Edexcel AoS 1: Mozart’s The Magic Flute

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born and raised in Salzburg, where he and his father, Leopold Mozart, were on the Prince Archbishop of Salzburg’s music staff. On discovering and nurturing his children’s musical talents, however, Leopold decided to tour the courts and cities of Europe to show them off.

The young Wolfgang loved the years of travelling, and was exposed to a huge range of music and styles in the main musical centres of Western Europe, which included Munich, Mannheim, Mainz, Frankfurt, Brussels, London and Paris – in the latter two cities the Mozarts had longer stays. He thrived abroad, with a tour of Italy in his teenage years inspiring a huge output of operas, symphonies and chamber music. His return to Salzburg was always disappointing, since commissions there were confined to masses and anthems. Mozart was desperate to leave Salzburg, and it was Vienna that had captured his imagination.

In the 1700s, Vienna was the heart of the Habsburg Empire and also the seat of the Holy Roman Emperor. The city was rich in culture, with opera, churches and plenty of potential patrons. In 1773 Mozart attempted to find employment there but was unsuccessful, and therefore forced to return to Salzburg. Over the next years, Mozart redoubled his efforts to look for employment outside Salzburg and away from the Prince Archbishop.

In 1781, Mozart seized his chance. The Archbishop and his entourage had been travelling across Europe and were due to visit Vienna. Mozart caught up with the tour there, having been in Munich for the premiere of his opera Idomeneo. During this visit to Vienna, Mozart made a number of new contacts, as well as getting back in touch with the Weber family (whom he had met in Mannheim, and who had since moved to Vienna). After disagreements with the Archbishop, Mozart’s contract was terminated and he did not return to Salzburg.

Vienna

At this time, Emperor Joseph II (for whom Mozart was desperate to compose and perform) was making significant reforms across the Empire with the aim of reducing the power of the church. Vienna’s atmosphere was that of entertainment and Enlightenment, and it was particularly theatres that flourished.

The Emperor took over the central Burgtheater himself, while leasing other theatres to outside producers. He employed Count Rosenberg as director of the Burgtheater, and insisted on German-language works and the avoidance of opera seria. Mozart enjoyed huge success with his Singspiel Die Entführung aus dem Serail, which premiered at the Burgtheater, and established his reputation as a successful composer in Vienna.

A Singspiel (literally ‘sing play’) is similar to an opera, containing solo arias and ensemble numbers, but the recitative found in opera seria is replaced with spoken dialogue with no musical accompaniment. Singspiels are generally comic or romantic, with elements of magic and fantastical creatures, as well as characterisations of good and evil. The Magic Flute is a Singspiel in perhaps its most sophisticated form.

Though the Burgtheater was a key part of the cultural life of Vienna, the Emperor took a more relaxed approach to theatres outside the city walls. As part of his new ‘theatre freedom’, he allowed for the establishment of new theatres in Leopoldstadt (1781) and Josefstadt (1788), as well as the Freihaus-Theater in Wieden (1787).

These theatres developed their own traditions – particularly the Freihaus, which was run by Emanuel Schikaneder. He and Mozart were already well acquainted: Mozart had contributed music to some of Schikaneder’s touring productions. The two men met again in Vienna when Schikaneder embarked on a new production of Die Entführung aus dem Serail, which caused a great deal of controversy.
Schikaneder’s maverick tendencies were attractive to Mozart, compounded by his need for new connections
and new work, despite initial success at the court. After the death of Emperor Joseph II and the coronation of
the much more theatrically ambivalent Leopold II, Mozart and his wife struggled to make ends meet.

Freihaus-Theater

It was through his friend Benedikt Schack (Mozart’s first Tamino) that Schikaneder and his company provided
Mozart with a financial lifeline. The troupe occupied the huge Freihaus to the point of living in it, and their
collaborative approach to writing and producing was something Mozart loved. Audiences were less pretentious,
and tickets were not as expensive as they were for the Burgtheater. However, maintaining this cooperative was
costly, and both Mozart and Schikaneder soon faced financial problems. Their new Singspiel, Die Zauberflöte
(The Magic Flute) was premiered on 30 September 1791. This sadly came too late for Mozart, who died on 5
December the same year, never living to see The Magic Flute's lasting financial and artistic success.

THE MAGIC FLUTE: THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND FREEMASONRY

The Magic Flute’s fairytale plot is an allegory that has no real locality or historical period. Although it’s not
essential for students to remember the whole of the plot, an overview and an awareness of its links with the
Enlightenment and Freemasonry are essential to enhancing the understanding of the whole opera. Mozart
takes this fantasy tale and sets it to such moving music that the listener feels part of the protagonists’ emotional
turmoils and physical ordeals.

The plot

Students can watch an animated version of The Magic Flute's plot here. There are plenty of synopses
online, but this one is particularly good.

The specific plot details of each excerpt will be discussed in the analysis section of this resource.

On the surface, the plot is a fairytale comedy with a happy ending, but beneath the surface lies a
huge amount of symbolism and meaning which have been discussed extensively over the years. Not
all musicologists have agreed on the ‘meaning’ of the work, which makes it all the more fascinating.

The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment was an intellectual and philosophical movement in the 18th century, focused on reason
being the primary source of authority and legitimacy. It advanced ideals including liberty and progress, and
encouraged the separation of church and state. In The Magic Flute, Sarastro, the High Priest of Isis and Osiris,
rules according to principles based on reason, wisdom and nature. Tamino and Papageno embark on an
educational journey, which progresses from chaos, through religious superstition to rational enlightenment, in
order to make ‘the Earth a heavenly kingdom, and mortals like the gods’ (‘Dann ist die Erd’ ein Himmelreich,
und Sterbliche den Göttern gleich’).
Enlightenment values were also pursued by the Freemasons, the secret men’s society into which Mozart and his father were initiated. *The Magic Flute*’s masonic themes are undeniable. Its story deals with the Masons’ main themes: good versus evil; enlightenment versus ignorance; and the virtues of knowledge, justice, wisdom and truth.

In order to demonstrate his worthiness of marrying Pamina, Tamino must undergo trials similar those found in a Masonic initiation. The injunction of silence in the Masonic ritual (in *The Magic Flute*, Tamino is also not permitted to look at Pamina in his trials) as well as the worship of the Egyptian gods Isis and Osiris also identify with Masonic traditions.

The number three (a significant Masonic number) is also found throughout *The Magic Flute*: three ladies; three boys; three loud chords at the beginning of the overture; three temples; three knocks at the temple; and three flats (E flat major) defining the primary key of the work.

Alongside these themes, Mozart’s sublime setting of Schikaneder’s libretto brings depth and profundity to this comedy. Mozart’s final opera demonstrates some of his most profound and exquisite music, while still maintaining the lighter tradition from which this piece originates.

‘O ZITTRE NICHT, MEIN LIEBER SOHN!’
(Act 1, No. 4)

Before this aria, the Queen of the Night’s three ladies in waiting show Tamino a portrait of the Queen’s daughter, Pamina, with whom he falls in love. The Queen makes her first appearance. She seems to be grief-stricken and explains to Tamino that her daughter is being held by a villain, the High Priest Sarastro. She tells Tamino that if he rescues her daughter, Pamina will be his forever.

**Structure and tonality**

This movement is in two main sections: recitative and aria (see bar numbers below).

**RECIPIEVE**

The Queen of the Night addresses Tamino.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bars</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Features of note</th>
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</table>
| 1-10 | B flat major | • Orchestral introduction  
       | | • Syncopation and excitement  
       | | • Heralding the entrance of the Queen (dotted rhythms) |
| 11-15 | B flat major, moving to F major (dominant of B flat) | • The dominant of the dominant is introduced in bar 14 |
| 16-20 | F major for two bars; section closes in G minor (relative minor of B flat) | • The dominant of G minor appears in bar 18 |

**ARIA**

This aria is in two sections, defined by their keys and tempo. In the first section (Larghetto), the Queen of the Night explains that she is grief-stricken as Pamina has been taken from her by an evil fiend (‘ein Bösewicht’). The key of G minor has often been associated with grief. Dido’s Lament from Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas* is in G minor, and later on in *The Magic Flute* Pamina expresses her grief (‘Ach ich fühlt’s’), also in G minor.

In the second section (Allegro moderato), the Queen calls upon Tamino to rescue Pamina. This section harks back to the *aria di bravura* of the Baroque period, in which the singer is expected to demonstrate vocal virtuosity.
The aria has a binary structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bars</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Plot</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Opens in G minor</td>
<td>The Queen of the Night expresses her sorrow concerning Pamina’s capture.</td>
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<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>B flat major; moves to C minor (established by bar 40); returns to G minor</td>
<td>The Queen refers to Sarastro as the music moves to B flat major. The music moves to C minor as the Queen refers to Pamina’s distress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>G minor</td>
<td>The music returns to G minor as the Queen of the Night regrets her failure to save Pamina.</td>
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<tr>
<td>61 (Allegro moderato)</td>
<td>B flat major (bar 62)</td>
<td>The Queen calls Tamino to rescue Pamina.</td>
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<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>B flat major (hints at E flat major in bars 80-83)</td>
<td>The Queen declares that Tamino will earn his right to Pamina if he is successful.</td>
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**Organisation of pitch: melody**

The melodies in both the recitative and the aria are mainly diatonic, with occasional chromaticisms. The most noticeable chromaticism can be found in bars 42-43 in a descending chromatic scale, as the Queen describes Pamina’s fear.

In the Larghetto, the vocal line is sometimes doubled by an instrument in the orchestra: for example, the first violins play the opening phrase (bars 21-25). The oboe then doubles the voices at bar 28-29.

**PHRASE LENGTHS**

In the recitative, the phrases are short and fragmented, interrupted by the orchestra. The phrase lengths in the Larghetto become a little longer. The open phrases of the aria (bars 21-27) contain two three-bar phrases – unusual for the Classical period, but perhaps demonstrating the Queen’s supposed grief and unsettled nature. The rest of the aria generally has two-bar phrases, with the final two phrases (bars 53-61) being four bars each, as the Queen comes to terms with the fact that she was too weak to save Pamina.

From the Allegro moderato, the phrase lengths are generally more settled, though there is still variety in length, which could again allude to the Queen’s disturbed nature as she expresses such extreme emotions in one movement.

**MELODIC SHAPES**

Melodic shapes vary this movement. In the Larghetto, the melody mainly moves by step. Leaps are often used to emphasise a specific word or sentiment: at bar 34, the Queen leaps a 5th on the word ‘Bösewicht’ (villain), and later in bars 43 and 48 as she cries for help. In the Allegro moderato, there are more leaps, sometimes spanning an octave or more.

This aria contains some exceptionally difficult phrases for the singer. As well as a flourish of scalic semiquavers at bar 80, from bar 83 the Queen of the Night sings a combination of scales and arpeggios that push the coloratura soprano to her highest tessitura.

The diminished 7th (often used in the Baroque period to indicate extreme emotion, usually grief or sorrow) is used to express the Queen’s anguish. She sings a falling diminished 7th in bar 20 (over a diminished 7th chord – see below) over the word ‘Mutterherz’ (‘mother’s heart’), perhaps indicating the sorrow she feels about her daughter.

In terms of word setting, the recitative is mainly syllabic, whereas the Allegro moderato contains some sections of long melismas.

In bars 83-90, sequences can be found.
Organisation of pitch: harmony

As is typical of Mozart’s music, and music generally from the Classical period, the harmony is functional and diatonic, and is punctuated by perfect and imperfect cadences. Much of the harmony is based on tonic and dominant chords and their inversions. Chromatic chords are used to decorate and create tension in the drama.

Some harmonic highlights include:

- The use of the first-inversion chord in the recitative. This was a typical feature of recitatives, maintaining tonality while also avoiding a sense of completion until the end of a phrase or of the entire recitative. First-inversion chords can be found in bars 15 and 18. Each time they are chord Vb of the new key.
- Mozart creates even more tension in the Larghetto by using inverted cadences. At bar 24, the cadence is IV-Vb (an inverted imperfect cadence). The music moves to B flat shortly afterwards, and at bars 32 and 33, we see two inverted plagal cadences:
  - Bar 32: IVb-Ic
  - Bar 33: IV-Ib
- Interrupted cadences are used sparingly. Mozart uses one in bars 55 to 56 after the phrase ‘meine Hilfe war zu schwach’ (‘my help was too weak’). The cadence allows for the Queen to pause for thought, and for her to repeat the phrase again in order to emphasise it, this time ending it with a perfect cadence at bar 61.
- Mozart uses the Neapolitan 6th chord in bar 19 to emphasise the word ‘tiefbetrübte’ (‘deep distress’). Following this in bar 20, Mozart uses a diminished 7th chord on the word ‘Mutterherz’ (‘mother’s heart’), over which the Queen also sings a falling diminished 7th, creating further ambiguity or tension concerning the mother-daughter relationship.
- Mozart uses a German 6th chord in bar 43. Turn the C sharp into a D flat and the German 6th becomes a dominant 7th in E flat major.

Sonority

In The Magic Flute’s original production, the Queen of the Night was played by one of Mozart’s sisters-in-law, Josepha Hofer, who was known to have had a very high (if not very nice) voice. The role places huge demands on any soprano who takes it, as she has to have an exceptionally high range and enormous vocal virtuosity. These demands are revealed slowly over the course of the movement.

The recitative reveals a typical soprano range, but as the Queen becomes more distressed in the Larghetto, her tessitura rises (an A flat in bar 47). The Allegro moderato allows for the soprano to soar into her upper range (and stay there), and to sing with great virtuosity and skill. The use of this extreme range not only gives the soprano opportunities to show her skill and control, but more importantly also lets us into the Queen’s troubled and distressed state of mind. This becomes even more evident later in the opera as the Queen unleashes fury in her second aria ‘Der Hölle Rache’.
This movement is scored for two oboes, two bassoons, two horns in B flat, and strings. There are no flutes, clarinets, trumpets, trombones or timpani.

**Texture**

The predominant texture is melody-dominated homophony, with the melody line being accompanied by a homophonic texture. Counterpoint is rare in this movement, though there are some brief moments. At the beginning of the Larghetto, there is a moment of imitation in bars 22-23, when the opening vocal phrase is imitated a bar later in the cellos. The bassoons and violas also have a haunting countermelody in the middle of the texture in bars 36-44.

**Tempo, rhythm and metre**

There are several different tempos in this movement. The syncopations in the majestic introduction create a sense of anticipation of the Queen of the Night’s arrival. As is conventional with recitatives, this is intended to be sung in a freer rhythm and tempo, set by the singer.

The Larghetto is in a slow triple time, allowing the Queen to reflect on her grief and despair. The music moves in a combination of crotchets and quavers, but is held up at times to emphasise certain words. At bar 34, the dotted minim (along with the first venture into the voice’s upper register) emphasises the word ‘Bösewicht’ (‘villain’), and later on, at bars 47 and 48, the minim emphasises ‘helft!’ (‘help!’).

In the Allegro moderato, the music is in simple quadruple time. The unrelenting semiquavers of bars 80-83 are a highlight here. After this excitement and the vocal gymnastics that follow, the closing minim's (bars 94-98) provide a solid ending to the movement.

**Dynamics**

The dynamics of this movement range from piano to forte, with some fp (fortepiano) and sf (sforzando). Crescendos are used (for example in the orchestral introduction), often to increase tension. These indications are, however, all in the orchestra.

‘HM! HM! HM! HM!’ (ACT 1, NO. 5)

After the Queen of the night’s exit, Tamino briefly wonders whether what he saw was real (in spoken text). The drama is outlined in the Structure and tonality section below.

This movement is born from one of Mozart’s key innovations in operatic writing, and his solution to his frustrations with opera seria. Mozart felt that the constraints of solo arias and choruses were not appropriate responses to the drama, and that while in spoken text, everyone has to take turns to speak, in music, each character can express different (or the same) sentiments (and sing different words) at the same time. In this movement, there is general agreement among the characters.

It’s worth comparing this to the extensive finale to Mozart’s The Marriage of Figaro, in which 11 characters come together in different combinations to bring the plot and the opera to a thrilling close.
Structure and tonality

There is no overall form to this ensemble piece. The movement is **through-composed** with five sections, which are based around the drama. The movement begins and ends in B flat major.

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<tr>
<th>Bars</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Plot</th>
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| 1-32 | B flat major | • Tamino is unable to free Papageno from the padlock on his mouth (hence ‘Hm! Hm!’), which the Three Ladies placed there earlier as a punishment for lying.  
• At first they sing separate four-bar phrases, which become shorter exchanges at bar 19. From bar 27, the two sing their different ideas together. |
| 33-76 | F major | • The Three Ladies appear (on the Queen’s order) and set Papageno free, warning him about any further misdemeanours. They sing together in praise of brotherhood on earth.  
• The First Lady’s phrase (bars 34-38) becomes the basis for this next section. Dialogue occurs between Papageno and the Ladies, after which they come together in a homophonic texture to sing about the brotherhood. |
| 77-131 | B flat major, with a brief visit to F major in bars 96-101. | • The First Lady gives Tamino a magic flute from the Queen, whose sound will protect him from harm, and turn sadness into joy.  
• After a short solo from the First Lady, the Ladies all sing together.  
• The Three Ladies, Tamino and Papageno all sing together in praise of the magic flute. |
| 132-213 | G minor  
D minor (bar 142)  
G minor (bar 164)  
E flat major (bar 172)  
B flat (bar 179) | • The Three Ladies tell Papageno that he will accompany Tamino on a mission. They give him some silver bells, which together with the magic flute, will protect them on their mission.  
• Tamino and Papageno then ask who will guide them on their mission.  
• Much of the material is based on the phrase heard at 141-143. |
| 214 | B flat major | • The Three Ladies inform the pair that they will be guided by Three Boys. They all bid farewell.  
• The tempo changes here. The Ladies sing homophonically. The material of this section is mainly based on bars 271-225. |

Organisation of pitch: melody

The simplicity of Papageno’s opening melody runs throughout most of this moment. As a happy-go-lucky birdcatcher, his melodies reflect his naivety, with repeated pitches and mainly crotchets (though this could also be due to his mouth being padlocked). When Tamino enters, he copies Papageno’s melodic shapes, and throughout the movement, the melodic shapes are predominantly stepwise melodies with simple rhythms. There are occasional moments where the music is more triadic, for example in bars 50-52, when the Ladies warn Papageno against any lying in the future.

Phrase lengths are mainly balanced and even. At the beginning, the two protagonists alternate four-bar phrases. Later on, there are many two-bar phrases thrown around the texture as the characters engage in musical conversations.

Like the Queen of the Night’s aria, the melodies here are diatonic. One of the few chromaticisms is found in bar 158: Papageno’s anxiety increases in a chromatic scale as he fears what Sarastro might do to him. The falling chromatic figures in bars 242 and 244 provide a poignant farewell to end the number.

The singers’ parts are often doubled in the orchestra: Papageno’s opening melody, for example, is doubled by the bassoon.
Organisation of pitch: harmony

The harmony is diatonic and functional. Due to the much lighter nature of this excerpt, the chromatic chords found in the preceding aria do not appear as frequently here (though there is a German 6th in bar 138).

Perfect and imperfect cadences are frequent, as well as the typical cadence of Ic-V (strong to weak beat), for example in bars 84 and 191.

There are numerous uses of appoggiaturas, notably in Tamino’s part on the first beat of bars 21 and 23. These appoggiaturas are written out, whereas those in bars 12 and 130 use the appoggiatura ornament, which has exactly the same effect:

At the time of writing *The Magic Flute*, the clarinet was a relatively new instrument, for which Mozart had written a Clarinet Quintet in 1789, and a Clarinet Concerto to be performed in October 1791 (a month after *The Magic Flute’s* premiere), both for the clarinetist Anton Stadler.

Sonority

Aside from the five singing parts, the orchestral scoring is exactly the same here as in the previous number, though at the Andante in bar 214 clarinets enter (accompanied by pizzicato strings) to change the music to a more sombre mood, as the Three Ladies explain that the Three Boys will guide them on their journey. Tamino and Papageno repeat this phrase (and the subsequent alternate phrases) but are joined by the cellos, bassoon and French Horn, to match their lower timbre.

No flutes or bells are used in this number, despite the appearance of these instruments in the story. The triadic interjections from the first violins in bars 143 and 145 could, however, suggest bells.
Like the previous number, melody-dominated homophony is the overall texture here, but Mozart demonstrates great variety in his vocal textures in particular. He varies these according to the demands of the drama and handles them with great skill.

The movement opens with a solo voices, which take turns to converse and eventually come together (despite singing different words). Mozart uses a homophonic vocal texture to express agreement or the delivery of a moral or message.

At bar 46, the Three Ladies sing a homophonic warning to Papageno, and between their phrases, he promises never to lie again. By bar 51 it is clear that he has understood his warning as he sings the same rhythms as the Three Ladies. They are then joined by Tamino as they sing of the brotherhood. This kind of writing occurs throughout this number.

This movement is in cut common time, giving the tempo a swift two-in-a-bar feeling. The slower Andante section occurs at 214 as the mood of the music becomes more sombre.

The rhythms and note values are generally very simple (mainly crotchets and quavers), to emphasise the comic nature and the simplicity of Papageno. At bar 217, the short quavers and rests give the Three Ladies an opportunity to introduce the idea of the Three Boys. As well as making this clear to Tamino and Papageno, Mozart is also making this obvious for his audience.

While the dynamic range is quite similar to that of the previous excerpt, there are more dynamic indications for the singers. Mozart frequently uses *sotto voce* (literally ‘under the voice’) to indicate a more reflective approach to the ensemble singing.