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Il Barbiere di Siviglia

SAN JOSÉ

Opera San José

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Virtually every aspect of Opera San José's production of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* sparkled on February 12, the opening night of its eight-performance run in the California Theatre. Stage director José Maria Condemi's generous bag of stage tricks, Kent Dorsey's bright lighting and the irresistible smile of baritone Krassen Karagiozov's Figaro were just some of the elements that guaranteed a good time for all.

The presence of a small, youthful cheering squad of irrepressible cast boosters, whose inappropriately loud laughter and ill-timed applause at almost anything anyone did in the first half of the opera occasionally drowned out the vocal line, left most audience members perplexed at what they might possibly have missed. A loud "bravissimo" at the end of conductor Bryan Nies's snappy reading of the overture — produced titters from other audience members. The conducting was sprightly, and tempos always apt, but somewhat scrappy violins and a blooper of a French horn entrance do not a "bravissimo" warrant.

The Almaviva, tenor Michael Dailey, displayed a truly lovely, fresh sound through most of his range. Although taxed by Almaviva's highest notes and the need to enunciate clearly in rapid patter passages, Dailey offered a lightness of sound and sweetness of persona that proved ideal for the role. Karagiozov, who sang powerfully as Angelotti a few months back, found it a challenge to wrap his voice fully around forte passages higher in the range. As Basilio, Isaiah Musik-Ayala attempted to add soft nuance to an already undernourished "La Calunnia" and ended up sounding weak. Even bass Silas Elash, whose truly beautiful voice and sonorous resonance made for a thrilling Dr. Bartolo, was a bit stretched on top.

Mezzo-soprano Betany Coffland (Rosina), the fifth member of Opera San José's resident company in the first-night cast, showed the rest of the ensemble how it ought to be done. In terms of temperament, Rosina might have been written with her in mind. Sounding too arch at the start, with an "Una voce poca fa" a few embellishments short of brilliant, her instrument bloomed as the evening progressed. By Act II, Coffland was able to sweeten her tone at will, all the while traversing her role's large range with

aplomb. It was an extremely fine performance.

Although Act II dragged a bit, the end of Act I was so hilarious that it left the audience in stitches. I haven't had so much fun at an operatic comedy in years. □

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