

The Day



CLO Does Justice To Mozart With Stellar 'Figaro'

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New London – Delights are too often fleeting, but not so Friday night on State Street. For three delicious hours, the pleasures of Mozart's "Le Nozze di Figaro," presented by Connecticut Lyric Opera, delighted a nearly full house at the First Congregational Church – and, it seemed, the excellent cast itself.

Few, if any, stage pieces can match Mozart's melodious farce of botched seductions and mistaken identities for unabated brilliance, and the Lyric Opera cast seemed to revel in it. For nearly three hours, the score's musical momentum, variety and inventiveness never flags. And, remarkably enough, through the three hours, the vocal power of the ensemble here Friday seemed to grow.

Now in its fourth season, the company assembled a nearly ideal cast to populate the tiny but functional stage in the church. The intimacy of the setting, much more to the scale of the stages of Mozart's day than modern theaters, allowed the singers to focus on technique and beauty, not volume.

Artistic director Adrian Mackiewicz led the 13-piece orchestra from the continuo and, aside from one nasty train wreck in a transition of the long Act 2 ensemble sequence, had an ideal sense of pacing and sensitivity to the singers. The stage direction by David Jaffe – his first venture into opera – emphasized characterization by each character, with the sort of broad asides that befit a farce. Yet Jaffe showed his sensitivity to Mozart's singular score in moments such as Figaro's Act 4 aria "Aprite un po quegli occhi," in which Figaro rails against his new bride's presumed infidelity. As he repeats the line that everyone knows women are unfaithful, a horn flourish from the pit stuck some musical horns on Figaro, a musical pun about cuckoldry, and Jaffe had his Figaro spin and point an accusing finger at the orchestra.

As the carefree Figaro, baritone Colin Brady was ebullient in voice and manner. Like all of the principals, he projected a vibrato-free, unaffected

vocal purity. His bride, Susannah, sung by soprano Deborah Selig, was the star throughout. In ensemble and in arias, her sense of line and nuance were matched only by the sheer beauty of her tone and power of projection. As the blustery Count, who spends the opera alternately chasing Susannah and trying to placate the Contessa, baritone Timothy Hill was a consummate actor, crucial to the ensembles both vocally and as the dramatic foil to all the trickery.

The evening's finest moments belonged to the company's resident soprano star, Jurate Svedaite-Waller, in the role of the wistful Contessa. The role is graced with two gorgeous moments, the Act 2 cavatina "Porgi, amor, qualche ristoro" and the Act 3 "Dove sono," both full of longing and sorrow. In both, vedaite-Waller employed a gorgeous messa di voce to subtly taper long, fluid lines and transfix the audience. Her heart-wrenching "Dove sono" was one of those moments of opera magic, when a palpable electricity filled the room.

As the love-struck page boy Cherubino, mezzo-soprano Hayden DeWitt was a crowd-pleaser. A specialist in trouser roles, she was antic in her characterization and strong-voiced in the ensembles. As Marcellina, the conniving would-be wife of Figaro, Margaret Tyler was a scene-stealer with her perfect sense of comic timing, as pinpoint subtle as DeWitt was over-the-top. And as the servant Barbarina, soprano Jonelyn Langenstein was just plain lovely to the ear and the eye.

An opera so full of memorable moments almost defies recounting. From Figaro's military send-off for Cherubino, to the famous Act 2 ensembles in the Contessa's quarters, to the brilliant letter scene soprano duet, to the Act 4 solo showpieces for each principal, this "Figaro" fulfilled the high standards of one of the greatest of all theater works.

Seldom has the final sublime ensemble "Ah! tutti contenti" ("Let us all be happy") rung so true.