La clemenza di Tito premièred in 1791 at the Nationaltheater in Prague

WOLFGANG MOZART (1756-1791)

Libretto by Caterino Tommaso Mazzolà, after Pietro Metastasio

Running time: 143 minutes

Performed at Glyndebourne in 1991

Tito, Roman Emperor	*Philip Langridge*	Tenor
Vitellia, daughter of deposed Emperor	*Ashley Putnam*	Soprano
Sesto, young Roman patrician	*Diana Montague*	Contralto
Annio, Sesto's young patrician friend	*Martine Mahé*	Mezzo
Servilia, sister of Sesto	*Elzbieta Szmytka*	Soprano
Publio, Captain of the Praetorian Guard	*Peter Rose*	Bass
Conductor	*Andrew Davis*	
Stage Director	*Nicholas Hytner*	

Synopsis

Set in Rome in 79-81 AD

ACT 1 Vitellia had hoped to marry the new Emperor Tito, but he's been paying court to a Jewish princess Berenice. In her apartments Vitellia persuades Sesto – who is in love with her – to join a conspiracy to assassinate the Emperor.

Tito is next praised by a crowd in the forum. He tells Sesto that he's decided to send Berenice away, and marry Servilia instead. Annio nobly keeps quiet, but after he breaks this news to Servilia, they both declare their love for each other.



Tito praises Servilia's candour when their love is revealed to the Emperor. Vitellia, hearing that she's been passed over again, promises to marry Sesto if he immediately kills Tito. He departs reluctantly to murder his beloved friend. As soon as he leaves, Annio and Publio arrive to pay homage to Vitellia as the newly chosen empress. She hysterically tries to call Sesto back, while others interpret her emotion as joy.

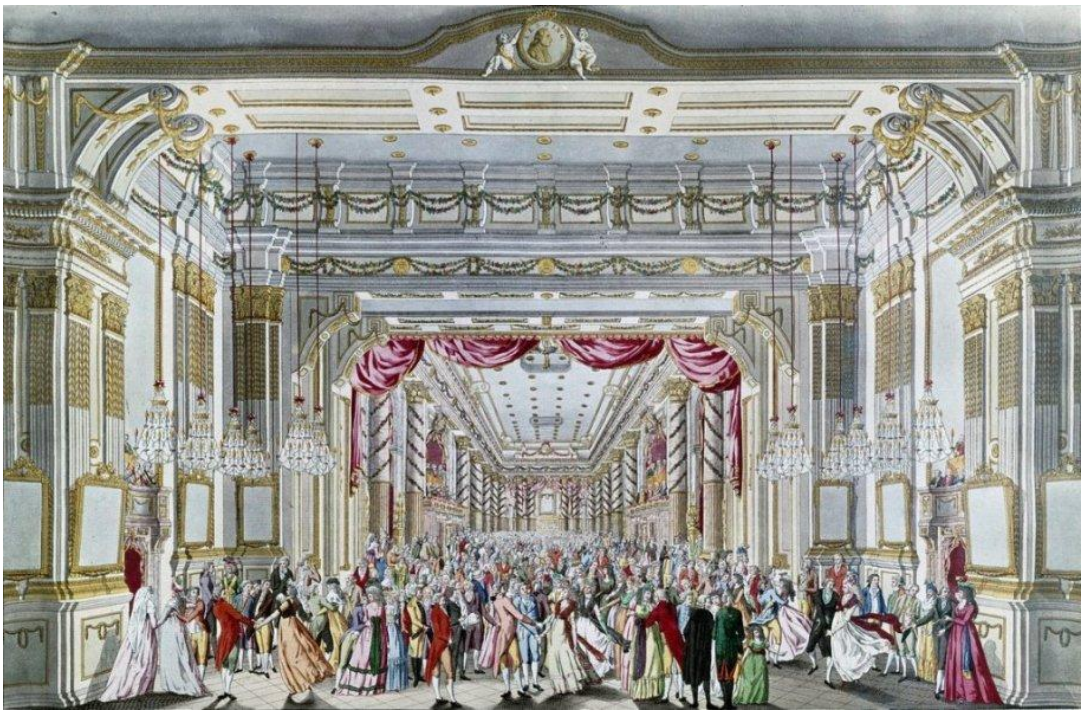
Sesto is torn by conflicting emotions below the Capitol. Just as he resolves to save Tito, he sees flames leap up. While others run around in confusion, Vitellia urges Sesto to conceal the truth. Roman people are heard mourning Tito offstage.

[Interval]

ACT 2 In a garden on the Palatine hill Annio tells Sesto that Tito has survived, and advises him to seek mercy. The conspirators' identity still seems to be unknown, so Vitellia begs Sesto to flee. When Publio approaches to arrest him, Sesto takes tender leave of Vitellia.

Thanks are given for Tito's survival in a great throne room. The Emperor can't believe that his friend Sesto is guilty, but Publio warns him not to judge others by his own high standards. Annio can only advocate mercy. Tito is torn by inner conflict: he envies those who enjoy a less demanding life.

Sesto refuses to reveal Vitellia's complicity, then leaves Tito. The Emperor wishes to be seen as a clement ruler, so he eventually tears up the death sentence. Servilia begs Vitellia, the empress elect, to save Sesto. Vitellia resolves to sacrifice her own life and happiness for Sesto, who hasn't betrayed her.



PREMIÈRE DURING CORONATION FESTIVITIES FOR LEOPOLD AS HABSBURG KING OF BOHEMIA

A crowd has assembled at the entrance to the arena, where wild beasts await the condemned. As Tito is about to pass sentence on the conspirators, Vitellia flings herself at his feet and confesses that she is guiltier than anyone – mistaking his goodness for love, she had hated him for seeming to spurn her. Tito forgives them all. Amidst their praise he resolves to devote himself only to the well-being of Rome.

La clemenza di Tito **by Mozart**

Despite the extremely enthusiastic Prague reception given to *Marriage of Figaro* and to *Don Giovanni*, Mozart wasn't approached until it became clear that the Habsburg court composer Salieri was unavailable. A firm commission didn't materialise until July 1971. Although Mozart was working concurrently on the *Magic Flute*, his *clemenza di Tito* score was nevertheless nearly complete before the end of August.

The Roman emperor Titus Vespasianus was an ideal subject for a Coronation opera: Leopold had been hailed as a latter day Titus during his reign as Grand Duke of Tuscany. Mozart accepted an Opera Seria format to please the new Austrian Emperor, but also ensured that it was refashioned to be more stimulating. One third of Metastasio's text was cut, while the rest was structured as eleven Arias and two Finales, plus THREE Duets, THREE TRIOS and THREE Choruses [it seems curious that the Masonic number of THREE remains prominent during the

time when Mozart is preoccupied with the *Magic Flute*]? Metastasio's libretto had often been modified in 40 previous settings, but never so radically.

Despite these alterations, the revised libretto doesn't really escape from its Opera Seria origins: each ensemble focuses on a static situation, without any real action or interaction. Metastasio's elegant plots and verses aren't particularly well suited to political subjects. Tito is the only historical figure in this drama. The ferocious Vitellia is derived from a Racine precursor. She contrasts with all other Roman characters, until she finally becomes another self-sacrificing Metastasian heroine during her last great scena.

The ruling classes weren't completely happy with Mozart's opera. However the last performance of the original Prague production – attended by a less exclusive audience – took place on exactly the same day as the triumphant Viennese première of the *Magic Flute*. Mozart was delighted to hear that every number had been applauded during this final performance. For 30 years *la clemenza di Tito* remained among Mozart's most popular operas [it was the first to be performed in London fifteen years later], though it subsequently fell out of fashion until about 1970.



Vitellia is the driving force in this opera. Her role contains an amazing range of emotions (with a correspondingly large vocal range from bottom A to top D). During this opera Tito is too predictably merciful and obliging (eg contemplating marriage to three different women in a single day)!

The sparse orchestral scoring is – not surprisingly – reminiscent of the *Magic Flute* composed during the same period. The Act 1 Finale is the most striking section: an offstage chorus alternates with a quintet of soloists in poignant harmonies prophetic of the 19th century. After if opens with a brilliant overture, the opera ends with the emperor's almost ecstatic devotion to his people, an exuberant finale that might have inspired the conclusion of Beethoven's *Fidelio*.

Major clarinet – and basset horn – soli were originally played by Mozart's friend Anton Stadler (for whom he also wrote a famous Quintet and Concerto). Antonio Baglioni, the first TITO, had also created the role of DON OTTAVIO in the same Prague theatre four years earlier. Recitative composed by Stephen Oliver is performed in this Glyndebourne production, replacing the original notes usually attributed to Süssmayr (who also assisted with Mozart's Requiem).

The Operas of Mozart

Although Mozart wrote great music in different genres, Concerto and Opera are two forms where he maintains a particular pre-eminence. In *Amadeus*, Peter Schaffer realistically portrays a vulgar, uncouth man with a gift to write uniquely sublime music. It's particularly paradoxical that Mozart was also a supreme musical dramatist, with the ability to capture profound human insights in his operatic masterpieces. The following table interleaves all Mozart's 'Seria' works with five of his better known stage pieces:

Age	*Title*	*Librettist*	*Language & Style*	*First Performance*
14	Mitradate, re di Ponto	derived from Racine	Italian Opera Seria	Milan 1770
16	Il sogno di Scipione	P.Metastasio	Italian 'Serenade'	Salzburg 1772
16	Lucio Silla	G.de Gamerra	Italian Opera Seria	Milan 1772
19	Il re pastore	P.Metastasio	Italian Opera Seria	Salzburg 1775
25	Idomeneo	G.Varesco	Italian Opera Seria	Munich 1781
26	Die Entführung [Seraglio]	G.Stephanie	German Singspiel	Vienna 1782
30	The Marriage of Figaro	L.da Ponte	Italian Comedy	Vienna 1786
31	Don Giovanni	L.da Ponte	Italian Comedy	Prague 1787
33	Così fan Tutte	L.da Ponte	Italian Comedy	Vienna 1790
35	La clemenza di Tito	P.Metastasio	Italian Opera Seria	Prague 1791
35	The Magic Flute	E.Schikaneder	German Singspiel	Vienna 1791

As well as reminding us of Mozart's short lived precocity, this summary also shows that he lived in a transitional era. German speaking cities near the Alps historically followed the dominant European tradition, with everything sung in Italian. After 1778 *Singspiel* – a 'sung play' with spoken dialogue – was introduced to the Viennese, who naturally found German words easier to understand.

Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782)

Metastasio's domination of eighteenth century *opera seria* is so pivotal that a complete genre – with a highly regular and stylised verbal and dramatic structure – is sometimes known as *Metastasian opera*. He was committed to a musical as well as a literary conception of *opera seria*, so he fraternised with composers and singers throughout his life as well as men of letters. Metastasio also routinely acted as a stage director for his dramas. All his libretti were conceived with a focus on their musical realisation.



Aria texts were shaped into two verses, with contrasting or complementary sentiments that lent themselves to the *da capo* pattern favoured by composers before 1750. He came to place his arias at the end of scenes, where they consolidate the emotion developed in the preceding recitative; and they also provide a musical context for singers to leave the stage. Metastasio used verbs of motion to anticipate where key changes were likely, and chose the best vowel sounds where singers normally embellished cadences. Each verse nearly always ended with an accented final syllable, coinciding with an emphatic tonic in the anticipated musical cadence.

Metastasio showed little interest in ensemble numbers, because he felt that two verse arias were the perfect way to achieve his dramatic aims. The eight *drammi per musica* that he wrote in Italy between 1723 and 1730 established him as easily the most sought after *opera seria* librettist. These texts became the proving ground for a young generation of composers, all trained in Naples, who developed a fresh musical language to complement the elegantly concise and suave qualities of the new libretti.

In early 1730 Metastasio moved to Vienna to become Poet at the court of Charles VI (who was to reign until 1740). This Holy Roman Emperor – himself a composer – was the last Habsburg to devote lavish resources on *opera seria*. Metastasio's twenty Viennese texts were as much sought after as their Italian precursors. He continued to write opera libretti into the mid 1740s, then concentrated mainly on a shorter *serenade* format for about 15 years, but attempted little after reaching his seventies.

The number of operas inspired by Metastasian libretti is genuinely astronomical: an estimate of 1,050 altogether, averaging nearly 40 versions per libretto. *Artaserse*, the most popular was set about 90 times. Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito* is the last example of the *opera seria* genre that has remained at all well known. The demise of castrato singing was one crucial factor. Their otherworldly sound was deemed particularly suitable for classical mythology and for ancient historical subjects (and correspondingly inappropriate for comic opera).

As well as Mozart, the following better known composers used Metastasio libretti:

Dates	*Composer*	*Operas*
1728-32	Handel	*Siroe, Poro*, and *Ezio*
1734-35	Pergolesi	*Adriano in Siria* and *L'Olimpiade*
1734-37	Vivaldi	*L'Olimpiade* and *Catone in Utica*
1741-65	Gluck	About 20 (including *Ezio* twice, *Artaserse* & *La clemenza di Tito*)
1745-60	Giuseppe Scarlatti	Seven (as well as a famous 1763 revival)
1772	Joh.Christian Bach	*Endimione*
1779	Haydn	*L'isola disabita*
1819	Meyerbeer	*Semiramide riconosciuta*

Selected Musical Biographies

TITO: PHILIP LANGRIDGE (1939-2010) was an English tenor who married the mezzo-soprano Ann Murray DBE. As a highly regarded interpreter, he performed Britten roles for at least 12 companies across the world. He was also closely associated with five major Janàček roles. Langridge additionally appeared as a distinguished concert singer and recitalist. He was well known for masterclasses held in at least ten locations.

CONDUCTOR: SIR ANDREW DAVIS (1944-2024) was an English conductor who held opera appointments for more than 30 years, starting at Glyndebourne and concluding in Chicago. He also held orchestral appointments in Toronto, Melbourne and with the BBC (twice giving a *Last Night of the Proms* speech that included a G&S patter song). His wide conducting repertoire included a focus on British composers – including Britten – and also on 20th century music.