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### A Day in the Life of Figaro

**Rossini, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*:** Soloists, Chorus of the Grand Théâtre Geneva, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande / Jonathan Nott (conductor), Geneva, 16.9.2017. (ALL)



Grand Théâtre de Genève, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* de Gioachino Rossini, septembre 2017 à l'Opéra des Nations  
Lena Belkina (Rosina), Marco Spotti (Basilio), Bruno Taddia (Figaro), Bruno de Simone (Bartolo) &  
Bogdan Mihai (Il Conte di Almaviva)

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**Cast:** Figaro – Bruno Taddia  
Il Conte Almaviva – Bogdan Mihai  
Rosina – Lena Belkina  
Bartolo – Bruno di Simone  
Basilio – Marco Spotti  
Berta – Mary Ferminear  
Fiorello – Rodrigo Garcia  
Un Ufficiale – Aleksandar Chaveev  
Ambrogio – Peter Beakeun Cho  
**Production:**  
Director – Sam Brown  
Design – Ralph Kotai  
Costumes – Sue Blane  
Lighting designer – Linus Fellbom

The Geneva musical season has started with a highly original triple bill of three works inspired by Beaumarchais' Figaro: Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* and Langer's *Figaro Gets a Divorce*. This original initiative is co-shared with the Welsh National Opera. All three works are the products of different composers and are performed and staged by different teams, but the costumes, settings and orchestra are the same on the three days.

We are at the beginning of Figaro's journey with the *The Barber of Seville* but knowing that tomorrow will not be as sunny, one can start thinking about future issues: that Rosina marries a bit quickly, that Figaro overestimates his capabilities, that Almaviva seems to believe that problems can be solved easily with money ...

But this is a time to rejoice and laugh. Rossini's delightful work is always a pleasure to experience in the theater. Sam Brown's production is lively in the slapstick tradition: Figaro enters from the back of the house and distributes his business cards to the audience. Don Basilio's costumes and props (a dog) are hilarious. The best part is a "slow motion" sequence during the finale of act 1 which had audiences really laughing.

Geneva's cast was uneven. Lena Belkina has nice high notes but her Rosina lacked sparkle. Bogdan Mihai had all the notes for the treacherous part of Almaviva but lacked projection. Bruno Taddia tended to consistently sing *forte* but was redeemed by genuine acting skills. The best of all were Marco Spotti's sonorous Basilio, Mary Femeinar's single sparkling aria and Bruno di Simone's Bartolo, which showed that he is a quintessential Rossini singer, sonorous and flexible.

Actually, best of all was the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande under its principal conductor, Jonathan Nott. One of the criteria when selecting a new chief conductor was that he or she would conduct at the Opera, which was not the case with previous directors Marek Janowski and Neeme Järvi. In the concert hall, Jonathan Nott has proved to be very sensitive to having his orchestra develop collective spirit. He has modified string seating with the cellos in the middle and the violins positioned in the extreme "Viennese style". He has challenged them in large scale Germanic works, which are not the Orchestra's typical repertory. He has finally managed to make them sound better in the difficult acoustics of Geneva's lovely but outdated and problematic Victoria Hall.

These qualities were in ample evidence here. The sound was refined and full. Rhythms were crisp. There was genuine care for Rossini's orchestration. Since the move from the Grand Théâtre to the Théâtre des Nations, this was the best orchestral performance we have had. Nott is known for his work at the head of Boulez' *Ensemble Intercontemporain*, as well as his exploration of the German repertory, and few expected him to be so eloquent in Rossini's work. We now eagerly await his return to the pit.

For the time being, Rosina and the Count are married, but will they live happily ever after? To be continued ...

**Antoine Lévy-Leboyer**