

Reviewed By: Paul Joseph Walkowski for OperaOnline.us

THE STORY:

All the servant Figaro wants to do is marry the housemaid Susanna. Problems arise when the Count, Figaro's master, says he would like to exercise the right of "first night" with Figaro's bride-to-be. This announcement doesn't sit well with anyone, including the Countess, or the future Mr. and Mrs. Add to this mixture a little confusion about just who Figaro really is, and stir it around with the amorous intentions of an older woman, Marcellina, who has designs on Figaro herself, and who intends, with the help of a wealthy doctor to snare him into marrying her, and you begin to see the "problems" plaguing our young groom. Or so you think you do. Figaro turns out to be the long lost son of Marcellina and Dr. Bartolo. This rules out any relationship there. The Count turns out to be not so bad a guy after all when he realizes that he really does love his wife, and reunites with her. And Figaro and Susanna, with the help of a page, Cherubino, end up happily-ever-after.

WHERE I VIEWED IT:

The Capitol Center for the Arts in Concord, New Hampshire is a suitable, acoustically friendly forum for opera that is roomy and easily accessible to the Interstate. The pit is level with the first row of chairs, meaning there is no orchestra pit, but the stage is big and expansive enough that once lit, the presence of the orchestra players is not really much of a distraction at all – and to the extent it is, it appears to be so for only several rows back.

THE PERFORMANCE:

As noted in a previous review of this opera, "Le Nozze di Figaro" is the eighteenth of Mozart's twenty-two operas, and has been hailed by many as one of his best in the opera buffa tradition. It also contains another one of those "gender-bending" roles where a major character, written by Mozart for a young boy named "Cherubino" is sung by a soprano -- a popular idea in the late 1700s but one which, I think, needs updating today. Having made that (by now an almost obligatory caveat when I review this opera) there is nothing in the way of criticism that can be leveled at Granite State Opera's lively and colorful production of Mozart's "Le Nozze di Figaro" performed at the Capitol Center for the Arts in Concord New Hampshire, November 19 and 21st. I attended the Sunday afternoon November 21st performance of this fine production with a house that was about three-quarters full and I was, like everyone else in the audience, seduced by the color, the music, the performances and the sheer delight that this fine cast and superbly directed orchestra made of this well-known favorite. Tip of the hat to conductor and artistic director Philip Lauriat for making a thirty piece orchestra sound like sixty, and for delivering a solid three hours of truly enjoyable music that came off without a hitch. Well done! On a visual level this was a production with economical and imaginative set design by Cristina Tedesco that was lit exceptionally well by Mark Lanks and outfitted superbly by Carlos Ramy (costumes) and Jason Allen (wigs). The stage direction, too, by Sharon Daniels, moved the players around nicely and kept audience members focused on what was going on on stage – and there was a lot. Indeed, maybe it was the fact that the theater is small and homey, but this production seemed to touch the audience in a way few performances I have seen have. It must have been a combination of both the youthful attractiveness of the singers and the witty and exuberant nature of the libretto and music that cast such a powerful spell. But a spell was cast, and Granite State Opera scored a winner here casting its spell far and wide.

The inexhaustible bass-baritone David Cushing sang the role of Figaro and, as he has in other productions, proved that he has a happy talent for not only mastering a role, but absorbing it into his being when he takes it on. His voice was consistently strong throughout, but not just strong, for strong without expressiveness is little more than yelling – and this fine singer doesn't need to yell. He has good command of the full range and when he sings, that range and depth surfaces naturally. He was captivating in this role. Equally mesmerizing was David Kravitz as Count Almaviva. Mr. Kravitz not only has a fine voice, but he has a commanding presence on stage. His Count was humorous and expressive and his delivery was clear and crisp through the full three hours. Bass-baritone Dan Sullivan as Dr. Bartolo gave us a delightful interpretation of Figaro's long-lost father, and proved he has a good sense of comedy, movement and timing. His is another bass-baritone that was a Verdi favorite, delivered with clarity and apparent effortless affection. The stand out male performer in this opera, however, was Darren Anderson, singing the part of the obsequious, groveling, music master, Don Basilio. I watched him when he was both singing and in the secondary character role, and he had every swish, every pucker of the aristocrat's butt-kissing lips, every flick of the handkerchief, and a hilarious method of standing with hand on hip, full body propped up by one leg that just cracked me up. A better suck-up you couldn't find as he

chased the Count around stage nodding his approval of everything the count said and did. Wonderful! For this, this fine singer and actor gets a gold star. His performance was brilliant; his voice was strong and expressive, and his stage presence was commanding – even when there were prettier faces to look at.

On the female side there is a wealth of talent to commend here. First, kudos to soprano Heather Parker for her role as Susanna, the would-be bride of Figaro. I saw her perform in Opera North's "Midsummer Night's Dream" and she did a superlative job there as she did here. Ms. Parker exhibited just the right amount of gutsy perkiness and sensual "come hither" the role required, and sang up a storm to boot. She has a good stage presence coupled with a consistently strong voice that is bound to pay dividends as she moves along in her career. Theresa Cicone as the Countess, gave an equally compelling and consistently strong performance, displaying nice control and acting throughout the full three hours, as did Paula Murrhiy as the youthful Cherubino, the Count's lustful page. Ms. Murrhiy carried herself well in the role of Cherubino and had some of the mannerisms of that age down, too. This is a tough role for a woman, especially for a woman with as fine a soprano voice as Ms. Murrhiy, but she carried herself well and gave a strong performance that sounded great. Mezzo-soprano Janice Edwards as Marcellina, Figaro's pursuer/mother gave us a fine performance too and maintained good voice throughout and contributed a fair amount of talent, helping make this strong ensemble effort so successful.

All in all, this production of "Le Nozze di Figaro" has to be viewed as a feather in the cap for Granite State Opera. It's a demanding opera that requires good timing and endurance – both from the orchestra and singers. There was plenty of both in supply Sunday afternoon.