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## 'Barber of Seville' never sags, always delights

By JULIE McHALE - *TimeOut Theater Critic* September 24, 2009

Gioachino Rossini wrote many operas, but none so popular as "The Barber of Seville." In it we meet the inimitable Figaro, the not-so-modest barber who plays many roles from wigmaster to surgeon to matchmaker, and who also stars in several other operas. The Skylight Opera opens its 50th season with this rollicking, boisterous romp set in Seville, Spain, in 1785. It will be followed in January by Mozart's version of the same character in "The Marriage of Figaro." Andrew Wilkowske will play Figaro in both productions.

Many a tale is woven around the idea of the challenges a lover faces in securing his love. In this story, Rosina is virtually being held captive by her guardian, Dr. Bartolo, who has desires to marry her himself. Meanwhile, Count Almaviva is trying desperately to court her but needs someone more clever than himself to find access to her, so he elicits the help of the incomparable Figaro.

Mayhem ensues for a time, but eventually under several disguises, Almaviva gains entrance to her house. In the process, we meet many intriguing characters, among them the rapacious Basilio, the often comatose servant Ambrogio, the allergic maid Berta and helpful musician Fiorello. All in some way assist or impede Almaviva's pursuit of Rosina.

Rosina herself is trapped and suffocated by Dr. Bartolo, but is spunky and creative in her efforts to escape marrying him. Katherine Pracht, with her glorious, fluid voice and overt facial expressions, captures this struggling character beautifully. Dr. Bartolo is fun to ridicule and hate as played by Jason Budd, who has a great voice and superb comic sense. Daniel Klein is convincing as the slippery, greedy, dark Basillio, willing to do almost anything for money.

Of course, Figaro, so aptly played by Andrew Wilkowske, is the star of the show. We smiled as he boasted beyond bounds of his expertise in all things, but we loved him anyway. His baritone voice is very impressive.

The ensemble numbers are well executed. Kathy Pyeatt, Bryce Lord, Doug Clemons, Peter Voigt, David Flores, Gustavo Chaviano, Justin Deehr, Emmitt Morgans, Eric Nelson, Jonathan Stewart and Lillian Tillson add their rich voices to the chorus. The slow-motion scene is especially impressive when the cast is

coordinating intricate music and movements simultaneously. There are no memorable arias in this opera, but the music is complex and requires a great deal of skill to accomplish melodically. And timing is a challenge in many scenes where a multitude of characters is involved.

The pace is lively, and with using the apron and the full stage alternately, no time is wasted in changing sets. The orchestra, directed by Pasquale Laurino, is supportive but never intrusive. Costume designer Carol J. Blanchard created beautiful gowns for Rosina, and scenic designer Van Santvoord a setting befitting a wealthy doctor and his ward. Figaro walked around with his business on a cart, which is amusing and apt for a man of his many talents and skills.

The production never sagged and always delighted. Bill Theisen at the helm assured the overall success of the outcome. The show runs through Oct. 4. Call (414) 291-7800 for times and tickets.