

# Opera director Noa Naamat: The Marriage of Figaro is sheer brilliance



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The Sibelius Academy Opera: The Marriage of Figaro



Sibelius Academy's opera welcomes the Israeli-born Noa Naamat to direct *The Marriage of Figaro* – a classic opera piece by composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and librettist Lorenzo da Ponte. The opera will premiere on April 6<sup>th</sup>. We had a chance to interview Noa just a few days after her arrival in Helsinki.

**Yesterday you had your first rehearsal. How did it go?**

Yesterday's rehearsal went really well! We kicked things off with a concept presentation, talking through the overarching vision for the production, followed

by some insightful character discussions with the singers. It was mainly about laying down a solid foundation for our joint weeks ahead, and the energy in the room was just great, so I look forward to seeing where we go from here!

## **What led you to pursue a career as an opera director? Share your story.**

Well, back in high school I was deeply involved in theater, both on stage and behind the scenes. Directing my first play at 16, “The Lesson” by Ionesco, was a thrilling experience, and I realized that directing was my true calling. But it wasn’t until I went to see my first opera in Tel Aviv at 19 that everything changed. The sheer power of the music and storytelling blew me away. Just two weeks later, I already started working at the Israeli Opera, and the rest is history.

## **What are your favorite moments in your job as an opera director?**

I truly enjoy those intimate moments with the singers, watching their characters evolve throughout our rehearsals, adding more nuance and depth. And when everything—the set, the lighting, the costumes—comes together to breathe life into the production, there’s really nothing quite like it. It’s a wonderful journey that gets richer and more rewarding with each step.

## **How would you describe your directing?**

When working on a piece, I strive to delve deep into the essence of the opera. It’s not just about what happens on the surface; it’s about getting to the core of the story. I ask myself, what defines the world of this opera? What power structures and hierarchies shape its dynamics? I’m interested in tapping into those universal, timeless themes and giving them a fresh spin. We have to keep opera relevant and relatable for our audiences.

## **Why is The Marriage of Figaro one of the most famous operas in the world and what is so amazing about it?**

Well, it is a real gem in the operatic world; vibrant characters, absurd comic situations, and plot twists that keep you on the edge of your seat. And that second-

act finale? It's like witnessing a finely tuned Swiss clock in action. I think Mozart's divine music, paired with Da Ponte's sharp-witted libretto, really pushed the boundaries of opera buffa, infusing it with layers of complexity and emotional depth. It's sheer brilliance – a complex work that provokes both reflection and laughter.

## **What current themes are addressed in The Marriage of Figaro opera in today's context? What deeper undertones does the story explore?**

One of the central themes revolves around the dynamics of social class and the challenge to aristocratic authority. The Count is used to getting what he wants, but something changes on that day; the traditional power dynamics shift and the powerful individuals can no longer enforce their will unchecked. This reminded me of the modern Me Too movement, where suddenly the rules of the game have changed – women are standing up and asserting their autonomy over their bodies.

In Act 4, the Count's plea for forgiveness signifies a transformative moment in the narrative. By acknowledging his mistakes, he endeavors to adapt to the changing societal values. When he's accepted back into the community, despite his past, it sends a powerful message, particularly relevant in today's cancel culture discourse. It shows how redemption and accountability are vital for societal growth and evolution.

## **What kind of opera is this from a student's point of view? What is it like to learn it?**

Operas like those crafted by Mozart and Da Ponte offer an invaluable learning experience. They provide roles tailored to young singers' vocal abilities and age group. Plus, since the opera is in Italian, the singers get to fine-tune their language skills, especially with their work on the recitativi. It also presents a unique challenge with its lengthy roles and extensive stage time, demanding both comic timing and authenticity in character portrayal. For me, this opera, alongside its counterparts *Così fan tutte* and *Don Giovanni*, is like the ABCs of opera, laying down the basics for any aspiring singer.

## **Opera is said to be an elitist, overpriced and old-fashioned art form. What does this evoke in you?**

When people label opera as elitist or old-fashioned, I can't really relate. You see, I grew up in a working-class Jewish family in Israel, with roots stretching back to Iraq and Afghanistan. Needless to say, my cultural influences leaned heavily towards the Middle Eastern. European culture, let alone classical music or opera, wasn't part of my upbringing. But then, I attended my first opera, and it struck a chord deep within me.

Also, working in opera, I have the privilege of collaborating with individuals from diverse backgrounds. I often wish the public could see beyond the grand performances and realize that behind the scenes, we're just a group of people doing what we love, whether we're in jeans or fancy costumes. At its core, opera is about ordinary people coming together to create an extraordinary experience.

## **What advice would you give to aspiring musicians on building their international network?**

I'd say there's no one-size-fits-all approach. Each of us has our own unique journey, right? It's all about figuring out what fuels your artistic fire and helps you grow as an artist. Speaking from my own experience, diving headfirst into different opera scenes worldwide, understanding their mentalities and learning their languages has been a game-changer for me. It helped me connect directly with the text and build relationships with artists from around the globe.

I think it is also important not to get too comfortable in one place. Pushing yourself outside of your comfort zone and exposing yourself to diverse approaches to music and theater-making worldwide is crucial for artistic growth. So, I'd say embrace the adventure and enjoy the ride!

## **Come and witness the revolutionary opera in April!**

### **Opera studies at the Sibelius Academy**

Opera students at the Sibelius Academy perform in four full-scale productions in the course of their studies and in one dramatised concert with piano accompaniment. The opera productions are staged with the assistance of Finnish and foreign professionals of opera and of the stage.