

Oberlin Opera Theater: Secret Marriage, Public Hilarity (Mar. 26)

by Daniel Hathaway



It's been said that six is the magic number of guests to invite to a dinner party. Fewer than that reduces the likelihood of witty repartée, and more than that risks having the party break up into multiple conversations. That principle also applies to casts of comic operas that depend on scintillating conversations and wild misperceptions to fuel the plot.

Theatre performance of Cimarosa's *Il Matrimonio Segreto* at Hall Auditorium brought exactly half a dozen talented singer-actors together in a tightly-woven plot that left its characters and relationships in a quandary right before intermission.

The "secret" of the title is revealed to the audience at curtain rise: in a world where arranged marriages are the rule, Carolina (played by Isabella Lopez), the daughter of the wealthy merchant Geronimo, and Paolino (sung by Blake Harlson), a young man in the merchant's service, are emerging from under the covers of the prominent bed that occupied the upper level of Laura Carlson-Tarantowski's attractive set — having taken things into their own hands and gotten married on the sly. Only they — and we, the audience — know this.



Not long after, we meet the others: Geronimo himself (sung authoritatively by Brian Wacker), the eccentric English Count Robinson (played with hilarious gestures and tics by Evan Tiapula), Geronimo's older daughter Elisetta (acted formidably by Erica Thelen), and his widowed sister Fidalma (played stylishly by Genevive Dilan), all of whom have formed attractions or agendas that are at odds either with convention or the desires of others.



After spinning out these plot threads, *Cimarosa* allows Act I to end in a hopeless tangle, only to sort things out in Act II just in time for all to end well. If tragedies end in death, comedies end in marriage, and true to type, this one required the services of a notary, not a mortician, before the curtain came down. The secret marriage is revealed, the Count agrees to end his fascination with Carolina and wed Elisetta *comme il faut*, and things end happily enough.

Impressive singing and acting distinguished this production, supported by fine playing in the pit by the Oberlin Orchestra under the sure baton and wise pacing of Christopher Larkin. Jonathon Field's lively direction made the wordy libretto zip along, and recitatives were crisp and expressive. Effects like the dimming and focusing of lights when characters were giving asides worked beautifully, and little touches like the individual dance steps each character contributed to the bows at the end engendered smiles.



Now if we could only get Cimarosa to change up the endings of his arias — all of which begin to sound like boilerplate after a while! But the guy wrote 80 operas, so cutting a few corners is quite understandable.

Photos by Yevhen Gulenko.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com April 1, 2022.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)