

**BW's *The Secret Marriage*: questions for
Covent Garden guest director Noa Naamat**

by Daniel Hathaway



Baldwin Wallace Conservatory will present four performances of Domenico Cimarosa's late-18th-century opera, *Il matrimonio segreto* ("The Secret Marriage") this week at the John Patrick Theater on the school's campus in Berea. The performances, from Thursday, March 22 through Saturday, March 24 at 7:30 pm and Sunday, March 25 at 2:00 pm, will be guest directed by Noa Naamat of London's Royal Opera at Covent Garden. Tiffany Chang will conduct the BW Symphony Orchestra.

Although Cimarosa wrote over 80 operas, *Il matrimonio* is the only title to have won a permanent place in the canon, where it is favorably compared to the comic operas of Mozart. It became a hit at its first performance in Vienna in 1792, when Emperor Leopold II commanded the entire piece to be encored — after thoughtfully treating the performers to supper.

A native of Israel, Noa Naamat joined the Jette Parker Young Artists Programme at Covent Garden in the fall of 2017 after studying in Florence and Scotland and directing theater and opera productions in Israel, Germany, Italy, Austria, the UK, and Ireland. She has served as assistant director at the Vienna State Opera, Scottish Opera, Israeli Opera, Deutsches Nationaltheater und Staatskapelle Weimar, and Teatro dell'Opera di Roma.

Among her other credits, she served as apprentice director at Oberlin's Summer Opera Program in Italy, where she directed *Don Giovanni*, *L'elisir d'amore*, and *Don*

Pasquale, and where she met Scott Skiba, Baldwin Wallace's director of opera studies. Because Naamat was in the thick of technical rehearsals and not available for a telephone interview, she graciously agreed to respond to some of our questions by email.

Daniel Hathaway: What are your responsibilities with the Young Artists Programme at Covent Garden?

Noa Naamat: I am responsible for directing the Jette Parker Young Artists chamber opera and for the staging of the annual mainstage summer performance. In addition, the stage director acts as assistant director on Royal Opera productions and works with the other Young Artists in workshops.

DH: Did you select Il matrimonio?

NN: I didn't, but I believe this opera offers college-age performers a great opportunity to sing in Italian and work on recitatives, while also exploring the world of opera buffa and the challenges of bringing a comedy to life.

DH: Baldwin Wallace has sometimes mixed music theater and opera majors in the same cast. Will that be true this time?

NN: No, there is no crossover in this production. To my knowledge, all the performers are opera majors.



DH: Tell us a little about your concept for the production.

NN: The first thing that came to mind was the strong presence of traditional gender roles. It's a society where fathers choose their daughters' husbands for them as they try to marry them off to acquire more land, titles, and social status. On the surface, it seems that the men get to rule the women, but actually, it is the women in this piece who move the plot forward by following their own desires. I wanted to highlight this theme in the opera while preserving its comedy, and therefore decided to set the opera in a dollhouse.

That allows us to play with the idea that as much as we would expect these characters to follow the norm and behave in a certain way, they do quite the opposite, hence the comedy! The direction of the staging is very stylistic and energetic, exploring the absurdity of the characters and the situation. Most of the set is white, but each performer has his or her own colour, allowing the characters to become splashes of colour on a white canvas and so to bring life into the space.

DH: Eighteenth-century operas are famous for convoluted plots. How would you describe what happens in Il matrimonio in 25 words or less?

NN: The secret marriage between Paolino and Carolina triggers a great comedy about unrequited love, family obligations, and social class.

DH: Will this show appeal to kids as well as to students and adults?

NN: I believe there is "something for everyone" to enjoy. I would think a human-size dollhouse should be a stimulating and entertaining experience for all ages!

Published on ClevelandClassical.com March 20, 2018.

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