

A marriage of genius and delight

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RJW reviews this year's Opera Dei Lumi's performance at the Berwick Festival Opera

The latest performance of the syntax-bothering 'Berwick Festival Opera 2015' comes from Opera dei Lumi

Following on from last year's much admired production of Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*, they have upped the ante with their concert performance of *The Marriage of Figaro* – a show whose plot doesn't even pretend to make sense, and owing as much in its style to a restoration Comedy of Manners as it does to the stages of 18th century European Opera.

Weighing in at a little over three hours, it's hardly a gentle jumping-off point for the newly initiated.

It is, however, a piece that delights with every new twist of notes upon the stave.

A nuanced and textured work of genius that, especially when orchestrated in single string orchestral representation is a work that only the very brave or fool-hardy would attempt.

So into what category would Peter Keenan fall? Opera Dei Lumi's young conductor is definitely of the latter. A heroic feat that was a total triumph from overture to finale.

They say that in an orchestra, the musicians play their instruments while the conductor plays the orchestra: when these elements are as in tune with each other as they were on that night, a symbiosis occurs – feeding and nurturing one another. It's real magic. It's more than translating the notes on the page into sound. It's a magic that enthrals, and one that no one will ever be able to figure out how it's done.

Youth in art is a breeding ground for bravery. Here, Keenan brings alive Toshi Ogita's double bass into a supplicating slave to rhythm, driving the music with whip-sharp force one moment, cooing like a matinee idol into the heart of the strings the next.

On the vocal front, Sam Carl in the role of Figaro was simultaneously louche and charismatic. All hipster beard and ponytail, and a vocal performance that was so immediately relatable and naturalistic that spoke total honesty and truth in all its rich, treacly perfection.

As Susanna, Catrin Allegra Giagu as the Countess owned the audience. There was an inky pavonine complexity to the soprano's vocals that tapped into the same vein of genuine emotion as her leading couple.

Jonathan Forbes Kennedy provided a suitably uppity foil as Count Almaviva. Kennedy "gave good pomp" and a comically endearing stiffness to his portrayal.

Another noteworthy performance came from Robert Forrest who gave life to two distinct characters; The adenoidal Basilio and the more stridently powerful Don Curzio. This performance saw him stepping out from the world with the aid of her voice and 97 gallon lungs, his debut as a solo opera singer, leaving everyone to ask, "What took you so long?"

If I could force myself to pick a fault, it would be the format.

I would have loved to see this as a fully realised performance.

I'm sure I'm not alone in wishing that for their next venture, Dei Lumi bring in a director to craft a stage performance.

I can only imagine how magical that would be. For now, *Le Nozze di Figaro* is a fine testament to some once-in-a-lifetime talents.