



“Variations of Love under a Magnifying Glass”

Elsa Dreisig, Joana Mallwitz and Christof Loy in a Terrace Talk on the Revival of the Opera *Così fan tutte* by W. A. Mozart



Elsa Dreisig (Fiordiligi), Joana Mallwitz (Conductor), Christof Loy (Director) © SF/Jan Frieze

(SF, 1 August 2026) “It’s like a family reunion here,” says conductor Joana Mallwitz about the cast of the Salzburg opera production *Così fan tutte*. In 2020, she and Christof Loy created a reduced version of the opera without an interval – for the Salzburg Festival’s centennial and due to the circumstances of the pandemic – which many viewers still remember vividly. Now the successful production returns to the stage of the Großes Festspielhaus as an expanded revival: within its signature stage set, the entire 2020 cast meets again, with the exception of one new cast member. During the Terrace Talk, Joana Mallwitz, Christof Loy and Elsa Dreisig, who sang the role of Fiordiligi then and now reprises it, discuss the extended concept and the rehearsals for this year’s *Così fan tutte*.

Inside the Emotional Labyrinth

The casual title of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's opera *Così fan tutte* – which translates to “That’s how all women do it” – may be irritating. According to director Christof Loy, there are numerous productions which portray the female figures in a naïve, exaggerated way, focusing on the superficial humour. Loy, on the other hand, tries to treat the characters with dignity, without creating “caricatures”. He speaks of the “paradisical state” they find themselves in at the beginning of the piece, and describes “the women’s innocence as something very beautiful”.

After all, the men are „initially far more depraved” with their wager to test the women’s faithfulness, and Loy’s staging makes them “look into unexpected abysses” when the intrigue slips out of their hands. In *Fiordiligi*, the director sees “the absoluteness of feelings”, which is something Elsa Dreisig relates to: “She experiences everything 100 percent, there is nothing half-hearted there. I love this woman; she has an enormous amount of temperament.” The soprano speaks lovingly about her role: „She could be a friend of mine.”



Christof Loy's first Salzburg production was in 2007 © SF/Jan Frieze



Elsa Dreisig sings *Fiordiligi*, as she did in 2020 and 2021 © SF/Jan Frieze

“I try to focus all my concentration and that of the audience on the states immanent in the characters, states that keep changing. And I leave out anything that might be distracting.” Unlike the scenario in the libretto, the Salzburg production is not set in a specific location; the viewer sees an expansive, white set with two doors. This timelessness and general validity gives the characters on Loy’s stage plenty of room to wear their innermost feelings on their sleeves. Even when he first

borrowed the score at the age of 12, he suffered with the characters in Act II. He missed this empathetic reading, however, in the productions he subsequently saw: “Most of the time, the first act was odd, because there was too much superficial comedy and elaborate stage sets, making it impossible to delve into this labyrinth of feelings later.” Even the puppet master Don Alfonso has more sensitive facets in Christof Loy’s concept than in many other productions: “He too has been wounded by love.” To Joana Mallwitz, the opera is like a “magnifying glass”, broadening our views on various forms of love, i.e. “love between siblings, infatuation, mad love, desperate love, lonely love and fateful love”.

Starting with the Innermost

“We had to be fast,” Joana Mallwitz remembers the creation of the 2020 version. She and Christof Loy pursued the same vision: “Not thinking about what we could cut, but considering the things we definitely wanted to hear.” Both describe some of the cuts as “painful”; mostly, this concerned the soloists’ second arias. While these gaps are filled in the revival, Mallwitz and Loy have kept some of the cuts – some of them recommended even by Mozart himself, for example in the ensemble sections.



The conductor emphasizes the “incredible diversity of layers you can hear at any time in this opera”. The psychological view of the characters does not work through subtraction, but by “starting to think from the innermost, from the core”: “In 2020, for the first four weeks we only sat around the piano, working on the texts and asking ourselves: what’s the timing? Where’s the impulse? Where does the feeling start, at which point does it have to be established? Which chord from the fortepiano has to follow it, in which shape? And then the opera was complete, and we were able to stage the whole thing in brief.” The fact that most of the soloists from the first time are once again part of the production this year is a “great stroke of good fortune”: “Everyone is so very attuned to each other in these roles. The core is still there, and it works.” In her musical work, Mallwitz emphasizes the confluence of very good technique and “a musical articulation that is always pegged to the text, that can even be a bit cheeky”. This is an attitude she attests to the soloists and the Vienna Philharmonic: “They have the ability to deal with the text and to bring out even the smallest emotion in every letter.” The Salzburg production allows the singers a good view of the orchestra. To Elsa Dreisig, this proximity feels “like chamber music”. “It’s a dream come true.”

“The ideal *Così*”

The reduced version is now six years old, and a lot has happened in these years: “personally, in terms of development, also vocally,” Joana Mallwitz explains. The fact, however, that *Così fan tutte* “was rehearsed at the time with such precision and passion” means that it’s burned into their memories. “I am curious to see what the piece does to us now, six years later.” To Mallwitz, it’s “the most honest of all Mozart operas”, and this production is “the ideal *Così*”. Christof Loy underlines the “responsibility towards the work created at the time”, describing a choreographic and emotional “clockwork” whose precision needs to be restored. Elsa Dreisig remembers having “butterflies”: “I had the feeling that we were all collectively in love.” At the 2026 Salzburg Festival, *Così fan tutte* will be performed six times, starting on 6 August at the Großes Festspielhaus.

Photographs from the press event are available here:
<https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/en/photos/295735>

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

Così fan tutte

ossia LA SCUOLA DEGLI AMANTI

Dramma giocoso in two acts K. 588 (1790)

Libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte

Revival

Joana Mallwitz Conductor

Christoph Koncz Conductor (22 and 29 August)

Christof Loy Director

Johannes Leiacker Sets

Barbara Drosihn Costumes

Olaf Winter Lighting

Elsa Dreisig Fiordiligi

Victoria Karkacheva Dorabella

Andrè Schuen Guglielmo

Bogdan Volkov Ferrando

Lea Desandre Despina

Johannes Martin Kränzle Don Alfonso

Concert Association of the Vienna State Opera Chorus

Jozef Chabroň Chorusmaster

Vienna Philharmonic

Six performances between 6 August and 29. August

Großes Festspielhaus

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