



From left, Dorabella (Arminè Kassabian), Don Alfonso (Cairan Ryan), Ferrando (Sergio Ricardo Gonzalez), Despina (Margot Rood), Guglielmo (Rodolfo Nieto) and Fiordiligi (Leila Bowie) in Green Mountain Opera's "Così fan tutte."

Photo by Spencer Leonard

**TIMES ARGUS**

By JIM LOWE

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WAITSFIELD — "Charming" may be too mild a word to describe the Green Mountain Opera's stripped-to-the-essentials production of Mozart's "Così fan tutte," which opened Thursday at the Skinner Barn.

The performance of this comic opera by the company's Emerging Artist Program could also be described as raucously funny, wryly witty and simply beautiful. (Tonight's final performance at 7:30 p.m. is sold out.)

"Così," with libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte, has great fun with the battle of the sexes in a farce-like comedy with sublimely beautiful music. After all, a loose but apt translation of the title is "They All Do It."

Don Alfonso, a philosopher of sorts, bets the young gentlemen, Guglielmo and Ferrando, that when push comes to shove, their lovers, Fiordiligi and Dorabella, could be enticed to be unfaithful to them.

What ensues, with the aid of the wily maid Despina, is psychologically razor-sharp and terribly funny. This is a truly sophisticated romantic comedy set to some of the greatest music ever written.

The Emerging Artist Program offers young up-and-coming professional opera musicians nearly a month of working with masters in anticipation of substantial careers. To a one, the singers were excellent.

The production, directed by renowned baritone Sanford Sylvan and conducted by Bruce Stasyna, director of the program, has reduced the opera to basic but effective storytelling. Substantially but judiciously cut (to two and a half hours!), it relies on minimal staging, contemporary costumes, an expert string quintet of Vermont professional musicians and an electronic keyboard, well played by another emerging artist, Jennifer Szeto.

The production, sung in the original Italian, did, however, benefit from English super-titles projected above the stage, making the story easy to follow.

The production was well sung and acted throughout, but one performer stood out. McGill University-trained American soprano Margot Rood, in her second year in this program, proved a particularly able Mozart singer and a terribly witty comedian. Rood's brilliant soprano is bell clear, and she delivers it with great agility and, more importantly, a deep musical understanding and expressiveness. Rood is a singer to watch.

The others were no slouches either. Leila Bowie employed her rich and warm soprano expressively in Fiordiligi's florid music. Arminè Kassabian, also McGill-trained, used her unusually rich but light mezzo warmly to deliver Dorabella's lyrical lines.

Cairan Ryan, yet another product of Montreal's McGill, proved a witty comedian as well as an able singer with an attractive baritone as Don Alfonso. Rodolfo Nieto's rich bass-baritone gave him real presence as Guglielmo, while Sergio Ricardo Gonzalez's light, expressive tenor made for a most sympathetic Ferrando.

Green Mountain Opera's "Così fan tutte" may have been bare bones, but it was great entertainment — and beautiful music.

Green Mountain Opera Festival

Saturday, June 18: "Così fan tutte," 7:30 p.m. — sold out.

Sunday, June 19: "Carmen" 3 p.m. — Bizet's tale of passion and revenge starring Julie Nesrallah  
Barre Opera House, 6 N. Main St., Barre, \$25-\$60, 802-476-8188, [www.barreoperahouse.org](http://www.barreoperahouse.org).