



The P. Craig Russell Library of Opera Adaptations: Vol. 1 - The Magic Flute: Adaptation of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (v. 1)

By P. Craig Russell, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart



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Long out of print, the many adaptations that Russell has done of famous operas are finally collected again in 3 volumes, in the wake of his highly successful massive recent adaptation of Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung. This first volume presents his adaptation of one of Mozart's most famous works, a farcical tale mixed with fantasy. The story begins as the Queen of the Night sets Prince Tamino on a quest to rescue her daughter, Pamina from the evil Sarastro. On the way, he meets the bird-catcher Papageno, who is "persuaded" to help Tamino in his quest. Tamino's spiritual quest is counterpoised with Papageno's own earthly search for his one true love, Papagena. Both couples' strivings are juxtaposed with the eternal conflict between Sarastro and the Queen of the Night.



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Mozart's "fairy-tale opera" is one of the most beloved works in the repertory. It is a favorite for children's first exposure to opera as it is an enchanting work jammed with melodies that are both noble and playful. *The Magic Flute* is also one of the most problematic works in the repertory, full of staging difficulties (the hero enters, pursued by a monstrous serpent, and promptly faints--not very heroic of him) and some elements that seem unpleasantly sexist and racist to today's sensibilities. And there's the perennial malcontent who's all too eager to point out that *The Magic Flute* is not really a grand opera in any case, but a mere singspiel, with spoken dialogue and coarse comedy, no better than an operetta. And what's with all the Masonic imagery?

The story certainly has problems, but the score--one of Mozart's last--overcomes them all as surely as the Three Ladies scrag the serpent and Sarastro and the forces of truth and reason overcome the wicked Queen of the Night. This music has it all, from the heroic notes of Sarastro and the priests to the humor of the bird catcher Papageno. Don't overlook the wonderful ensembles of the Drei Damen and Drei Knaben; Mozart blends trios of soprano voices in a way that's undiluted magic, and that no one even came close to imitating until more than two centuries later, when Richard Strauss took the master's lessons to heart.

You can examine for yourself just how Mozart achieved his effect with this full orchestral score from Dover. It's a reprint of another publisher's out-of-copyright score (C.F. Peters of Leipzig, in this particular case); also, there's not a word of English in it once you get past Dover's title pages and the translation of the table of contents that they've thoughtfully provided. What you will get is all of the instrumental parts (note that most pianists will be unable to do much with this score!), all of the vocal parts, and acres of uncut German dialogue. Dover scores are a reasonably priced resource for singers, instrumentalists, conductors, and anyone who cares deeply about the opera.

From Publishers Weekly

Adapting any work to sequential art is intimidating, but adapting opera takes a special kind of confidence. Adapting comic opera--particularly one by Mozart--takes a confidence that borders on hubris. Fortunately, Russell, who's adapted everything from Neil Gaiman's short stories to *The Ring of the Niebelung*, has the talent to back up his ambition. Sure and confident, Russell's art switches from tense action sequences to slapstick without missing a beat. His sense of physical characterization is also impressive, helping readers keep track of Mozart's often confusing cast of characters. Even traditionally less-recognized aspects of comics presentation, like color and lettering, here serve the story brilliantly. And as impressive as Russell's art is, his writing is possibly even more noteworthy. Much of this graphic novel is told without narration or dialogue (presumably to simulate the longer musical passages Mozart included in the opera), and Russell's selection of sequential images keeps the story moving along without ever losing readers. When he does use dialogue, often the hardest part of a graphic novel to pull off properly, he hits just the right tones: brash and aspiring for young Prince Tamino, earthy and hearty for cynical bird-catcher Papageno, haughty and cryptic for the mysterious Queen of Night. NBM's reprint of Russell's classic adaptation superbly displays the artist's skill at both writing and illustrating.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 4 Up?A stunningly illustrated, well-written retelling of one of Mozart's most beloved works. This

operatic fairy tale is related in an elegant, clear tone in 15 scenes; most have a single page of text and one facing full-page painting. This technique breaks the rather complicated story into easy-to-follow pieces. Malone's soft oil paintings are full of light; stylized but warm, they precisely catch the flavor of Mozart's vision. Story and pictures are lovely, fresh, and rich, but it is the enclosed CD with 16 selections coded to each page of the book that make this a unique and appealing offering. This reading-plus-listening package is almost as good as being in the audience. Libraries may encounter problems circulating a book with a CD tucked in the back, but this a special item and it deserves a place on the music shelves of most libraries. A beautiful treat for the eyes, the ears, and the imagination. ?Beth Tegart, Oneida City Schools, NY
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