

Arts



Review: 'The Barber of Seville'



Opera San Jose hits all the right notes with classic production

November 16, 2016 By Tad Malone



OSJ's production of 'The Barber of Seville' is razor sharp.

Opera San Jose's latest production is not only one of the best-known operas ever written, it is also a bucket of laughs.

Debuted in 1817 at the Teatro Argentina in Rome, *The Barber of Seville* has enjoyed one of the most successful runs in opera history. It is currently ranked No. 9 among the most-performed operas worldwide. However, while its popularity makes it a go-to production for opera companies the world over, its familiarity (and its famed Bugs Bunny spoof) means that *Barber* is no guaranteed hit.

Thankfully, instead of employing novelties or flashy effects to keep the story fresh, Opera San Jose plunges into the *The Barber of Seville* without any frills—the intimate cast eager to bring the equally explosive and silly story to life.

The production opens to a public square where a servant, Fiorello (played with the perfect nuances of a minor character by Babatunde Akinboboye) corrals local musicians to help accompany his master in courting a woman. The master, Count Almaviva, is desperate to win the romantic favor of Rosina, who is already attached to marry an elderly doctor, Bartolo. Enter Figaro, an enterprising conman who has talked his way into a job as a hairdresser. After meeting Almaviva, he decides to help him win Rosina's favor. What follows is the quirky quest of a rag-tag duo hell-bent on capturing Rosina's heart in an increasingly hilarious and perplexing romp.

Kirk Dougherty shines as Count Almaviva. He is both genteel and ludicrous in his pursuit of Rosina. Vocally, Dougherty's mid-range tenor reaches and holds very high notes with crystal clarity. Rosina, played by Renee Rapiere, is equally brash and silly, giving her character a refreshing self-awareness not seen in the others, save Figaro, to whom she most closely relates. Her voice is a deep and smoky mezzo-soprano, though she displays a wide tonal dexterity. The doctor, Bartolo, is played by Valerian Ruminski, who convincingly plays the part



of the older and perpetually paranoid male suitor; his mutterings and patronizing comments are complemented by Ruminski's deep baritone voice.

The standout performance belongs to Matthew Hanscom as Figaro. Demonstrating easy command over his powerful, yet flexible, voice, Hanscombe focuses on channeling the comedy through his face. His expressions—hilarious and cartoonish—are incredibly emotive and clearly capture Figaro's passionate but lackadaisical personality.

A razor-sharp sense of comedy is imperative in producing *The Barber of Seville*, and Opera San Jose sees it through with tremendous success. Using everything from sight gags and running jokes, to emphatic repetition, *The Barber of Seville's* inherent silliness and levity is solidified. Given a little room, everyone in the opera—rightfully—gets a little goofy. But simultaneously, everyone in *The Barber of Seville*, from lead to bit player—when given the chance—shines to great effect.

The Barber of Seville

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