

The Ghosts of Versailles

JOHN CORIGLIANO AND
WILLIAM M. HOFFMAN

LA OPERA
JAMES CONLON

World Premiere Recording
Live Recording

PENTATONE
AMERICAN OPERAS
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



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Beaumarchais (Christopher Maltman, left) introduces a flashback to a romantic interlude between Rosina (Guanqun Yu, center) and the young pageboy Cherubino (Renee Rapier, right).
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Live recording in 2015

"It's comic and serious, entertaining and erudite, silly and thoughtful, emotional and mysterious, harrowing and uplifting, intimate and over-the-top — and the more times you see it, the more you'll find in it and the more you'll get out of it. It helps to be an opera or history buff to get all of the references, reminiscences and send-ups, but it's not necessary."

Los Angeles Times

"*The Ghosts of Versailles*, over 20 years after its premiere, (which was 11 years after it was commissioned) was worth the wait. William M. Hoffman's poetic libretto with Corigliano's evocative fusion of styles makes not only an impressive spectacle of theater, but an opera of intense feeling and LA Opera's production captures that magic exquisitely. It was a triumph."

Bachtrack

The Ghosts of Versailles

A Grand Opera Buffa in Two Acts

JOHN CORIGLIANO (b. 1938)

WILLIAM M. HOFFMAN (b. 1939)

CD 1 (PTC5186589)

ACT I

1	“Mon coursier hors d’haleine” <i>Woman with Hat, Louis XVI, Marquis, Gossips, Aristocrats</i>	7. 11
2	“All-powerful Queen of Beauty and ruler of my willing heart” <i>Beaumarchais, Marie Antoinette</i>	1. 44
3	“They are always with me: the unbounded waiting, the odor of blood on steel, the terrible sound” <i>Marie Antoinette</i>	8. 09
4	“My wife was always hard to please” <i>Louis XVI, Aristocrats, Woman with Hat, Marquis, Gossips, Beaumarchais</i>	2. 17
5	“Oh no. Here we go again!!” <i>Chorus, Figaro, Susanna, Almaviva, Aristocrats</i>	1. 39
6	“They wish they could kill me” <i>Figaro, Marie Antoinette, Woman with Hat, Aristocrats</i>	8. 43
7	“Bravo, Beaumarchais! Brilliant!” - “Then why are you weeping, your Majesty?” <i>Louis XVI, Beaumarchais, Marie Antoinette, Aristocrats</i>	2. 12

6

8	“Magic! It is Paris, the autumn of ‘93” <i>Beaumarchais, Marie Antoinette, Louis XVI, Almaviva</i>	2. 52
9	“And with the one million pounds, grant Her Majesty a safe refuge in the New World” <i>Almaviva, Figaro, Susanna, Louis XVI, Wilhelm</i>	3. 51
10	“Fool! Idiot! Moron! You forgot where Almaviva plans to sell the jewels?” <i>Bégearss, Wilhelm, Aristocrats, Marie Antoinette</i>	1. 12
11	“I can’t wait to betray Almaviva” <i>Bégearss, Florestine</i>	2. 20
12	“Oh, the lion may roar and the eagle may soar.” <i>Bégearss</i>	3. 58
13	“I remember, Master, I remember!” <i>Wilhelm, Bégearss, Susanna, Figaro, Aristocrats, Woman with Hat</i>	1. 18
14	“Poor Florestine, I pity her.” <i>Marie Antoinette, Beaumarchais, Louis XVI, Aristocrats</i>	1. 59
15	“New Scene: Rosina’s boudoir. They say New York is a lively town” <i>Beaumarchais, Louis XVI, Bégearss, Rosina, Almaviva</i>	2. 09
16	“Now we go back in time” - ‘Cherubino, Cherubino’ <i>Rosina, Beaumarchais, Cherubino</i>	0. 48
17	“Look at the green here in the glade” <i>Beaumarchais, Rosina, Cherubino, Marie Antoinette, Louis XVI</i>	7. 33
18	“No. I’ve had enough. I see what’s happening here” <i>Louis XVI, Beaumarchais, Woman with Hat, Aristocrats, Marie Antoinette, Marquis, Chorus</i>	2. 26

7

19	“Selamünaleyküm [Welcome!]” <i>Pasha, Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, Léon, Florestine, Almaviva, Rosina, Susanna, Marquis, Beaumarchais, Bégearss</i>	4. 02
20	“His Excellency, the English Ambassador” <i>Page, English Ambassador, Almaviva, Pasha</i>	2. 36
21	“I am in a valley and you are in a valley” <i>Samira, Pasha</i>	3. 37
22	“Ya omri. Limatha hajartani?” <i>Samira, Figaro, Chorus</i>	3. 00
23	“Tafaddaloo marhabun bikoom” - “Shall we?” <i>Figaro, Chorus, Almaviva, English Ambassador, Bégearss, Wilhelm, Marie Antoinette, Aristocrats, Florestine, Rosina, Susanna</i>	5. 07

Total playing time CD 1: 80. 57

CD 2 (PTC5186590)

ACT II

1	“Hurry, hurry... It’s late! The second act is beginning!” <i>Beaumarchais, Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, Almaviva, Marquis, Susanna, Florestine, Woman with Hat, Rosina</i>	3. 01
2	“Watch. Now Figaro comes back” <i>Beaumarchais, Louis XVI, Almaviva, Susanna, Figaro, Marie Antoinette, Florestine, Rosina, Woman with Hat, Marquis</i>	2. 21

8

3	“Wait!... Figaro was supposed to return the necklace” <i>Beaumarchais, Marie Antoinette, Louis XVI, Woman with Hat, Marquis</i>	5. 12
4	“Damn that Figaro. He’s your husband” <i>Almaviva, Marquis, Susanna, Woman with Hat, Marie Antoinette, Florestine, Rosina</i>	1. 36
5	“As summer brings a wistful breeze” <i>Susanna, Rosina, Marie Antoinette, Léon</i>	3. 05
6	“And now I must go” - “Bless you, Madam, bless you” <i>Rosina, Susanna, Figaro, Beaumarchais, Marie Antoinette</i>	1. 24
7	“What is happening?” <i>Susanna, Marie Antoinette, Figaro, Chorus</i>	1. 55
8	“Antoinette, we want your head!” - “Order! Order!” <i>Chorus, Beaumarchais</i>	0. 54
9	“Marie Antoinette of Lorraine and Austria” <i>Marie Antoinette, Chorus, Beaumarchais, Figaro</i>	6. 38
10	“Monarchy. Revolution. It’s all the same to me” - “Women of Paris, listen!” <i>Bégearss, Chorus</i>	5. 46
11	“Welcome, Madeleine, welcome” <i>Rosina, Aristocrats, Almaviva, Florestine, Bishop, Léon</i>	3. 09
12	“Remember the chestnut trees in the gardens of the Tuileries?” <i>Léon, Florestine, Almaviva, Rosina</i>	3. 03

9

13	"I hope I'm not too late for your party" <i>Bégearss, Almaviva, Aristocrats, Rosina, Léon, Florestine, Chorus, Figaro, Beaumarchais, Marie Antoinette, Louis XVI, Wilhelm, Susanna</i>	5. 20
14	Interlude	3. 01
15	"I am very well, my dear Marquis" <i>Duchess (Woman with Hat), Aristocrats, Marquis, Wilhelm, Chorus, Rosina, Florestine, Susanna, Léon, Almaviva</i>	4. 05
16	"O God of love, O Lord of light" <i>Almaviva, Rosina, Florestine, Léon, Susanna, Marie Antoinette</i>	7. 06
17	"We are finished" - "Farewell, my faithful friend" <i>Susanna, Rosina, Florestine, Léon, Almaviva, Figaro, Duchess, Beaumarchais, Wilhelm</i>	3. 09
18	"Look, her breathing is diminished" <i>Florestine, Rosina, Almaviva, Beaumarchais, Figaro, Léon, Wilhelm, Susanna, Bégearss, Duchess, Chorus</i>	3. 12
19	"Goodbye, Figaro. Goodbye, Beaumarchais" <i>Beaumarchais, Marie Antoinette</i>	1. 59
20	"No, Beaumarchais. It is as it should have been. Once there was a golden bird" <i>Marie Antoinette, Beaumarchais</i>	5. 01
21	"Come, Antonia" <i>Beaumarchais, Chorus</i>	3. 29

Total playing time CD 2: 74. 37



Introduced in the opera-within-the-opera, Figaro (Lucas Meachem, center) is pestered by angry pursuers.

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Cast of characters (in order of appearance)

The Ghosts

Woman with Hat Victoria Livengood (Mezzo)	Trio of Gossips So Young Park (Soprano) Vanessa Becerra (Soprano) Peabody Southwell (Mezzo)	Frederick Ballentine (Tenor) Patrick Blackwell (Bass)
Louis XVI Kristinn Sigmundsson (Bass)	Jaded Aristocrats at the Opera Summer Hassan (Soprano) Lacey Jo Benter (Mezzo)	Beaumarchais Christopher Maltman (Baritone)
Marquis Scott Scully (Tenor)		Marie Antoinette Patricia Racette (Soprano)

Additional Performers

Nicholas Brownlee (Bass-Baritone)(Figaro Pursuer, Juror, Soldier, Guard), Philip Cokorinos (Bass)(Juror, Soldier, Guard), Lisa Eden (Soprano)(Figaro Pursuer, Dancing Girl, Revolutionary Women), Lori Ann Fuller (Soprano)(Figaro Pursuer, Dancing Girl, Revolutionary Women), Katherine Giaquinto (Soprano)(Figaro Pursuer, Dancing Girl, Revolutionary Women), Michele Hemmings (Mezzo)(Figaro Pursuer, Dancing Girl, Revolutionary Women), Museop Kim (Baritone)(Figaro Pursuer, Juror, Soldier, Guard), Renée Rapier (Mezzo Soprano)(Figaro Pursuer, Revolutionary Women), Melissa Treinkman (Mezzo)(Figaro Pursuer, Dancing Girl, Revolutionary Women), Gabriel Vamvulescu (Bass)(Figaro Pursuer, Juror, Soldier, Guard), Danielle Marcelle Bond (Mezzo)(Third Witness), Omar Crook (Tenor)(Man on Ladder in Window, Fourth Witness, Bishop, Second Aristocrat), Gregory Geiger (Baritone)(Page with Crotales), Abdiel Gonzalez (Baritone)(Muscovite Trader, Fifth Witness, Young Man, First

The Players in the Opera

Figaro Lucas Meachem (Baritone)	Léon Brenton Ryan (Tenor)	Cherubino Renée Rapier (Mezzo Soprano)
Susanna Lucy Schauer (Mezzo Soprano)	Florestine Stacey Tappan (Soprano)	Suleyman Pasha Philip Cokorinos (Bass)
Count Almaviva Joshua Guerrero (Tenor)	Bégearss Robert Brubaker (Tenor)	English Ambassador Museop Kim (Baritone)
Rosina Guanqun Yu (Soprano)	Wilhelm Joel Sorensen (Tenor)	Samira Patti LuPone (Mezzo)

Aristocrat), Robert Hovencamp (Bass)(Muscovite Trader), John Kimberling (Tenor)(Man with Lather on Face), Gabriel Manro (Baritone)(Muscovite Trader), George Sterne (Tenor) (Other Man in Room), Rebecca Tomlinson (Soprano)(First Witness), Jennifer Wallace (Mezzo) (Second Witness)

LA Opera Chorus

Soprano: Jamie Chamberlin, Nicole Fernandes, Ayana Haviv, Renee Sousa, Rebecca Tomlinson, Sunjoo Yeo. **Alto:** Danielle Marcelle Bond, Aleta Braxton, Michelle Fournier, Adriana Manfredi, Helene Quintana, Jennifer Wallace. **Tenor:** Omar Crook, Steven Harms, John Kimberling, Charles Lane, Francis Lucaric, George Sterne. **Bass:** Gregory Geiger, Abdiel Gonzalez, Robert Hovencamp, Mark Kelley, David Kress, Gabriel Manro.

Orchestra

Violin I

Roberto Cani,
Concertmaster
Jessica Guideri,
Associate Concertmaster
Lisa Sutton,
Assistant Concertmaster
Margaret Wooten
Olivia Tsui
Tamsen Beseke
James Stark
Tina Chang Qu
Marisa Sorajja
Loránd Lokuszta
Movses Pogossian
Radu Pieptea

Violin II

Ana Landauer,
Principal
Steve Scharf,
Associate Principal
Florence Titmus
Leslie Katz
Michele Kikuchi
Cynthia Moussas
Jayme Miller

Grace Oh
Irina Volohina
Elizabeth Hedman

Viola

Yi Zhou,
Principal
Andrew Picken,
Associate Principal
Karie Prescott
Shawn Mann
Dmitri Bovaird
Kate Vincent
Alma Fernandez
Aaron Oltman

Celli

John Walz,
Principal
Dane Little,
Associate Principal
Kim Scholes
Xiao-Dan Ervin
Nadine Hall
Ira Glansbeek
Maggie Edmondson
Andrew Hayhurst

Basses

David Young,
Principal
Ann Atkinson,
Associate Principal
Frances Liu Wu
Don Ferrone
Tim Eckert
James Bergman

Flutes

Heather Clar,
Principal
Angela Wiegand
Sarah Weisz,
Piccolo

Oboes

Leslie Reed,
Principal
Sarah Beck
Jennifer Johnson,
English horn

Clarinets

Stuart Clark,
Principal

Donald Foster
Stephen Piazza,
Bass clarinet

Bassoons

William May,
Principal
Bill Wood
Judith Farmer,
Contrabassoon

Horns

Steven Becknell,
Principal
Daniel Kelley
Jenny Kim,
Associate Principal
James Atkinson

Trumpets

David Washburn,
Principal
Marissa Benedict
Andy Ulyate
Jennifer Marotta

Trombones

William Booth,
Principal
Alvin Veeh
Terry Cravens,
Bass trombone

Tuba

James Self,
Principal

Harp

Joann Turovsky,
Principal

Timpani

Gregory Goodall,
Principal

Percussion

Theresa Dimond,
Principal
Timm Boatman
John Wakefield
Scott Higgins

Keyboards

Bryndon Hassman,
Principal piano
Audrey St. Gil,
Synthesizer

Orchestra Personnel Manager

Brady Steel

Librarian

Mark Fabulich

It's been 25 years in the making.

When The Metropolitan Opera offered to commission a new opera—my first—for their 100th anniversary, I was both honored and intimidated. The Met was, and remains, one of the world's most important theatres. And I wanted to write a piece not only for, but also about, the Met—about what opera and its history meant to American art. But an artist can't address that question abstractly. So I had to envision a piece about what that history meant to me, knowing that it would need to persuade some of the most discriminating audiences in the world.

Where to start? With comedy, and with continuity. I'd always loved the exuberance and virtuosity, of Mozart's and Rossini's *opera buffa*. But I couldn't merely revisit their world; the 18th century isn't ours,

and how could I improve upon the neo-classicism of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*? I also wanted to build a musical bridge between Mozart's world—a world of clarity and grace, as well as drama and ambition—and ours. I'd always been ambivalent about modernism in music: embracing its thrilling experiments, but wincing at its presentism and exclusivity. Might I find a way in which the music of the past could dance with the music of the present—and, in so doing, suggest a music of the future?

My brilliant librettist William Hoffman invented a theatrical scenario that empowered my musical one. In the afterlife, the playwright Beaumarchais devises a new opera to amuse the ghost of Marie Antoinette, still in mourning for the life swept away by the French Revolution. Beaumarchais's play enlists his familiar Figaro, Susanna, Almaviva and Rosina to plot

to sell the Queen's diamond necklace and rescue her from the guillotine, But all goes wrong; and Beaumarchais has to enter the world of history to try to save the play, and the Queen. Bill's libretto enabled me to do exactly what I wanted: to play the not-quite Mozartean idiom of the *buffa* characters against the not-quite-modernism of the ghost figures, and develop from both of them a music that embraces the past even while leaving it behind.

In Colin Graham's magnificent production, conductor James Levine led Teresa Stratas, Marilyn Horne, Renée Fleming, Hakan Hagegard, and an exemplary cast in a premiere a composer could only dream of. That performance's telecast, later released on DVD, led to engagements in theatres large and small, from Wexford and Hanover to Aspen and New York. But—for 25 years—one thing

eluded *The Ghosts of Versailles*: a first-class audio recording of performances by artists who could equal, or surpass, the achievements of its first cast. You are now reading the booklet of that recording. The artists of Los Angeles Opera's 2015 production made as compelling a case for *The Ghosts of Versailles* as I heard on its first night at the Met in 1991. To have that performance preserved in a recording of this quality is, for this composer, a dream come true.

John Corigliano



John Corigliano had told Maestro James Levine that he loved the buffas of Mozart and Rossini, and that audiences love them, too. But Levine noted that the Metropolitan Opera was just too big for buffas. It was more of a grand opera house. So John, improvising, replied that he could write a “grand opera buffa,” which would combine grand opera with the buffa.

Luckily, John and I had just come across Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais’ third Figaro play, *La Mère coupable* (*The Guilty Mother*), the sequel to *The Barber of Seville* and *The Marriage of Figaro*. And so John proposed that we adapt it. The Met liked this idea, and approved me as his librettist—and so off we were to the races. This particular race took twelve years from start to photo finish.

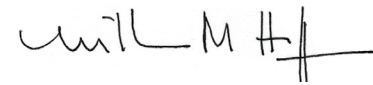
Prima le parole. First the words—they always come first in opera. Of course, I immediately stalled. The first reason was the minor detail that neither John nor myself had actually studied *La Mère coupable*, there being no full translation available at the moment. What? Yes, I confess, we had committed ourselves to writing an opera based on a play we didn’t really know in detail—plus it was to be in a form that was nonexistent. I was also terrified at the prospect of writing a libretto that was bound to be compared to two certified masterpieces, which I joined the world in adoring, and which I was about to desecrate by turning them into prequels to *La Mère coupable*. The opera world might not love me for such chutzpah.

And I was stuck. How to dramatize *La Mère coupable*? I knew I wanted to include Beaumarchais and Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI as characters, as well as some of those

of *La Mère coupable*, but I lacked the framework. I kept on presenting John with literal approaches that clearly lent themselves to a neoclassical musical vocabulary that felt dull to both of us and unimaginative. So, naturally, I decided to go to Paris. Somewhere in all this complex and fertile swamp of history and personalities was my libretto. I followed the footsteps of Beaumarchais and the court of Louis XVI. A visit to Marie Antoinette’s theatre, which still housed the sets of the Queen’s era, and the nearby Temple of Love, made me feel as if I were intruding into an alternative dreamlike or ghostly universe, one in which Marie Antoinette might suddenly appear. It was vital that I stood in the tiny cell that housed the Queen and her pet dog just before she went to the Place de la Révolution, where she lost her head.

When I came back to New York I presented John with two approaches, either of which I believed would enable me to interpret the *La Mère coupable* imaginatively and to free John to employ a totally inclusive musical vocabulary. The world of dreams or the world of ghosts both fit the bill. I’m glad we chose the latter to become *The Ghosts of Versailles*.

William M. Hoffman



Premiere in 1991

“Opera history was made at the premiere of *The Ghosts of Versailles*.”
USA Today

“One of the most imaginative theatrical experiences of the last decade.”
The New York Times

“A masterpiece. [...] What Corigliano and Hoffman have created is a Gesamtkunstwerk in which all the arts share equally to create music drama on the highest level.”
New York Daily News

“Brilliant, moving, and hysterically funny. [...] Without imitating, the music conceals its innumerable references to the past and makes use of a very large palette, from the most surprising dissonances to the sweetest melodies; it connects recitatives, arias, arioso and concerted passages, indelibly printing itself in the minds of the listeners.”
Opéra International (Paris)

“An event of international standard: fascinating, wonderfully orchestrated music and moments of gripping drama that truly get under the skin. One can assume that this production, rewarded with long premiere applause, will be a long-running hit. Unconditionally recommended.”
Pyrmonter Nachrichten, Die Welt

“The most popular full-length opera written in half a century. A beguiling entertainment, *The Ghosts of Versailles* [...] will offer pleasures to wide audiences.”
The New York Times

“*The Ghosts of Versailles* is the opera of which composers can only dream: skillful, masterly, and shamelessly playful. It encompasses a universal range of emotions and ties up its musical bouquet in so colorful a manner that it bowls you over.”
Hannover allgemeine Zeitung



John Corigliano

John Corigliano continues to add to one of the richest, most unusual, and most widely celebrated bodies of work any composer has created over the last 40 years. Mr. Corigliano's numerous scores – including three symphonies and eight concerti among over 100 chamber, vocal, choral, and orchestral works – have been performed and recorded by many of the most prominent orchestras, soloists, and chamber musicians in the world. Recent scores include *Conjurer* (2008), for percussion and string orchestra, commissioned for and introduced by Dame Evelyn Glennie; *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra: The Red Violin* (2005), developed from the themes of the score to the François Girard's film of the same name, which won Mr. Corigliano the Academy Award in 1999; *Mr. Tambourine Man: Seven Poems of Bob Dylan* (2000) for

orchestra and amplified soprano, the recording of which won the Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Composition in 2008; Symphony No. 3: *Circus Maximus* (2004), scored simultaneously for wind orchestra and a multitude of wind ensembles; and Symphony No. 2 (2001), which won the Pulitzer Prize in Music. Other important scores include his String Quartet (1995: Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Composition); Symphony No. 1 (1991: Grawemeyer and Grammy Awards); the opera *The Ghosts of Versailles* (Metropolitan Opera commission, 1991; International Classical Music Award 1992); and the Clarinet Concerto (1977). One of the few living composers to have a string quartet named for him, Mr. Corigliano serves on the composition faculty at the Juilliard School of Music and holds the position of Distinguished Professor of Music at Lehman College, City University of New York, which has

established a scholarship in his name. He and his partner, the composer-librettist Mark Adamo, divide their time between Manhattan and Kent Cliffs, New York.

www.johnorigliano.com

William M. Hoffman

William M. Hoffman is the author of the Broadway play *As Is*, which earned him a Drama Desk Award, an Obie, as well as a Tony nomination for best play of 1986. Since that time *As Is* has received innumerable productions, including a recent well-received London and Edinburgh revivals.

In addition to *The Ghosts of Versailles*, Hoffman has written the libretti for *Morning Star* (music by Ricky Ian Gordon) and *The Cows of Apollo* (music by Chris Theofanides).

He is also the author of the plays *Riga*, *A Quick Nut Bread To Make Your Mouth Water*, *Gilles de Rais*, *Chico de Jazzz*, *Cyberian Nights*, *The Stench of Art* and co-author (with Anthony Holland) of three comedies: *Cornbury*, *Shoe Palace Murray*, and *After the Orchard*, among other plays. Hoffman is a professor of theatre at Lehman College, of the City University of New York, where he hosts the award-winning *Conversations with William M. Hoffman*, on CUNY-TV.

LA Opera

In just three decades of existence, LA Opera has become one of America's most exciting and ambitious opera companies. Presenting benchmark productions of standard repertoire as well as new and rarely-staged operas, LA Opera brings together world-renowned singers, designers, directors

and conductors for performances that attract the attention of international audiences and critics. Highlights of recent seasons include the first major staging in two decades of John Corigliano's *The Ghosts of Versailles*, the first major U.S. production in four decades of Verdi's *The Two Foscari*, the world premiere of Daniel Catán's *Il Postino* and the company's first complete *Ring* cycles. In addition to its mainstage performances, LA Opera presents a robust variety of educational programming and innovative community engagement offerings, experienced by more than 135,000 people each season.

www.laopera.org

James Conlon

James Conlon, one of today's most versatile and respected conductors, has cultivated a vast symphonic, operatic and choral repertoire. Since his 1974 debut with the New York Philharmonic, he has conducted virtually every major American and European symphony orchestra. Through worldwide touring, an extensive discography and videography, numerous essays and commentaries, frequent television appearances and guest speaking engagements, he has become one of classical music's most recognized interpreters. Mr. Conlon is Music Director of LA Opera and Principal Conductor of the RAI National Symphony Orchestra in Torino, Italy. He previously served as Music Director of the Ravinia Festival, summer home of the Chicago Symphony (2005-2015); Principal Conductor of the Paris

National Opera (1995-2004); General Music Director of the City of Cologne, Germany (1989-2002), where he was Music Director of both the Gürzenich Orchestra and the Cologne Opera; and Music Director of the Rotterdam Philharmonic (1983-1991). He served as Music Director of the Cincinnati May Festival, America's oldest choral festival, from 1979 to 2016 – longer than any other music director in the festival's 143-year history. Mr. Conlon has conducted more than 270 performances at the Metropolitan Opera since his debut there in 1976. He has also conducted at Milan's Teatro alla Scala, the Vienna State Opera, London's Royal Opera House Covent Garden, the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino and the Teatro del Opera di Roma.

www.jamesconlon.com



John Corigliano
© J. Henry Fair



William Hoffman
© Jerold Barnard



James Conlon
© Chester Higgins

Love Save the Queen: *The Ghosts of Versailles* Haunts a New Century

There’s an entire category of landmark operas that originally met with resistance from their own composers. Take *Ariadne auf Naxos*. In its first version, the work posed so many problems that a frustrated Richard Strauss shelved the project for several years. And when he was approached by director Peter Sellars with the concept for his first opera — a venture tentatively titled *Nixon in China* — John Adams initially kept a skeptical distance.

The inception of *The Ghosts of Versailles* couldn’t have offered a more encouraging set of circumstances. Desiring to present a brand-new work

to celebrate its upcoming centenary season, the Metropolitan Opera was determined to pull out all the stops. What composer would not leap at the chance — especially given such a spectacular context for his debut opera?

“When James Levine [the Metropolitan Opera’s music director] first asked me at a dinner party, ‘Don’t you want to write an opera?’ I answered, ‘No,’” Corigliano recalls. “Aaron Copland once warned me never to bother with writing opera. He pointed out that in the amount of time it would take to put it all together I could have written three symphonies.”

In this case, Copland’s prediction that Corigliano would need to set aside a few years to create an opera turned out to be a wildly optimistic underestimate. “It took me twelve years!” Measured, that is, from that original dinner party conversation in

1979 to *Ghosts*’ belated world premiere at the Met in December 1991 — eight years past the centennial season for which it had first been envisioned.

A reduced version introduced at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis has been done at the Wexford Festival and has been making the rounds since then at a handful of music festivals. But over the opera’s nearly quarter-century history — and despite its notable success when first presented to the public — performances of the full-scale version of *Ghosts* have remained a rarity. Following a reprise at the Met in the 1990s (with a smaller cast allowed by some doubling of roles), another planned revival was dropped from the schedule there in recent years in the wake of the Great Recession.

“Any producer who saw how the performers filled the stage at the Met would have said, ‘No way am I

going to do this!’ The problem is of course the casting and expense,” Corigliano points out. Adds William M. Hoffman, the librettist of *Ghosts*, “We were actually encouraged to do that,” referring to the large cast and extravagant orchestral forces made available for the centennial commission.

That was a unique occasion, of course. Yet quite aside from that specific context, Hoffman and Corigliano jointly conceived of *Ghosts* as a work of music theater that celebrates and even takes as one of its principal themes the artistic power of opera. The grandeur of the full-scale version is not merely festive display: it deploys lavish operatic resources precisely so as to allow grand opera to weave its spell over a contemporary audience. And through its links to the other two operas inspired by the Figaro trilogy of plays by Pierre-Augustin Caron de

Beaumarchais (1732-1799), *Ghosts* is also rooted in the comic opera buffa tradition — hence Corigliano’s reference to the work as a “grand opera buffa.” The composer remarks: “Once I decided to take on the commission I wanted to write a buffa opera because that forces you to write beautiful ensembles from beginning to end.”

But the Beaumarchais connection took an unexpected turn early in the opera’s genesis. Thanks to his experience as a seasoned playwright, Hoffman quickly realized that simply adapting the third (and most obscure) of the Figaro plays — *La mère coupable* (*The Guilty Mother*) — wouldn’t provide an effective libretto for what they sought to create. “It’s quite a weird tragedy, in fact,” explains Hoffman. “But what the play gave us was a way to bring the [fictional characters] into the French Revolution. And it

introduces new characters, like the villain Bégearss, who become part of our story.” Eventually they arrived at the intricate interweaving of fiction, fantasy (with elements of interactive “fan fiction”), historical reality, and allegorical implication that comprises the story’s narrative.

Both Hoffman and Corigliano are native New Yorkers (just a year apart in age) and have been friends throughout their careers; their first collaboration dates back to 1965 (*The Cloisters*, a song cycle to the poetry of Hoffman). “Billy is exactly what I need in a librettist, because he’s both a poet and a playwright,” says Corigliano. “It was essential to have the dramatic instincts of a playwright but also instincts of a poet. *Ghosts* is not merely about facts or events from the past: this is a fantasy and deals with poetry as fantasy does.” They collaborated closely to break the

back of the libretto but had to operate from different perspectives. “I could read his words and understand them,” the composer says, “but he couldn’t hear the music associated with the ghosts [in the Prologue, for example] because I couldn’t play it at the keyboard” — to which Hoffman adds: “It drove me nuts!”

This mysterious music — the eerie sound world that most clearly evokes a “modernist” sensibility and that Corigliano describes as “a world of smoke”— became the starting point for the fantasy of a limbo-like zone for the ghosts “in which there is no time,” he explains. The challenge was to write in a way that could “sustain a kind of unsubstantial sound that was always in flux. I knew from the start that I didn’t want to write ‘neo-classical’ — I’d done that in some of my earlier concert works, and besides, *The Rake’s Progress* had already accomplished

that for opera. Instead, my strategy became to really drift into a different world of Classicism and to overlay that with the world of the ghosts.”

For his part, Hoffman singles out several models who helped him navigate the challenges of such a complex libretto: Monteverdi’s operas; the multi-layered narrative of Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s *Ariadne auf Naxos* libretto for Strauss; and Beaumarchais himself — not just for the Figaro characters but for his larger sensibility and imaginative reclamation of the farcical *commedia dell’arte* patterns from theatrical tradition.

In *The Marriage of Figaro*, Mozart and Da Ponte deliberately press the absurd complications of the plot and the zaniness of the stock characters to a point where that very absurdity becomes the point. “You’re not meant

to disentangle all these threads,” Hoffman says. “You are meant to ride along with the wave of crazy twists and no longer be able to keep track. It’s liberating.” The music is then in a position to restore a moving sense of harmony. In *The Barber of Seville* and even other comic operas not derived from Beaumarchais, Rossini’s classic ensemble finales whip up the characters’ reactions into a gloriously frenzied state, a collective hysteria. “That kind of Rossinian madness offers something healing to our psyches,” according to Hoffman. “Rossini asks you to follow this insane logic of his operas so that by the time you reach the finale you’re filled with joy simply because your cares are gone.” Corigliano insisted on including just such a Rossinian finale when they began by mapping out the larger architecture of the opera. “One of the happiest experience I’ve ever had in the opera house was with *L’italiana*

in Algeri, when you see the whole audience bobbing up and down with joy. There’s a wonderful chaos and wildness about it that served as the model for the ending of Act One [the madcap scene in the Turkish Embassy].”

Yet *Ghosts* encompasses a profoundly dark, disturbing side as well. “That’s only Act One,” says Corigliano. “In Act Two, we burst into a third kind of world, after the world of the ghosts and the buffa characters — and that’s the reality of the horrors of the French Revolution.” The second act focuses on what happens when Beaumarchais crosses over and interacts with his fictional characters from *A Figaro for Antonia* — the “opera within the opera” — and confronts historical reality as represented by the plight of Marie Antoinette.

“Of course the Revolution changed fundamental things about the modern world,” Corigliano remarks, “but its history was written by the victors, which is always the case. For sheer brutality, the French Revolution is in a class by itself.” As their work on the opera extended over the 1980s, the bicentennial of the French Revolution occasioned a deeper awareness of that brutal side — and of its legacy in the violent cataclysms of the twentieth century. “The more I researched,” declares Hoffman, “the more the Revolution reminded me of the Russian and Nazi Revolutions.” The logic of the hypocritical schemer Bégearss, for example, turns out to be “pure Himmler”; for his chilling aria with chorus “Women of Paris!” in the second act, Hoffman actually quotes from one of Himmler’s propaganda speeches.

Meanwhile, the AIDS crisis had reached terrifying proportions within just a few years. As a direct response to the deaths of numerous friends, Corigliano would go on to compose his award-winning First Symphony in the late 1980s, while Hoffman’s seminal, Tony-nominated play *As Is* became the first major theatrical work to tackle the subject of AIDS on Broadway when it opened at the Lyceum in 1985.

All of these influences — abstract, historical reflections and visceral personal experiences of loss — left their mark on the creation of *Ghosts*. Alongside his reference to Strauss’s *Ariadne*, *Der Rosenkavalier* comes readily to mind: like *Ghosts*, *Rosenkavalier* involves a complex tribute to Mozartean inspiration that is anything but “pastiche” but that instead creates a unique sensibility; and what for Strauss and Hofmannsthal began in a spirit of

comedy came to embrace a more serious meditation on the effects of time.

“Ultimately, despite the comedy, this is a serious piece about change,” says Corigliano. “The whole point is about different ways in which change happens: either through the violence and tragedy of revolution — the idea that you get to a new place by destroying and building on the rubble — or the evolutionary way of change where you can embrace the past, live in the present, and look to the future. The message of the entire opera is that these can all coexist without the destructive path.”

To elucidate how these ideas play out in terms of actual musical choices and strategy in *Ghosts*, Corigliano emphasizes the central role of counterpoint, of the simultaneity of multiple independent layers. “That’s

what counterpoint is all about: two things existing at the same time.” He adds that this can happen in spoken theater as well: In *As Is*, Billy has single characters intermingle and you can hear each one’s logic — in a kind of musical counterpoint to each other.”

In the idyllic Garden Scene in Act One, for example — as Beaumarchais conjures a flashback of the love between Rosina and Cherubino (which resulted twenty years before in the birth of Florestine’s beloved, Léon) — the memory of that love intersects with the playwright’s rapturous present-moment exchange with Marie Antoinette. The dramatic situation creates an opportunity for a complex evocation of the Classical world “as many different ostinatos: I pictured them as clouds going at different speeds,” explains the composer.

Drawing on superficial first impressions, many of *Ghosts*’ first critics were content to tag the score according to whichever element they had focused on — as if the allusions, say, to Mozart (merely one thread of this luxuriant fabric) were characteristic of its entire sound world. Yet one of *Ghosts*’ essential features is precisely to avoid tracing a simple one-to-one correspondence between types of music and its distinctive theatrical levels (the timeless ghost-limbo, the buffa characters, and the historical personalities).

It’s a strategy that has newfound resonance for our polyglot, stylistically boundary-less new century. The mistake is to try to reduce the operatic feast that is *The Ghosts of Versailles* to a single dish. “I like to think of the story of the elephant and the blind men,” says Corigliano. “Depending on wherever they touch, it’s a different

animal. I couldn’t play you any one moment of *Ghosts* and say: this is what the opera is. You have to hear the whole piece, how it flows from one thing to another and superimposes one thing on top of another.”

Thomas May



Synopsis

ACT I

The ghosts of the court of Louis XVI arrive at the theatre of Versailles. Bored and listless, even the King is uninterested when Beaumarchais arrives and declares his love for the Queen. As Marie Antoinette is too haunted by her execution to reciprocate his love, Beaumarchais announces his intention to change her fate through the plot of his new opera ‘A Figaro for Antonia.’

The cast of the opera-within-the-opera is introduced. Following the familiar escapades of the Figaro characters, Almaviva has divorced the Countess after she had a son, Léon, with Cherubino. Léon wants to marry Florestine, Almaviva’s illegitimate daughter, but the Count has forbidden the union as retribution for his wife’s

infidelity and has promised Florestine instead to Bégearss.

Figaro enrages the Count by warning him that his trusted Bégearss is in fact a revolutionary spy. Figaro is fired, but overhears Bégearss and his servant Wilhelm hatching a plot to arrest the Count that evening at the Turkish Embassy when he sells the Queen’s necklace to the English Ambassador. Figaro intercepts the plot by infiltrating the party, dressed as a dancing girl. During the outrageous performance of the Turkish singer Samira, Figaro steals the necklace from the Count before the sale can take place, and runs away.

ACT II

Figaro returns only to defy Beaumarchais’s intention that he return the necklace to the queen, as he wants to sell it to help the Almavivas escape. To put the story back on course, Beaumarchais enters the opera and shocks Figaro into submission by allowing him to witness the unfair trial of Marie Antoinette.

The Count, swayed by his wife’s wishes, rescinds his offer to Bégearss of his daughter’s hand. Even though Figaro gives him the necklace, Bégearss is enraged and sends the Spaniards to the prison where Marie Antoinette lingers.

Beaumarchais and Figaro, the only two to escape, arrive at the prison to try to rescue the Almavivas. They are shortly followed by Bégearss whom Figaro denounces to the

revolutionaries, revealing that he has kept the necklace rather than using it to feed the poor, as he promised. Bégearss is carried off, the Almavivas escape to America and Beaumarchais is left with the keys to the Queen’s cell. But the power of his love has made the Queen accept her fate and she refuses to let Beaumarchais alter the course of history. Marie Antoinette is executed, and the pair is united in paradise.

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The Ghosts of Versailles

A Grand Opera Buffa in Two Acts

Suggested by Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais’ La Mère coupable Music John Corigliano Libretto William M. Hoffman

First Act

TIME: The present and the autumn of 1793. PLACE: Marie Antoinette’s intimate private theatre in the Petit Trianon of Versailles.

PROLOGUE

(The curtain rises revealing an almost empty stage dimly lit. We see pieces of the theatre: a pillar or two, a chair, a box, the front curtain. After a few measures of music, the interior will

gradually assemble itself before our eyes. The beginning of the Prologue is also marked by the appearance of an elegant woman wearing an extremely large dress and vast hat depicting peace and plenty in the land of France. She sings words by Beaumarchais to the tune of “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow.” The following sections of the Prologue form a collage of events that start, stop, overlap, and intertwine.)

Woman with Hat

Mon coursier hors d’haleine

1

(Que mon coeur, mon coeur a de peine!)

J’errais de plaine en plaine

Au gré du destrier,

Sans varlet, n’écuyer,

Là près d’une fontaine,

Songeant à ma marraine,

Sentais mes pleurs couler.

(Que mon coeur, mon coeur a de peine!)

[With my charger out of breath,

(Alas, how weary is my heart!)

I wandered from field to field
At the whim of my steed.
Without page or squire,
Close by a fountain,
Thinking of my girl,
I felt my tears fall.
(Alas, how weary is my heart!)]

Louis

(Drinking with Marquis)

My glass. Thank you, my friend.

Marquis

The Queen languishes in despair,
Your Majesty.
Hopeless afraid, she clings to the past.

Louis

A commoner is courting her.

Marquis

But will he have her?

Louis

I don’t care! Let him have her! Let him

have her! I don’t care!

(Three elegantly dressed women skitter in like insects. They are mindlessly gossiping and find each other hilarious.)

Gossips

He’s in love, he’s in love, he’s in love!

Beaumarchais’s in love with Marie

Antoinette!

The Queen is sad!

She longs for death!

She’s been dead for two hundred years!

Marquis

The Queen languishes in despair,

Your Majesty.

Hopeless afraid, she clings to the past,

Your Majesty....

Gossips

She regrets her past... She will not

rest... She can’t find peace... She seeks

solace... She longs for death... She’s

been dead for two hundred years!...
He’s in love, he’s in love with Marie
Antoinette...

Louis

I don’t care. I don’t care. Don’t...

Woman with Hat

Mon coursier hors d’haleine
(Que mon coeur, mon coeur a de
peine!)
J’errais de plaine en plaine
Au gré du destrier...

(In an opera box a Quartet of Ghosts
watch impatiently, yawning.)

First Woman

Another evening at the opera.

First Man

I’m so bored.

Second Woman

I’m so bored.

Second Man

Perhaps Beaumarchais can amuse us...
Bored as a rug.

First Woman

Well, I know you can’t.

Second Woman

Bored as an egg.

First Woman

I loathe you.

Second Man

(To First Woman)
Oh, Lucienne how you bore me...

Second Man

Bored as a potato...

Gossips

I’m so bored... He’s in love...
Beaumarchais’s in love with Marie
Antoinette!...

All

Bored...

Marquis

The Queen languishes in despair, Your
Majesty.

Louis

I don’t care! Don’t...

Marquis

Hopeless afraid, she clings to the past,
Your Majesty... A commoner is courting
her... But will he have her?...

Woman with Hat

Mon coursier hors d’haleine
(Que mon coeur, mon coeur a de
peine!)
J’errais de plaine en plaine
Au gré du destrier...

(When the theatre set is completed,
two shimmering figures appear—
Marie Antoinette and Beaumarchais.

Beaumarchais is serenading the
Queen. The Queen is dressed simply.
She is at the height of her beauty.)

Beaumarchais

All-powerful Queen of Beauty ²
And ruler of my willing heart,
To make you smile is my duty,
To make you laugh is all my art.

Marie Antoinette

Leave me alone, Beaumarchais? Why
do you persecute me with your love?
I no longer long to love. Leave me in
peace, Beaumarchais. As color fades
from flowers, feeling leaves the soul.

Beaumarchais

Orion, Orion,
Even the moon moves
And is laced gently by leaves.

ARIA

Marie Antoinette

They are always with me:
The unbounded waiting,
The odor of blood on steel.
The terrible sound.

They are always with me:

The crying children,
The crowds pushing.
Severed heads on pikes.

Ah, ah, ah!
Lord, let me forget!

Once there was a golden bird

In a garden of silver trees.
From the courtyard could be heard
The laughter of women at their ease.

They are always with me:

The breaking windows,
The throngs pushing,
Hawking souvenirs,
Stuffing food into jeering mouths

That foam with wine—
A screaming horse—
A man mounting a girl—
A party, a fair, a picnic—
Lord, Lord, let me forget,
Let me forget!

Once there was a golden bird

In a garden of silver trees.
From the courtyard could be heard
The laughter of women at their ease.

It is time:
Eleven o’clock.
“What will you eat?” they ask.
“You will wear white,” they say.
They cut my hair.
They give me back my ring.
Am I going to my wedding?

The back of an oxcart in the October
sun.

My people insult me, they scorn me,
They spit on me as I pass.

What are those flames?
Flags in the streets of Saint Honoré.
What is that sound?
My funeral drums.

I climb the stairs.
Am I dreaming?
Someone wake me!

Three steps. Four.
I want to cry out,
“I am innocent!”

Seven. Eight.
“Take care of my children!”

Nine. Ten.
“Don’t take me!
Don’t take me!”
Lord, let me forget!
Let me forget.

Once there was...

Louis

My wife was always hard to please... ⁴
Antonia, you must change with the
times! We are dead! It is time to rejoice!

Quartet

Dead...dead...bored.

Gossips

It is time to rejoice!

(Louis stops them with a withering
look.)

Louis

Beaumarchais, you promised us an
opera.

Beaumarchais

Only if Her Majesty desires it.

Louis

To please us, Antonia?

Gossips, Quartet

Please us... Bored... Rug... Potato...
It is time to rejoice!... Bored...

Louis

Really!

Beaumarchais

(To Marie Antoinette)

I am a doctor, Your Majesty. My opera can cure melancholy. My words are a spell. Listen to my title: “A Figaro...”

Quartet

“Figaro...”

Beaumarchais

“...For Antonia.”

Quartet

“For Antonia...”

Beaumarchais

Watch!

(Beaumarchais claps his hands. The curtains of a stage within the stage part. We are in the elegant drawing room of the Almaviva mansion in Paris at the start of the Reign of Terror. There are many doors, screens, a large chest, a window, and a barber’s chair.

One of the doors opens and Figaro peeks in, making sure that the room is unoccupied. He is mopping his brow, exhausted from running. He tries not to make any noise, and is about to sit down but at that moment he has to SNEEZE, at which moment Figaro’s Pursuers—his wife Susanna, his employer Count Almaviva, mistresses with babies, creditors, judges, clients—all invade from behind the doors, screens and furniture.)

Figaro

Oh, no. Here we go again!!

[5]

(They chase Figaro.)

Pursuers

Stop!

Muscovite Traders

You owe me money!

Old Man on Ladder

You thief, you stole my daughter!

Other Man in Room

My wife!

Old Man on Ladder

My wife!

Susanna

You’ll pay you’ll pay you’ll pay.

Pursuers

Stop! Stop, Figaro!

Figaro

Ooops.

Man with Lather on Face

How could you leave me like this?

Mistress

(Holding baby)

Look at your son! Give him a kiss!

Other Woman Holding Babies

Where are you, Figaro. Come to me, Figaro.

Figaro

They love me! Just listen to them!

All Pursuers

Stop! Stop, Figaro!

(Susanna pursues Figaro with a rolling pin.)

Susanna

Where are you, Figaro. Come to me, Figaro!

Almaviva

Wretch, did you forget to deliver the letter?

Figaro

No, Master. I swear it.

Susanna

(Pointing at various children)

Is that your child is that your child is that your child?

Figaro

I’ve never seen them before!

All Pursuers

Stop, stop... Figaro!

Man with Lather on Face

Figaro, when will you finish my shave?

Three Muscovite Traders

Figaro, you owe me money!

Almaviva

Figaro...

Figaro

Yes, sir.

Almaviva

(Grabbing Figaro by the collar)

...did you forget to deliver the letter?

Figaro

No, sir.

Woman with Baby

Figaro, give him a kiss.

Figaro

No, sir.

Women with Children

Figaro.

Figaro

Yes, mam.

Women with Children

Is that your child? Is that your child?

Almaviva

Figaro, did you forget to deliver the letter?

Figaro

No, mam... yes, sir!

Pursuers

Figaro, come to me, Figaro...

(They corner Figaro.)

Figaro

STOP!!!

(The group is stunned by Figaro, whereupon he darts away from them and resumes the chase.)

Pursuers

(Variously)

Get ‘im! There he is!... Over here!... I see him!... There he is!... STOP!

Quartet of Ghosts

Dead...Egg!... Bored... Rug... Potato!

Pursuers

STOP! STOP, FIGARO!

(Excited by the onstage chase scene, the Ghosts initiate one of their own, in which Marie Antoinette, Beaumarchais, and Louis do not participate. Madness has broken out onstage and off. Figaro leads his Pursuers into a closet we know is too small for one person. Figaro appears through another door a race toward the closet. We hear the muffled cries of the Pursuers.)

Figaro?...

(Figaro slams the door shut. The irate Pursuers pound on the door.)

ARIA

Figaro

They wish they could kill me.

They wish they could stop me.

They hate me, they loathe me.

Tell me why do they torment me so.

They’re jealous! They’re jealous! They’re

[6]

jealous! They're jealous!
Of what you may ask?
(He slumps like an old man.)
I pant when I walk.
I wheeze when I talk.
My muscles are slack.
I've a pain in my back.

My money is low.
My status less than quo.

I'm poor, I'm weak,
My future's rather bleak.
I'm stooped, I'm spent,
I'm almost impotent.

Once master, now valet,
As fortune would have it,
I've been diplomat, acrobat,
Teacher of etiquette,
Student and swordsman,
Spy and musician.

I've been satirist, pessimist,
Surgeon and Calvinist,

Spanish economist,
Clockmaker, pharmacist,
Veterinarian, egalitarian,
Heathen comedian,
Pious tragedian.

I've been orator, poet,
And pirate and prophet,
A man for the ladies
And father of babies,
Drunken and sober,
A husband and sailor,
Banker and barber
And brother and lover.

Diplomat, acrobat,
Teacher of etiquette,
Student and swordsman,
Spy and musician,
Satirist, pessimist,
Surgeon and Calvinist,
Spanish economist,
Clockmaker, pharmacist,
Veterinarian, egalitarian,
Heathen comedian,

Pious tragedian,
Orator, poet,
And pirate and prophet,
A man for the ladies
And father of babies,
Drunken and sober,
A husband and sailor,
Banker and barber
And brother and lover.

Diplomat, acrobat,
Teacher of etiquette,
Student and swordsman,
Spy and musician,
Satirist, pessimist,
Surgeon and Calvinist,
Spanish economist,
Clockmaker, pharmacist,
Drunken and sober,
A husband and sailor,
Banker and barber
And brother and lover,
And now I'm a failure!

I've seen everything, done everything,
had everything, and lost everything.

Of what then are they jealous?

Marie Antoinette
Poor Figaro.

Woman with Hat
Poor man, poor man.

Figaro
My spirit:
A vapor deliquescent,
An effervescent liquid
Pervading, invading, taking my body,
Making me fluid, light, buoyant,
I'm sunlight, a moonbeam,
And carefree I fly to the stars.

Capella, Carina,
Spica, Auriga,
Libra, Lyra,
Andromeda,
Fornax, Phoenix,
Bellatrix, Pollux.
Joy! Joy!
Carefree I fly to the stars:

Vulpecula, Vela,
Columba, Ara,
Lacerta,
Lupus, Lepus—
Joy! Joy! Joy!
Pegasus, Perseus, Aquila.

*(The banging at the door resumes,
bringing Figaro back to reality.)*
They wish they could kill me.
They wish they could stop me.
They hate me, they loathe me.
And we know why they must torment
me so.
They're jealous! They're jealous! They're
jealous! Yes, jealous
Of Figaro, your Figaro,
I'm home again!

I've been veterinarian,
Egalitarian,
Heathen comedian,
Pious tragedian,
Orator, poet,
And pirate and prophet,
A man for the ladies

And father of babies,
Drunken and sober,
A husband and sailor,
Banker and barber
And brother and lover.

Diplomat, acrobat,
Teacher of etiquette, me!
Satirist, pessimist,
Surgeon and Calvinist, I.
I've been diplomat, acrobat,
Teacher of etiquette,
Student and swordsman,
Spy and musician,
Satirist, pessimist,
Surgeon and Calvinist,
Spanish economist,
Clockmaker, pharmacist.
I'm Figaro,
Your Figaro,
I'm home again,
(Banging is heard through the door.)
Home again!

*(The door flies open. The Pursuers
spill out and look up at Figaro.*

*Beaumarchais closes the curtain of the
little stage as the Ghosts applaud. The
Ghosts are delighted, except for Marie
Antoinette, who weeps softly.)*

Louis
Bravo, Beaumarchais.

Marquis
Brilliant.

Beaumarchais
(To Marie Antoinette)
Then why are you weeping, Your
Majesty?

Marie Antoinette
It was so beautiful, so full of life.

Beaumarchais
Antonia, I can bring you back to
life, home again. May I borrow your
necklace, Your Highness?

Ghosts
Necklace?

Marie Antoinette
My necklace?

Beaumarchais
With your necklace I shall change your
past. I shall show you history as it
should have been.

Marie Antoinette
I want to live again!

Beaumarchais
I'll make you live again. I, Pierre-
Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, will
change the course of history with a
necklace.

Marie Antoinette
You are mad. You risk your immortal
soul.

Beaumarchais

The Revolution never happens! There is no guillotine! A new age dawns! Marie Antoinette lives! Love me, Your Majesty!

Marie Antoinette

I cannot love.

Louis

Believe her, Beaumarchais.

Beaumarchais

I have the powers of a god. Watch me! *(She gives him her necklace. He pours the necklace from one hand to the other.)*

Diamonds... I see diamonds... I see a room with many doors... Diamonds... Doors... Magic!

8

(Beaumarchais turns his back to the audience and holds the diamonds aloft. He lowers his arms. The curtain opens again, revealing the same drawing room, but this time Count

Almaviva is kneeling in the middle of it, holding aloft a diamond necklace identical to the one Beaumarchais was holding. Soldiers are marching outside the square, which is visible through the window. Beaumarchais turns around. He has no necklace.)

It is Paris, the autumn of '93. Terror... Revolution... The King is dead. The Queen awaits her fate in prison.

(The Queen cries out in pain.)

Louis

How can you be so cruel? You open old wounds.

Beaumarchais

I can help her. Believe me.

(To Marie Antoinette.)

You have entrusted your diamonds to your old friend, the Spanish Ambassador, Count Almaviva, a character from my first two operas. He has a plan to save you.

Marie Antoinette

Save me! Save me! I want to live!

Beaumarchais

My opera will save you, Your Majesty. Let me tell you about my other characters. Almaviva's wife, Rosina. *(We see Rosina seated in a chair, weeping.)*

For the last twenty years her husband has resented her because—remember Almaviva's young page, Cherubino? *(We see Cherubino.)*

He and the Countess had a child, Léon. *(We see Léon.)*

And he has fallen in love with Florestine! *(We see Florestine with Léon.)*

She is the Count's offspring by a nameless woman of high rank. Here is the problem: Almaviva has never forgiven his wife's infidelity. And so he refuses to give his consent to the marriage of his daughter and her son.

Instead, he has promised his daughter to his best friend, our villain Patrick Honoré Bégearss. *(We see Bégearss.)* To complete the cast, Figaro and Susanna—

Louis

Get on with it, Beaumarchais! I never could follow the last act of *The Marriage of Figaro*, and this is even worse!

Almaviva

O heavenly Father, hear my vow: On my life I promise to set free Thy persecuted daughter, Marie Antoinette of France. And if it be Thy will, O Lord, I shall sell these jewels to the English Ambassador at the reception of the Turkish embassy. And with the one **9** million pounds, grant Her Majesty a safe refuge in the New World. *(Chanting)*

Ave Maria, gratia plena. Benedictus fructus ventris Tuis— (Figaro knocks at the door, infuriating the Count.) Who is it?

Figaro

Figaro...

Susanna

And Susanna.

Almaviva

(Aside)

Those two. They mustn't see the jewels. *(He shoves the necklace into his pocket. To Figaro and Susanna:)* One moment.

(Figaro and Susanna enter, with mops and dusters.)

Figaro

Just cleaning the room, Master.

Susanna

Tidy and clean, neat as a pin.

Figaro, Susanna

We won't be minute.

(Figaro and Susanna quickly search the room while pretending to clean. Susanna spies the necklace sticking out of Almaviva's pocket.)

Susanna

(Snatching the necklace)

What this?

Almaviva

(Snatching it back.)

None of your business.

Figaro

Secrets from your loyal Figaro?

Susanna

And devoted Susanna?

Almaviva

Devoted and loyal to Rosina and her son. I'll never forgive that woman.

Susanna

For the love of God forgive your wife.

Figaro

And forgive her son. Let him marry your daughter.

Susanna

My lady has already given her permission.

Almaviva

How dare she? Florestine will marry Bégearss. He's the only man I trust.

Figaro

But Master, he only pretends to be your friend.

Almaviva

Mind your place!

Figaro

He's a spy for the revolutionaries.

Almaviva

Don't be absurd!

Figaro

I caught his servant searching your room.

Almaviva

I don't believe you.

Figaro

Reading your letters.

Almaviva

I wont listen!

Figaro

Where did you get that necklace?

Almaviva

This time you've gone too far. I dismiss you, Figaro. Leave at once. You will

obey. My wife will obey! I'm still king in this house.

(Exit Almaviva)

Louis

I said the very same words.

Susanna

Stubborn! Oh, Figaro, what are we going to do? We'll starve.

Figaro

(Tapping his head)

Not as long as I have my wits.

Susanna

What's the world coming to? Master sneaks around with stolen jewels; our Mistress cries all day. And outside, Paris has gone mad: a King has lost his head; the Queen languishes in jail. I am frightened for simple folk like us.

Figaro

Susanna, Susanna, at least we have each other.

(Figaro and Susanna hear the offstage approach of Wilhelm and Bégearss, who is beating Wilhelm.)

Wilhelm

Ouch!... Ooh!...Argh!...

Figaro

But who is that coming?

Susanna

Bégearss and his servant Wilhelm.

Wilhelm

Ow... Yeow!... No. No. No. No. No.

Susanna

He's always beating him.

Figaro

Miserable man. Let's hide and see

what we can learn. Come, Susanna.

(They hide. We see Bégearss and Wilhelm. Bégearss beats him.)

Bégearss

Fool! Idiot! Moron! You forgot where ^[10]

Almaviva plans to sell the jewels?

How could you?

Wilhelm

I read the letter, but then that Figaro came in and scared it out of me!

(Bégearss kicks Wilhelm.)

Bégearss

When? Where? I need to know so I can expose the plot to save the Queen.

(Hitting Wilhelm.)

Think, you idiot. Think! Think! Think!

Think!

Wilhelm

Uh... Uh... I can't... I'm sorry I can't. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry I can't!

Ghosts

Sorry!... Can't... Idiot!... Guilty!...

Hit 'im!... Think!....

Wilhelm

Sorry!

Marie Antoinette

(To Ghosts)

Imbeciles. Shhhh!

(Beaumarchais offers Marie Antoinette a cushion. She smiles at him. The Ghosts giggle.)

Wilhelm

Forgive me, Master, I beg you.

What can I do?

Bégearss

What can you do? What can you do? What you're good for. Polish my boots...and keep thinking!...

RECITATIVE

I can't wait to betray Almaviva. When ^[11] they arrest him, I'll make him crawl to me on his hands and knees like a dog.

(Patting Wilhelm on the head.)

Good boy! But I'll send him to the scaffold anyway. And then I'll make the Countess my maid. Yes! And if she doesn't like that I'll send her to the cart also. And Léon will be my Page,

as his father was to the Count. And Florestine, my wondrous Florestine, will be my mistress, my wife, my slave, will be my love...

(We see Florestine as in Bégearss' imagination, radiantly beautiful, reading back a letter she has just written. She holds a quill in her hand.)

My love, my love, my love, my love, my love...

Florestine

Come, my love. Come to me, my love. I am yours. Your mistress, your wife,

your slave! Oh, Léon, Léon. Oh, Léon, Léon. Ah! Ah! Ah!

Bégearss

Léon? Léon? Léon? Get out of my way! What about me, Patrick Honoré Bégearss? It's true that I'm low, base, vile. But don't they know the king of beasts is the worm?

ARIA

Oh, the lion may roar ^[12]
And the eagle may soar,
And man may sail the darkest sea,
But the worm lives on eternally.
Long live the worm.

Cut him in two,
Each part'll renew.

Slice him to bits,
The worm persists.
He still crawls on,
Scales walls on
Sheer will and

Burrows burning sand.
Long live the worm.

He travels on by
The poor man's sty,
Groveling past the royal palace,
And enters the coffin
Of the red-haired dauphin.
Long live the worm.

The wind whistles
And the storm bristles,
And mud covers the ground.
The worm wanders round and round
Morning and night,
Hidden from sight,
Over mountain and shore,
Wanting more and more,
Devouring city and plain,
Enduring snow and rain.
Long live the worm!

Oh, the lion dies,
The eagle dies,
And man dies,

But the worm lives on eternally.
Long live the worm.

Wilhelm

I remember, Master! I remember! ^[13]
The reception at the Turkish Embassy!
Tonight! Almaviva's going to sell the jewels tonight to the English Ambassador!

(Figaro and Susanna look alarmed, realizing what Bégearss is planning. Wilhelm grovels at Bégearss' feet.)

Bégearss

Good boy. Good boy.

Wilhelm

Thank you, Master, thank you.

Susanna

We must tell the Count.

Figaro

He'll never believe us.

Wilhelm

Or was it the Turkish Ambassador at the English Embassy? No, it definitely was the Turkish Embassy and the English...or was he Spanish?

Bégearss

Enough! I know which one.

(He starts to chuckle.)

Susanna

What will we do? All is lost.

Figaro

As long as I have my head I'll never give up! Come, Susanna, I have an idea.

(Figaro and Susanna sneak out.)

Bégearss

Ha! I have him now! Now I have them all! And Florestine will marry me... or Dr. Guillotine. Come, Wilhelm.

(They exit. The small theatre curtain closes.)

Ghosts

Rogue!... Villain!... Murderer!...

Woman with Hat

Oh, what a terrible man!

Marie Antoinette

Poor Florestine. I pity her. She is so young. When I first came to France I was only fourteen. 14

Beaumarchais

It was May. There were parades in Lorraine. Remember?

Marie Antoinette

I remember I was lonely.

Beaumarchais

There were ribbons in the tress of Compiègne. Remember?

Marie Antoinette

I remember I was frightened.

Beaumarchais

Fireworks at Versailles. Oh, how the people loved you.

Marie Antoinette

I was such a homesick little girl. Poor Florestine. Don't let him marry her!

Beaumarchais

Don't be afraid, Your Majesty. I won't let that happen. And Almaviva and Figaro will foil Bégearss and bring you to the New World.

(Marie Antoinette makes a disdainful face.)

And I'll be there to amuse you...just the two of us.

Louis

(To Beaumarchais)

The two of you? This time you go too far! I warned you.

(Louis goes to his sword.)

Defend yourself!

Marie Antoinette

(Putting her hand over Louis')

Don't be absurd!

Louis

How dare he!

Ghosts

How dare he!

Marie Antoinette

(To Beaumarchais, silencing the Ghosts)

Do something. Beaumarchais.

(Beaumarchais leaps onto the apron of the little stage.)

Beaumarchais

New scene: Rosina's boudoir. 15

(He opens the curtains. He blows Marie Antoinette a kiss.)

They say New York is a lively town.

(Louis stamps his foot.)

Louis

After all, she is my wife!

(The curtains to the little stage part. We are in Rosina's boudoir. Beaumarchais leaves the apron.)

Bégearss

(To Almaviva)

Turn the other cheek and forgive your wife.

Rosina

Forgive me, I beg you, my husband.

Almaviva

There's no mercy in my heart.

Rosina

Forgive me, my lord.

Almaviva

I'll never relent.

Bégearss

(Aside)

His hatred fills me with joy.

Rosina

If you love me, let our children marry. And forgive our son.

Almaviva

Neither! Never! You loved Cherubino, now live with your shame.

(To Bégearss)

Come, my friend, let us discuss your wedding plans.

Bégearss

(To Rosina)

I did my best.

(Exit Bégearss and Almaviva.)

Rosina

(To herself)

That man is a saint, but even he can't help me now. I am truly lost. Oh, oh, Cherubino, I gave up my life for you. Cherubino, Cherubino...Cherubino...

Beaumarchais

Now we go back in time. Let it be 16 Spain, twenty years before. Let it be Seville, the full bloom of spring.

Rosina

Cherubino...? Cherubino...?

(Rosina's clothing comes off, and she seems twenty years younger, dressed as a shepherdess. She puts on a blindfold. Meanwhile the stage-within-a-stage has become the Garden of Aguas Frescas, home of the Almaviva family in Spain. We are in a bower. The set is reminiscent of the Fragonard painting "Hide and Seek." Cherubino appears dressed as a shepherd. He gently removes her blindfold.)

Where are you taking me, young shepherd?

DUET

Cherubino

Look at the green here in the glade. 17 Feel the mild breeze and the scent of wild thyme. Hear the vixen's shrill cry and the lamb's complaint. We're in the Garden of Earthly delights.

Rosina

I'm not acquainted with these parts. I'm lost in this land and frightened.

Cherubino

To the north is the Village of Shy Glances.

Rosina

My soul is closed to sweet pleasures.

Cherubino

To the east is the Grove of Tender
Touching.

Rosina

Rage, bitterness, and hate consume
me.

Cherubino

To the west is the River of Sighs.

Rosina

Oh, Cherubino, take me home. I am
unworthy of paradise.

Cherubino

And south, past the arching willow, is
the Temple of Love.

Come now, my darling, come with me,
Come to the room I have made for
thee.

*(Rosina turns toward Cherubino, who
is at last won over.)*

Let us strew the bed with flowers,
There we will spend the hours.

Rosina, Cherubino

Yes, yes, my darling, I'll come with thee,
Come to the room that is made for thee.
Let us strew the bed with flowers,
There we will spend the hours...

*(In the audience Beaumarchais moves
closer to Marie Antoinette, who is
listening, entranced, to Rosina. Louis
grows uncomfortable as Beaumarchais
and Marie Antoinette become more
intimate.)*

Beaumarchais

(To Marie Antoinette)

Look at the green here in the glade.

Feel the mild breeze and the scent of
wild thyme.

Hear the vixen's shrill cry and the
lamb's complaint.

We're in the Garden of Earthly delights.
To the north is the Village of Shy Glances.

*(Simultaneously with Beaumarchais
Hear the vixen's...)*

Rosina, Cherubino

Though hours pass swiftly,
Love is eternal

Marie Antoinette

My soul is closed to sweet pleasures.

Beaumarchais

To the east is the Grove of Tender
Touching.

Marie Antoinette

Rage bitterness, and hate consume me.

Beaumarchais

To the west is the River of Sighs.

Marie Antoinette

Oh, Beaumarchais, let me be. I am
unworthy of paradise.

Beaumarchais

And south, past the arching willow,

is the Temple of Love.

Come now, my darling, come with me,
Come to the room I have made for
thee.

Let us strew the bed with flowers,
There we will spend the hours...
(etc.)

*(Simultaneously with Beaumarchais
Come now my darling...)*

Rosina, Cherubino

The birds are hushed.

Your cheeks are flushed.

The earth is sweet and soft,
Cool and safe.

There we will spend the hours.... (etc.)

Rosina, Cherubino

Yes, yes, my darling, I'll come with
thee,

Come to the room that is made for me
[thee].

Let us strew the bed with flowers,
There we will spend the hours...

QUARTET**Marie Antoinette**

My soul is closed to sweet pleasures.

Beaumarchais

To the east is the Grove of Tender
Touching.

Marie Antoinette

Rage bitterness, and hate consume
me.

Beaumarchais

To the west is the River of Sighs.

Marie Antoinette

Oh, Beaumarchais let me be. I am
unworthy of paradise.

Beaumarchais

And south, past the arching willow, is
the Temple of Love.

Beaumarchais, Marie Antoinette

Yes, yes, my darling, I'll come with
thee,

Come to the room that is made for me
[thee].

Let us strew the bed with flowers,
There we will spend the hours...

*(Rosina and Cherubino kiss. Louis
reacts to the kiss and moves near
Beaumarchais and Marie Antoinette.
Just at the moment that those two
are about to kiss, Louis places his
sword between their lips.)*

Louis

No. I've had enough. I see what's 18
happening here. You want to steal my
wife.

(To Ghosts)

He wants to steal my wife. You've
written an opera to steal my wife.

Beaumarchais

I've written an opera to amuse Antonia.

Louis

Now it's Antonia! Have your arrogance
and presumption no limits? Defend
yourself, if you are a man!

Beaumarchais

With pleasure.

Woman with Hat

(To Marie Antoinette)

How exciting! He's going to fight over
her.

(Beaumarchais draws his sword.)

Louis

En garde, Beaumarchais.

*(Louis and Beaumarchais duel. They
are both fine swordmen, but Louis'
skills are hampered by excessive
posing. The Ghosts add occasional
appropriate ad libs.)*

DUELING SONG**Ghosts**

He will cut you into pieces.

He will slice you for the pot.

There's another of his caprices.

That's how men do the gavotte.

He will feed him to the dogs.

He's not good enough for hogs.

He's consumed by a raging fire.

Thrust it deeper, get him, Sire.

He will stop him.

He will chop him...

Stop him, chop him, stop him, chop
him, stop him, chop him...

*(Louis runs Beaumarchais through with
his sword. Marie Antoinette shrieks in
horror, while Louis walks off in triumph.
After a moment, calmly, painlessly,
and slowly Beaumarchais pulls the
sword out of himself and, kneeling in*

mock respect, returns the sword to Louis.)

Beaumarchais

You forgot your sword, Your Majesty.

(Marie Antoinette bursts out laughing.)

She’s laughing.

Marie Antoinette

We’re dead.

(Ghosts join in laughter.)

Beaumarchais

You’re laughing.

Marie Antoinette

We’re dead!

(Beaumarchais gleefully runs Louis through. The King finally joins the laughter. Everyone is laughing, singing, and running each other through.)

Ghosts

He will cut you into pieces.

He will slice you for the pot.

There’s another of his caprices.

That’s how men do the gavotte.

He will feed him to the dogs.

He’s not good enough for hogs.

He’s consumed by a raging fire.

Thrust it deeper, get him, Sire.

He will cut you into pieces.

He will slice you for the pot.

There’s another of his caprices...

FINALE

(The dueling scene is interrupted by the appearance on the little stage of two large muscular, oiled, bald men, stripped to the waist, wearing baggy pants, dueling with long, heavy scimitars. The décor pays homage to the Turkomania of Europe in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Presiding over

a glittering court of officials, harem girls, and Europeans, near a lavish display of food, is Suleyman Pasha, a huge, round, jolly man wearing a turban and an embroidered coat.

The Pasha is seated crosslegged on a round cushion placed on a vast Oriental rug. Standing to the side, on a balcony overlooking the street, to the right of an enormous potted palm, are Almaviva, Rosina, and Susanna. The Count anxiously surveys the room, obviously waiting for someone. To the left of the tree, partalliy hidden by the fronds, are Florestine and Léon. Every time the Count looks in their direction, Léon ducks behind the palm, prodded by Florestine. The two duelers bow. The guests and Ghosts applaud. The Pasha greets his guests in Turkish.)

Pasha

Selamünaleyküm. [Welcome.]

I am Suleyman Pasha.

(He sneezes.)

I bid you welcome to my humble abode.

(He sneezes.)

Haydi bakalım gelecek oyun başlasın.

[Let the next act begin!]

(The Pasha claps his hands, signaling the start of a new entertainment. Onstage instrumentalists begin playing. The performers’ curtain is raised and dancers emerge and entertain the guests.)

Louis

(To Beaumarchais)

I can’t stay angry with you, you old magician.

Marie Antoinette

I feel tipsy.

(She giggles. Léon peeks from behind the tree.)

Léon

Say it, darling, say it!

Florestine

Quick, Léon, hide!

(Léon hides.)

Almaviva

(Turning)

Oh, where is he? The Ambassador is late.

(Almaviva turns away.)

Léon

I don’t care about your father. Say it, I beg you!

(As Almaviva turns again, Florestine pushes Léon behind the palm tree.)

Florestine

Quickly, dearest!

Rosina

(To Almaviva)

Listen to reason. Do not sell the jewels tonight.

Almaviva

My mind is made up.

Susanna

But, Master...

(Léon reappears as Almaviva and Susanna turn away again.)

Léon

I no longer know who I am or what I’m doing. One moment I’m on fire, the next I’m like ice. Say it, darling. Do you love me?

(Florestine taps her head to indicate that Léon is mad.)

Florestine

Poor lad.

Marquis

(To Beaumarchais)

She loves you.

Léon

Awake I think of you, asleep I think of you. Walking, running, reading, eating, breathing, I think of you.

Florestine

Oh, why do I love such a silly, useless boy?

Léon

She loves me! You love me! Say it again!

Beaumarchais

(To himself in wonderment)

She loves me.

Marie Antoinette

(Overhearing Beaumarchais)

Shhh! I’m listening.

Florestine

Not now, my pet. Oh, where is Figaro?

He said he’d be here.

(Léon hides as Florestine smiles and waves her handkerchief at her father. Florestine pushes Léon back. He pops his head out.)

Susanna

Listen to Figaro.

Léon

That man is a saint.

Almaviva

That traitor!

Susanna

Bégearss is the traitor.

(Enter Bégearss, Wilhelm, and Revolutionary Guards—thinly disguised goons.)

Bégearss

(To Guards while entering)

...But remember, you are foreign diplomats.

Almaviva

That man is a saint...

Florestine

I'll never marry him.

Almaviva

... And my daughter's fiancé.

Léon

Say it again!

Florestine

(Seeing Bégearss)

Quick, hide!

(Léon hides again.)

Bégearss

... And when he gives him the jewels,

then, and not before, you attack like wild dogs and hold the Count in your jaws.

Almaviva

(Seeing Bégearss)

Ah, Bégearss, my friend.

Bégearss

My dear friend.

(The Page rings a hand bell. The English Ambassador appears as the onstage musicians scurry together to play his national anthem.)

Page

His excellency, the English Ambassador. [[]

(The Ambassador looks less and less happy with the rendition of the musicians. The Pasha beams at the musicians. The Ambassador bows to the Pasha, then joins Almaviva's group.)

Ambassador

My dear Almaviva, it has been a long time.

Almaviva

Too long, your excellency. How is your cousin and Lady Alice?

Ambassador

We have so much news to exchange.

(To Rosina)

You will excuse us, madam.

(They walk off arm in arm with exaggerated politeness.)

Almaviva

I have a little gift for you, sir.

(They walk toward the palm, not noticing that they are being followed by Susanna, Léon, Florestine, Rosina, Bégearss, and the Revolutionary Guards. The Pasha notices this procession and, curious, joins the line. Almaviva and the Ambassador notice

nothing. Finally, everyone, including the entertainers and the guests and Turks, is silently staring.)

Ambassador

(Looking at Almaviva)

And I for you.

(He looks at Almaviva.)

Almaviva

Shall we?

Ambassador

Shall we?

(The Ambassador and Almaviva put their hands in their pockets. They are about to make the exchange when... the Pasha SNEEZES. The Ambassador and Almaviva look down the line of Pursuers to a very embarrassed Pasha. Simultaneously they remove their hands from their pockets.)

Bégearss

Damn!

(The Pasha motions the Page to ring his bell.)

Pasha

O excellent ones! O noble gathering! To the singing of Samira, attend! The fragrance of jasmine, the warmth of the desert, the beauty of the moon— Samira!

CAVATINA

(The performers' curtain parts, and Samira makes a spectacular entrance. She is elaborately and gorgeously garbed as an Arab diva.)

Samira

I am in a valley and you are in a valley. [[]

I have no she- or he-camel in it.

In every house there is a cesspool.

That's life!

He beat me, then wept,

Stole my water and then complained.

Some days it's honey,

Some days onions.

But repetition will teach even a donkey.

That's life!

Pasha

(Calling out to Samira in Turkish)

Çok yaşa yavrum! [Long live my baby!]

Samira

Far from the eye, far from the heart.

Keep away from evil and sing to it.

Pasha

Söyle, güzelim! Söyle, güzelim! [Sing, my beauty!]

Samira

(Singing to Pasha seductively in Arabic)

Ya habibi... [My love.]

Ya omri!... [My life!] [[]

CABALETTA

Limatha hajartani? [Why did you leave me?]

Hattamta kalbi. [You broke my heart.]

Kayfa tafal biya hatha? [How could you do this to me?]

Ya rohi, habaitak, laken tansa woo-oo-dak... [My soul, I loved you, but you broke all your promises.]

(Samira opens the performers' curtain and gracefully pulls out the hand of a beautiful dancing girl, who enters pulling the hand of another beauty, and then another. The final dancer is Figaro in disguise. He sings and dances with the girls hoping to be unnoticed.)
Limatha hajartani?...

Dancing Girls, Figaro

Ya rohi, habaitak, laken tansa woo-oo-dak... Khain! [Traitor!]

(Samira's singing and Figaro's antics are more and more outrageous, and

the dancing of the Dancing Girls is wilder and wilder until Samira starts to ululate.)

Samira

...Ya omri! Ya omri! Ya omri! Ya omri! ...

Samira, Figaro, Dancing Girls

Ya rohi, habaitak, laken tansa woo-oo-dak...

(Samira, Dancing Girls, and Figaro freeze. The Pasha's audience and the Ghosts applaud them, after which Samira exits. The other dancers, including Figaro, acknowledge the applause by bowing their heads and then leave the playing area to offer the guests fruit from large bowls.)

Dancing Girls

Tafaddaloo marhabun bikoom... [[] [Please have some.]

(At the same time, Almaviva and the

Ambassador once again try to sneak off together, and once again the other principals, minus the Pasha, follow them. Figaro makes his way to the head of the line of Pursuers, offering each one in turn some fruit. Almaviva and the Ambassador, thinking they are alone put their hands in their pockets to exchange the money for the diamonds.)

Figaro

Marhabun bikoom...

Almaviva, Ambassador

Shall we?... Shall we?

(They are interrupted by Figaro, who slips between them with his bowl of fruit. With a sexy smile and a wiggle, he offers them figs.)

Figaro

Tafaddaloo marhabun bikoom al figi?

Ambassador

No thank you, madam.

Figaro

Figi? Figi?

Almaviva, Ambassador

(Aside)

She's offensive.

Figaro

(Overhearing them)

I'm offensive.

(Almaviva and the Ambassador try to ignore Figaro. In the guise of being seductive, Figaro searches Almaviva's pocket for the jewels. Figaro thrusts an orange at Almaviva.)

Tafaddaloo marhabun bikoom al orangy?

Almaviva

I beg your pardon, madam.

Almaviva, Ambassador

She's repulsive.

Figaro

I'm repulsive.

Bégearss

Will you please go, madam?

Figaro

(Throwing a large avocado at Bégearss)

Avocadi avocadi?

Almaviva, Ambassador, Bégearss

She's loathesome.

Figaro

I'm loathesome.

(Figaro frantically searches Almaviva, accidentally tickling him.)

Almaviva

What are you doing? NOW STOP THAT!

Figaro

Tafaddaloo marhabun bikoom al banan?

(Figaro leers and pulls out a large banana. He distracts the Count and finds the jewels and snatches them. But Wilhelm has witnessed the theft.)

Wilhelm

The jewels! She's got the jewels! Arrest that woman!

Marie Antoinette

My diamonds!

Bégearss

Arrest her!

All (Except Figaro)

Ha! There's Figaro!

Figaro

Oh, no! Here we go again!

(Figaro begins another chase.)

Pursuers

Stop! He stole the jewels. Stop.

Bégearss

You thief, my plan is shattered.

Wilhelm

You'll pay! You'll pay, you'll pay, you'll pay, you'll pay!

Pursuers

Stop! Stop! Figaro! You'll pay, you'll pay, you'll pay, you'll pay! ...

Marie Antoinette

(To Beaumarchais, clapping enthusiastically)

Bravo, Beaumarchais! It's wonderful!

Ghosts

Dead!... Egg!... Bored!... Rug!... Potato!

(Figaro hides behind the palm tree.)

Pursuers

Where are you, Figaro? Come to me, Figaro.

Figaro

They love me! Just listen to them!

Pursuers

Stop, Figaro!

Figaro

Adorable!

Pursuers

There is my Figaro. Come to me, Figaro.

Figaro

What passion! It's marvelous!

Pursuers

Stop, stop!

Ghosts

Figaro's where?... Figaro's there...

Figaro

Here's Figaro.

Ghosts

Figaro's here?... Figaro's near... Figaro's where?

Figaro

Your Figaro.

Ghosts

Figaro's there?... Figaro's past... Figaro's here... Figaro's gone... Figaro's near... Figaro, Figaro, Figaro...

Pursuers

Stop! Stop! Stop! Figaro!...

(A marching rhieta orchestra — Arab oboe — made up of members of the ensemble not already onstage as guests of the Pasha, are playing kazoos disguised by black cardboard tubes to look like rhietas. The Pursuers and Figaro continue their chase.)

Florestine, Rosina, Susanna, Léon

Go! Figaro, go! Figaro!

Pursuers

No! No! Stop, Figaro!

Florestine, Rosina, Susanna, Léon

Fly! Figaro, fly! Figaro!...

(Variously)

Go, Figaro! Hurry!

Pursuers

No, no, my Figaro!

(Ad lib, variously)

There he is!... Get 'im!... Over here!

Ghosts

Dead... Egg.. Bored... Rug...

Gossips

Look at Figaro...

(Laughter. Woman with Hat, now wearing Valkyrie helmet and battle dress, enters, outraged.)

Valkyrie

This is not opera! Wagner is opera!

(Figaro runs to the side of the stage, past the palm tree, on to a balcony. Figaro’s friends and the rheita orchestra hold back the Pursuers. The Page rings the bell to restore order.)

Florestine, Rosina, Susanna, Léon

Go! Figaro, go! Figaro!

(The other Ghosts shout bravos and applaud and cheer.)

Marie Antoinette

I love it! I love it!

Pasha

Haydi bakalım gelecek oyun başlasın!

[Let the next act begin!]

Florestine, Rosina, Susanna, Léon

Go! Figaro, go! Figaro!...

Pursuers

No! No! Stop, Figaro!

Valkyrie

This is not opera! Wagner is opera!

(Cornered on the balcony, Figaro leaps off of it to freedom. The lights black out in mid-leap.)

Second Act

SCENE 1

(Beaumarchais is trying to begin the second act of his opera, but the Ghosts are dawdling over intermission. They are slowly returning to their seats, carrying glasses of wine and chatting animatedly about the opera. One of the Ghosts hovers above the stage and then descends into his or her seat.)

Beaumarchais

Hurry!... It’s late!... Hurry!... It’s late!... **[1]**

Madam... Sir... Hurry... Hurry... The second act is beginning!

Louis

(Laughing, to Marie Antoinette)

No, no, no, my dear!

Marie Antoinette

Of course, he’s serious.

Louis

It’s just an amusement.

Marie Antoinette

I’ll ask him.

(To Beaumarchais)

Beaumarchais, are you claiming you can bring me back to life?

(The curtains of the little stage open onto Figaro’s and Susanna’s bedroom. It is the following morning. Almaviva, Rosina, Florestine, and Susanna are present.)

Beaumarchais

I can change history.

Marie Antoinette

(To Louis)

You see?

Louis

Abracadabra.

Almaviva

I’ve waited long enough, Figaro won’t return the jewels.

Marquis

(Mocking)

He will change history.

Susanna

My husband is an honest man.

Florestine

And Bégearss is—

Almaviva

I won’t listen to your lies. Somehow I’ll save the Queen.

Beaumarchais

My words have power.

Almaviva

I have the power.

Beaumarchais

My music has power.

Woman with Hat

Power!

Almaviva

You’ll see.

Beaumarchais

I want to make you happy.

Marie Antoinette

I want to live again! Can you do that, Beaumarchais?

Beaumarchais

Yes! We shall live in Philadelphia.

Almaviva

Well?

Louis

If you call that living.

Woman with Hat

Every day I thank God I’m dead.

Rosina

It’s late.

Marie Antoinette

You don’t understand! None of you were ever truly alive. I loved life. I did! I want to live again!

Louis

Excessive in life, excessive in death.

(The Ghosts laugh.)

Florestine

I’m worried.

Marie Antoinette

(To Beaumarchais)

I believe you.

Beaumarchais

At last.

Almaviva

(To Susanna)

Tell me, where is that husband of yours?

Beaumarchais

Watch. Now Figaro comes back. **[2]**

(Figaro enters looking disheveled.)

Louis

Finally.

Almaviva

Finally.

Susanna

Where have you been?

Figaro

All over. I was followed.

Beaumarchais

(To Marie Antoinette)

Figaro returns the necklace and then he and the Count will rescue you from prison.

Almaviva

Just give me the necklace.

Figaro

I...was thinking...

Beaumarchais

What?

Almaviva

The necklace.

Figaro

...about that necklace.

Beaumarchais

The idiot hasn't learned his lines.

(Figaro takes the necklace out of his pocket. He toys with it and paces. Almaviva follows him.)

Susanna

Just give it to him.

Beaumarchais

Just give it to him!

Figaro

I said to myself, why does my Master want it?

Beaumarchais

How dare he improvise? Singers have no minds.

Almaviva

To save the Queen, idiot!

Figaro

Why save her?

Beaumarchais

Why save her?

Louis

I love it!

Figaro

She's spoiled, arrogant, decadent...

Marie Antoinette, Beaumarchais

What?

Louis

What an idea!

Susanna

Figaro!

Figaro

...and a traitor to France.

Marie Antoinette

I am innocent!

(Almaviva lunges for the jewels.)

Louis

Figaro rebels against Beaumarchais.

Figaro

Save your family instead.

Beaumarchais

Those are not my words!

Louis

A theatrical revolution!

Marie Antoinette

(To Beaumarchais)

Why are you doing this to me?

Almaviva

I'll kill him!

Beaumarchais

(Yelling at stage)

I'll kill him!

Louis

What an idea!

Woman with Hat, Marquis

Bravo!

Figaro

She's a vampire. She's a vulture.

Marie Antoinette

They called me that.

Susanna

Listen to me!

Figaro

What do I care if she loses her head?

Louis

He goes too far.

Woman with Hat

How cruel.

Marquis

What fun!

Almaviva

Give me the jewels!

Florestine, Rosina, Susanna

Figaro!

Figaro

What has the Queen ever done for Figaro?

Marie Antoinette

What have I done to deserve this?

Florestine, Rosina, Susanna

Figaro, no!

Beaumarchais

Who told him to say that?

Almaviva

Give me the jewels!

Marie Antoinette

Oh...

Florestine, Rosina, Susanna

Give him the jewels!

Marie Antoinette

... What have I done?

Florestine, Rosina, Susanna

Give him the jewels!

Almaviva

Give me the jewels.

Florestine, Rosina, Susanna

Give him the jewels! Give him the—

Figaro

Down with Marie Antoinette! We will escape to London with the money from the jewels!

Beaumarchais

Close the curtain!

(Figaro rushes out. Almaviva is too shocked to pursue him. There is a beat of silence. The curtains to the little stage close.)

Marie Antoinette

I thought you were my friend. But all this time you've hated me.

Beaumarchais

Antonia...

Marie Antoinette

Thank you for a splendid evening, Monsieur Beaumarchais.

Beaumarchais

Please don't go, I beg you.

Woman with Hat

It's only an opera.

Marie Antoinette

I shall be at the pavilion...

Beaumarchais

I'm innocent... Don't... Wait!... Figaro ^[3]

was supposed to return the necklace.

The Count was supposed to set you free. The children were supposed to marry. The villain was supposed to die.

You were supposed to live.

ARIA

I risk my soul for you, Antonia.

Is it all in vain, Antonia,

all in vain?

(Marie Antoinette starts to leave again.)

Wait!

The Revolution never happens.

There is no guillotine.

A new age dawns.

Poverty is abolished.
Education is free.
A canal in Egypt!
A tower in France!
Balloons deliver mail!
Antonia lives!
I risk my soul for you, Antonia.
Is it all in vain,
all in vain?

Vast theatres play our visions.
Salons ring with unheard of sounds.
And there are new fabrics
Dyed inconceivable colors,
And new kinds of roses, tulips, orchids,
And new industries,
Powered by wind, water, and sunlight!
And new sciences:
Mesmerism, magnetism, electricity!
And Antonia lives!
History as it should have been.

Marie Antoinette
As it should have been.

Beaumarchais
I do this out of love for you,
all embracing love for you, Antonia...
(Beaumarchais journeys from the ghost world into the opera world by walking onstage...)
I will save you...

Marie Antoinette
What are you doing?

Beaumarchais
I will force Figaro to return the necklace!

Marie Antoinette
Don't!

Louis
Sensational!

Beaumarchais
The Count will rescue her.

Woman with Hat
What an affect!

Marie Antoinette
Stop him!

Marquis
A coup de théâtre.

Beaumarchais
I will enter the opera.

Marie Antoinette
No! Change the past and you will lose your power.

(Beaumarchais passes through the curtains.)

Almaviva
(To Susanna)
Damn that Figaro! He's your husband. **4**
You find him.

Marquis
(To Woman with Hat)
Well, where's Beaumarchais?

Susanna
I don't know where he went.

Woman with Hat
(To Marquis)
He's looking for Figaro.

Almaviva
Find him, or I'll throw you out.

Rosina
It's not Susanna's fault.

Almaviva
Come, we have to prepare for the ball tonight. It look as if this will be the last one.

Rosina
I'll be along in a moment.

Susanna
On my mother's grave.

Rosina
My dear little Susanna...

Susanna
I swear I don't know where he is.

Rosina
I believe you. My husband is grossly unfair.

Susanna
And mine is too. He gets us both into trouble and then runs away, leaving me to deal with the Count.

Rosina
Mine was always difficult, but now he's impossible.

Susanna
Mine used to be gentle.

Rosina
Mine used to be loving.

Susanna
But what's the use of complaining?

Rosina
Time changes all.

DUET

Susanna
As summer brings a wistful breeze, **5**
Cooling houses, blowing trees,
Women dream their bridal days.

Rosina
As autumn brings its windy chill
And water freezes on the hill,
Women love and hate their men,
Wishing they were young again.

O time, O time, O thieving time,
Give me back my stolen years.

As winter brings a longer night,
And women read by candle light,

Rosina, Susanna
They come to know, like sun, like rain,
Nothing lasts, not love or pain.
O time, O time, O thieving time,
Give me back my stolen years...

Marie Antoinette
...My stolen years.

Louis
Oh, let her go.

Rosina
And now I must go. **6**

Susanna
Bless you, madam, bless you.

(Rosina and Susanna embrace and kiss each other on the cheek. Rosina leaves.)

Susanna
What a kind woman.
(Immediately Figaro enters.)
Ha!

Figaro
Quick, hide me!

Susanna
Where were you?

Figaro
I was followed.

Susanna
That's what you said the last time.

Figaro
It's true.

Susanna
I don't believe you.
(Beaumarchais suddenly appears from nowhere near Figaro)
Oh, my God! How did he get in?

Louis

Oh, there he is.

Figaro

That's him!

Susanna

It's witchcraft!

Figaro

Who are you, sir?

Beaumarchais

I am your creator.

Figaro

And I'm the Queen of France!

Susanna

Do as he says.

Rosina

Return the necklace!

Woman with hat

They don't believe him.

Figaro

Never!

Beaumarchais

How dare you argue with me? You do not even exist.

Susanna

I'm frightened.

Figaro

He's mad.

Beaumarchais

You are my fantasy!

(Beaumarchais steps forward towards them. They back off to the door.)

Susanna

Run!

Figaro

Run!

Beaumarchais

You can't escape!

Marie Antoinette

Figaro...

Beaumarchais

We must save the queen.

Figaro

We must save ourselves!

Beaumarchais

The necklace!

Figaro

No!

Marie Antoinette

Figaro...

Susanna

Who is that calling?

Marie Antoinette

Figaro...

(Beaumarchais takes Figaro by the hand)

Beaumarchais

Come with me.

Figaro

More tricks.

Susanna

Black magic.

Beaumarchais

No!

(Beaumarchais and Figaro disappear.)

Susanna

Where is he?

Marie Antoinette

Figaro...

Susanna

Where are they?

(The set is changing)

What is happening?

(Susanna disappears. During the Interlude that follows, Beaumarchais, Susanna, and Figaro enter the ghost world of Versailles. They move like somnambulists, looking around in wonder. Marie Antoinette stands in front of the Temple of Love.)

Marie Antoinette

Figaro.

Figaro

It is black magic.

Marie Antoinette

Approach, Figaro.

Susanna

Be careful.

Marie Antoinette

Figaro...

7 **Figaro**

Who are you?

Marie Antoinette

I am your Queen.

Figaro

Impossible. She's on trial this very moment. Why have you brought me here?

Marie Antoinette

To save my life.

Figaro

You are an evil spirit.

Marie Antoinette

Return the jewels.

Figaro

You are a monster.

Marie Antoinette

Beaumarchais, prove to him I'm innocent. Show him the trial of the Queen of France.

(With a gesture Beaumarchais changes the set to that of the Revolutionary Tribunal, in the Palace of Justice. Unruly Citizens have come to enjoy the spectacle. The Ghosts enter, dressed as the Judges, Jury, Soldiers, and Witnesses. Beaumarchais puts on a wig, assuming the role of the Public Prosecutor. He carries a heavy walking stick. Marie Antoinette plays herself.)

Revolutionary Women

Antoinette, we want your head!... **8** Antoinette, we want your head!...

(Beaumarchais bangs two times with the walking stick.)

Beaumarchais

Order, order! Order!... Behold a woman who formerly possessed all the glory that the pomp of kings could invent now occupies the tribunal. Let no one say that she did not reap the benefits of the people's justice.

Citizens

Hang her royal neck!... To the scaffold with her!... Look at her now!... You reap what you sow!

Beaumarchais

Silence!

(To Marie Antoinette)

What is your name?

Marie Antoinette

Marie Antoinette of Lorraine and **9** Austria, wife of Louis Capet, once King of the French, thirty-eight years of age.

Citizens

Kill her!... Kill the Austrian!... Make her pay with her blood!...

Beaumarchais

Widow Capet, do you think that kings are necessary to the happiness of France?

Marie Antoinette

That is not for me to decide. My only desire is the happiness of France...

Citizens

Make her bleed. That'll make me happy!... Give her to me. She can make me happy... Antoinette, you want to make me happy?...

Beaumarchais

Widow Capet, you are charged with squandering enormous sums for your pleasures and intrigues...

Marie Antoinette

I spent more than I wished for but let the truth come to light...

Beaumarchais

...and committing treason with your brother, the Emperor of Austria—

Marie Antoinette

No! I loved my husband! I loved France!

Revolutionary Women

A-chop, chop, chop,
The guillotine is working overtime.
Ka-thump, thump thump the heads are rolling,
Pouring out their rosy wine.

Beaumarchais

You are responsible for the outbreak of war.

(Citizens respond with laughter and catcalls.)

Marie Antoinette

I tried to bring peace.

Beaumarchais

You tried to corrupt and intoxicate the regiment of Flanders!

Citizens

She got me drunk... She gave feasts and orgies... She slept with everyone!... Whore!... Slut!... Adultrress!...

Marie Antoinette

No!... Lies!... Lies!... Lies!

Beaumarchais

And finally, there is no doubt that there has been an act of incest between you and your son, seven years old.

(Marie Antoinette does not reply.)

Figaro

For God's sake, leave her alone!

Beaumarchais

The accused does not reply.

Marie Antoinette

If I did not reply, it was because my nature cannot answer such a charge.

Beaumarchais

The court demands an answer!

(She turns to the Citizens.)

Marie Antoinette

I appeal to all mothers in the courtroom.

Witness 1

She had a packet of hair of different colors.

Marie Antoinette

They come from my dead and living children and from my husband.

Witness 2

And a page with ciphers on it.

Marie Antoinette

I was teaching my son to count.

Witness 3

A gold ring.

Witness 4

A looking glass.

Witness 5

A portrait of a woman.

Marie Antoinette

My mother.

Witnesses

(Mocking)
Mama, mama!

Marie Antoinette

No, I'm innocent!...
These are lies!

(The Citizens make the sounds of goats, dogs, chickens, pigs, while the

Revolutionary Women resume their chanting:)

Revolutionary Women

Antoinette, we want your head!...
Antoinette we want your head!...

(Beaumarchais pounds his cane on the floor.)

Beaumarchais

Widow Capet, you are the declared enemy of the French nation. Do you have anything to say in your defense?

Marie Antoinette

The accusations are—

Beaumarchais

Silence bloodsucker! What is the judgment of the people of France?

Jury

Yes to all questions.

Figaro

No! No! Unjust. This trial is unfair. Set her free!

Jury

In accordance with the first article of the first section of the first chapter of the second part of the penal code, the accused should be condemned to death.

Beaumarchais

(To Marie Antoinette)
Have you anything to say?

Marie Antoinette

Nothing.

Figaro

(Kneeling)
Your Majesty, forgive me.

(Marie Antoinette touches Figaro's hand.)

Beaumarchais

Today a great example is given to the universe. Nature and reason are satisfied at last. Equality is triumphant with respect to the Widow Capet.

(As the scene changes to a Paris street, the Revolutionary Women march again.)

Revolutionary Women

A-chop, chop, chop,
The guillotine is working overtime.
Ka-thump, thump thump, the heads are rolling,
Pouring out their rosy wine.

Come, march, we'll slaughter the haughty witch.
Join us, we'll butcher the bitch... (etc.)
Antoinette, we want your head...

(A parade of women carry severed heads on pikes. They are joined by Street Musicians, and on a makeshift

platform Punch and Judy Performers work a miniature guillotine mimicking Paris’ daily executions. Parents watch the frightening processions with glee. Enter Bégearss, leading Wilhelm. They mount the platform, which is vacated immediately by the Children and the Performers. With a gesture Bégearss silences the women.)

Bégearss

(To himself)

Monarchy, Revolution, it’s all the same to me. Belief is for fools. I merely lust to rule. I will bend these women to my will, Watch them squirm with delight As I whip them into a frenzy. They want to hate. They need to hate. 10
(To the women)
Women of Paris!

(Three Revolutionary Women come forward with pikes, with severed heads.)

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Revolutionary Women

Bégearss, Bégearss, Bégearss!

Bégearss

Women of Paris!

ARIA

Listen! Hear!
Listen to their little feet!
Hear them scurry from the corners.

Listen! Hear!
They are coming to spread their plague.
They assemble in secret cabals.
They whisper in private rooms against us.

They slyly creep down dark streets,
Their shiny fur is pressed against the wall.
They are trying to be invisible.
But we see them.
We see their greedy eyes and hungry

mouths.

They want to free the Queen of Rats.
They want to release her from her trap.
But we have her by the tail.
Shall we let her go?

Revolutionary Women

No!

Beaumarchais

Shall we let her go?

Revolutionary Women

A-chop, chop, chop,
The guillotine is working overtime.
Ka-thump, thump thump, the heads are rolling,
Pouring out their rosy wine.

Come, march, we’ll slaughter the haughty witch.
Join us, we’ll butcher the bitch...

Bégearss

Listen! Hear!
The chief rat Almaviva has summoned his rat troops for a rat meeting in his rat hole.
They are there right now, sharpening their fangs and claws.
What do we do when rats infest our houses?

Revolutionary Women

Exterminate them!

Bégearss

What do we do when rats eat our food?

Revolutionary Women

Exterminate them!

Bégearss

What do we do when rats rule us?

Revolutionary Women

Extermination!

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Bégearss

The vermin are having a party tonight at Almaviva’s house.

Revolutionary Women

Exterminate them!

Bégearss

We’ll get them!

Revolutionary Women

Exterminate them!

Bégearss

What do you say?

Revolutionary Women

A-chop, chop, chop,
The guillotine is working overtime.
Ka-thump, thump thump, the heads are rolling,
Pouring out their rosy wine.

Come, march, we’ll slaughter the haughty witch.

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Join us, we’ll butcher the bitch...

SCENE 5

(The peers of Paris—those who have not fled or been thrown in jail—assemble for one last time. The aristocrats are decked out in pre-revolutionary splendor. They are dressed à la victime, with thin red ribbons around their necks, commemorating relatives lost to the guillotine. Three Ghosts haunt the hall. The Ghosts cannot be seen, heard or touched. Rosina and Almaviva stand to one side greeting people. Nearby, Florestine paces nervously.)

Rosina

(To an older woman, embracing her)
Welcome, Madeleine, welcome. 11

First Ghost

I knew that woman.

Almaviva

(Kissing the ring of a bishop)
Your excellency, welcome.

Florestine

(To First Young Man)
Have you seen Léon?

First Young Man

No. I’m sorry.

Second Ghost

Her young man left her.

First Ghost

Marguerite!

Florestine

(To Second Young Man)
Have you seen Léon?

Second Young Man

Not since Easter.

Florestine

I don’t know where he is.

Bishop

We must never give up hope.

First Ghost

Poor girl.

Second Ghost

Poor Florestine.

Florestine

Where did he go?

Almaviva

(Clapping his hands)
Friends, welcome. For one last time, we have come together in the name of love and amity. But even as I speak all of France suffers, and our Queen awaits her verdict. When I think of her, I reproach myself the air I breathe and am torn between pain and rage, but tonight let us forget our sorrows and

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celebrate this moment of freedom. Let the golden days return! Musicians!

(Everyone dances. For a moment all pains are forgotten as the salad days of the monarchy are revived. After a while Léon enters furtively. He stands partially hidden near Florestine.)

Léon
Florestine!

Florestine
Léon!

Léon
Your father!

Florestine
I don't care!

(Léon holds her. Almaviva sees them. Rosina restrains Almaviva.)

Almaviva
Your son!

Rosina
Don't!

Florestine
Thank God you're safe!

Almaviva
How dare he come here?

Léon
Darling.

Almaviva
I'll have him thrown out.

Florestine
I thought you had left me.

Léon
Leave you.

(Almaviva tries to speak. Rosina cuts him off.)

Rosina
Will you? Will you?

Florestine
I was so frightened.

Almaviva
(Aside)
I know she's right. We committed the same sin...

Rosina
(Aside)
What can I do to make him forgive me?

Almaviva
Yet I can't forgive her.

Léon
How could I leave you?

QUARTET
Remember the chestnut trees
In the gardens of the Tuileries?

Florestine
You took me by the hand.

Almaviva
I'd like to touch her hand.

Rosina
I wish he'd take my hand.

Léon
Remember the mist on the Seine
And the bridges in the easy rain.

Florestine
You held my face and kissed me.

Léon
I held you and kissed you.

Florestine
Remember the fallen birch in the
cloister of the little church.

Léon
I took you by the hand.

Florestine
Remember us drifting, afloat,
In the silence of the gliding boat?

Léon
I held you and kissed you.

Florestine
You shivered and trembled.

Almaviva
Look how she loves him.

Léon
You quivered and sighed.

Rosina
Look how he loves her.

Léon
Remember the fragrance of
mushrooms in the air.

Rosina
I remember a shimmering light.

Almaviva
I remember a star-filled night.

Florestine
I remember there were raindrops in
your hair.

Léon, Florestine
I swore to love you always. I gave
myself to you forever.

Almaviva
I swore to love her always.

Rosina
I gave myself to him forever.

(Suddenly Bégearss, leading the

Revolutionary Women and Soldiers, interrupts the dance and the tender sentiments of the Almaviva household.)

Bégearss
I hope I'm not too late for your party.^[13]
My dear Almaviva, why did you not
invite your good friend, Bégearss?

Almaviva
I don't understand. What is the
meaning of this?

Bégearss
(To Soldiers)
Citizens, arrest the aristocrats!

Ghosts
Let's tell the others... Let's tell Her
Majesty.
(The Ghosts disappear.)

Bégearss
Now do you understand?

Almaviva
You have betrayed me!

Rosina
We are lost!

Léon
Traitor.

Florestine
Judas!

Bégearss
The necklace.

Almaviva
I don't have it.

Bégearss
Where is it?

Almaviva
I don't know where it is.

(Figaro and Beaumarchais enter and

watch unnoticed.)

Bégearss

Give it to me! Or perhaps you would prefer to talk to my friends here.

Revolutionary Women

Me, me, me! No!... Me, me, me!... Give ‘em to me, give ‘em to me, give ‘em to me!

Almaviva

I don’t know!

Florestine, Rosina

He doesn’t know!

Revolutionary Women

Me, me, me! No!... Me, me, me!...

Figaro

Stop! I have it, you traitor!

(Figaro gives Bégearss the necklace! He holds it aloft.)

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Bégearss

At last I have you, Almaviva! I seize this in the name of the people. It will be used to feed the poor. And house the homeless.

(The mob cheers. Bégearss puts the necklace in his pocket. Cheers. Applause. Susanna enters and hides behind a pillar. From time to time she peeks her head out. The rest of the Ghosts, led by Marie Antoinette and Louis, enters.)

Almaviva

Forgive me, Figaro. Once again you have proved me a fool.

Bégearss

(To Wilhelm)

My hatred is in full bloom.

(To Almaviva)

Almaviva, I am now your equal. Now we are all aristocrats. And I want to marry Florestine.

Rosina

No!

Léon

No!

Bégearss

You will give me your daughter’s hand. I want that pleasure. Deny me and you all will die.

(To Wilhelm.)

Take them to prison.

Figaro

(To Beaumarchais.)

Free us. Use your powers.

Bégearss

Powers? What powers? I have all the power.

(Beaumarchais makes a magical gesture to the Soldiers.)

Rosina

No!

Léon

No!

Bégearss

You will give me your daughter’s hand. I want that pleasure. Deny me and you all will die.

(To Wilhelm.)

Take them to prison.

Beaumarchais

Release them!

(Nothing happens.)

Marie Antoinette

I knew it. He lost his power.

Louis

He’s become mortal.

(Beaumarchais tries again.)

Marquis

Poor man.

Beaumarchais

I command you!

(Nothing happens again.)

Bégearss

Your friend is mad.

Beaumarchais

I am as weak as smoke.

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Bégearss

(To Wilhelm)

Take them to prison.

(To Almaviva)

Almaviva, I’ll see you at dawn.

(To onstage musicians)

Musicians, play. Amuse the aristocrats as they go off to their cells.

(Bégearss exits.)

Wilhelm

(To the prisoners)

This way and be quick about it!

(The Ghosts dance. Susanna takes Figaro aside.)

Susanna

(To Figaro)

No that way and be quick about it! Go. *(Figaro fetches Beaumarchais. Wilhelm notices.)*

Rosina

No!

Léon

No!

Bégearss

Musicians, play. Amuse the aristocrats as they go off to their cells.

(Bégearss exits.)

(Turmoil as the aristocrats are herded off, Susanna among them, and Figaro and Beaumarchais escape.)

Wilhelm

What’s this? What’s this?

(Susanna distracts Wilhelm as Figaro and Beaumarchais sneak away. Wilhelm traps Susanna as she is about to join Figaro.)

Not you, woman.

(Turmoil as the aristocrats are herded off, Susanna among them, and Figaro and Beaumarchais escape.)

Susanna

Fly, Figaro, fly!

Wilhelm

Stop them! They’re escaping, you fools! Master will kill me!

(Wilhelm, the Soldiers, Revolutionary Women, Guests, and the Almaviva household all leave. The stage is empty except for the musicians and the Ghosts. They dance a spectral version of the ball. Marie Antoinette enters.)

Marie Antoinette

(To herself)

He sacrificed his powers and he risked his soul because he loves me. He loves me.

(The curtain closes while the set changes. When the curtain opens again we are in the dismal Gothic-vaulted interior of the Conciergerie prison, which has two different levels. On the first is a barrack-like cell containing a group of terrified, disheveled aristocrats awaiting execution. An ancient, demented Duchess with grand manners, wearing a decaying extravagant hat and ball gown, is serving imaginary tea to imaginary guests. She is the living version of the Woman with Hat. Two men are sitting in a corner quietly talking. Most of the other Prisoners are trying to sleep. Steps lead to a second level of smaller cells, the barred doors of which are visible.)

Duchess

(To imaginary guest)

I am very well, my dear Marquis.

Would you like a cup of tea?

(To imaginary servant)

Madeleine, bring Marguerite some chocolate.

(To another guest)

Oolong lai chi.

(First Aristocrat hands a letter to Second Aristocrat.)

First Aristocrat

If you should survive tomorrow, please give this to my wife.

Second Aristocrat

How could I, my friend? No one survives a visit to the guillotine.

Duchess

(To another guest)

...She was wearing a gown of red pekin, trimmed with tiny white roses.

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It was exquisite.

(Reacting to a compliment)

I'm so fond of rubies. Grandmother

gave them to me. She lived to a

hundred and three, and drank only

wine. But say what you will, Diane's

trout were divine...

(To another guest)

Shocking, my dear. And with a bishop?

(She laughs. The cell door rattles and

bangs open. Wilhelm and a group of

Guards, push the Almaviva group into

the cell.)

Wilhelm

In you go, aristocrats.

(To Rosina, pulling her by the arm)

Here, you stay with me, Countess.

Guards

(Jeering)

Countess... Countess... Contess...

Almaviva

Don't you touch her!

(Wilhelm is about to strike Almaviva,

but the Guards restrain him.)

Susanna, Rosina

Leave him alone!

Florestine, Léon

Don't hurt him!

Guards

(To Wilhelm)

No! No!

(Wilhelm holds up his hand to silence

them.)

Wilhelm

Don't worry, I won't harm him. He's a

special guest of Citizen Bégearss.

(To Almaviva)

Perhaps he'll invite you to join our

gracious Queen. She's staying in

the royal suite. Upstairs. They say

she's leaving for a long voyage in the

morning. Sleep well, aristocrats.

(Wilhelm points to the second level

and dangles his keys. He then leads

the Guards off, banging the door shut

behind them. Almaviva sits on a bench

near the door. Rosina sits next to him.

Florestine and Léon sit on another

bench nearby. Susanna stands. Silence.)

Rosina

(To Almaviva)

You were very brave.

(Almaviva doesn't look at her.)

Florestine

(To Susanna)

He could have been hurt.

Susanna

His only thought was for your mother.

(Still Almaviva doesn't respond.)

Léon

I am proud of you, Father.

Almaviva

(Almaviva looks at Léon.)

You can still call me Father after

the way I've treated you? I am so

ashamed.

(Léon falls to his knees in front of

Almaviva and embraces him. To Rosina:)

I beg your forgiveness.

Rosina

It is I who caused you pain.

Almaviva

I was arrogant and prideful.

Rosina

I was foolish and vain.

Almaviva

You were lonely.

(They embrace.)

Rosina.

QUINTET

Almaviva, Rosina

O God of love,

O Lord of light,

Redeeming, embracing Savior,

Thank You for this moment of peace...

Almaviva

Storm and fire overwhelm me,

Fear and death are at my door,

But the thought of these dear faces

Bring me rest in this time of war ...

Léon, Florestine

O God of love,

O Lord of light,

Redeeming, embracing Savior,

Thank You for this moment of peace...

(A candle is lit in one of the cells

above, casting the flickering silhouette

of a woman on the opposite wall.)

Marie Antoinette

Please hear my last prayers that You

will receive my soul.

(Almaviva hears Marie Antoinette and

looks up.)

Almaviva

Your Majesty!

(Almaviva falls to his knees in front of

Marie Antoinette's cell.)

Marie Antoinette

I ask forgiveness of those I have known

for the sorrow I have caused them. I

forgive my enemies the evil they have

done me. I say farewell to my family

and friends. Adieu, adieu.

MISERERE

Miserere mei, Deus,

Secundum magnam misericordiam

Tuam.

Dele iniquitatem meam,

Et a peccato meo munda me;

Et peccatum meum contra me est

semper,

Et in peccatis concepit me mater

mea...

[Have mercy on me, God

According to Your great kindness

And according to the multitude of Your

mercies,

Erase my iniquities

And cleanse me of my sins

For my mother conceived me in sin.]

Almaviva, Florestine, Rosina,

Susanna, Léon

(Variously)

O God of love,

O Lord of light,

Redeeming, embracing Savior,

Thank You for this moment of peace...

Marie Antoinette

Incerta et occulta sapientiae Tuae

manifestasti mihi;

Lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor,

Et exultabunt ossa humiliata,

Miserere mei, Deus.

Amen.

[And You teach me wisdom in the

hidden places.

Purify me and I will be clean,

Wash me, and I will be whiter than

snow,

And my humble bones will rejoice.

Have mercy on me, God.

Amen.]

(Marie Antoinette blows out her

candle. Almaviva returns to the lower

level. The prisoners make themselves

as comfortable as possible and go

to sleep. Through barred windows

morning gradually dawns. Susanna

awakes suddenly as the cock crows.

The cell door starts to creak open, and

two ominous cloaked figures enter.)

Susanna*(Whispering to Rosina)*

We are finished.

Rosina

Farewell, my faithful friend.

*(The other prisoners have awakened by now.)***Florestine**

I'm frightened.

Léon

At least we shall die together.

Susanna

I wish Figaro were here.

Almaviva*(Holding Rosina)*

Stay close to me.

*(The two figures approach Almaviva.)***Figaro***(Disguising his voice)***17**

Almaviva, prepare to meet your maker.

Almaviva

See here, how dare you disturb our sleep? We are the private prisoners of Citizen Bégearss.

Figaro*(Mocking Almaviva)*

The private prisoners of Citizen Bégearss? Ha, ha, ha!

Almaviva

You can't frighten me. If you don't withdraw immediately, I shall be forced to—

*(Figaro pulls back his hood.)***Figaro**

Stop! Don't you recognize your old Figaro?

Florestine, Rosina, Susanna, Léon, Almaviva

Figaro!

Almaviva

You idiot!

Duchess*(To Beaumarchais)*

Would you like a cup of tea?

Beaumarchais

No thank you.

Figaro

We've come to lead you to freedom.

*(He dangles a large key.)***Léon**

How did you get it?

Figaro

Bribery. Larceny. And a little violence. But we haven't the key to Her Majesty's cell. Wilhelm has it.

Beaumarchais

What will we do?

Almaviva

What can we do? Wilhelm has the key.

Susanna

Wilhelm has it? Wilhelm? You men can rest now. Let the women do some work. Come, ladies.

*(Susanna, Rosina, and Florestine have a little conference. They laugh and titter under the men's lines.)***Léon**

I'm afraid the game is over.

Almaviva

All is lost, dear Figaro.

Figaro

Not with my Susanna in command. Just watch!

*(The women break for action.)***Susanna**

Oh, Wilhelm! Wilhelm.

Almaviva

Rosina, what are you doing?

*(Rosina puts her hand over Almaviva's mouth. Wilhelm appears.)***Wilhelm**

You called, Countess?

*(Rosina pretends that she is about to faint.)***Rosina**

Oh, help me, help! Someone help!

Susanna

My mistress feels faint.

Rosina*(Trying open to her bodice)*

I can't breathe!

Florestine

We can't untie the knot!

Wilhelm

No tricks now, or you'll regret it.

Susanna

For the love of God, go to her!

ENSEMBLE*(The women fall into provocative poses as Wilhelm enters the cell.)***Florestine**Look, her breathing is diminished. **18****Rosina**

Another second and I will be finished.

Almaviva*(Aside to Rosina)*

Rosina!

Beaumarchais

Your wife is bolder than I thought her.

Figaro

She's your idea, you must have taught her.

Léon

My stomach's turning into water.

Wilhelm

My stomach's turning into water.

Rosina

Please open up my bodice.

Wilhelm

I don't know what to do!

Florestine

A man like you is heaven sent.

Almaviva*(To Léon)*

A wife should be obedient.

Léon

It's just a small divertissement.

Beaumarchais*(To Figaro)*

These women are magnificent!

*(The women surround Figaro)***Wilhelm**

Let me out of here!

Susanna*(Stroking Wilhelm's face)*

Don't be so belligerent.

Florestine*(Stroking Wilhelm's pistol.)*

What a piece of armament!

Rosina*(Revealing some leg)*

Help!

Susanna
Look her face is turning white.

Florestine
She's giving up the fight.

Rosina
Commend me to your sight.

Florestine, Rosina, Susanna
Ah!

Almaviva
(Aroused)
She is doing it for spite.

Léon
(Overjoyed)
Oh, Father, what a night!

Beaumarchais
A woman free is man's delight.

Figaro
And what's a bitch without a bite?

(Susanna stretches out her arms to Wilhelm.)

Susanna
You must go to her.

Florestine
You're so strong.

Rosina
And such a man.

Almaviva
Rosina, how can you?

Wilhelm
(Seduced)
Do you think so?
(Susanna sighs)

(Wilhelm goes to touch Rosina's bosom. Without realizing it, he hands his pistol to Susanna, who immediately knocks him senseless with it. Dropping the gun, she snatches his key ring and

throws it to Almaviva.)

Susanna
So much for endless talk.
(To Beaumarchais)
Free Her Majesty!

(Almaviva runs toward Marie Antoinette's cell. The Queen has lit her candle, again casting a silhouette.)

Figaro
This way.

(A door slams. Bégearss and his men block the exit.)

Bégearss
No escape. My dear Count, you disappoint me.

Wilhelm
(Coming to)
Oh, Master, they tricked me. Will you ever forgive me?

Bégearss
Of course I forgive you.

(Wilhelm smiles and kisses Bégearss' hand.)

Wilhelm
Thank you... Thank you...

(Bégearss pulls his hand away suddenly.)

Bégearss
But the Revolution does not. You are unfit to serve her. Seize him!
(To the Guards, pointing at Wilhelm)
Seize him!

(They seize Wilhelm.)

Wilhelm
(Whimpering)
No, please.

Bégearss
And now, my friend, about that little matter we discussed: your daughter's hand or death to you and your family.

Florestine
You traitor!

Rosina
Monster!

Susanna
Murderer!

Bégearss
Your answer.

Figaro
Wait!
(Pointing to Bégearss)

I denounce that man in the name of the Revolution! Search his coat and you will find the Queen's necklace. He has kept it for himself.

Bégearss
(Laughing)
That's ridiculous. Take him away.

Wilhelm
It's true! It's true! He plans to sell it in London.

Bégearss
He's lying.

(The Guards are listening to Wilhelm by now.)

Wilhelm
I know all his secrets. He hates the Revolution. All he cares about is himself, and what's more—

Beaumarchais
They say his mother was a Duchess.

(The Duchess tries to embrace Bégearss. The Guards look confused. Bégearss pushes the Duchess away.)

Duchess
My son, my son.

Bégearss
Get away from me!

Figaro
He's a spy for the English.

(The Guards believe Figaro and Beaumarchais.)

Beaumarchais
He's a counter-revolutionary.

Bégearss
No, I'm innocent.

Figaro
Arrest him!

Bégearss
(The Guards seize Bégearss as Wilhelm searches him for the necklace.)
Let me go!... Don't touch me... No!

No!... Let me go!
(Wilhelm discovers the necklace.)
Hah!

Wilhelm
(Holding the necklace aloft)
You see? You see?

Duchess
(To Wilhelm)
Some tea... some tea?

(Figaro takes the necklace from Wilhelm)

Figaro
(To Wilhelm)
Here let me see.

Guards
Spy!... Traitor!... Counter-revolutionary!... To the guillotine!... The necklace!...

Bégearss

No!

Wilhelm

(Retrieving the necklace)

It’s mine!

(Bégearss retrieves the necklace)

Bégearss

I’m innocent!

Beaumarchais

(Taking the necklace)

May I see?

Bégearss

No! No!

Wilhelm

Give it back!

(Figaro starts to lead the group to the exit door.)

Guards

Spy!... Traitor!.... Counter-revolutionary!... To the guillotine!... The necklace...

Bégearss

No, I’m innocent!

Figaro

This way!... Hurry!... Quickly!

(Almaviva is torn between freeing the Queen and leaving with his family. Beaumarchais recognizes Almaviva’s dilemma and takes the key ring from his hand. Almaviva smiles and bows, then continues out. Beaumarchais runs up the stairs. Bégearss notices the escape. Figaro is ushering the prisoners out the door. He is still in the doorway.)

Bégearss

Fools! They are escaping!

(Wilhelm sees Beaumarchais with the necklace.)

Wilhelm

My necklace!

Bégearss

Get them!

(The Guards chase Figaro and the prisoners out, along with Bégearss and Wilhelm. Figaro waves goodbye to Beaumarchais, who waves back. Figaro exits, pursued by Guards.)

ENSEMBLE

Stop! Stop! Stop, Figaro!

(Beaumarchais is left alone on stage. From offstage we hear:)

Stop! Stop! Stop, Figaro!

Beaumarchais

Goodbye, Figaro... Farewell... Safe journey... You were my favorite

child... Goodbye, Figaro... Goodbye, Beaumarchais. You’ve come to the end of your road. And for the sake of the ghost of a woman who doesn’t even love you... But I love you, Antonia. *(At Marie Antoinette’s door)* Your Majesty, I give you your life. Be ready for freedom. *(The silhouette of the Queen stands.)* I am opening the door.

(Beaumarchais goes to put the key in the lock. Beaumarchais spins around and sees the ghost of Marie Antoinette behind him.)

Marie Antoinette

No, Beaumarchais.

Beaumarchais

Antonia, what are you saying? She must escape for you to live. Almaviva brings her to London!.. The Revolution fails! A new age dawns! Antonia lives! History as it should have been!

Marie Antoinette

No, Beaumarchais. It is as it should have been.

Beaumarchais

Antonia!

ARIA**Marie Antoinette**

She must stay and ride the cart
And see the crowds
And hear the drums
And count the stairs
And feel the blade.
She must stay, Beaumarchais,
And she must die.

Once there was a golden bird,
A bird who lived in a silver cage.
I never saw the world outside.
I never knew the world of pain.
I did not know, did not know!

I have to stay, Beaumarchais,
And I have to die.
For there was no peace.
I wandered, cold, bitter, empty,
Until with your art and love you called me.

You taught me that acceptance is the only road to freedom
And forgiveness sets our spirits free to fly.
Floating, rising, soaring—
Delight, rapture, paradise!
Thank you for this moment of peace.

I suffered here in endless night,
And then you came and brought me light.

I love you.
(She kneels before Beaumarchais.)

Beaumarchais

(Lifting Marie Antoinette)
Come, Antonia.

(Beaumarchais gestures and Soldiers appear. They take the Prisoner Queen away. Immediately the walls of the prison rise, revealing the enormous Place de la Révolution. Toward the back of it looms a towering guillotine. On the opposite side of the stage is a gaily painted Montolfier balloon. A large crowd of Parisians in their Sunday best has come to view the execution of their monarch and the balloon ascent. The gardens of Aguas Frescas appear high up, hazily lit, as if in a vision. Beaumarchais and the ghost Marie Antoinette slowly walk toward it arm in arm. Meanwhile, led like a tethered animal by a cord tied to her hand, the Queen is brought by the Soldiers to a shabby cart drawn by two dray horses. To further humiliate her they place her in it so that she is sitting backward. She is wearing a simple white gown and bonnet and is accompanied by the Executioner and a Revolutionary Priest. As the cart slowly makes its way to the

guillotine, the crowd shouts and jeers.)

Crowd

Long live the Republic!... Down with tyranny!... Death to the Austrian!... There’s the wicket Antoinette, she finally finished!... Antoinette, we want your head...

(At the same time, the now forgotten Almaviva household makes its way to the balloon. When the cart draws up beside the scaffold, the Queen, refusing help, descends by herself and quickly mounts the steps. The executioner places her head on the block. The blade hits as Figaro severs the mooring rope of the balloon. The crowd stands motionless cheers and sings.)

Crowd

*Allons enfants de la Patrie,
Le jour de gloire est arrivé.
Contre nous de la tyrannie
L’étendard sanglant est levé...*

(The music and lighting on the Place de la Révolution slowly fade out. The balloon rises and disappears. Beaumarchais and Marie Antoinette have arrived at Aguas Frescas. Louis is waiting there with the other Ghosts, holding the Duchess' hand and smiling.

A spotlight illuminates Beaumarchais and Marie Antoinette as the lights on Aguas Frescas dim. Finally, only Beaumarchais and Marie Antoinette are illuminated as he places the jewels around her neck and then kneels and kisses her hand. Fade to black.)



Beaumarchais (Christopher Maltman, in judicial wig at left) shows the unjustness of the trial of Marie Antoinette (Patricia Racette, center)
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Album cover

Marie Antoinette (Patricia Racette) and Beaumarchais (Christopher Maltman) are united forever.

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Cover CD 1

Act One of "The Ghosts of Versailles" comes to a riotous climax in a scene set at the Turkish Embassy, where Figaro makes a bold move.

© Craig Henry

Cover CD 2

Marie Antoinette (Patricia Racette, at right) relives the horror of her final days, with Beaumarchais (Christopher Maltman, at center in judicial wig) taking the role of her prosecutor.

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