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Festival review: Il Barbiere di Siviglia, Festival Theatre, Edinburgh

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Barber of Seville

Il Barbiere di Siviglia

Festival Theatre, **Edinburgh**

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four stars

BY THE time a cascade of crochets showers down upon the cast in Laurent Pelly's staging of Rossini's best-known opera, the message is clear: everything that happens in this adaptation of Beaumarchais' familiar tale of an old rogue thwarted in his intentions by our heroine's younger lover (crucially aided by the titular Barber of course) is there in the music.

With conductor Jeremie Rohrer and his Cercle de l'Harmonie providing the freshest interpretation of the music in the pit, the characters inhabit a world framed by pages and staves of music, sometimes literally replicating the score on a huge scale. Songs

and fictional operas are already pivotal ingredients in the libretto and this production takes that and builds a self-contained world around it.

Created by the Theatre des Champs-Elysees in partnership with five other houses, there have been some changes in the cast in its incarnations, but it is hard to find any fault in the one that has come to Edinburgh. Catherine Trottman is a vivacious Rosina with a superb range and American tenor Michele Angelini has astonishing articulation in even the most stratospheric sections of his arias, while Peter Kalman's Bartolo tends to own the stage whenever he is on.

Perhaps that skews things a little, not least to the slight exclusion of Guillaume Andrieux's louche Figaro at times, as does some unevenness in the energetic performance style, which is less convincing when it shades from careful choreography towards broad farce. A vaudeville approach is nonetheless an important element of the tweaking of the show for its new Edinburgh variety **theatre** home, with scenes "in front of the cloth" essential to its success.

The young chorus, Unikanti, are as well-drilled as the principals and the balance between voices and the instrumental ensemble pretty much perfect, from the revelatory account of the overture to the poised fortepiano continuo playing, with the period wind instruments, especially the clarinets, absolutely sparkling. Further performances on Tuesday and Wednesday.