

**Baldwin Wallace Opera:  
Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro***

by Mike Telin



A mainstay of the opera repertoire, *The Marriage of Figaro* is the first of Mozart's collaborations with librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte. The plot is filled with mistaken identity, surprise paternity, and intrigue, as the servants Figaro and Susanna triumph in marriage while comically thwarting the attempts of the philandering Count Almaviva to seduce Susanna.

On Thursday, March 24 at 7:30 pm at Gamble Auditorium, Baldwin Wallace Opera Theater will launch Mozart's comic opera in a production directed by Scott Skiba, with Dean Buck conducting the BW Orchestra. The opera will be sung in Italian with English supertitles. Performances run through Sunday, March 27. Tickets are available [online](#). The performances will also be live streamed.

Based on a Pierre Beaumarchais play, *Figaro* is a social commentary about the lower versus the upper class — servants outsmarting the aristocracy. And it is the combination of comedy and great music that makes the opera a masterpiece. "I think it's one of the greatest pieces in all of theater, whether it's opera or musicals," Scott Skiba said during a recent telephone conversation. "The Beaumarchais plays are brilliant and the Mozart/DaPonte collaboration is equally brilliant."

One of the reasons the opera is as popular with performers as it is with audiences is all the twists and turns of the plot and music — especially during the Finale of Act II. “You never know what is going to happen next.” Skiba said.

“During the staging we talked a lot about the fact that once the count knocks on the door, it’s one power shift after another: This character has the upper hand — now it’s this one, and now it’s that one. And it’s all setting up the moment when Susanna comes out of the closet and the Count is on the highest of high horses. I think the way that Mozart and DaPonte captured that from the play — it’s just remarkable how it builds and builds. There’s a push and a pull but you don’t feel weary when it’s done.”



The production will be presented in period setting, “We’re reinventing the 2017 Cleveland Opera Theater production we did at Masonic Auditorium, but we’re reimagining how the set is used,” Skiba said. “I always seem to have some sort of ‘ography’ when I’m directing, and this one is ‘doorography’ — the doors move to create rooms, archways, things like that. And of course, Gamble Auditorium is a concert hall and not a proscenium theater. But the set is fun and flexible.”

Skiba said that it’s wonderful to be able to present *Figaro*. “You have to have the cast,” he said. “It’s a great opportunity for the students to learn this material in an undergraduate setting, since they are going to encounter it throughout their careers.”

After the casting was finalized in late August, the students immediately began familiarizing themselves with the score and the story. “They also started wrapping their minds around the Italian language,” Skiba said. “We spent many sessions talking about how language is expressed during recitatives, arias, and ensemble numbers. And even though they are vocalists, they also need to be thinking of the score instrumentally — this character has the line and then passes it off to this character, who passes it off to this one.”

While the *Marriage of Figaro* is not without its challenges, Skiba said that everyone is having a fun time overcoming them with their colleagues. “Best of all, we’re back presenting live performances.”

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