

VIEWPOINT: A Composer's Perspective by Jeff Gibbens

WHY FIGARO? The character of Figaro, the former Barber of Seville, is a prototype for the modern person — in the 1780s, the revolutionary bourgeois. When Figaro becomes part of Almaviva's household, he loses his independence. Omniscient, he is now a servant, and his slide is capped by the threat of Almaviva to compromise his bride on their wedding day.

In this closed social hierarchy, outside of the urban environment where Figaro flourished, his fiancée Susanna is an essential ally, because she has access to more information than any other character and can handle it with resourcefulness. The other principal characters — the Count, the Countess, and the page Cherubino — command a mixture of sympathy and skepticism as to their motives: the Count due to his vacillation between jealousy and desire (both driven by his wish to control the household); the Countess as a victim both of her husband and her own immature emotions; and the page who charms but behaves like an ass.

In spite of the many cultural antecedents to *Le nozze di Figaro*, including *commedia dell'arte* and the plays of Goldoni and Beaumarchais, we know these characters in their spatial, temporal, and emotional dimensions through Mozart's music. Although there are significant moments of sustained lyricism, the vocal parts are built up from short motives in *parlando* style, and the rhetoric of the characters is underscored by constant give-and-take with the orchestra, for example the depiction in the winds of the Count's and Countess's bells ringing in Figaro and Susanna's duet, "Se a caso madama la notte ti chiama."

"If you are poor but clever, arm yourself with patience, and work. If you do not grow rich, you will at least remain a clever man. If you are an ass, but wealthy, take advantage of your good fortune and be lazy. If you do not become poor, you will at least remain an ass."

—W.A.Mozart (*Deutsch, Mozart: a documentary biography* (1965), p. 268)

WHY MOZART? Without his operas and works for connoisseurs, like the set of quartets dedicated to Haydn completed shortly before the preparation of *Le nozze di Figaro*, Mozart's reputation might be buried by his extraordinary success as a "poor and clever" provider of practical music. His greater success was to have supported his family, as difficult as that was, to have satisfied contemporary taste, and to have secured a legacy as an independent modern artist for which Handel is the only real precedent.

We know that Mozart was attracted by the Universalism of the Enlightenment, which led him to Freemasonry, and we know that he chafed under the subordination expected of a musician in Central Europe, but we care about this through the filter of his operas where he excels as a creator of fantasy grounded in the convincing portrayal of reality. This particular excellence of his might be inferred from his symphonies or piano concerti, but is clear only because of the compositional opportunities afforded by opera. So the relevance of the story of Figaro becomes the test of Mozart's relevance, while Mozart's music confirms the continued relevance of opera itself.

Karlos Moser Wants to Celebrate 85 with You at Music Hall on November 8

Karlos and Melinda Moser have assembled their fellow players with the **New Hyperion Jazz Babies**: Rebecca Mackie on violin, Eric Ellis on clarinet, and Ben Ferris on bass, to celebrate Karlos' reaching 85 in fine style. They will be joined by Opera Props fellowship winners Nicole Heinen and Fabian Qamar, a mystery guest from Fleet, England, and six others to finish the show with several long-time Hyperion favorites.

Opera Props will help the celebrations by providing a reception afterwards, partly to recall its own founding 35 years ago by Karlos and another set of friends, and partly to help this fundraiser for the MKMOTF (Melinda & Karlos Moser Opera Ticket Fund). Tickets are available at the School of Music's box office, \$30 for general admission; or \$85 for donors — who will be invited to the reception on stage immediately after the performance to meet the musicians and congratulate Karlos.

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The Marriage of Figaro, Mozart–daPonte's Masterpiece of Comedy and Intrigue

After the unprecedented success of last spring's sold-out run of *The Magic Flute*, University Opera will present four performances of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. This new production will be directed by returning interim opera director, **David Ronis**, and **James Smith** will conduct the UW Symphony Orchestra.

The opera will be performed in Italian with projected English supertitles in Music Hall, 925 Bascom Mall, during October 23-27 on Friday, Saturday, and Tuesday evenings at 7:00 pm. (*not 7:30, note!*), with the Sunday matinee at 3:00 pm.



The Marriage of Figaro was the first of Mozart's collaborations with the formidable librettist, Lorenzo da Ponte, and shows both geniuses at the height of their powers. Da Ponte based

his libretto on Pierre Beaumarchais' seminal play of the same title. With its topical references and oblique indictment of the French aristocracy, the play was considered scandalous when it opened in 1784. Although da Ponte and Mozart's version, written two years later, keenly depicts the underlying tension between the sexes and social classes, it focuses less on the period's political issues and more on the complex humanity of its characters.

Mozart and da Ponte's *Figaro*, which provides insight into the tenuousness of human relationships via hilarious situational comedy, is at once a delightful yet profoundly moving work. Mozart's brilliant score mirrors the complex world it depicts with stunning arias and intricate yet transparent ensembles.

Although written before Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, *The Marriage of Figaro* represents the continuation of that story. In *Figaro*, Count Almaviva, having married Rosina, has taken to philandering. His downtrodden wife conspires with Figaro, now his valet, and Figaro's bride-to-be, Susanna, the Count's current amorous target, to teach him a lesson. In the process, all of the relationships in the opera are called into question and undergo both subtle and not so subtle changes. All is resolved in the end when the Countess's love and devotion wins out as she is reunited with her repentant husband.

Viewing *Figaro* as a work that is intimately tied to the 18th century, Director Ronis has assembled a design team to create a traditional

setting for the production. But he also sees it as a piece with tremendous relevance today. He remarks: "Even though it can be difficult for modern audiences to relate to men in frock coats and women in hoop skirts, by realistically focusing on the characters' joys, pains, and struggles, it is possible to deliver the messages of *The Marriage of Figaro* in a way that is both entertaining and meaningful in the 21st century."

The large cast is split between two assignments, either for Saturday/Tuesday or for Friday/Sunday performances, according to the list on the following page.

Assisting Maestro Smith will be **Kyle Knox**, assistant conductor; Professor **John Stowe**, harpsichord continuo; **Andrew Briggs**, cello continuo; **Chan Mi Jean** and **Kangwoo Jin**, musical preparation; and **Sara Guttenberg**, chorus master.

The production will be designed by **Dana Fralick**, scenery and props; **John Frautschy**, lighting; **Hyewon Park** and **Sydney Kreiger**, costumes; and **Jan Ross**, wigs. The production stage manager will be **Isabel Karp** and the assistant director, **Elisheva Pront**. Additional student staff includes **Sarah Kunath**, master electrician, and **Emi Chen**, costume assistant.

Tickets are \$25 for the general public, \$20 for senior citizens and \$10 for UW-Madison students, available in advance through the Campus Arts Ticketing office at (608) 265-ARTS and online at www.arts.wisc.edu/ (click "box office"). Tickets may also be purchased in person at the Wisconsin Union Theater Box Office Monday-Friday, 11:30 am-5:30 pm and Saturdays, 12:00-5:00 pm and at the Vilas Hall Box Office, Monday-Friday, 11:30 am-5:30 pm. and after 5:30 pm on University Theatre performance evenings. Because shows often sell out, advance purchase is recommended. If unsold tickets remain, they may be purchased at the door beginning one hour before the performance. The Carol Rennebohm Auditorium is located in Music Hall, at the foot of Bascom Hill on Park Street.

University Opera is a cultural service of the School of Music at the University of Wisconsin-Madison whose mission is to provide comprehensive operatic training and performance opportunities for our students and operatic programming for the community. For more information, please contact opera@music.wisc.edu. Or visit the School of Music's website at music.wisc.edu.



Special Vocal Events Coming Up

October 10, 7:00 pm (Capitol Lakes auditorium), **An Evening of Opera Arias** presented by students at UW-Madison.

October 10, 8:00 pm (Mills), **Brass Fest II!** with Danish trumpeter Adam Rapa and vocalist Elisabeth Vik. (Non-students \$15)

October 11, 7:30 pm (Mills), **Brass Fest** continues with soloists Rapa and Vik. (Free concert)

October 14, 12:00-12:40 pm (Morphy), Consuelo Sanudo, mezzo soprano, and Jeff Gibbens, piano, in an open rehearsal of Schoenberg's song cycle on 15 poems from S. George's *Book of the Hanging Gardens, Op. 15*.

October 15, 5:00 pm (1351 Humanities), **"Beyond Race – African-American Voices in Classical Music"** with Emery Stephens, baritone, lecture-recital with pianist Martha Fischer.

October 16, 3:30-5:00 pm (1351 Humanities), **Master class** with Emery Stephens.

November 8, 7:30 pm (Music Hall), **Karlos Moser's New Hyperion Jazz Babies** (with Opera Props Awardees Nicole Heinen and Fabian Qamar).

November 19, 7:30 pm (Music Hall), **Opera Workshop**, featuring these scenes and singers: Excerpt from Act II of Handel's *Orlando* (with Meghan Hilker, Tyana O'Connor, Antonio De Souza); Duet and Aria from *Der Freischütz* (Alannah Spencer, Emi Chen); Duet from *La Clemenza di Tito* (Tyana O'Connor, Meghan Hilker); Duet from *Arabella* (Emi Chen, Cayla Rosché).

November 20, 6:30 pm (Morphy), Will Ottow, tenor, **Senior recital** with Thomas Kasdorf, piano.

December 4, 8:30 pm (Morphy), Shun-Jung Hsu, DMA **piano recital**, with Sara Gutterberg, singer; Thalia Coombs, violin; Kyle Price, cello.

December 12, 8:00 pm (Mills), UW Choral Union & UW Symphony Orchestra, Beverly Taylor cond. Poulenc **"Gloria,"** Stravinsky **"Symphony of Psalms."** (\$15 general public, \$8 students, seniors)

Le nozze di Figaro at UW-Madison Opera

Cast	Sat Oct 24/Tue Oct 27	Fri Oct 23/Sun Oct 25
Susanna	Anna Whiteway	Erin Bryan
Figaro	Joel Rathmann	Ben Schultz
Countess	Anna Polum	Yanzelmalee Rivera
Count	Brian Schneider	Gavin Waid
Cherubino	Kirsten Larson	Alaina Carlson
Marcellina	Tia Cleveland	Meghan Hilker
Bartolo	Tom Weis	Tom Weis
Basilio	Fabian Qamar	Dennis Gotkowski
Curzio	Jiabao Zhang	Todd Keller
Antonio	Kyle Connors	Mikko Utevisky
Barbarina	Emily Weaver	Emi Chen

Some Hints on the Story of Our Opera

The story of *Le Nozze di Figaro* is arguably the most complicated in all operatic literature. Its intricacies, nevertheless, can be readily grasped if one thinks of it in terms of the interplay of a number of plotlines all revolving around Count Almaviva's attempts to induce his wife's personal maid, Susanna, to submit to his amorous desires.

Major Plotline

Although Count Almaviva has consented to the marriage of his valet, Figaro, to Susanna, he wishes first to obtain from Susanna "certain intimate favors" — favors that were formerly his legal right ("*Droit du Seigneur*") as Lord of the Manor. The Count's advances, conveyed both by the Count himself and by his intermediary, Basilio, are rejected by Susanna. In response, the Count tries to prevent Susanna's marriage to Figaro by supporting the claim of the housekeeper, Marcellina, who also wishes to marry Figaro.

Subplots

Marcellina had once loaned Figaro a sum of money with the understanding that he would either repay it or marry her. Although the Count sees to it that the lawsuit is decided in favor of Marcellina, the judgment is nullified when it is discovered that Figaro, in reality, is Marcellina's long-lost son Rafaello who was stolen by robbers.

Dr. Bartolo, Countess Almaviva's former guardian, bears a grudge against Figaro for having prevented his own marriage to Rosina (see *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*). He therefore acts as lawyer for his former sweetheart, Marcellina, in her suit against Figaro. When it is revealed that Figaro is his own illegitimate son, Bartolo accepts the situation and belatedly marries Marcellina at the same time that Figaro and Susanna are married.

The young page boy, Cherubino, is awakening to love and is pining after the Countess, the ideal of his dreams. He does not, however, neglect the possibilities inherent in flirtations with less exalted objects such as Susanna or her teenage cousin, Barbarina, the gardener Antonio's daughter. Since Count Almaviva is pursuing the same young ladies, the page boy constantly gets in his way.

Counterplots

Learning of the Count's intentions regarding Susanna, Figaro tries to force the Count's hand by inducing him to crown Susanna with a bridal veil, symbolic of innocence. He furthermore attempts to distract and confuse the Count by sending him an anonymous letter informing him of an impending amorous tryst between the Countess and a lover. The Count cleverly sidesteps the threat of the veil, while the anonymous letter boomerangs so badly that Figaro is eventually forced to admit its authorship.

Count Almaviva's wife, Rosina, is also fully aware that her husband is bent on amorous philandering. With the help of Figaro and Susanna, the Countess intends to catch her husband red-handed and to teach him a lesson by having Susanna arrange a secret

Hints continued

meeting with him. At first, it is planned that the page boy, Cherubino, should take Susanna's place. In order to implement this project, the ladies dress Cherubino as a girl, but the escapade misfires badly when the Count, returning unexpectedly, almost catches his wife in an embarrassing *tête-à-tête* with the page boy. It requires all of Susanna's and Figaro's cleverness to spirit the boy away to allay the Count's suspicions. Later, the Countess decides that, under cover of darkness, she will take Susanna's place. The ensuing action enables her to successfully prove her husband's infidelity.

The Count is not the only one taken in by the masquerade of the ladies. Figaro, for a while, also believes that the Count is making love to his newlywed bride. This development adds further zest to the finale of the last act, and permits Susanna to cure her husband of foolish jealousy.

Originally written by Boris Goldovsky and adapted by Arthur Schoep and Vernon Hartman. Further modification by David Ronis.

UW Opera Props is a friends group designed to encourage the University Opera and its connected voice program at the UW School of Music. The organization has two primary goals: to promote and enhance enjoyment of the opera productions and other vocal programs provided by students and faculty; and to fund annual awards to promising vocal students.

Opera Props seeks to serve as a link between University Opera and the surrounding community. The group welcomes as members all who enjoy the UW Opera productions, and who take an interest in the progress of students in its program.

Please fill out the form below and help support our efforts during the current year!

A Dining Idea for Friday, October 23, Opening Night for *The Marriage of Figaro*

Join us at the University Club for a social hour: cash bar and fellowship 4:30–5:15 pm in the spacious first floor reception areas. Note that this is earlier than usual, due to our early 7:00 pm curtain for the night's opera (but the best time of day for on-campus parking). Then, from 5:15-6:40 pm we'll share a pleasant meal in the Wayside Dining Room.

Our Program: Joining us to discuss their reactions to preparing and singing this particular opera, and related issues, will be Kirsten Larson and Joel Rathmann, our Cherubino and Figaro at the Saturday and Tuesday performances.

The menu, with choice of entrée:

SALAD: Preset Green Kale – roasted apples, crumbled bacon, Craisins and goat cheese, tossed with a maple walnut balsamic vinaigrette.

ENTRÉES – Choose one of the following:

- 1. Whole Roasted Tenderloin** – slow-roasted beef tenderloin with a house-made demi-glace.
- 2. Mushroom Strudel** – wild oyster and crimini mushrooms mixed with sautéed spinach & wrapped in a flaky puff pastry.

Both served with chef's choice of **potato** and **market vegetable**.

DESSERT: Bread Pudding – pumpkin Challah, cinnamon, vanilla rum custard and candied pecans.

This meal is inclusive (there are no additional tip/tax fees). Choice of coffee, tea, milk; or wine and beer from the cash bar. Entrée 1 choice is \$35, Entrée 2 is \$25.

Please send your list of dinner partners, with their choices of entrée, and a check for your group (\$35 for those choosing #1 or \$25 for those choosing #2).

Checks should be payable to "UW Opera Props," and **please mail by Monday, October 19** to Chelsie Propst, 4454 Hillcrest Drive, #A, Madison, WI 53705.

Questions? Call Ann Campbell at 274-8751. The University Club is located at 803 State Street Mall.

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