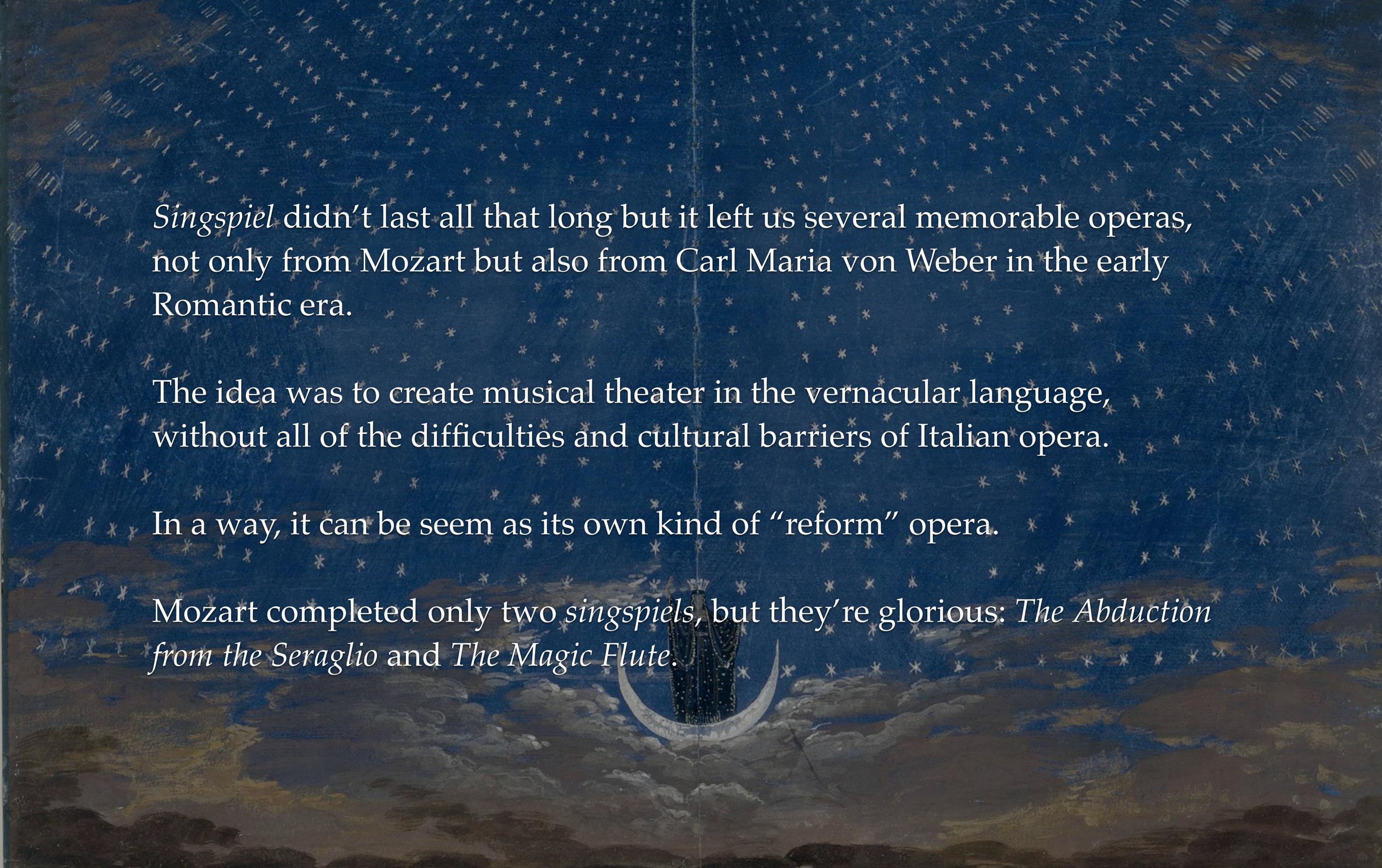


Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

The Magic Flute, K. 620

*Wie stark ist nicht dein
Zauberton*

Piotr Beczala, tenor
Iván Fischer
Opéra National, Paris

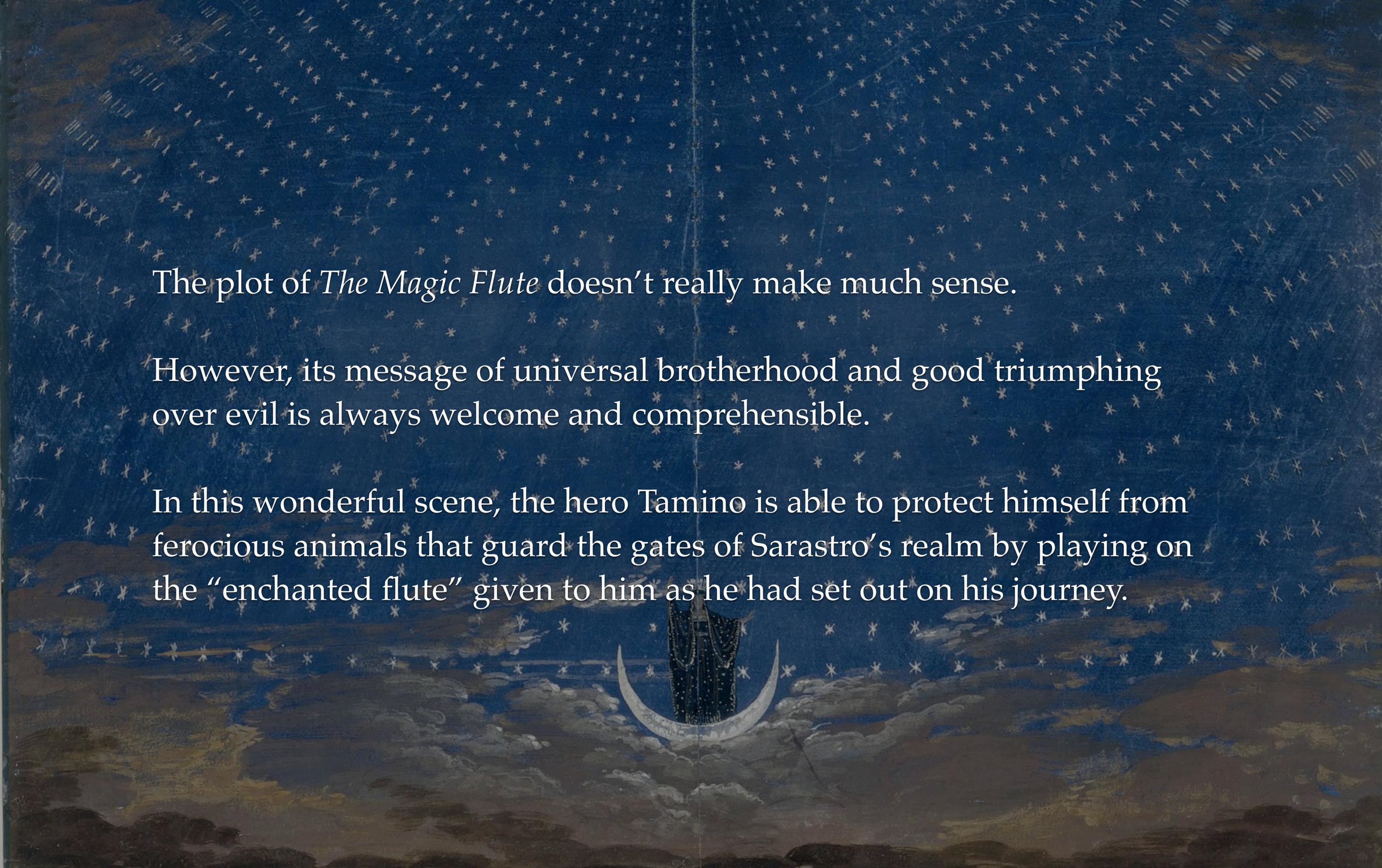
The background is a painting of a night sky. The upper portion is a deep blue, filled with numerous small, white, star-like specks. A thin, vertical line, possibly a seam or a star, runs down the center. Below the starry field, a crescent moon is visible, partially obscured by a dark, vertical shape that looks like a shadow or a silhouette. The lower portion of the image shows a dark, textured landscape with some lighter, brownish-yellow patches, suggesting a horizon or a field of low-lying vegetation.

Singspiel didn't last all that long but it left us several memorable operas, not only from Mozart but also from Carl Maria von Weber in the early Romantic era.

The idea was to create musical theater in the vernacular language, without all of the difficulties and cultural barriers of Italian opera.

In a way, it can be seen as its own kind of "reform" opera.

Mozart completed only two *singspiels*, but they're glorious: *The Abduction from the Seraglio* and *The Magic Flute*.

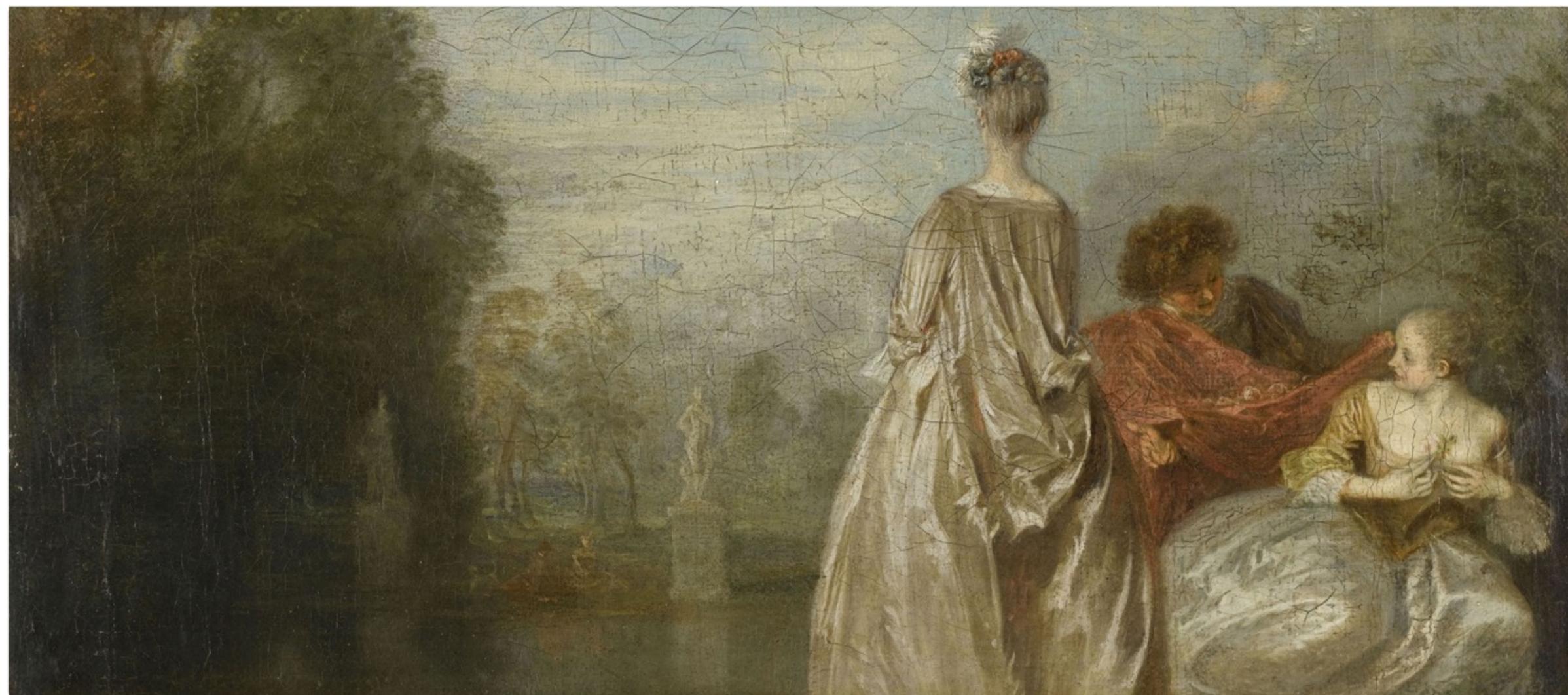
The background is a painting of a night sky. The sky is a deep, dark blue, filled with numerous small, white, star-like specks. A prominent, bright crescent moon is positioned in the lower center of the frame. On the surface of the crescent moon, a small, dark, silhouetted figure stands, facing forward. The lower portion of the image shows a dark, textured landscape, possibly representing a horizon or a body of water, with some lighter, brownish-yellow tones. The overall composition is centered and symmetrical.

The plot of *The Magic Flute* doesn't really make much sense.

However, its message of universal brotherhood and good triumphing over evil is always welcome and comprehensible.

In this wonderful scene, the hero Tamino is able to protect himself from ferocious animals that guard the gates of Sarastro's realm by playing on the "enchanted flute" given to him as he had set out on his journey.





Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

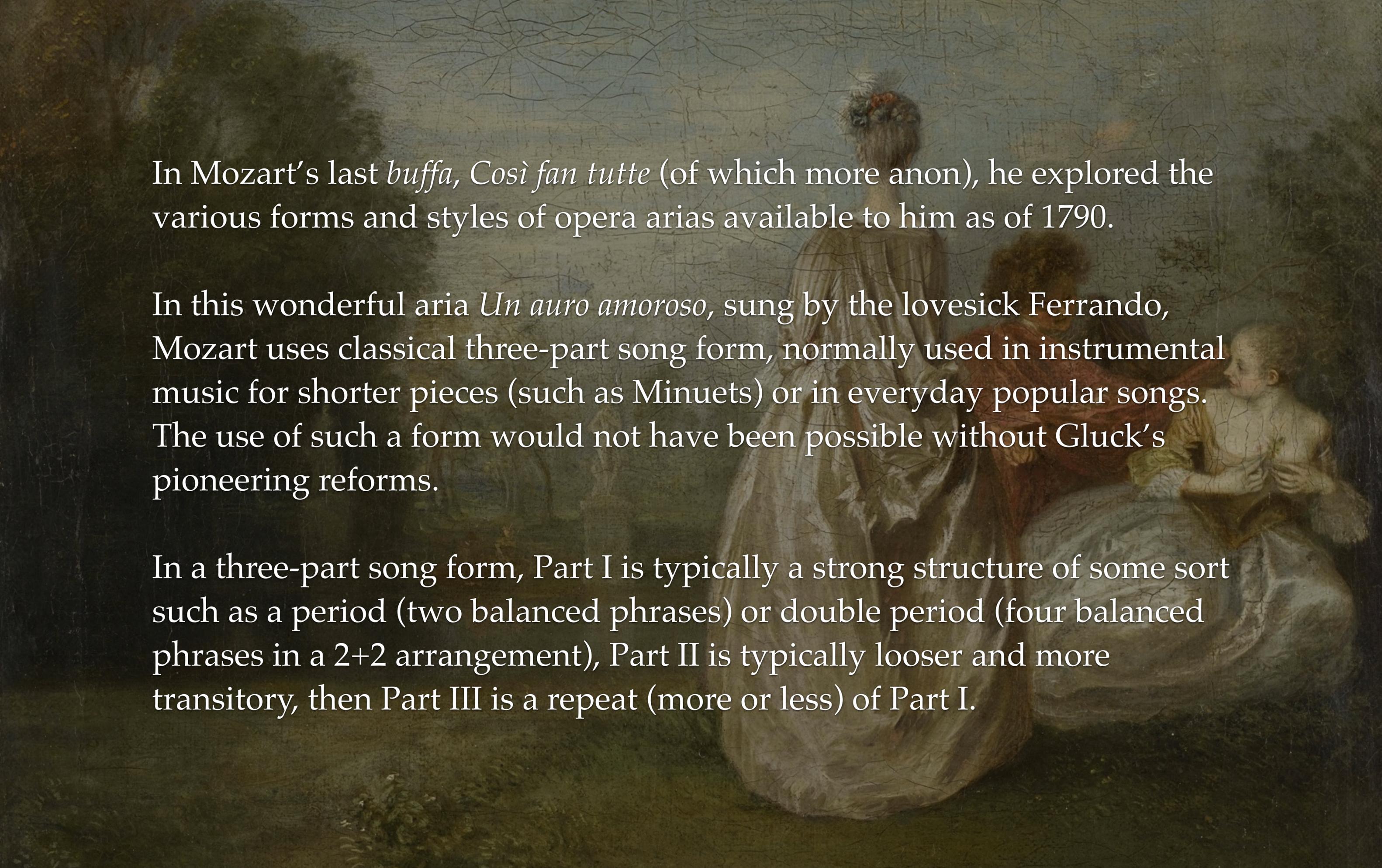
Così fan tutte, K. 588

Un auro amoroso

Werner Güra, tenor

René Jacobs

Concerto Köln



In Mozart's last *buffa*, *Così fan tutte* (of which more anon), he explored the various forms and styles of opera arias available to him as of 1790.

In this wonderful aria *Un auro amoroso*, sung by the lovesick Ferrando, Mozart uses classical three-part song form, normally used in instrumental music for shorter pieces (such as Minuets) or in everyday popular songs. The use of such a form would not have been possible without Gluck's pioneering reforms.

In a three-part song form, Part I is typically a strong structure of some sort such as a period (two balanced phrases) or double period (four balanced phrases in a 2+2 arrangement), Part II is typically looser and more transitory, then Part III is a repeat (more or less) of Part I.

PART I: CONTRASTING DOUBLE PERIOD

Period 1	a	PAC	Un' aura amorosa del nostro tesoro
	b	HC	un dolce ristoro al corporgerà
Period 2	c	HC; V _{ped}	Un' aura amorosa del nostro tesoro
	d	IAC	un dolce ristoro al corporgerà
	d'	PAC; quasi-codetta	un dolce ristoro al corporgerà

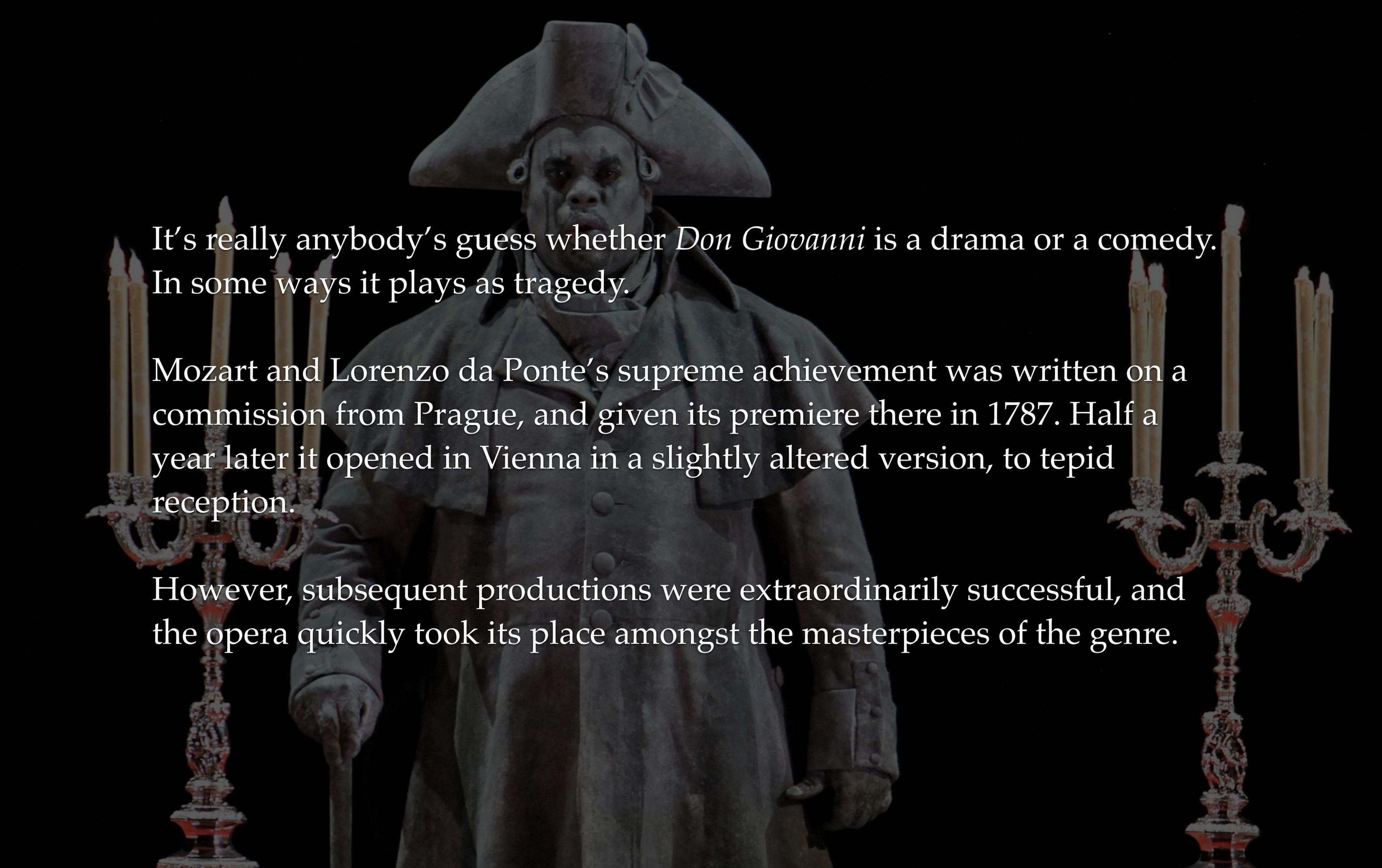


Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Don Giovanni, K. 527

Act 1 Scene I

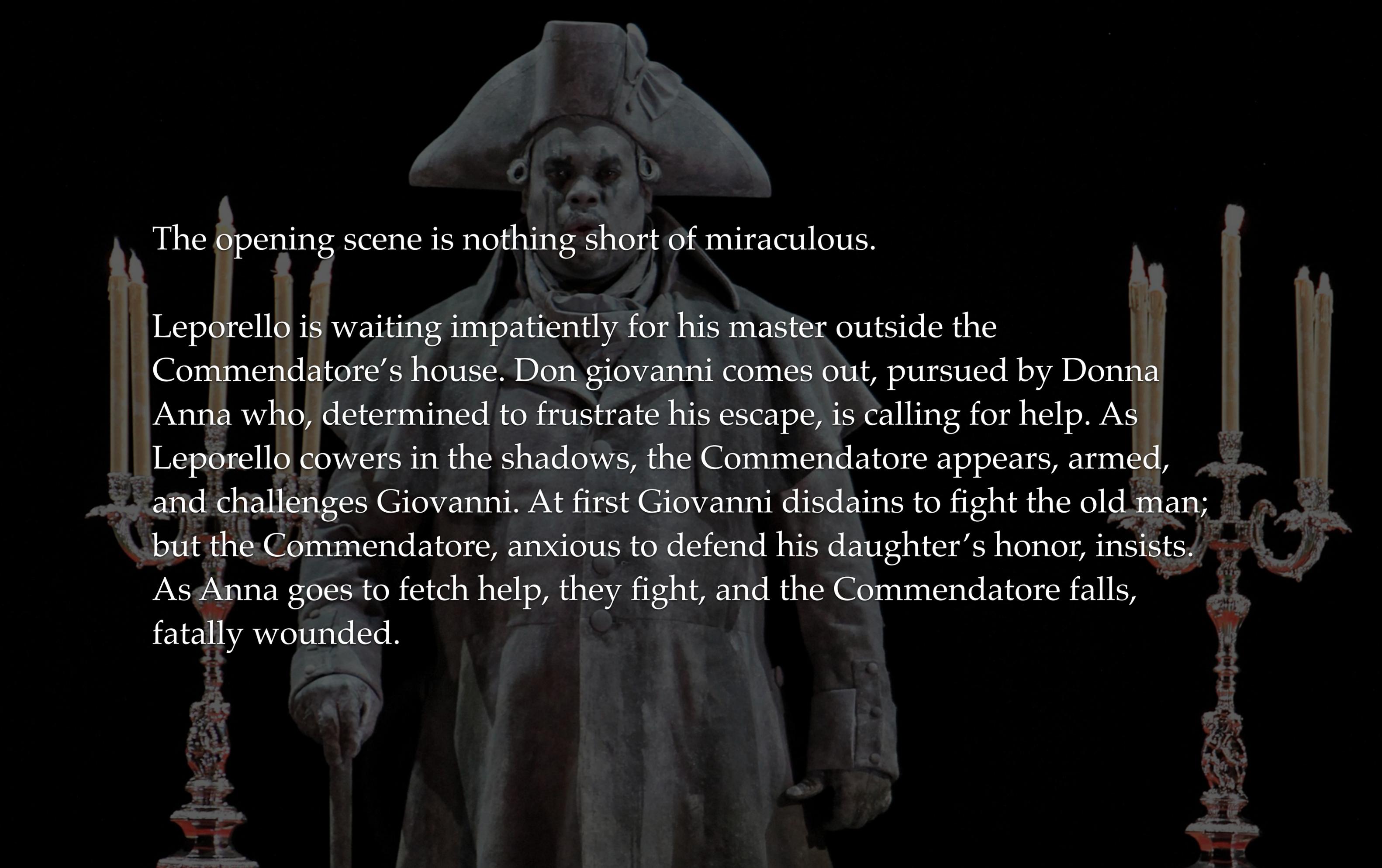
James Levine
Metropolitan Opera
*Bryn Terfel, Renée Fleming, Ferruccio
Furlanetto, Sergei Koptchak*



It's really anybody's guess whether *Don Giovanni* is a drama or a comedy. In some ways it plays as tragedy.

Mozart and Lorenzo da Ponte's supreme achievement was written on a commission from Prague, and given its premiere there in 1787. Half a year later it opened in Vienna in a slightly altered version, to tepid reception.

However, subsequent productions were extraordinarily successful, and the opera quickly took its place amongst the masterpieces of the genre.

A man in 18th-century attire, including a large powdered wig and a long coat, stands in a dimly lit room. He is holding a cane in his right hand. The room is decorated with two ornate candelabras, each holding several lit candles. The background is dark, and the overall atmosphere is dramatic and historical.

The opening scene is nothing short of miraculous.

Leporello is waiting impatiently for his master outside the Commendatore's house. Don Giovanni comes out, pursued by Donna Anna who, determined to frustrate his escape, is calling for help. As Leporello cowers in the shadows, the Commendatore appears, armed, and challenges Giovanni. At first Giovanni disdains to fight the old man; but the Commendatore, anxious to defend his daughter's honor, insists. As Anna goes to fetch help, they fight, and the Commendatore falls, fatally wounded.



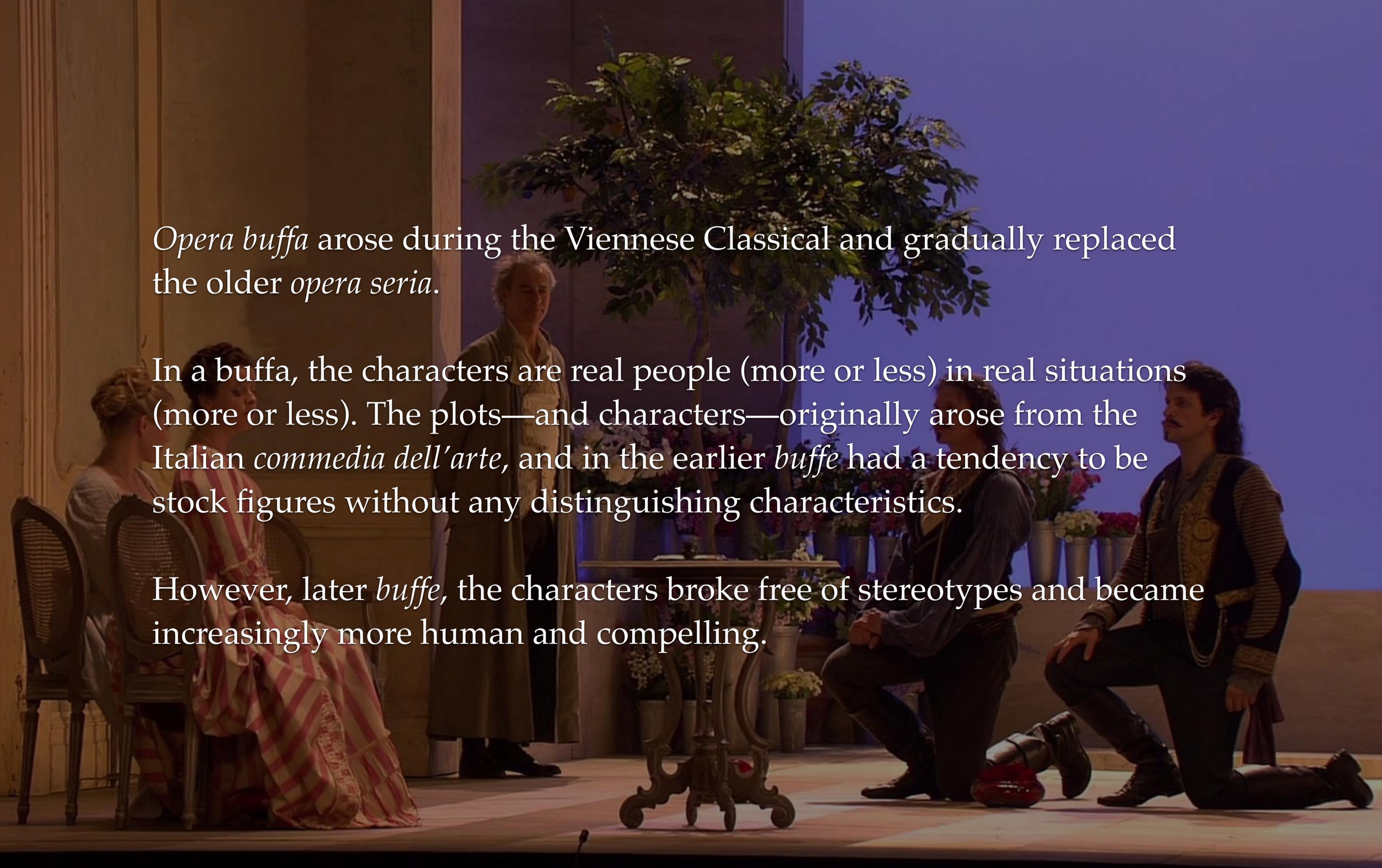


Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Così fan tutte, K. 588

Act 1 Finale

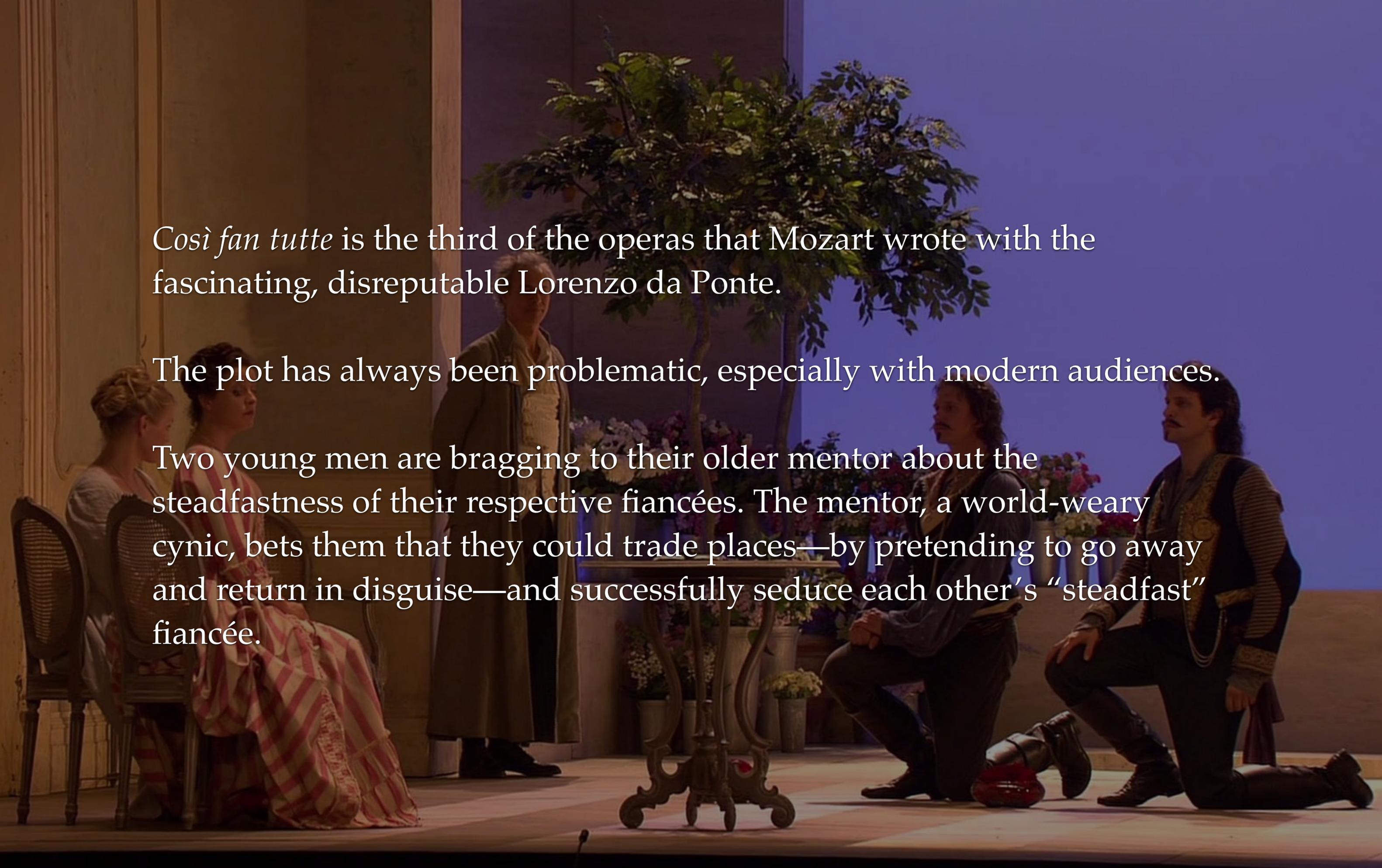
John Eliot Gardiner
English Baroque Soloists
Monteverdi Chorus



Opera buffa arose during the Viennese Classical and gradually replaced the older *opera seria*.

In a buffa, the characters are real people (more or less) in real situations (more or less). The plots—and characters—originally arose from the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, and in the earlier *buffe* had a tendency to be stock figures without any distinguishing characteristics.

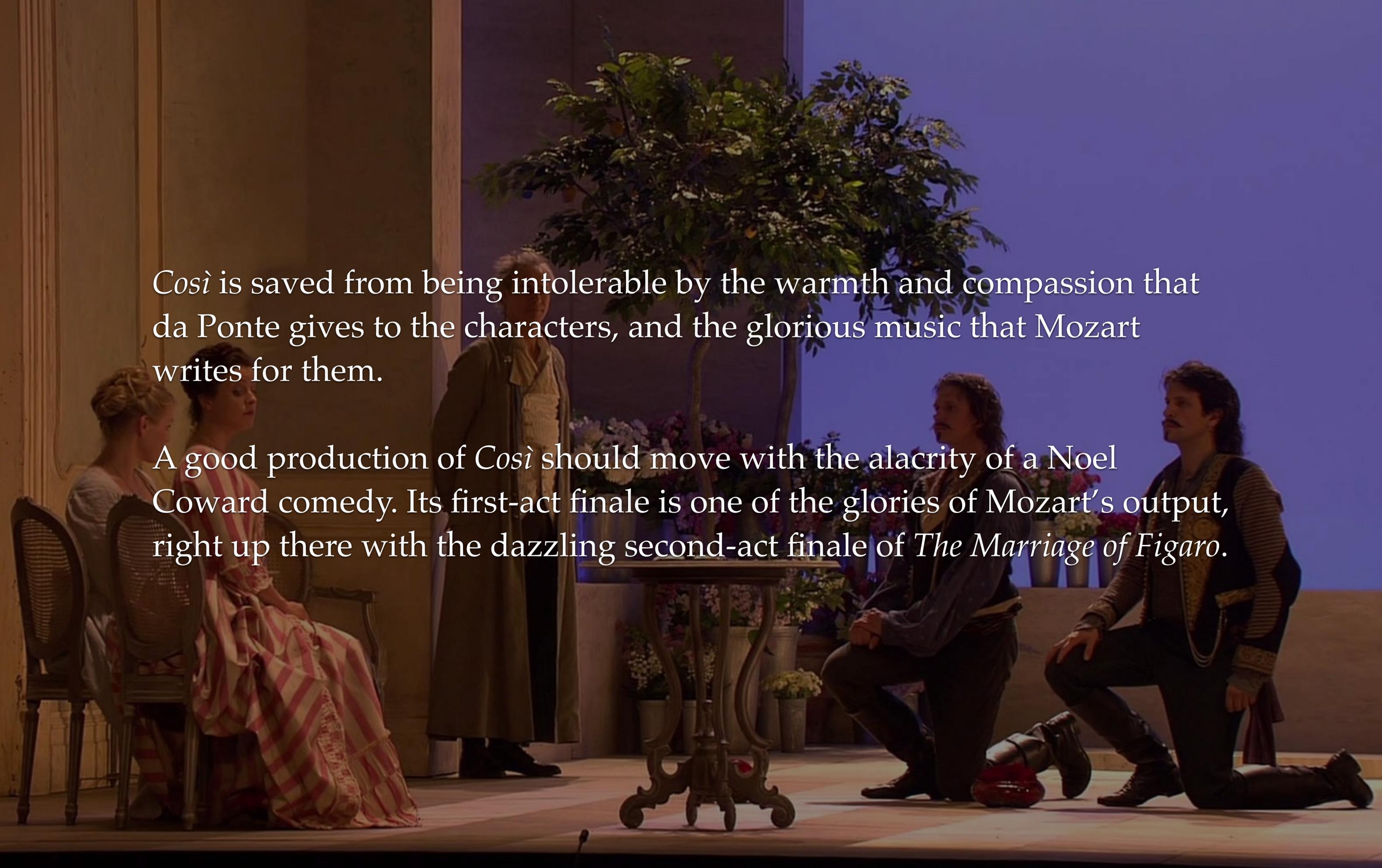
However, later *buffe*, the characters broke free of stereotypes and became increasingly more human and compelling.



Così fan tutte is the third of the operas that Mozart wrote with the fascinating, disreputable Lorenzo da Ponte.

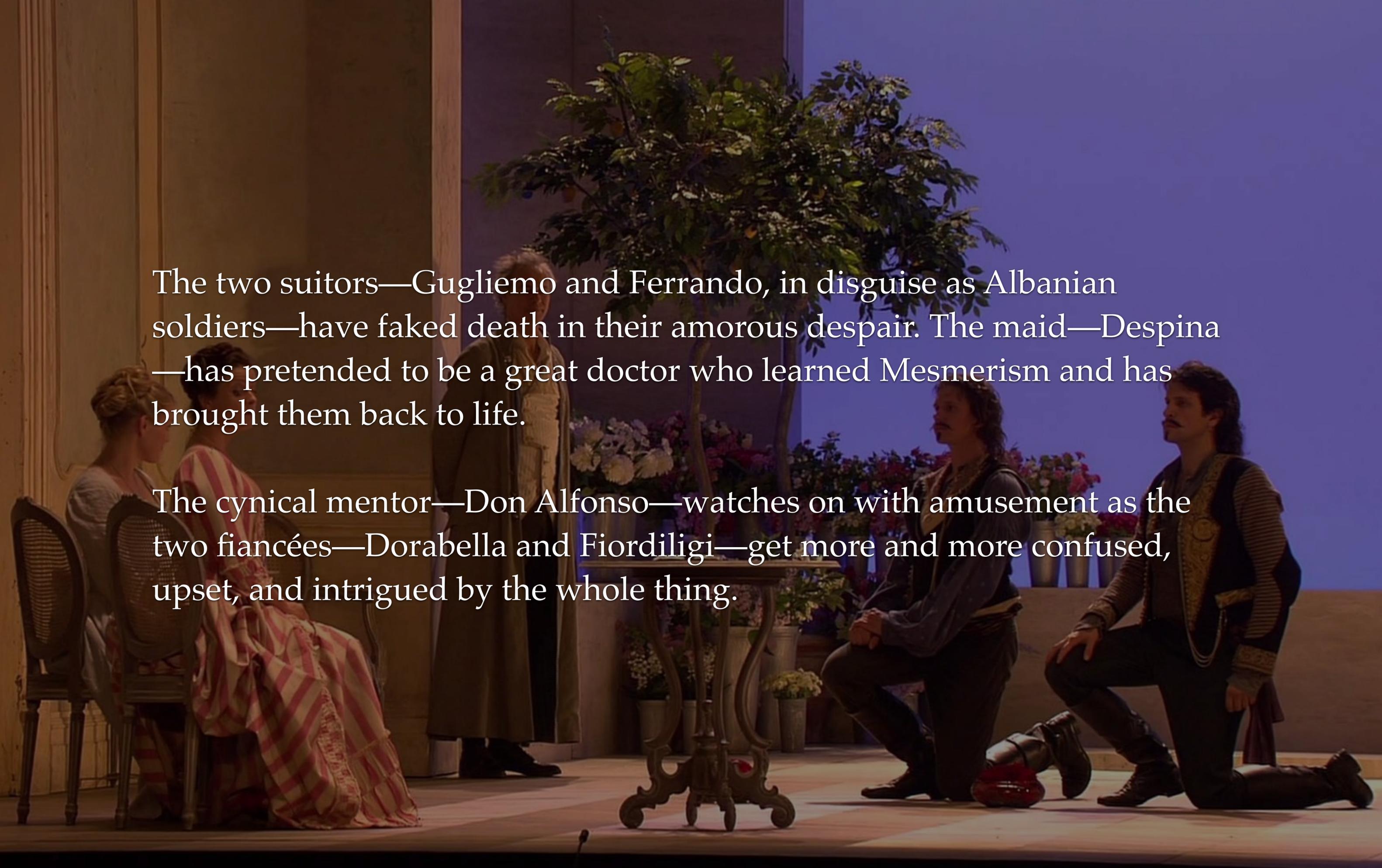
The plot has always been problematic, especially with modern audiences.

Two young men are bragging to their older mentor about the steadfastness of their respective fiancées. The mentor, a world-weary cynic, bets them that they could trade places—by pretending to go away and return in disguise—and successfully seduce each other's “steadfast” fiancée.



Così is saved from being intolerable by the warmth and compassion that da Ponte gives to the characters, and the glorious music that Mozart writes for them.

A good production of *Così* should move with the alacrity of a Noel Coward comedy. Its first-act finale is one of the glories of Mozart's output, right up there with the dazzling second-act finale of *The Marriage of Figaro*.



The two suitors—Guglielmo and Ferrando, in disguise as Albanian soldiers—have faked death in their amorous despair. The maid—Despina—has pretended to be a great doctor who learned Mesmerism and has brought them back to life.

The cynical mentor—Don Alfonso—watches on with amusement as the two fiancées—Dorabella and Fiordiligi—get more and more confused, upset, and intrigued by the whole thing.



