

HELLO, I'M EDGAR LOESSIN WITH LOESSIN AT LARGE. THE FRENCH DRAMATIST BEAUMARCHAIS WROTE THREE COMEDIES WITH THE CENTRAL CHARACTER FIGARO. THEY WERE POINTED ATTACKS AGAINST THE DECADENT ARISTOCRACIES OF THE DAY. WHEN DA PONTE AND MOZART DECIDED TO DO *MARRIAGE OF FIGARO*, THE AUSTRIAN EMPEROR WAS NOT PLEASED. THE BOYS ASSURED THE KING THAT THEY WOULD NEUTER THE PLAY OF SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND MAKE IT A FARCE. HE RELENDED. DA PONTE PUT THE EMPHASIS ON A HIGHLY INVOLVED PLOT, AND HE AND MOZART WERE OFF AND RUNNING. THE RESULT, ESPECIALLY IN VIRGINIA OPERA'S NONSTOP FUN PRODUCTION, IS A SEXUAL ROMP WITHOUT A BED, EITHER RUMPLED OR MADE-UP, IN SIGHT. THERE ARE LEERS, PINCHES, A GROPE OR TWO, WOULD BE TRYSTS, AND EPISTLES GALORE. IT'S A CARROUSEL OF COMEDI DELIGHTS PROPELLED BY ROMANTIC INTRIGUE, CUNNING VIXENS AND MASTERS OF DECEIT CAUGHT UP IN SITUATIONS THAT DEVELOP WITH THE SPEED AND SUDDEN ENERGY OF A DEVIL'S BROOM.

CONDUCTOR DAN SAUNDERS PUTS US IN THE RIGHT MOOD WITH HIS BRISK, SPARKLING RENDITION OF THE ACT I OVERTURE. IT HAS A BROADWAY OVERTURE KIND OF EXCITEMENT FOR ME. STAGE DIRECTOR LORNA HAYWOOD TAKES OVER FROM THERE AND DOESN'T MISS ONE FARCIAL MOMENT OR NAUGHTY NUANCE. DOUBLE ENTENDRES ABOUND. IN FACT THIS NICE ENGLISH LADY CAN BE DOWN RIGHT BAWDY.

I DOUBT THAT ANYONE NEEDS A REFRESHER COURSE ABOUT THE PLOT, BUT BRIEFLY HERE'S WHAT HAPPENS: SERVANTS FIGARO AND SUSANNA ARE PREPARING TO WED. BUT COUNT ALMAVIVA, THEIR EMPLOYER, LUSTS AFTER SUSANNA. THE PAGEBOY, CHERUBINO, LUSTS AFTER THE COUNTESS. FORMER GOVERNESS, MARCELLINA, WOOS FIGARO. SUFFICE IT TO SAY ALL ENDS HAPPILY, AND LOVE CONQUERS ALL VIA MOZART'S MAGICAL ARIAS AND OTHER COMPOSITIONS. I'LL HAVE MORE TO SAY ABOUT THAT "HAPPY ENDING" LATER.

WHAT IS MOST IMPRESSIVE ABOUT THIS FIGARO IS THE WONDERFUL CAST FROM TOP TO BOTTOM. IT'S A TRUE ENSEMBLE. THEY WORK LIKE METHOD ACTORS, ALL CUT FROM THE SAME OPERA BOUFFA FABRIC. AND EACH IS A FINE ACTOR WITH A VERY GOOD VOICE. YOU DON'T ENCOUNTER THAT OFTEN.

ONE WANTS TO SEARCH FOR SUPERLATIVES TO DEFINE EVERY PERFORMER. JANE REDDING'S SUSANNA IS MOST ADORABLE, A KITTEN YOU WANT TO CUDDLE...BUT SHE CAN BE A HELL CAT TOO, OF SORTS, BUT THAT IS BELIED BY HER SWEET VOICE. JOSHUA

WINOGRADE, FIGARO, IS BELIEVABLE AS A CUNNING SERVANT WITH A FLARE FOR COMEDY BOTH VOCALLY AND PHYSICALLY. MICHAEL TODD SIMPSON HAS A COMMANDING BARITONE AND HANDSOME BEARING, WITH A HINT OF VULNERABILITY, THAT MORE THAN FULFILL ONE'S VISIONS OF A COUNT ON THE MAKE. WITH REGAL BEAUTY, PATRICIA ANDRESS SINGS A LOVELY COUNTESS. I FOUND HER TOO REALISTICALLY SADDENED BY HER TROUBLED MARRIAGE. IT'S VERY TRUE SHE IS SAD, OF COURSE, BUT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PIECE WE ALL KNOW IT'S GOING TO WORK OUT OKAY. CHERUBINO IS FABULOUS FUN AS DONE BY GIAVANNA KERSULIS AS ARE TERRY HODGES AS DOCTOR BARTOLO AND GENEVIEVE DESPRESS AS MARCELLINA.

DIRECTOR HAYWOOD POINTS OUT THAT THE LOSS OF PERSONAL HAPPINESS IS AN ONGOING NOSTALGIC THEME IN THE OPERA. FOR ME IT IS A VERY MINOR THEME AMONG THESE MENAGES. SHE QUOTES FROM BAEUMARCHAIS' PLAY IN A LINE BY THE COUNT. HE SAYS '*LOVE IS JUST A NOVEL OF THE HEART; IT IS PLEASURE WHICH IS THE TRUE STORY.*' AND SO IT IS WITH *THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO*. HAS LOVE CONQUERED ALL, AND IS HARMONY RESTORED? FOR ME, NO. I THINK A LEER, A WINK, OR A WELL PLACED GROPE COULD SHATTER EVERYTHING, AND WE'D HAVE AN ARIA DA CAPO. AND WHAT'S MORE, I'D EAGERLY LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING IT ONE MORE TIME.

THIS IS EDGAR LOESSIN WITH LOESSIN AT LARGE, AND I'LL SEE YOU AT THE NEXT OPENING.