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Opera review: The Barber of Seville, Edinburgh Festival Theatre

The production relies on sparse sets. 'Picture: Vincent Pontet The production relies on sparse sets.

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Have your say It's an opera about music. That appears to be the central message director and designer Laurent Pelly and his team are dealing with in his concept production of Rossini's Barber of Seville for Théâtre de Champs-Élysées. The Barber of Seville, Edinburgh Festival Theatre (***) There is no setting as such, merely a stage design made up of giant manuscript paper, a collapsible pop-up music room for Rosina's music lesson, and her prison bars configured as musical staves. All very inoffensive, and once we get used to the fact that that's it visually – the robotic chorus (the youthful Unikanti) and Figaro's repeated descent on a deus ex machina serve to emphasise the sensory detachment – the concentration settles comfortably on the music. There are musical delights from the very outset, conductor Jérémie Rhorer's period band Le Circle de l'Harmonie colouring the overture with raw pizzazz, and a final crescendo that translates into dizzy expectation.

Opera preview: Michèle Losier on preparing to sing the title role in La Cenerentola at the Edinburgh International Festival Rhorer's swift and seamless direction underpins the strong points of this cast. Michele Angelini's performance as Count Almaviva combines vocal gymnastics with easeful portrayal of the conniving aristocrat. Just occasionally, his pitch drops off centre. Catherine Trottmann plays Rosina with red-hot physical energy and a strong, enrapturing top voice. As Bartolo, Peter Kálmán looks and sounds every inch the villain, a stentorian voice that would shake the rafters. Robert Gleadow's Basilio is an engaging mix of lugubrious stupidity and wily survivability, and as Berta, Julie Pasturaud, ensures her one big number makes characterful impact. Which leaves Figaro, and a portrayal by Guillaume Andrieux that sparkles with nimble wit, artful stagecraft and athletic voice. There IS more to Rossini's opera than the score. But the virile energy of this performance mostly compensates for what is missing.

7th and 8th August

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