

Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* at Roodepoort Theatre

The Cape Town Opera, in collaboration with Sempre Opera and Roodepoort Theatre, is presenting Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* in July.



Image by Annene Van Eeden: Conroy Scott, William Berger and Brittany Smith in *Le Nozze di Figaro*

“We are delighted to welcome Cape Town Opera, Africa's Premiere Opera Company to the Roodepoort Theatre and to host one of the most performed and best-loved operas worldwide.” says Prithvee Pillay, general manager of Roodepoort Theatre. “We believe a production such as *Le Nozze di Figaro* is symbolic of our commitment to supporting and growing local talent. We therefore respectfully encourage audiences share our vision by returning to the theatre.”

The production, a collaboration between Cape Town Opera (CTO) and the Gauteng-based Sempre Opera, is directed by CTO's Magdalene Minnaar, with set and costume design by Maritha Visagie and Rabia Davids, movement direction by Fiona du Plooy and lighting design by Nicolaas de Jongh.



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The Sempre Opera Instrumental Ensemble will be conducted by Schalk van der Merwe, whose fresh new presence on the podium befits an opera by a young composer. Unbelievably, Mozart was barely 30 when he wrote *Le Nozze di Figaro*!

Director Minnaar relishes her part in staging what she sums up as "a perfect opera in every way," with good reason. This gem of the repertoire may be found in a symbiosis of farce, political comment, and psychological finesse as sublime music is married to a rich text.

Sparkling but never superficial, darker issues still relevant today are discernible to alert audiences beneath its shimmering surface. This work is adapted from the second novel of a sprightly trilogy by the 18th-century author Pierre-Augustin Caron (*Beaumarchais*). His cheerful cynicism matched the spirit of his age, and it is apparent in *Le Nozze di Figaro*.

Here we have the sequel to *Le Barbier de Séville* (Rossini), where a younger, more sentimental Figaro promotes the obstacle-fraught romance and marriage of a lovelorn Count (Almaviva) and an equally smitten girl (Rosina). In Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, the lustre has worn off their once radiant union; the Count has become an inveterate lecher, and his Countess is understandably depressed. Once more, Figaro comes to the rescue with the added incentive of jealousy. His comely fiancée Susanna has caught Almaviva's wandering eye... and his betrothed ably abets him in frustrating the adulterer's intentions.



Image by Annene Van Eeden: Brittany Smith as Susanna and Conroy Smith as Figaro in *Le Nozze di Figaro*

Between them, the Count's social inferiors outwit Almaviva and contrive to reignite his love for the wronged Rosina. In the end, all's well that ends well, in the best of comic opera tradition. A couple of entertaining sub-plots are added to this central plot to pique the audience's interest up to the *dénouement*.

The stellar all-South African cast features Conroy Scott as Figaro, Brittany Smith as Susanna, William Berger, and Siphamandla Moyake as Count and Countess Almaviva, Megan Kahts in her trouser role *début* as Cherubino, Monica Mhangwana as Marcellina, Danie Verster as Bartolo, Chris Mostert as Basilio/Don Curzio, Alida Stoman as Barbarina, Rouel Beukes as Antonio and the Sempre Opera Adhoc Chorus under the direction of Chorus Master Colleen Maré.

Minnaar and Visagie approached the production with a view to this year's CTO themes of Sustainability, Creativity, and

Diversity, in light of which they created modular set units for reuse in future productions on stages of varying sizes.



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Costumes, wigs, props, and furniture form a great collection, judiciously upcycled from the existing CTO and Artscape stores. Inspired by the Rococo aesthetic, Minnaar opted for a period look-and-feel but took a few liberties here and there to give it a unique modern twist.

All in keeping with Mozart's sense of fun. "I wanted to create a world inspired by the romanticism of artful decay. It encapsulated the opera's story and the world we currently live in," says designer Maritha Visagie.

The production will take place from 5-15 July at the Roodepoort Theatre. Tickets are available [here](#) at R220.

All Covid protocols will be observed. Seating is unreserved. Patrons will be seated on arrival at the venue by the ushers in accordance with social distancing protocols.

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