



A **1980s 'Do** FOR 'THE BARBER OF SEVILLE'

BY NED CANTY
PHOTOS BY DAVID SWANSON

*The barber of Seville was in town in May, giving a shave and scheming toward a secret wedding, as the Curtis Opera Theatre staged Rossini's opera at the Prince Music Theater. A theatrical take on the 1980s informed the work of director Ned Canty, set and costume designer Marie Anne Chiment, and lighting designer Thom Weaver—and gave the cast a colorful and at times outrageous context in which to perform. The director looked back on the production, through these photographs, and shared his thoughts with **Overtones**.*



(Opposite) Kevin Ray as Figaro, Joshua Stewart as Almaviva, and Sarah Shafer as Rosina in their quintessential '80s costumes, designed by Marie Anne Chiment.



The inspiration for our production came primarily from the high school movies of the 1980s. Dozens of movies are referenced in ways subtle or non, but the biggest influences were likely *Say Anything*, *Sixteen Candles*, and *Better Off Dead*. It struck me early on in our discussions how similar they were to *Barber* thematically—each is about young people trying to be together in defiance of the older generation, fate, or society. Most involve

(This page) Ms. Chiment's innovative set offered a street view when closed (above, with Joseph Barron as Bartolo) and opened smoothly to an elegant internal space (at left, with Shir Rozzen as Berta).

shenanigans or disguise to win the day. There was an antic spirit to those movies, as well, that seemed to suit the informed optimism of Rossini. It is also a period where the excesses of fashion can at least begin to approach the excesses of fashion in Rossini's own time. Many sins of fashion were committed in those dark '80s days, and we will not soon forget.

The set for this show—designed by Marie Anne Chiment, who also did the costumes—was the anchor for everything we did. It allowed us to be both outside and inside, and its interior allowed for all the doors you need for a farce, as well as that wonderful staircase, perfect for creeping up, or rushing down. It was based on the architecture of Philadelphia and suggests a neighborhood that was once grand, fell on hard times, and is now in the midst of colonization by a wave of artists, musicians, and hipsters.

I loved the moment in the show when the set opened for the first time—pure theatrical bliss. Green screen and CGI are no substitute for the wonderful feeling of seeing the impossible in the flesh: That house is *moving!* ◇