

W A MOZART



In 1768, the twelve-year-old Mozart had composed his first opera 'La Finta semplice' for a Vienna impresario, Giuseppe d'Affligio. but widespread doubts about whether someone of Mozart's age could compose a large-scale work (one rumour was that the work would be composed by his father Leopold) caused d'Affligio to withdraw his support. The Mozarts had to return to Salzburg with an unperformed opera. But the following year they were rewarded by its performance under the auspices of Leopold's employer, Archbishop Sigismund von Schrattenbach.

But in the same year of 1768 Mozart was consoled by another opera commission, and this time his work was quickly performed. Anton Mesmer, a Viennese doctor with private means and the inventor of mesmerism, a doctrine of the influence of magnetism on human health, asked Mozart to compose an opera based on a popular Viennese comedy, 'Bastien und Bastienne' by F W Weiskern, with additional material written by the Viennese actor Johann Müller. This comedy itself derived from a French play, 'Les Amours de Bastien et Bastienne'. This in its turn was based on the plot of the opera 'Le Devin du Village' by the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Its plot deals with simple country folk, expressing their emotions about a romantic entanglement in an unsophisticated way, as a contrast to the supposed deviousness and artificiality of eighteenth-century French urban society.

Although no direct evidence of date or place survive; the first performance is supposed to have taken place in the garden of Mesmer's house in Vienna in late 1768. Mozart intended to stage further performances, with additional material, on his return to Salzburg, but this attempt was unsuccessful. The first modern performance of the opera did not occur until 1890 in Berlin.