

Oberlin Opera Theater: Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* (November 3)

by Daniel Hathaway



What does it take to create a sparkling production of Mozart's opera buffa *The Marriage of Figaro*? The music, of course, comes first, and you need a fine group of vocalists to put the composer's engaging arias and brilliant finales across, a flexible conductor

and orchestra in the pit, and a sure hand at the keyboard for recitatives.

Since it's a comedy, you need singer-actors who can put across the jokes and bring out the many twists and turns of the plot. It helps to have stage sets and costume designs that support the libretto and music without calling too much attention to themselves. Finally, you need a canny stage director who has the oversight to bring everything together into a coherent whole. All of these elements were firmly in place on Friday evening when Oberlin Opera Theater brought a delightful production of *Figaro* to the stage of Hall Auditorium.

Conductor Raphael Jiménez and the Oberlin Chamber Orchestra sparked the evening off with a tight and lively account of the overture. Then the curtain rose and Jeremy K. Benjamin's lights came up on Laura Carlson-Tarantowski's attractive period set (intentionally tatty for Act One) and Chris Flaharty's handsome period costume designs, setting the scene for uniformly strong singing and acting by the Friday-Sunday cast.



Cory McGee's Figaro and Amy Weintraub's Susanna were casting success stories both as actors and singers. Elana Bell created a believably masculine Cherubino — appropriately randy and mischievous, but delightfully awkward when got up as a woman in a hoop skirt. (That amounts to a trouser role turned into a dress role, but this is opera, so never mind.)

Kyle Miller was vocally commanding as the Count, Alexa Weeks delivered sonorous Second-Act arias as the Countess, and the mellifluous Jesse Mashburn brought great comic character to the role of Marcellina. Supporting roles were ably filled by Maggie McGuire (Barbarina), Harrison Heard (Don Basilio), Max Cook (Don Curzio), Simon Nam (Don Bartolo), and Colin Anderson (Antonio).

The chorus, prepared by Gregory Ristow, made a fine impression in their cameo appearances. Stage director Jonathon Field arranged cast and chorus in natural patterns, adding amusing touches like having the village folk fawningly bestow individual flowers on the Countess, then snatch them up one-by-one in disgust. Field saved his signature surprises for the Third-Act finale, when the leads each contributed a little personal break dance to the festivities.

Supertitles for this production were serviceable, if laden with typos and projected so high above the set that necks got a workout keeping up with the text. And did we mention the wigs? In a period production, you've got to have them, and Rae Phillips supplied some stunning ones.

Figaro is a long show. Even with the cuts that seem to have been made in this production, the Oberlin production lasted three and a half hours from stem to stern. Most of it sailed along nicely, but there were a few saggy moments when tempos might have been just a click or two peppier.

In the end, after some rather amazing wrinkles in the plot get ironed out, Figaro and Susanna, and Bartolo and Marcellina are free to get married — the obligatory happy outcome in Mozart comic operas — and forgiving each other, the Count and Countess are reconciled. That's a much happier fate than, say, *Don Giovanni*'s. Let the festivities begin!



Photos: Yevhen Gulenko

Published on ClevelandClassical.com November 9, 2017.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)