

**Lyrical Laughs- Granite State Opera presents
Mozart's comic 'Marriage of Figaro'**

By Victoria Shouldis for the Concord Monitor

Consider the plight of poor Figaro. It's his wedding day, but his intended, Susannah, is being pursued vigorously by the crafty and powerful Count, who seems remarkably unencumbered by his own marital vows to the Countess. He owes a ton of money to house maid Marcellina, who has decided that Figaro should marry her as a means of debt repayment. And Figaro's friend, Cherubino, has been sent off to serve in the military as punishment for his girl-chasing ways.

What's a poor valet like Figaro to do?

Well if you are David Cushing, a bass with the Boston Lyric opera and the Granite State Opera's choice for the role of Figaro, the answer is simple: You sing.

Cushing joins several familiar faces in this weekend's Granite State Opera production of *Le Nozze di Figaro*- that's *The Marriage of Figaro* for anyone not fluent in Italian - at the Capitol Center for the Arts.

Le Nozze di Figaro takes place in Seville, Spain, in the 18th century. It was Mozart's follow-up to *The Barber of Seville* and many of the characters, including the Count and Countess, are holdovers from *Barber*. But years have passed since the action that made up *Barber*, and *Figaro* offers a Count and Countess older and more disenchanting than they were in *Barber*. *Figaro* offers conflict among the wealthy and the penniless, cases of mistaken identity, and of course, a planned wedding day for faithful servant Figaro.

"There's tons of roles out there I used to dream of doing, and this is one of them," said Cushing. "Mozart is great because in his works everybody really gets a chance to shine."

Mozart first penned *Figaro* in 1786, and since then it has been performed in Italian, German and English on stages throughout the world, remaining popular across generations. A funny-with-serious-overtones story - technically, it's called an opera buffa, or comic opera - *Le Nozze di Figaro* offers a comic take on love and betrayal and loyalty that is as at home on the opera stage as it would be on reality television.

The production includes a cast of more than 20, a 28-piece orchestra and a couple dozen well-thumbed softcover Music of Mozart books. During rehearsals in a small

hall in the Capitol Center earlier this week, principals David Kravitz and Theresa Cincione (the Count and Countess) and Heather Parker (bride-to-be Susannah) joined voices in delicate harmony even as they portrayed disharmony and intrigue in "Susannah, Or Via, Sortite," which translates, roughly, into, "Susannah, Come Out Here Now."

"This is a classic story - it's a romance, it's a comedy - it's the story of a guy on the morning of his wedding day who needs to spend the whole day making sure things work out right," said artistic director and musical conductor Philip Lauriat, who has been at the helm of the Granite State Opera since its launch five years ago. "Mozart created a timeless story and the music moves things along, with drama and great passion. You can't help but be drawn in."

Although sung in the original Italian, the cast makes use of Mozart's expressive music to convey the potent emotion of each scene. Returning to the Concord stage are Kravitz and Cincione, who starred in the GSO's *The Magic Flute* last January.

During the rehearsal soprano Cincione walked the room in energized bare feet, trying to find the right balance of voice and orchestra in the bustling setting.

"*Figaro* is one of those productions that's accessible - and there is always a ring of truth in the story," said Cincione, a veteran of the Metropolitan Opera. "You look at my character, the Countess, and you might wonder why she stays with the Count when he can be so awful to her. But like a lot of people in her position, she chooses to remember their happier times."

Mezzo-soprano and Pembroke resident Janice Edwards rounds out the cast as Marcellina, the housekeeper who connives to keep Figaro from Susannah. When she was 12, Edwards's aunt and uncle took her to a Metropolitan Opera touring company production of Tosca in her native Atlanta. That started Edwards on her own path toward the stage. That path has included stops in New York and Europe.

"I saw that first show and I got the bug - even as a little girl I was just transcended by the music," said Edwards, who teaches voice privately and at Plymouth State University. "And this show is just as appealing - Mozart was a master in his ability to mix humor and humanity."

Cushing - that is, Figaro - agrees.

"It's the story - what a story!" said Cushing, "It's a story of good triumphing over evil. And it's beautiful music. Period."