

LYRIC OPERA

KANSAS CITY

THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

by W. A. Mozart

NOVEMBER 5, 9, 11 AND 13, 2016

“Figaro’s” triumphant return

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By Jessie Riggins



The Lyric Opera makes an exciting return to a classic audience favorite, featuring new faces to the Muriel Kauffman Theatre stage.

The Lyric Opera’s new production of *The Marriage of Figaro* has many in the Kansas City opera scene abuzz with the excitement of new beginnings. Stephen Lawless is making his directorial debut with the company; this is conductor Ryan McAdams’ debut. Four principal cast members are also making their debut, including bass Adam Lau in the title role.

The Lyric Opera last performed this, the most famous of Mozart’s opera buffa works, in their previous venue. It was their “goodbye” performance to the venue that held their namesake, the Lyric Opera House. That production was a bold, modern take on Mozart’s classic themes, adding many more layers to an already complex plot.

This production, set in the way Mozart had intended it to be, is fresh and exciting, and will appeal to those who may have felt adrift by the Company’s last production, while still catching the eye of those that enjoy slightly out of the box takes on old classics. This adaptation has embodied the essence of Mozart’s crude sense of humor: raunchy, tongue-in-cheek, and a side-splitting delight for its audience.

Set Designer/Costume Designer Leslie Travers is also making his Lyric Opera debut. His magnificent set, build here in Kansas City, will be seen nationally as it travels to the home venues of the three other opera companies co-producing this production: Opera Philadelphia, San Diego Opera, and Palm Beach Opera. Going too in-depth here would be a disservice to opera lovers planning to attend this show (as all should). This set, both simple and complex at the same time, becomes as important as the characters on stage themselves. Without any spoilers, it’s safe to say the transformations are mesmerizing.

Conductor Ryan McAdams calls this opera one of his “favorite pieces of art.” The well-balanced orchestra was a triumph, from the first note of the well-known overture to the very last bow. Mozart’s command of orchestral writing, paired with his expertise on writing for vocalists, leads to intersecting melody lines that help to drive the drama forward. In a time well before the leitmotifs of Wagner, Mozart gives each character their own individual motifs, continually developing them throughout. The use of a pianoforte is also noted, rather than a harpsichord.

The pianoforte allows for dynamic contrast, essential for the wide range of emotions felt by each of these characters, and often at a moment's notice.

Along with bass Adam Lau, several other cast members are making their Lyric Opera debut. Edward Parks' Count Almaviva is a picture-perfect villain. His rich baritone will unnerve even the purest of hearts, exemplified in his duet with Maureen McKay's Susanna, "Crudel, perché finora" ("Cruel girl, why do you make me wait so long"). Lau's Figaro was polished and controlled, and shines in the vulnerable "Aprite un po' quegli occhi" ("Open your eyes").

Reprising her role from the 2011 Lyric Opera production is Katie Van Kooten as Countess Almaviva. She is extraordinary in this role, as if Mozart himself had written it for her. As before, she was vocally unmatched in this cast. Her poise and grace, along with scenes of extreme sadness and tragic betrayal, seem the perfect ingredients for this soprano. Van Kooten's "Porgi, amor" was breathtakingly effortless.

The comedic aspect is heavily accented in this production, especially with Margaret Gawrysiak's Marcellina and Arthur Woodley's Doctor Bartolo leading the charge, sometimes playing off of other characters on stage, sometimes breaking the fourth wall with the audience, but always resulting in outbursts of laughter from the crowd. It is almost to the point of "campy" at times, but walks that fine line without going off the deep end.

Samantha Gossard was brilliant in her role of Cherubino. Not only did her mezzo-soprano's beautiful range and agility shine, but her comedic timing and gestures, as well as athleticism as Cherubino continually dives, jumps out of windows, does anything he can to get away from the ill-tempered Count and into the arms of his beloved Countess. Gossard was perfectly awkward during Cherubino's aria "Non so più cosa son" ("I no longer know what I am"), with well-placed props adding to his comedic misery.

There no doubt why audiences keep returning to *The Marriage of Figaro*, making it one of the top ten most performed operas of all time. While new adaptations are appreciated by some, a refreshing return to classic style, as is done magnificently with this production, remind us why we fall in love with this story time and time again.