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Tony Cooper

Something to suit all in Savile Row opera

Seville became Savile Row in this crazy, riotous and fast-paced version by Unexpected Opera of Rossini's most popular work.

An uproarious and totally unexpected makeover, it was lifted out of its pretty 17th century Spanish setting and dumped hook, line and sinker into 1950s London, the era of Brylcreem, Teddy Boys and rock and roll. And this show had it all.

Amorous Count Almaviva (sung admirably by Jazz James) became a marquis (but only of Basingstoke) while Dr. Bartolo (Matthew Quirk) was well suited to the part of Mr. Bart, a fashionable tailor of Savile Row, and Rosina, his lovely ward (sung with technical assurance by Aurore Lacabe) turned up as just plain Rosie Simpson – but a girl with attitude!

The long, boring recitative bits were replaced by spoken dialogue recycled into modern parlance, while in the second act a 'sing-a-long' found great favour with an audience who loved every minute.

Joe Morgan as Figaro (dressed impeccably as a Ted) possessed a fine lyrical voice, while his stage presence equalled his singing. And one of the most pleasurable scenes was Basingstoke serenading Rosie accompanied by a motley four-piece skiffle group complete with tea-chest bass and washboard but boasting a Spanish guitar. That's continuity for you.

The whole production, however, was a turn-up for the books and was splendidly conceived and wittily directed by Lynn Binstock, who particularly aimed it at a non-opera going audience, but any dedicated opera buff would, I'm sure, take to it like a duck to water.