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Culture Club

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Review:

Bugs would be proud

by [Paul Kosidowski](#) | Sunday 9/20/2009



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Bill Theisen is officially the “former Artistic Director” of the Skylight Opera. But you wouldn’t know it from the warm reception he got as he walked onstage to open the Skylight’s 50th season. The applause would have gone on for a solid five minutes, I think, if Theisen hadn’t gently gestured “enough” to the Cabot Theater crowd. The audience was glad to see him. And the two-and-a-half hours that followed explained why.

Theisen’s *Barber of Seville* was everything you could want from a Skylight show, and certainly made the case for the theater’s longtime conviction that the best opera should be a dramatic and musical event. The singing was spirited and legible, with nary a word of the English translation lost, even in the rapid-fire patter. The staging was chock full of great comic business and detail. And Theisen pulled out all the stops when needed, particularly in the Act One finale, a climb of increasingly frenetic comic mayhem that seems to reach a half of dozen climaxes before the act actually ends. No matter that this was 18th century opera buffa, Theisen was happy to draw inspiration from great comic minds of more recent times—Mack Sennet, Benny Hill and Bugs Bunny.

It helped that Theisen had great singing actors at his disposal. Andrew Wilkowske has a commanding and charming presence as Figaro. And Katherine Pracht and Gregory Schmidt make a great romantic couple, coloratura style. As the big and blustery Bartolo, Jason Budd showed why he's one of the most sought-after "buffa" comedians in America. Pasquale Laurino's orchestra made the best of the thin ranks

and compromised acoustics of the Cabot, but they were solid accompanists giving full support to the voices and storytelling on stage.

The production is all the more remarkable given the frantic goings on in the Skylight offices in recent months. While there are uncertainties ahead (the theater still has financial hurdles in its near future), this is the kind of work that should inspire the kind of community support to keep the Skylight going strong for another half century.

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