

Beware, Conniving Count, This Rugged Figaro Will Have You Dancing to His Tune

Cast changes are inevitable during the run of a production at a repertory opera company. But when Jonathan Miller's staging of Mozart's "Nozze di Figaro" returned to the Metropolitan Opera on Saturday afternoon after a break of more than three weeks, the company fielded an entirely different cast from the one introduced in early October.

ANTHONY TOMMASINI

MUSIC REVIEW

The lineup included two major stars: the bass-baritone Bryn Terfel as Figaro and the baritone Simon Keenlyside as Count Almaviva. The only holdover was the 34-year-old Swiss conductor Philippe Jordan, every bit as impressive as he was before.

The cast was working at a disadvantage. Given the constraints on scheduling at the Met, it is not possible for singers who step into a run to have a stage rehearsal in the house with the orchestra. All the more remarkable, then, that this performance was so rich, affecting and confident.

Singing the role of his momentous 1994 Met debut, Mr. Terfel was a larger-than-life Figaro. As his husky voice matures and darkens, he can still adapt it to the lyrical turns and fleet passagework in Mozart. Tall, rugged and burly, here was a Figaro who in a burst of desire could lift

"Le Nozze di Figaro" continues through Dec. 1 at the Metropolitan Opera, Lincoln Center; (212) 362-6000, metopera.org.

Le Nozze di Figaro Metropolitan Opera

up his Susanna in one arm and twirl her around.

There was real threat in the dead-serious account of "Se vuol ballare," when Figaro vows that if the lecherous Count intends to ensnare Susanna through an aristocratic dance of seduction, his lordship will step to Figaro's tune. Yet in phrases in which Figaro ponders his dilemma, Mr. Terfel sang with haunting sotto-voce subtlety. The lovely young Russian soprano Ekaterina Siurina made a charming and sassy Susanna. Her tone was clear and true, her sound warm and luscious.

It was no surprise that Mr. Keenlyside gave such a complex and volatile portrayal. A consummate stage artist, he made an entitled and preening Count: effete, yes, but in a strangely sexy way. His singing was as nuanced and contrary as his characterization, elegantly dignified one moment, bullishly impulsive the next. In encounters with Susanna he seemed as hormonal as the adolescent page Cherubino, here portrayed winningly by the vocally rich and dynamic mezzo-soprano Kate Lindsey.

Marie McLaughlin as Marcelina and Maurizio Muraro as Don Bartolo were delightful. The biggest ovations, and well deserved, went to the German soprano Anja Harteros as the Countess; in both her poignant singing and her vulnerable presence, she



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From left, Ekaterina Siurina as Susanna, Bryn Terfel as Figaro and Simon Keenlyside as the Count in Mozart's "Nozze di Figaro."

conveyed hurt and shame over the loss of her husband's affection. For a soprano with such a strong and earthy voice, Ms. Harteros can shape phrases with

melting pianissimo tenderness. Mr. Jordan, recently appointed music director of the Paris National Opera (starting in 2009), is emerging as a major musician.

Though the performance he drew from the orchestra and cast was lively and articulate, there was plenty of space for phrases to breathe. The music flowed

with disarming naturalness. His debut with the New York Philharmonic on Dec. 6 now looks like an important event of the season.