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The Barber of Seville

Opera San Jose delivers slapstick fun in new production of 'Barber'

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by Scott MacClelland on Feb 17, 2011

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Cathleen Candia showed off her rich-toned mezzo-soprano voice for Opera San Jose's 'Barber of Seville.'

You may have heard the singular crack of a slapstick at the start of Ravel's Piano Concerto in G. But once begun, the slapstick in *The Barber of Seville* at Opera San Jose goes totally viral. Argentine-born stage director José Maria Condemi left no sight gag or comedic epiphany unflipped. The mind boggles at how the cast members in Sunday's matinee could have memorized Rossini's riotous score and Condemi's hilarious stagecraft and delivered them with such razor sharp timing. The full house rocked with laughter.

The first performance by this cast probably explains the tentative start of Act 1, with animated but sober podium leadership by conductor Bryan Nies. The same was true onstage until Adam Meza as Figaro sparked the audience with the celebrated "Largo al Factotum." Just before that, Chester Pidduck as Count Almaviva delivered a tense nasally tone in his opening aria. Here making his company debut, Pidduck's tenor soon

revealed itself as an ideal fit for Rossini, light, bright and agile. Moreover, he successfully disguised his voice (as well as his identity) in winning the eagerly willing Rosina's hand and thwarting her suspicious, manipulative warder, Doctor Bartolo. In that role, Torlef Borsting held the stage with swaggering authority, booming baritone and explosive rages over his failures.

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As Seville's all-around factotum, Figaro offers his clients every manner of fix that his kit and his imagination can come up with—for payment in gold. Of course, Almaviva has more gold to spend than anybody else, and the wily barber happily schemes with him to keep Bartolo from contracting marriage to his comely ward. This involves manipulating Bartolo's servants, Berta and Ambrogio, and Rosina's music teacher, Don Basilio. In yet another laugh-out-loud performance, Paul Murray's Basilio outlines for Bartolo a highly inflated plan to slander Almaviva. Add to all this an exposed love letter that threatens the anticipated happy outcome, a wild thunderstorm that advances the plotters' plot, a ladder to abduct Rosina from her second story balcony, and ... well, you get the point.

To Rosina, Cathleen Candia gave a rich-toned mezzo-soprano and a smoothly flexible character that variously pouts and purrs. In Scene 2, Almaviva (as Lindoro), makes a drunken scene in Bartolo's. A squad



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of soldiers investigating the ruckus surrounds the hapless Bartolo, freezing him into a "cold and unmoving" pose that gives everybody something to make fun of in the run up to the big Act 1 finale. Act 2 concentrates comedy, music and stage action even further, as Almaviva, now disguised as a substitute music teacher, makes more moves on Rosina while Figaro distracts Bartolo with a shave. Kindra Scharich as Berta won cheers for her one big solo declaiming that master and ward deserve each other. Matthew Antaky's clever set and Kent Dorsey's lighting worked in great complement to Condemni's stage action. The orchestra and choristers maintained the company's high standards.

The Barber Of Seville

Through Feb. 27

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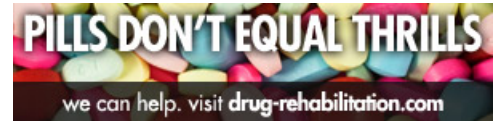
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