



Coiffing a pop-cultured opera

The Barber of Seville

Directed by Micheal Cavanagh
Starring Gregory Dahl, John Tessier,
and Krisztina Szabo with accompaniment
by the Edmonton Symphony
Orchestra.
3, 6 and 8 February
Jubilee Auditorium

LACINA DESJARLAIS
Arts & Entertainment Staff

A hush falls over the city of Edmonton in the dead of the night, and in the sky a gigantic symbol emblazoned with the letters EO flashes. It's the Edmonton Opera putting out the director call for their new production, and the man to step up to the challenge is noted director and former artistic director for the Edmonton Opera, Michael Cavanagh. While the process of finding a new director might not actually be this dramatic, Cavanagh admits that at times opera draws more from pop culture and cartoons than people know.

The Barber of Seville is the life story of Figaro, a scheming and clever barber. The tale follows Figaro and his plot to help unite two young lovers, Rosina and Count Almaviva, by outwitting Rosina's conniving and aged guardian who intends to keep her for himself.

According to Cavanagh, the plot provides plenty of twists and turns that will keep the audience guessing and laughing, but finding humour in the libretto wasn't the difficult part.

Relating the 200-year-old comedic opera to modern day life seemed to be the real challenge, but Cavanagh took it in stride, ultimately connecting the old opera to today's pop culture.

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MICHAEL CAVANAGH

"You can look at a situation that's there in the opera and see that it sort of resembles something out of pop culture. You just have to take it and make it a bit more suggestive of that," says Cavanagh. "There are *Simpsons* moments and we've got *Seinfeld* moments; there are all sorts of things off of TV and the Internet [in the production] that everyone knows.

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When asked about how he came up with the idea to tie all the pop culture references into the show, Cavanagh had a ready response.

"I'm easily bored," Cavanagh laughs. "For example, the Figaro character bursts into the room a lot, so all we do is try and give him the same kind of body language that Kramer has when he bursts into Jerry's apartment [on *Seinfeld*]. We take it and have fun with it, and the audience goes, 'Hey, that's Kramer,' drawing them even further into the story. Opera is nothing more and nothing less than storytelling."

And according to actor Gregory Dahl who plays Figaro, working with Cavanagh's vision and turning his dramatic personae into a living cartoon was less of a challenge than some of the other roles he has taken in the past.

"*Don Giovanni* was more of a stretch for me. This character suits my personality and is more like what I'm like in real life. I tend to be a bit of a card anyway," Dahl says. "It's more about honing your craft and so that you can make those situations, know exactly when you have to turn it on and when you have to draw focus and give focus away so that it becomes a show."

With a talented cast and a focused vision by the director, it seems *The Barber of Seville* is primed to become a hilarious hit. Nonetheless, Dahl still gets jitters before a performance.

"Yes, [opening night jitters] exist," Dahl admits. "If anyone says they're not nervous they're lying. A little bit of nervousness is good because it means you're there. You just say a prayer to your gods before you go out there and you just let 'er fly."

"Son, where are you going with that teeny black hoodie?"

"Converge is in town, mom, and apparently, they're going to sacrifice an armadillo to the gods of hardcore. I can't miss this show."

"What's that on your calf? Is that a tattoo? Is your eyebrow pierced? You're going nowhere with your life, young man! Come back here at once!"

"Never! I'll never be like you! I wish I was never born!"

And so went millions of exchanges between kids and their parents across North America when Converge released their landmark *Jane Doe*, and like any band in their position, they would continue to desperately try, time

and time again, to recreate the magic of that career plateau, two albums post.

If you close your eyes and try really hard, it almost feels like you're listening to the same album: there are the signature periods of washing, calming beauty (*No Heroes*' "Weight of the World" to *Jane Doe*'s "Hell to Pay") contrasted by grindy, intense blasts of rage ("Heartache" versus "Concubine") and the standard nine-minute-plus self-indulgers ("Grim Heart/Black Rose" versus "Jane Doe") but that's exactly where *No Heroes* fails in its attempt to astound. Converge has pigeonholed themselves and everything they do on their records is expected. It's officially the musical tragedy of the year.



Converge

No Heroes
Epitaph
www.convergecult.com

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