

- ThirdCoast Digest - <http://thirdcoastdigest.com> -

Review: The Skylight's Marriage of Figaro

Posted By [Tom Strini](#) On January 31, 2010 @ 12:18 am In [Arts & Culture 4](#), [Music](#), [Theater](#) | [3 Comments](#)

How do you know when a company is doing right by Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*?



[1]

Left to right: Andrew Wilkowske, Tanya Kruse Ruck, Kurt Ollmann and Alicia Berneche.

Are you laughing? Is everyone else laughing? If so, it's probably right. This weekend, The Skylight Opera Theatre opened the funniest *Marriage* I've ever seen — or, for that matter, heard. This cast knows how to deliver a punchline in recitative in English, and that is a rare and remarkable thing.

Alicia Berneche, as Susanna, and Andrew Wilkowske, as Figaro, were at the heart of it. They inhabited their characters and their relationship with an easy, playful physicality. These lovers are kidders, a fun and funny couple. They're smart enough not only to see the craziness around them at the Almoviva compound, but to get a kick out of it. The two singer-actors are so

comfortable with each other that they can punctuate tricky duets with quick kisses and invest a slap in the face and a pratfall with rhythm.

That rhythm rose as much from Mozart's music as from characters, plot and dialog. Berneche's easy brilliance with Mozart's melodies and ornaments was a joy to behold and said a lot about Susanna. Wilkowske did not merely sing, he probed and quipped and threw away lines with the music, and did it in a big, round, satisfying sound.

Wilkowske and Berneche understood how Mozart embedded comedy in the music, and so did Diane Lane, as Cherubino, and Kurt Ollmann, as the Count, whose philandering puts the farce in motion. Lane's singing surged as crazily as Cherubino's libido. Ollmann's Count was languid and sly when hatching his schemes and blustery or deflated in the face of opposition or in bewilderment.

The comic interactions of all the above, plus Thomas J. Weis (Bartolo), Susan Wiedmeyer (Barbarina), Ryan Matthew Porter (Antonio), Jennifer Clark (Marcellina) and William Lavonis (Basilio/Don Curzio) played out with the perfectly timed wackiness of a flawless [Rube Goldberg](#) [2] set-up.

The rhythm of it, again, rose from the music, beautifully paced by music director Jamie Johns. From the keyboard, he led the singers and a wind quintet. (The reduction of the orchestra score is completely charming in its sound and its comic qualities).

The Marriage of Figaro is a lot of fun, but it's not merely fun. The moral depth of it comes from the betrayed and humiliated Countess. Tanya Kruse Ruck played and sang the role with heartbreaking nobility tempered by a touching longing for a man's touch.

Director Bill Theisen assembled a smart, talented cast and gathered them into a whole. Beyond that, he managed to draw an arc that began last fall, in his Skylight production of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. That arc stretches to the final curtain of *The Marriage of Figaro*.