



# Intrigue, disguise and the damnation of ageing: Rossini's *Barbiere* in Zurich

Von Sarah Batschelet, 16 Mai 2019

Aspiring operatic voices of the renowned Zurich International Opera Studio recently premiered a new production of Gioachino Rossini's popular *Il barbiere di Siviglia* in the nearby city of Winterthur. The two-act opera tells the story of an energetic barber, Figaro, who makes cunning attempts to help Count Almaviva prise the beautiful Rosina away from her lecherous old guardian, Dr Bartolo. Rossini's work is based on an eponymous play by Pierre Beaumarchais, who actually wrote three plays around the figure of Figaro, this being the first.



Dean Murphy (Figaro) and Sinead O'Kelly (Rosina)

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Johannes Pölgutter's new production is strictly frontal in orientation. The singers often line up side-to-side and gesticulate to the audience almost as often as they do among themselves. Nikolaus Webern's stage design also underscores that: intermittently, some of the action transpires in front of a huge corrugated metal curtain that signs "stay out" and carries a couple of Banksy-like figures. The metal is raised to reveal the elderly Bartolo's residence, some half-dozen ship or railway containers of various lengths and widths, which reveal themselves as storage bays and rooms of the doctor's home. Bartolo's coveted collections of antiques and knick-knacks are stored in them, and selectively opened and closed, but as the singers climb up and down and in and out of the containers, they are challenged by chutes and ladders of an unsettling kind. The staging's motivation may have been pushing the action forward, but the stage itself demanded tremendous agility and sense of balance on the part of singers in addition to their vocal skills.

Of the leads, two voices stole the show. Dean Murphy's superb baritone gave real heft to the slick and natty Figaro, whose self-infatuation, given his clever schemes, could somehow be forgiven. The American's articulation and carriage as a modish sunny boy saw the audience in his hand from the start, and his character's preening and trendy blue hair made us love him even more. His vocal delivery of the popular "Largo al factotum" aria in which he lauds his own praises, couldn't have been more convincing: "Everyone wants me," he sings, "women, youngsters, oldies, the golden-haired..." Figaro's is a tremendously vibrant presence, the real driver of the action and Murphy brought the house lights on.



Richard Walshe (Bartolo), Justyna Bluj (Berta) and Sinead O'Kelly (Rosina)

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So too, did Sinead O'Kelly, the superb Irish mezzo-soprano, ideally cast as Rosina. Nothing seemed to get in the way of her consistently clear and flawless delivery, even from a narrow perch five metres above the stage, for example, or in the racing tempi the score repeatedly demanded. Seeming entirely at home in her role, O'Kelly brought energy, flippancy and vocal brilliance to the stage.

In other of the leads, Leonardo Sánchez sang Almaviva, not without a tad of difficulty in the highest register at the start. That said, the young Mexican tenor went on to shine in exchanges with the other principals, and had pep and stamina that nicely fleshed out his role. British bass-baritone Richard Walshe was convincingly transformed into the lecherous Dr Bartolo, adding a good 50 years to his own age. Despite the demands of "ageing", his voice had great kick and colour, and he consistently met the challenges of Italian at warp-speed. So too, bass Wojciech Rasiak sang Don Basilio, Rosina's music teacher, admirably.



The cast of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*

© Herwig Prammer

Under the seasoned direction of Ernst Raffelsberger, the Zurich Opera chorus added a dense musical texture to select scenes. Further, under conductor Antonino Fogliani's animated baton, the fine orchestra musicians of the Musikkollegium Winterthur gave a precise and airy performance, Enrico Cicconofri's fortepiano adding another sparkling layer.

Finally, Janina Ammon's costumes showed great imagination. As Bartolo's ward, for example, Rosina wears cream-puff like silk skirts and petticoats and a coiled Rococo wig. Having confessed her love for Almaviva, though, she changes into a Mickey-Mouse nightie, gets a streak of neon color in her hair and becomes the ultimate modern maiden. Ammon retains the lace cuffs and waistcoat vocabulary of the bygone era for the opera's oldies, but even the downtrodden maid Berta (Justyna Bluj) ultimately ditches her badly worn boots for a pair of new, rubber-soled running shoes. And her endearing complaint in Act 2 was a wonderful surprise. Hitherto, Berta had been portrayed somewhat like a female Quasimodo. Yet here, one suddenly realised that she, the only other female in this production's cast, also had a secure and gifted voice. That's just as it should be, for hands down, the IOS is geared to young singers of fine merit and talents.

★★★★☆ ?

KARTENVERKAUF

VERANSTALTUNG ANZEIGEN

Rezensierte Veranstaltung: Theater Winterthur, Zürich, am 15 Mai 2019

PROGRAMM

Rossini, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (Der Barbier von Sevilla)

DARSTELLER

Oper Zürich

Antonino Fogliani, *Dirigent*

Johannes Pölgutter, *Regisseur*

Nikolaus Webern, *Bühnenbild*

Janina Ammon, *Kostüme*

Sinead O'Kelly, *Rosina*

Leonardo Sánchez, *Graf Almaviva*

Dean Murphy, *Figaro*

Richard Walshe, *Dr Bartolo*

Justyna Bluj, *Berta*

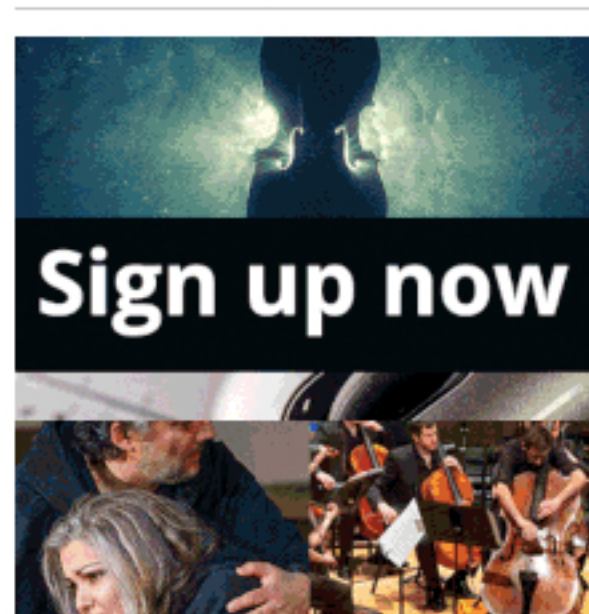
Thomas Erlank, *Ambrogio*

Wojciech Rasiak, *Don Basilio*

Kim Jungrae Noah, *Fiorello*

Musikkollegium Winterthur

Zusatzchor der Oper Zürich



WEITERE OPER KRITIKEN

Rameaus *Hippolyte et Aricie* fasziniert in Zürich

Christoph Wurzel, 21st May

In Zürich zeigen die Regisseurin Jetske Mijnsen und die Barockspezialistin Emmanuelle Haïm welche Dramatik in Jean-Philippe Rameaus Oper *Hippolyte et Aricie* steckt.

★★★★★ MEHR

Manon als Influencerin der Belle Epoque in Zürich

Isabella Steppan, 22nd April

Bildgewaltig inszeniert Floris Visser Jules Massenets Oper; Elsa Dreisig und Piotr Beczala erobern als unglückseliges Liebespaar Herzen und Ohren.

★★★★☆ MEHR

Così fan tutte erfrischend in Zürich

Sarah Batschelet, 5th June

In Mozarts fabelhafter Oper *Così fan tutte* artet das, was als harmlose Wette beginnt, schnell zur Katastrophe aus.

★★★★☆ MEHR

Unglücksraben: Barrie Koskys innovativer *Macbeth*

Sarah Batschelet, 4th April

Barrie Koskys neuer *Macbeth* ist frei von Schnickschnack, grellen Kostümen und Triviale. Er ist ein Fest der Vorstellungskraft, moderne Oper in Bestform.

★★★★★ MEHR

WEITERE KRITIKEN...

KRITIKEN VON

Musikkollegium Winterthur

Richard Walshe

Oper Zürich

Nikolaus Webern

Sinead O'Kelly

Thomas Erlank

Zusatzchor der Oper Zürich

Dean Murphy

Antonino Fogliani

*Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (Der Barbier von Sevilla)

Gioachino Rossini