

Classical Music

Classical Review

Plenty to Like in Skylight's 'Marriage of Figaro'

BY RICK WALTERS

Distinguished opera composer Dominick Argento once said to me, "The characters in *The Marriage of Figaro* are so rich, in both text and music, that I know them better than I know my own family." There are plenty of reasons to see the new production of Mozart's opera (sung in English) at Skylight Opera Theatre.

Bill Theisen's direction keeps the characters clear and the complex story moving forward. I wanted more unexplored character depth at times. Theisen has made much of the connection between Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, produced at Skylight this fall, and *Figaro*. This is a stretch. Except for being based on related Beaumarchais plays with some continuing characters, the two operas are completely different animals. Carol Blanchard's costumes are wonderfully rich. I liked Van Santvoord's multifaceted, architectural sets for Acts III and IV.

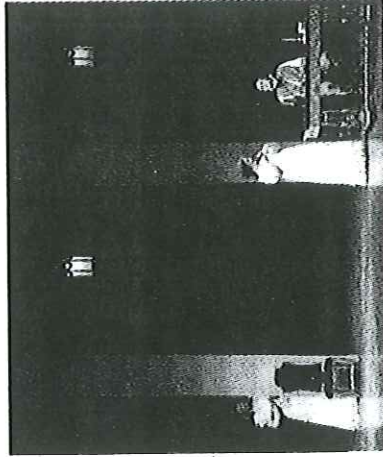
Usually an oversexed hothead, barely able to contain his rage at any threat to his authority and desires, Kurt Ollmann instead plays Count Almaviva as a cooler tempered aristocrat, more philosophical and bewildered than furious. It was

a fascinating twist. Soprano Tanya Kruse's earnest vulnerability matches the spurned Rosina. She conjured the best singing and most touching emotion of the evening in her Act III aria, and in her brief lines of forgiveness at the end of the opera.

Soprano Alicia Berneche gives an unusually earthy and flirtatious spin to Susanna, a soubrette character usually played lighter than air. Andrew Wilkowske is a charming, energetic, vocally pleasing Figaro. The role is best suited to a slightly lower, darker voice, but he handles it well. Diane Lane presents a credible and well-sung Cherubino, if sometimes slightly uncomfortable physically.

Fashions in Mozart performance practice have changed, but I found some of the more elaborate added vocal decorations to be a little much. The best reduced orchestrations at

Skylight have been inconspicuous. This was not one of them. All string parts were played by piano, with five wind players. Things started off on the wrong foot by replacing the famous overture with music not from the opera. A more tasteful choice would be to skip the overture altogether.



The Marriage of Figaro. Photos by Katherine Bieri

Classical Drama