



Key Notes

THE BARBER OF SEVILLE



Creative Revolutionaries

Bugs, Beaumarchais, & the Barber

Spare a thought for those children growing up today without a grounding in opera and classical music, courtesy of Bugs Bunny!

Past generations got to know Wagner, Rossini, and Donizetti through the irrepressible rabbit's cartoon adventures, among the zaniest of which is *The Rabbit of Seville* from 1949. Here Bugs and his nemesis, Elmer Fudd, wage another of their epic battles – with the most hare-brained shaving scene on film played out to the sound track of the overture from Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*.

The original Barber is of course the resourceful Figaro, whose schemes drive the action in Rossini's opera, as well as in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and some dozen other operas, all inspired by a trilogy of plays – *Le Barbier de Séville*, *Le Mariage de Figaro*, and *La Mère coupable* – by the French writer Beaumarchais.

Bugs Bunny is the perfect hell-raising successor to Figaro. To observe the cheerful, devil-may-care rabbit is to see the revolutionary spirit at its most creative.

The Literary Secret Agent

It is unfortunate that many people know of Beaumarchais only because Mozart and Rossini had the sense to make his plays into operas.

Despite his posh name, this was no stuffy writer of dusty French plays. Pierre-Augustin Caron (he added the “de Beaumarchais” to give himself an air of nobility) began his peripatetic career as a gifted watchmaker (which may explain his knack for juggling the clockwork intricacies of plot in his Figaro trilogy).

Beaumarchais also worked as an inventor, harp teacher, composer, financial

speculator, international secret agent, arms dealer, and publisher.

The son of a middle class watchmaker, young Pierre was determined to rise above his station. An inveterate social climber, buying and marrying his way into wealth and nobility, he was also a libertarian, who instinctively bristled at the constraints of the established social order.

Litigious, entrepreneurial, charming, and volatile, Beaumarchais was in many ways the model for his character of Figaro – a brilliant upstart, outspoken, even insolent, self-serving, yet morally well-intentioned. His life (1732 to 1799) straddled both the American and French Revolutions, and he is said to have helped foment both uprisings.

At 22, he made a splash at the Court of Louis XV by inventing an escapement for watches that let them be made smaller and more accurate; he then provided a miniature ring watch for the King's mistress and landed the job of Royal Watchmaker, followed by an appointment as harp teacher to the king's daughters. His career thereafter was marked by a turbulent series of business ventures, canny marriages, fortunes made and lost, court battles, and several stints in jail.

In 1774, he became a secret agent, first for Louis XV and then for Louis XVI. His missions were to neutralize (i.e., bribe) blackmailers who threatened to publish pamphlets that libelled French royalty.

By 1775 he was an international spy, collecting information on the conflict brewing between the British Government and the American colonies and actively lobbying the French government to support the colonists. Although France did not enter the Revolutionary War until

1778, it provided clandestine aid to the rebels by having Beaumarchais set up a “black ops” cover company to funnel military supplies to the Americans.

During the French Revolution, he returned to arms dealing, this time on behalf of the revolutionary government. However, his court connections and his conspicuous wealth (he had built an opulent mansion just across the street from the Bastille) made him suspect, and he was imprisoned and forced into exile.

During the years leading up to the two Revolutions, Beaumarchais also found time to write the first two Figaro plays, creating a legacy that echoes to this day.

The Revolutionary Barber

With its zany physical comedy and its stock characters and scenarios, *Le Barbier de Séville* is straight out of commedia dell'arte. We have the miserly old curmudgeon seeking a young wife; his foolish, know-it-all sidekick; the young lovers, the clever trickster of a servant.

But the servant is now the hero – the title character. The master-servant relationship is here turned upside down. Figaro is an entrepreneur with his own shop and a skilled trade. Keep in mind that until the 19th century, barbers provided a lot more than a shave and a haircut: Figaro is a wig stylist, dentist, druggist, surgeon, matchmaker, and indispensable Mr. Fixit. He's his own

Creative Revolutionaries

continued from p.1

boss, and he can charge the Count a pretty price for his help.

The action of *Barbier* (written in 1772, revised in 1773, premiered in 1775) centres on Figaro conspiring to liberate Rosina from her tyrannical guardian – and has been interpreted as mirroring both the American struggle for independence and the Enlightenment drive for liberty and individual rights.

The second play, *Le Mariage de Figaro*, is generally seen as the more seditious of the two. Although Figaro has now returned to the service of the Count, the two work at cross purposes, and the servant wins. The play ends with an incendiary monologue in which Figaro tells the Count what every would-be revolutionary has been thinking:

Because you are a great nobleman, you think you are a great genius ... What have you done to deserve such advantages? Put yourself to the trouble of being born – nothing more! ... Whereas I ... have had to deploy more knowledge, more calculation and skill merely to survive than has sufficed to rule all the provinces of Spain for a century.

Little wonder that *Mariage*, started immediately after the 1775 première of *Barbier* and completed in 1780, wasn't staged till 1784. When the play was read to him privately, Louis XVI sputtered prophetically, *It is detestable! ... Why, if this play were to be performed, the Bastille would have to be pulled down! That man mocks everything that ought to be respected in government.*

Years later, after the Bastille had been stormed and destroyed and Louis had lost both his throne and his head, Napoleon famously said of the play, *If I had been king, a man such as he would have been locked up ... The Marriage of Figaro is already the revolution in action.*

The Barber Restyled

The French Revolution was over when Gioachino Rossini's opera *The Barber of Seville* premiered in 1816, and the opera was considered harmless enough to be rubberstamped by the censor.

Rossini was a 24-year-old Wunderkind with 15 operas under his belt, already established as Italy's leading composer. Despite the hiccup of its opening night (a

notorious fiasco), *Barber* became hugely popular, and not just among the public. More than 80 years later, Verdi wrote to the French music critic Camille Bellaigue, *I cannot help but believe that The Barber of Seville, with its abundance of real musical ideas, comic verve and truth of declamation, is the most beautiful opera buffa in existence.*

Barber is popular for good reason. The music is sheer delight. One of the glories of *bel canto*, it's easy on the ear, brimming with tuneful vocal flourishes.

Rossini churned out his operas with astonishing speed. He composed *Barber* in under three weeks, cheating somewhat by recycling bits of his earlier works. The storm music in Act II comes from his 1812 hit *La Pietra del Paragone*, while the overture is literally déjà vu all over again, as he had used it in two previous operas,

A lovely little bit in Rosina and Figaro's Act I duet "Dunque io son" was originally the cabaletta (the fast part at the end) of an aria from Rossini's first staged opera, *La cambiale di matrimonio*, a work which featured that most exotic of opera characters – a Canadian businessman.

One of *Barber's* comic highlights is the music lesson scene. Almaviva, disguised as Lindoro disguised as a substitute music teacher, proceeds to give Rosina her singing lesson as Bartolo dozes off. The piece she sings is supposedly the rondo from the new opera, *The Futile Precaution* (the actual subtitle of both Rossini's opera and Beaumarchais' play).

This scene has long been fodder for prima donnas to interpolate arias of their own choosing, often with no regard for plot or situation. In fact, some singers would substitute two, three, even four arias, essentially putting on a mini concert (complete with encores) for their adoring fans.

The lesson scene has been tarted up with a startling range of showpiece arias, among them The Queen of the Night's "Der Hölle Rache" from *The Magic Flute*, the mad scene from *Lucia di Lammermoor*, even "Home! Sweet Home!" (a melody with bona fide opera credentials – it is heard in both Henry Bishop's *Clari, the maid of Milan* and the mad scene in Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*).

The Story

Count Almaviva follows Rosina, the girl of his dreams, to Seville, where he runs into his former servant Figaro, now a barber with a booming business. Almaviva hires Figaro to help him rescue the very willing Rosina from the clutches of her crochety old guardian, Dr. Bartolo. The opera ends, predictably, with the wedding of the Count and Rosina.

Spoiler: If we know the three Figaro plays (or even Mozart's opera), our pleasure is tempered with the edgy sense that this isn't a straight-up happy ending – for the marriage of Rosina and the Count is founded on deception and marked by later infidelity (In *Mariage* the Count has become a serial adulterer, while in *La Mère coupable*, we learn that both spouses have illegitimate children (who of course are in love with one another). Needless to say, Figaro must again come to the rescue.

Barber is often called a perfect first opera. While this is true in that one is sure to leave the theatre laughing and humming, it promulgates the silly myth that most opera is too sophisticated for the average Joe to understand.

Barber is just as perfect as a 91st opera. Seeing it again, from the perspective of a shiny new production, is a chance to dive in for a reunion with our old friends, Figaro, Rosina, Bartolo, and the gang, to re-acquaint ourselves with that luscious music, and to hear the familiar old songs ("Home! Sweet Home!" notwithstanding).

As for those lucky ones experiencing it for the first time ...you are in for a treat!

Maureen Woodall

Discover more
about *The Barber of Seville*
www.pov.bc.ca/barber.html

Music & Videos
Artist Information
Background
Synopsis

Links & Resources, including
Greater Victoria Public Library Reading List
CIA report on Beaumarchais
and the American Revolution

SEASON UNDERWRITERS



RBC Royal Bank®



VICTORIA
FOUNDATION



Chateau Victoria
HOTEL & SUITES



Sun
Life Financial

SURTITLES

CHORUS DEVELOPMENT

NRS Foundation

VICTORIA FOUNDATION

30 AND
YOUNGER



BRAVO SOCIETY

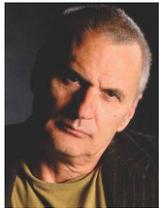
HORNE COUPAR
BARRISTERS + SOLICITORS

RBC Wealth Management
Dominion Securities

David W. Moore
Vice-President & Investment Advisor

Cast & Creative Team

In their first opera project for POV, in 2012, **Morris Panych** and **Ken MacDonald** created a moody, stylized *Macbeth*, which became a co-production with Opéra de Québec and was subsequently staged at Kentucky Opera.



One of Canada's most celebrated directors and playwrights, Morris Panych is a two-time winner of the Governor General's Literary Award for Drama and has collected 14 Jessie Richardson Awards, and five Dora Mavor Moore Awards. As the new *X-Files* miniseries hits the airwaves, it's worth mentioning that Morris's acting career includes appearances in a half dozen episodes of the original *X-Files* series.

Ken MacDonald got his start as resident designer for the Belfry Theatre and has now designed for all the major theatre companies in Canada. Along the way he has garnered a Gemini, 17 Jessie Richardson Awards, a Betty Mitchell Award, and two Dora Mavor Moore Awards.



The creative team for *Barber* also includes award winning costume designer **Dana Osborne**, who worked with Morris and Ken on POV's *Macbeth* and has designed for the Stratford Festival and Soulpepper, among others. Lighting designer **Kim Purtell** (POV's *Ariadne auf Naxos*) has credits across Canada, including the Stratford and Shaw Festivals.

The all-important music is in the brilliant hands of POV conductor **Timothy Vernon**, chorus master **Giuseppe Pietrarroia**, and Principal Coach **Tatiana Vassilieva**.



Clarence Frazer was **Figaro** last spring in the Canadian Opera Company's Ensemble Studio production where, *ham that he is, he also acted up a storm* (*La Scena*

Musicale). He also sang the role in a couple of performances on the COC's main stage as a last-minute replacement for an ailing Joshua Hopkins. He's off to Saskatoon in June for yet another turn as the wily barber.



Antonio Figueroa, our globe-trotting **Almaviva**, has just returned from performances in Paris and Vienna. In 2011 he completed a worldwide tour as

Tamino in English director Peter Brook's *A Magic Flute*. We last saw him at POV as Ferrando in our 2010 production of *Così fan tutte*.

A gift to coloratura mezzo sopranos, **Rosina** is such an irresistible character that covetous sopranos frequently poach the role. Mezzo soprano **Sylvia Szadovszki** has sung Rosina with Edmonton Opera and with Germany's Theater Hof. We're delighted to welcome her back to POV, following her 2012 debut as Mercédès in *Carmen*.



Peter McGillivray knows **Dr. Bartolo** very well from performances in both *The Barber of Seville* (Opera Lyra Ottawa) and *The Marriage of Figaro* (Manitoba Opera, Opera Lyra Ottawa). Peter was Yamadori in POV's 2008 *Madama Butterfly*, Noah in Noye's *Fludde*, and Vicar Gedge in *Albert Herring*.



The cast also includes **Giles Tomkins** as Don Basilio, in his sixth POV appearance; **Geneviève Lévesque** making her POV debut as Berta; and POV choristers **Nathan McDonald** (Fiorello) and **Andrew Erasmus** (the sergeant).

Les Feluettes

Libretto by Michel Marc Bouchard
Music by Kevin March

A new Canadian Opera
Co-commissioned & Co-produced
by Pacific Opera Victoria & Opéra de Montréal

For 30 years, **Michel Marc Bouchard's** vivid, structurally brilliant play *Les Feluettes* has been an opera waiting to happen. A major work of Canadian theatre, this stunning romantic drama cries out for operatic treatment.

Premiered in 1987, *Les Feluettes* (known in English as *Lilies*) has been produced all over the world and was made into a Genie-award winning movie in 1996.

The drama revolves round the consequences of a moment in 1912: a group of boys at a Quebec college rehearse Gabriele D'Annunzio's sensual play *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*. As a devastating love triangle unfolds, one boy dies, one is sent to prison, one becomes a bishop.

Decades later, the bishop is made to watch as prisoners re-enact the past, re-creating a panoply of vivid characters – a young pyromaniac; an old man hunting the missing pieces of his past; a brutal alcoholic; an exiled countess; a beautiful Frenchwoman who pilots a hot-air balloon.

The work is a play within a play within a play, where love flares into feverish splendour, memory becomes a prison, and justice is eternally elusive.

Pacific Opera Victoria and Opéra de Montréal are working together to make this new opera a reality.

Artistic Director Timothy Vernon is the musical dramaturge, and he will conduct both the Montreal world première this May and the Victoria première in April 2017. *Les Feluettes* is POV's first new work co-commissioned with Opéra de Montréal.

Les Feluettes is part of POV's 2016/17 season. Subscriptions are on sale beginning February 11 and may be ordered at performances of *The Barber of Seville*, at 250-385-0222, or online at www.pov.bc.ca.

Events

THE BARBER OF SEVILLE

February 11, 13, 19 at 8 pm
Wednesday, February 17, at 7 pm
Sunday, February 21, at 2:30 pm

Royal Theatre
Pre-performance
lobby lecture
1 hour before curtain

COMMUNITY EVENTS

INSIDE OPERA with Robert Holliston

Sunday, January 31. Two sessions: 10 am and noon.
Phillip T. Young Recital Hall, UVic.

Robert and guests present a guided tour of *The Barber of Seville*.
Bring your friends. **Free event. Free parking.**

RSVP by noon January 29: 250-382-1641 or rsvp@pov.bc.ca.

Family Day at the Royal BC Museum

Monday, February 8, 10 am to 5 pm. 675 Belleville St.

From 11 am to 1 pm, POV singers take over the galleries with performances in the Museum's nooks and crannies. Free.

Sense of Occasion Thursday, February 11, 6:30 pm.
East Lobby, Royal Theatre

Pre-performance reception to celebrate the opening night of *The Barber of Seville*. Gourmet finger foods and wine. Space is limited. Dress is festive. **\$35 per person.** Reserve with payment by February 5: 250-382-1641.

DONOR RECOGNITION EVENT

President's Circle Working Rehearsal

Saturday, February 6, Royal Theatre

1 pm Coffee and cookies

1:20 pm Discussion with members of the Creative Team

2 pm Orchestra Sitzprobe rehearsal begins

For members of the *Impresario Circle* and *President's Circle*.

Invitations have been sent by mail. RSVP by February 4 to

250-382-1641 or rsvp@pov.bc.ca.

BAUMANN CENTRE EVENTS

925 Balmoral Road

RSVP to 250-382-1641 or rsvp@pov.bc.ca

Opera Motifs Tuesday, February 2, 8 pm.

Robert Holliston explores *The Barber of Seville*. Free.

Artist Lounge Wednesday, February 10, 7 pm.

Robert Holliston chats with Director Morris Panych. Free.

Master Class Monday, February 15, 7 pm.

Timothy Vernon works with participants on artistic interpretation. With Tatiana Vassilieva on piano. Free.

Lunchbox Opera Tuesday, February 16, 12:30 pm.

A Don Quixote themed recital by baritone Peter McGillivray and bass-baritone Giles Tomkins, with pianists Robert Holliston and Tatiana Vassilieva. Bring your lunch or pre-order a Zambri's lunchbox for \$15 (please order by February 12: 250-382-1641).

Event Information: www.pov.bc.ca/calendar.html

Poulenc LA VOIX HUMAINE

A forty-minute one-act opera
for soprano and piano

May 12, 14, 18, 20 at 7:30 pm
May 22 at 2:30 pm

The Baumann Centre
925 Balmoral Rd

Starring Kathleen Brett, with Robert Holliston on piano
Directed by Diana Leblanc

*The telephone is
sometimes more
dangerous than
the revolver.*

Jean Cocteau

Adults: \$25
Students: \$15
250-385-0222
www.pov.bc.ca

Listen in on the final phone conversation
between a woman and her lover.

He has broken up with her and has called to arrange the return of his love letters. We hear only her side of the conversation as she tries to win him back and keep him talking.

The opera's themes of technology as a lifeline and a weapon, that both connects and isolates, are more relevant than ever in today's digital world.

Sunday, April 10, 6 pm

Carson Hall
Victoria Convention Centre

Spectacular MUSICAL GALA

A gala to benefit Pacific Opera Victoria & the Victoria Symphony
In recognition of the Diamond Jubilee of the Victoria Symphony

A magical, black-tie evening of music showcasing renowned voices from the opera stage together with the Victoria Symphony, which will have just returned from a successful national performance tour.

Gourmet hors d'oeuvres, a decadent three-course sit-down dinner, fine wines, glowing entertainment, a dazzling auction and more!

Tickets \$300 (with substantial tax receipt)

Contact Karen Batchelor at 250.412.1976

Karen@victoriasymphony.ca

Gala Chairman: Eric Charman

Gala Co-Chairs: David H. Flaherty & Patricia Lortie

KeyNotes

POV delivers the *KeyNotes* Newsletter and invitations to Producers events by e-mail. To receive POV Enews & emailed notification of *KeyNotes*, sign up for enews at www.pov.bc.ca or email enews@pov.bc.ca

On request, we'll mail *KeyNotes* to donors & subscribers who don't have internet access. Just phone 250-382-1641.

EDITOR: MAUREEN WOODALL

PUBLIC FUNDING

