

LYRIC OPERA

KANSAS CITY

THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

by W. A. Mozart

NOVEMBER 5, 9, 11 AND 13, 2016

Beautiful and comic, Lyric Opera's 'Figaro' hits all the right notes

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By Libby Hanssen

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The Lyric Opera of Kansas City, in a co-production with Opera Philadelphia, San Diego Opera and Palm Beach Opera, has created a "Marriage of Figaro" that is as beautiful as it is humorous, as sophisticated as it is raunchy, and the premiere performance Saturday in the Kauffman Theatre was as pertinent to present day society as it was more than two centuries ago.

With Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's brilliant score and witty libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte, this situational comedy masterpiece renewed the immense satisfaction in witnessing a rich, loosely moral, selfish, self-serving seducer, who bullies, bluffs and blusters to get his way, get his come-uppance by the hands of two strong and clever women.

With an innovative creative team and agile, legitimately funny cast, this production, directed by Stephen Lawless, meshed an 18th-century aesthetic with modern sensibilities, delivered with excellent staging, a natural flow to the action, and some stunning visual effects. Comedic capers and innuendo, too, were handled well, though there was far more spanking than would otherwise be anticipated. Laughter, even guffaws, rippling through the audience with frequency.

Ryan McAdams conducted the Kansas City Symphony in a crisp and nuanced Overture, the curtain up to reveal a story-high sculpted tree decked with bas-relief cameos. The orchestra sounded clean and lively throughout, with the added interest of the fortepiano.

Major kudos go to Leslie Travers, whose richly detailed, character-defining costume designs were sumptuous, his regal set design crafty and versatile. (Costumes and sets were made in Kansas City.) Lighting designed by Thomas C. Hase was heavily psychological, though mainly effective.

This show was marvelously cast, all fine actors and impressive singers. Adam Lau's Figaro was a smart, convincing character, easy to root for, a resounding voice without becoming ponderous. The Count, Edward Parks, was handsome, sleazy and spoilt, his commanding voice and presence eventually eroded, his authority stripped away.

Maureen McKay, as Susannah, the quick-witted, fiery bride, challenged their schemes and bravado and jealousies. Her "Deh vieni, non tardar" was exquisite.

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The only character to evolve, really, was the Countess, from neglected and disrespected wife to a woman in control. Katie Van Kooten played this transformation from sorrow to strength in “Dove sono i bei momenti” with subtlety and determination, her voice powerful and richly timbred, her dress resplendent.

Samantha Gossard was very cute as the women-crazed Cherubino, awkward, teasing and persistent, with a nice, dusky timbre for this role. Arthur Woodley (Bartolo) and Margaret Gawrysiak (Marcellina) were well suited with distinctive patter, while Steven Cole’s conniving, sniveling Basilio made me wish they’d not cut his aria. April Martin was the flirtatious Barbarina and Rhys Lloyd Talbot was the bumbling Antonio.

There were discrepancies between orchestra and singers at times, and a few instances when the instruments played over the voices, though just as often the audience’s laughter obscured some recitative, and miscued lighting marred the Act II finale, while other technical gaffs revealed unfortunate opening-night flubs.

But these moments aside, this was an appealing show: the singing excellent, the comedy well-timed and the production first class.