

Voi che sapete

(You Know What Love Is)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

“*Voi che sapete*” is a very popular aria from Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*), one of the most beloved and performed operas in today’s standard repertoire. This opera buffa was composed in 1786, with an Italian libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte, based on a 1784 stage comedy by Pierre Beaumarchais, *La folle journée, ou, le Mariage de Figaro*. Beaumarchais’s play is the second in his Figaro trilogy of plays, and follows the action of his first comedy *Le Barbier de Séville* (*The Barber of Seville*). Both Beaumarchais’s plays *The Barber of Seville* and *The Marriage of Figaro* are examples of light comedy in the eighteenth century, but are now remembered by the respective operas of Rossini and Mozart.

The plays were considered scandalous at the time because the drama involves an incompetent nobleman being upstaged by a crafty, quick-witted servant in their quest for the same woman. Performances were opposed by King Louis XVI and the French censors, and in Austria, Emperor Joseph II allowed Mozart to set it to music only after all the political speeches were taken out. The first performances of *Le nozze di Figaro* in Vienna and Prague were enthusiastically received, despite the fact that a servant’s name—Figaro—appeared in the title. With its humorous wordplay and lively characterization, Mozart’s setting of Beaumarchais’s play signaled the impending decline of the aristocracy, when the victory of ability over birthright was triumphed by the hero Figaro.

The action of *Le nozze di Figaro* recounts a single day in the palace of the Count Almaviva, where he lives with his Countess and a number of dependents. Among these are Figaro, Figaro’s fiancée Susanna (the Countess’s maid)

and the Count’s page, Cherubino. Rather than featuring a well-defined plot, the opera is a series of awkward and humorous situations, complete with a vibrant dialogue between the individuals involved. It is about the struggles and reconciliation of those in the court, all of which are presented in a masterpiece of comedic sentiment with inspired melodies and rich orchestrations.

“*Voi che sapete*” is performed by Cherubino, who is about to be sent off to the army because the Count finds him a nuisance. When Cherubino appears before the Countess and Susanna in the second act to tell them his fate, this aria is sung at the request of Susanna for a love song. Cherubino is characterized as a young adolescent who is in love with every woman he meets, and because his voice is yet unbroken, is always played by a female singer.

W.A. Mozart’s Sämtliche Werke, V, published by Breitkopf and Härtel (1876–1905) is the source for this edition. Originally set for mezzo-soprano with an accompaniment of woodwinds, horns and strings, the keyboard accompaniment in this arrangement is a reduction of those instrumental parts. Presented here in the original key, dynamic and metronomic indications and optional English words have also been added by the editor.

Mozart’s very tuneful melody is first heard in the opening measures of the accompaniment, where it should be given emphasis against the backdrop of the inner pulsating sixteenth notes. Both keyboard and vocal parts should be performed lightly with two constant beats per measure. The naturally energized syllables should be clearly pronounced while closely following the suggested dynamics that highlight the contrasting phrases.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Voi che sa-pe-te che co-sa è a-mor,
voi ke sa-pe-te ke kɔ-sæ a-mor,

don-ne ve-de-te, s'io l'ho nel cor,
dɔn:nɛ ve-de-te si:ɔ lɔ nel kɔr,

don-ne ve-de-te, s'io l'ho nel cor.
dɔn:nɛ ve-de-te si:ɔ lɔ nel kɔr.

Quel-lo ch'io pro-vo, vi ri-di-rò,
kwel:lɔ ki:ɔ prɔ-vɔ, vi ri-di-rɔ,

è per me nuo-vo, ca-pir nol so.
ɛ per me nwo-vɔ ka-pir nol sɔ.

Sen-to un af-fet-to pien di de-sir,
sɛn-tɔun af-fɛt:tɔ pjɛn di de-zir,

ch'o-ra è di-let-to, ch'o-ra è mar-tir.
kɔ-ra ɛ di-let:tɔ kɔ-ræ mar-tir.

Ge-lo, e poi sen-to l'al-ma av-vam-par,
dʒɛ-lɔɛ pɔi sɛn-tɔ lal-mav-vam-par,

e in un mo-men-to tor-no a ge-lar.
ɛin un mo-mɛn-tɔ tɔr-nɔa dʒɛ-lar.

Ri-cer-co un be-ne fuo-ri di me,
ri-tʃɛr-kɔun bɛ-nɛ fwɔ-ri di me,

non so chi'l tie-ne, non so cos' è.
nɔn sɔ kil tʃɛ-ne nɔn sɔ kɔ-zɛ.

So-spi-ro e ge-mo sen-za vo-ler,
sɔ-spi-rɔɛ dʒɛ-mɔ sɛn-tsa vo-lɛr,

pal-pi-to e tre-mo sen-za sa-per.
pal-pi-tɔɛ trɛ-mɔ sɛn-tsa sa-pɛr,

Non tro-vo pa-ce no-te, nè di, ma pur mi pia-ce lan-guir co-sì.
nɔn trɔ-vɔ pa-tʃɛ nɔt:ɛ ne di, ma pur mi pja-tʃɛ lan-gwir kɔ-zì.

Voi che sa-pe-te che co-sa è a-mor,...
voi ke sa-pe-te ke kɔ-sæ a-mor,...

Footnotes to Italian Pronunciation

- In multiple syllable words, the syllables that should be stressed are underlined.
- [r] should be flipped.
- [r] should be trilled.
- Certain double consonants can be sustained on a pitch while maintaining a legato line, such as those in the words “donne” and “quello.” The singer should take time for the singable double consonants in each of these words from the preceding musical note.
- There are other double consonants, such as those in the words “affetto” and “diletto,” which interrupt the legato line when pronounced correctly. For example, when singing the word “affetto” [af:fɛt-tɔ], the singer should briefly stop on the first [t], creating a slight silence before the sounding of the second [t].

TRANSLATION

*You, who know what love is,
Ladies, see if I have it in my heart.
That which I feel, I will explain to you;
It is new to me; I don't understand it.
I sense an affection full of desire,
Which now is pleasure, now is agony.
I freeze, and then I feel my soul burning,
And in a moment I return to freezing.
I look for something beautiful outside of myself,
I don't know who holds it, I don't know what it is.
I sigh and moan without wanting to,
I quiver and tremble without knowing it.
I find no peace night or day
but yet it pleases me to suffer this way!
You, who know what love is,...*

13. Voi che sapete

(You Know What Love Is)

Italian words by

LORENZO DE PONTE (1749-1838)

English words by PATRICK M. LIEBERGEN

from LE NOZZE DI FIGARO

Music by WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)

Edited and Arranged by PATRICK M. LIEBERGEN

Andante (♩ = ca. 66)

mp

5 *mf* *p*

9 *mp*

Voi che sa - pe - te che co - sa è a - mor,
You know what love is, where's it in my heart,

mp

13 *mf*

don - ne ve - de - te, s'io l'ho nel cor,
give me your an - swer, then I'll de - part,

mf

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17 *mp*

don - ne ve - de - te, s'io l'ho nel cor.
 give me your an - swer, then I'll de - part.

21 *mf*

Quel - lo ch'io pro - vo, vi ri - di - rò,
 Let me now tell you, all that I feel,

25

è per me nuo - vo, ca - pir nol so.
 it's ver - y new to me, is this love real?

29

Sen - to un af - fet - to pien di de - sir,
 I am so hap - py, full of de - sire,

33

ch'o - ra è di - let - to, ch'o - ra è mar -
it gives me great - plea - sure, pain, hot as

36

37

tir. Ge - lo, e poi sen - to l'al - ma av - vam -
fire. Fro - zen, my soul, then burn - ing like

40

par, e in un mo - men - to tor - no a ge -
flame, turns in a mo - ment cold at one

44

45

lar. Ri - cer-co un be - ne fuo - ri di me,
name. I seek a bless - ing that's not in me,

49

p

non so chi'l tie - ne, non so cos' è. So-spi-ro_e
I'm search - ing for it, please hear my plea. When I am

53

mp

ge - mo sen - za vo - ler, pal - pi - to_e tre - mo sen - za sa -
sigh - ing, that's not my way, when shak - ing, trem - bling, I'm in dis -

56

mf

per. Non tro - vo pa - ce no - te, nè di, ma pur mi
may. My life's not peace - ful, I feel the pain, but I still

59

pia - ce lan - guir co - sì. Voi che sa -
suf - fer, noth - ing I gain. You know what

63

pe - te che co - sa è a - mor, don - ne ve -
 love is, where's it in my heart, give me your

67

de - te s'io l'ho nel cor, don - ne ve -
 an - swer, then I'll de - part, give me your

mf

71

de - te, s'io l'ho nel cor, don - ne ve -
 an - swer, then I'll de - part, give me your

74

75

de - te, s'io l'ho nel cor.
 an - swer, then I'll de - part.

mp rit.

tr

mp rit. p