

'Figaro' and Vegas: A Zany Marriage

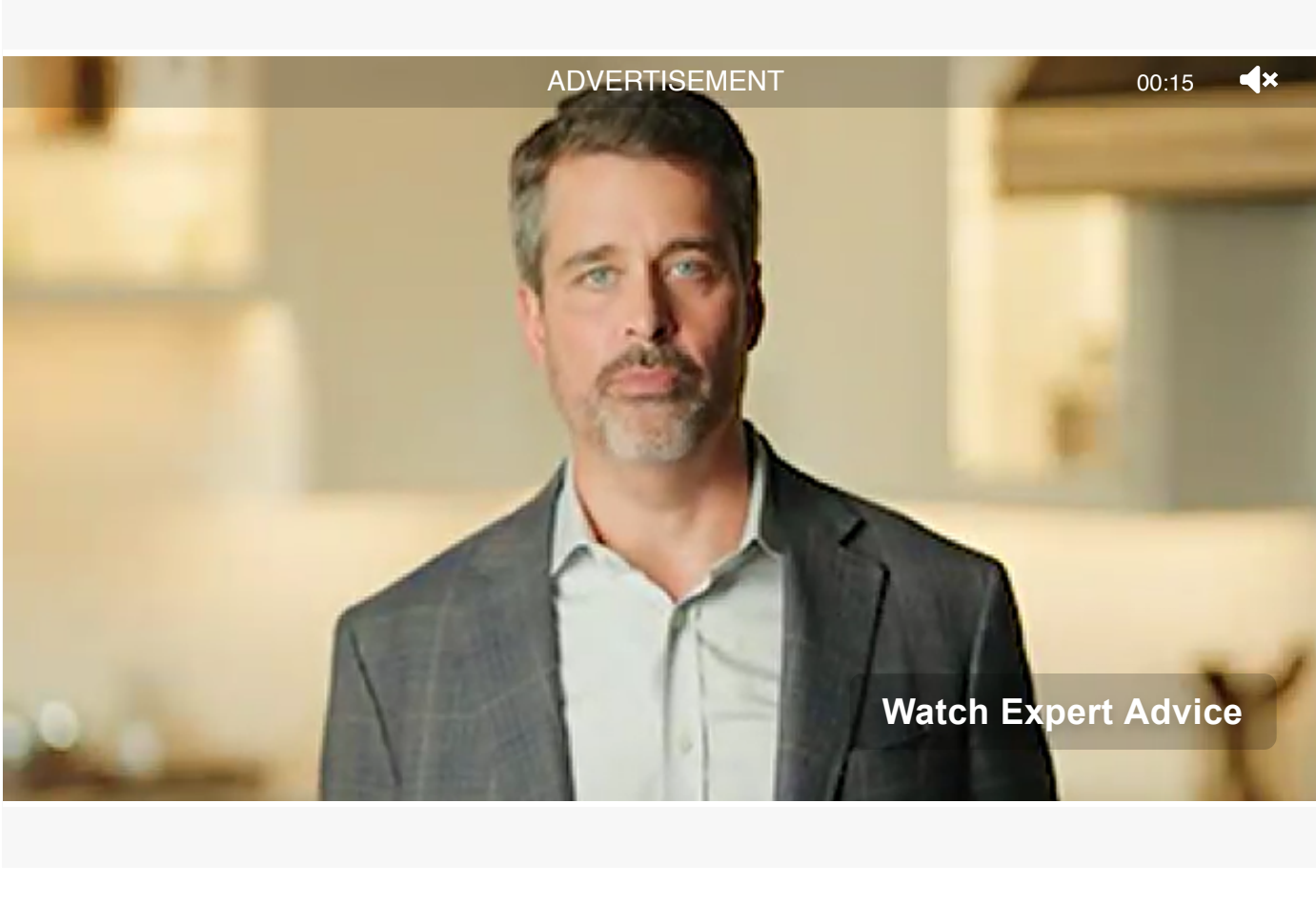
By **Joan Reinthaler**

January 23, 2006

Take Mozart's Count and turn him into a lounge lizard, and you have the enormously enjoyable "The Marriage of Figaro, the Las Vegas Version," currently onstage at the newly renovated Tivoli Theatre.

Part opera, part zany spoof, this show transports Beaumarchais' story from Seville in the 18th century to Sin City in the '60s, nudging Mozart's Count and Countess, Cherubino and Marcellina, Figaro and Susanna, closer to the worlds of "Guys and Dolls" and Gilbert and Sullivan than might have seemed possible -- or desirable. The beguiling thing about this show, part of the In Series's ongoing efforts to bring unusual artistic productions to this city, is that it moves in and out of Mozart's frame so comfortably, so smoothly and entirely without an attempt to simply recreate his wonderful opera.

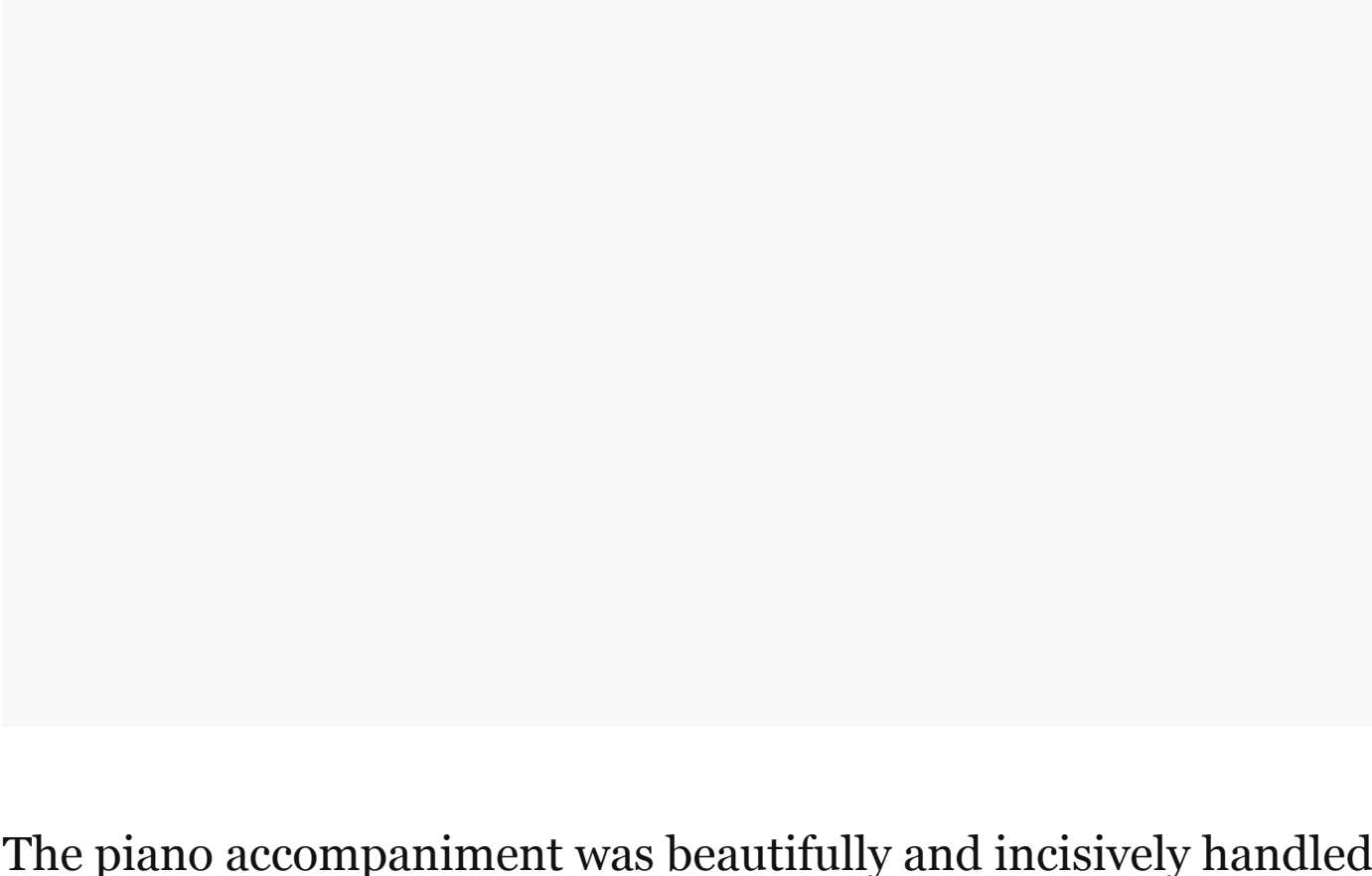
The Count, here a smarmy nightclub entertainer, is after Susanna, the Countess's assistant. Susanna is engaged to Figaro, the Count's assistant. Marcellina, moll and former chorus girl, wants Figaro, and Cherubino, a caricature of a '60s hippie, wants every female he lays his eyes on (here, just as in Mozart's time, the role is played by a woman). People masquerade as other people, hide from each other in closets and behind flimsy chairs and leap out of windows, but in the end they sort themselves out and pair up happily.



The libretto is no longer Lorenzo da Ponte's. It is Elizabeth Pringle's, and she has managed both to construct lines in '60s lingo that morph smoothly into arias entirely Mozart's (in English) and, occasionally, to break out completely into scenes of square-dancing, hopping jive or cabaret sophistication.

Both the acting and the singing ranged from good to excellent. Laura Lewis, a splendid Countess, managed a gorgeous "Dove sono" amid all the silliness. William Heim's Count was a master of the leer, the put-down and the expressive eyebrow. Terry Eberhardt, whose role required a chameleon-like ability to be a Mozartean Figaro one moment and a melodramatic ham the next, did both well. Rebecca Ocampo sang Susanna's arias nicely but was more pert than toothsome in the role. Linda Nadeau was a magnificent, buxom Marcellina, and other assignments were well handled by Ingrid Cowan as Cherubino, Scott Sedar as the lawyer Bartolo and as a drunken gardener, and Peter Burroughs as Basilio, the Mafiaesque nightclub manager.

But the real star here is director Tom Mallan, who clearly knows just exactly how far to go and what to do to get there. The acting details are exquisite. Things move seamlessly, and the three bimbos (clad mainly in net stockings and an assortment of spectacular wigs) whose job it is to rearrange the set and to hover over the proceedings, choruslike, pantomiming their commentary, are zanyly splendid.



The piano accompaniment was beautifully and incisively handled by Music Director Carlos Rodriguez, who reserved Mozart's overture for the very end to accompany the applause.

There's still a chance to see this -- tonight and next Saturday.

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