

**August 2005 / Princeton, New Jersey - TimeOFF**  
**'Il Barbiere di Siviglia' by Stuart Duncan**

The action takes place in Seville in the 1920s in this production, staged by New Jersey Opera Theater. *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (The Barber of Seville) was a fiasco on its opening night in Rome on Feb. 20, 1816, but a runaway success ever since. The work — with a text based on a Beaumarchais novel and music by Gioachino Rossini — has long been favored by coloratura sopranos, despite being subjected to disfiguring cuts. Recently it has taken on a new lease on life (hardly needed) as coloratura mezzos have sung it — as Rossini originally intended.

The composer, who wrote "serious" operas, here shows off his wit and musical invention. And it is with this spirit that New Jersey Opera Theater has brought us its version at the Berlind Theatre at McCarter. Director Rhoda Levine not only has moved the action of the evening to Seville in the 1920s, but filled the stage with witty bustle (each of the scruffy band of local musicians in the opening scene, for example, comes on stage with a decided character of his own). Later the same group will become the local soldiers, each again with individual characters and mannerisms.

**Nor has Ms. Levine forgotten the principals: the handsome Jason Kaminski as Figaro, and the lovely Gian-Carla Tisera as Rosina, singing like the proverbial bird with stunning power and warmth.** Richard Cassell as Basilio is ready to change sides and allegiances at the toss of a few coins, and Stephanos Tsirakoglou, as Dr. Bartolo, is at once imperious and conceited, humble and outwitted. Ms. Levine plants her seeds of humor and watches them sprout, much like slander from a whisper.

Conductor Brent McMunn shows right from the start that he admires Rossini. The overture is a thing of real beauty (even if legend is correct that he stole it from another of his operas). In his program notes, Mr. McMunn points out that Rossini was only 24 years old when he penned the entire opera in an unbelievable 13 days. In another paragraph he notes the composer's use of melody shades and rhythms to create stage characters and points to Rossini's imaginative use of "crescendos." An evening of delight and admiration of the young talent.