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## HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

### Theater: Yo! *Figaro 90210!* and *Somewhere (Almost) Fun*

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**FIGARO 90210** (advance)

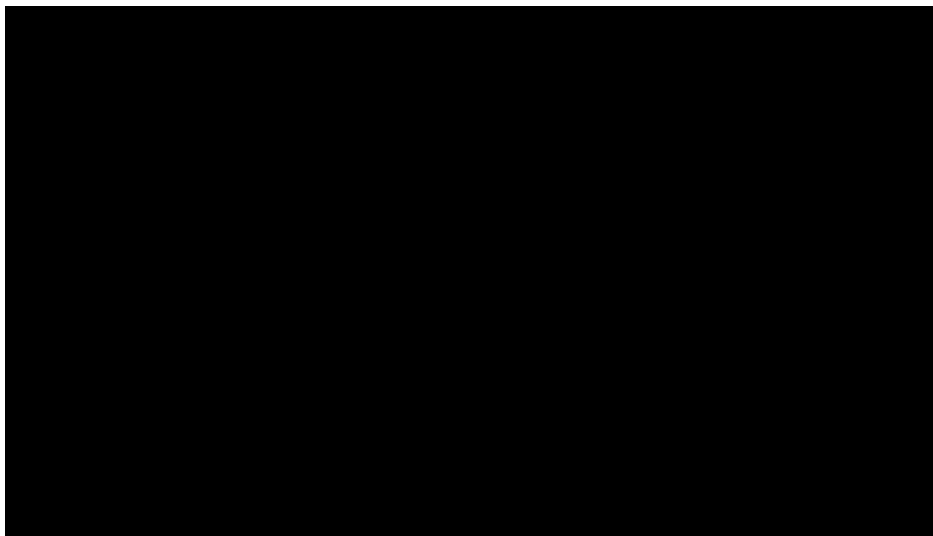
**SOMEWHERE FUN** \*\* out of \*\*\*\*

**FIGARO 90210** (advance)

**MORNINGSIDE OPERA AT NSD THEATRE**

Few things are scarier than having a friend insist you come to their relative/best friend/co-worker's play/rock band/reading/art show. But it's not every day they say, "Come to my brother's opera." It's even rarer when that experience is actually fun. That's what happened last fall when I attended *Figaro 90210!*, a multi-culti Los Angeles update to the classic Mozart opera set in the world of undocumented workers. Suddenly *The Marriage Of Figaro* involved pot-smoking landscapers, hip-hop teens rapping to some classical beats and true love endangered by a lecherous boss who knows one phone call can send you across the border and away from your sweetheart.

Conceived and with a new libretto by Vid Guerrerio, it combines a modern setting and all-new English lyrics with the music of Mozart for a show that is much shorter than most operas and fresh enough to give a new spin to that classic tale. Here's a video clip of "It's Like, Yo, I Don't Know" from last fall's staged reading.

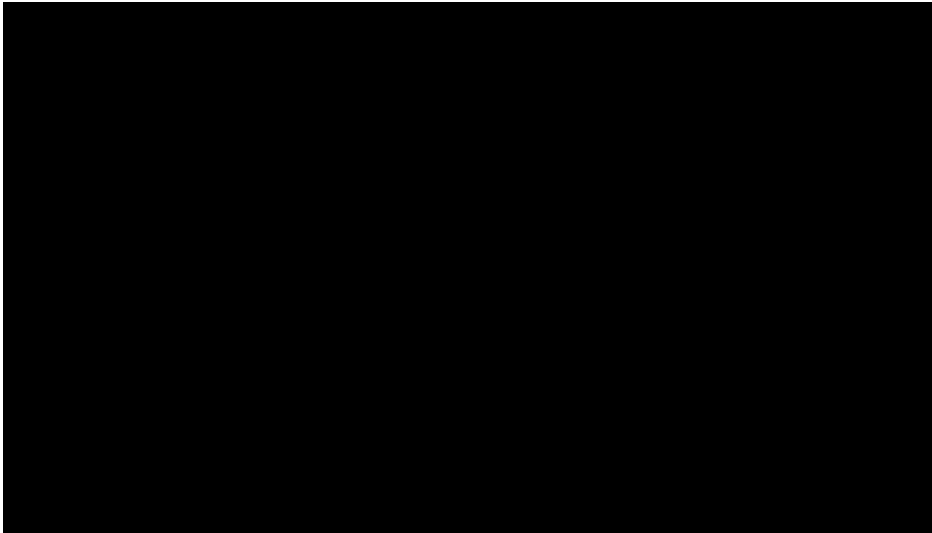


That brief run was a success and it's coming back June 11-16 via Morningside Opera at the NSD Theatre in NYC. In the clip, the artists were only accompanied by a single pianist. For this run, a new group of performers is joined by a pianist and a five string ensemble, making for a much more powerful musical punch. Sometimes, happily, friends of friends can actually be talented.

**SOMEWHERE FUN \*\* out of \*\*\*\***  
**VINEYARD THEATRE**

Playwright Jenny Schwartz is an artist still searching for her voice. She evinces a playful love for language a la Caryl Churchill. She embraces the arch absurdity of Will Eno. But as of yet, what she lacks is humanity, the ability to turn intellectual gambits into emotional truths, odd conceits into characters we care about even if we don't quite know why. *Somewhere Fun* becomes exhausting by the end but it's interesting enough to believe her next play or the one after that might be the breakthrough she needs.

The first act is the strongest. Rosemary Rappaport (Kate Mulgrew) is striding down a New York City street when she spots Evelyn (Kathleen Chalfant), an old acquaintance now in a wheelchair. They banter and Rosemary heads to lunch where she holds court, steamrolling over Cecelia (Mary Schultz) though Cecelia has news of her own thanks to an internet romance. The dialogue here is artificial and amusing when delivered by a pro like Mulgrew. She relishes the word play, the repetitions and -- for a while -- Schultz manages to convey the way people talk past each other. The style on display reaches for a heightened reality. It's a lot of work to listen to since it's all linguistic razzle-dazzle. Yes, information is imparted but it's mostly the verbal juggling that interests the playwright and a little bit of that goes a long way. The show is only 135 minutes or so, but you understand why it has two intermissions -- the audience simply needs a break.



But the distinctive patter Schwartz sets up in that first act -- a patter Mulgrew makes the most of -- slowly dissipates. The dialogue becomes more naturalistic, though no more natural or convincing. Soon we have flashbacks to characters as children (a very weak point of the show) and a surfeit of plot: cancer, a young woman with no face (it was torn off by a dog), budding romance, estranged family members, a woman who has melted into the sidewalk, an elderly romance. Unfortunately, none of this feels convincing -- it's just a framework on which to hang some more verbal pyrotechnics and those have lost their razzle dazzle, as fireworks always do.

The result is a tiring work with diminishing returns, though you can only diminish so much when talents like Mulgrew and Chalfant are on stage. They both shoulder the burden of this effort with their usual grace and are joined by a generally solid cast. Schultz is quite good as an old friend with a new love, Richard Bekins and Brooke Bloom are solid in smaller turns and Maria Elena Ramirez manages to infuse some life and humor into the omnipresent but little-noticed care-giver. Greg Keller is a standout again, as he was in the equally confused show *Belleville* by Amy Herzog. He has a wonderful, gravelly voice and an ease on stage that's winning; I look forward to seeing him in something better soon. The same is true of Schultz, who hopefully is working towards a story that needs to be told rather than a story that's an excuse for intellectual games.

**THE THEATER OF 2013** (on a four star scale)

*The Other Place* \*\* 1/2  
*Picnic* \* 1/2  
*Opus No. 7* \*\* 1/2  
*Deceit* \* 1/2  
*Life And Times Episodes 1-4* \*\*  
*Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* (w Scarlett Johansson) \* 1/2  
*The Jammer* \*\*\*  
*Blood Play* \*\* 1/2  
*Manilow On Broadway* \*\* 1/2  
*Women Of Will* \*\* 1/2  
*All In The Timing* \*\*\*  
*Isaac's Eye* \*\*\*  
*Bunnica: A Rabbit Tale Of Musical Mystery* \*\* 1/2  
*The Mnemonist Of Dutchess County* \* 1/2  
*Much Ado About Nothing* \*\*\*  
*Really Really* \*  
*Parsifal at the Met* \*\*\* 1/2  
*The Madrid* \* 1/2  
*The Wild Bride at St. Ann's* \*\* 1/2  
*Passion at CSC* \*\*\* 1/2  
*Carousel* at Lincoln Center \*\*\*  
*The Revisionist* \*\*  
*Rodgers & Hammerstein's Cinderella* \*\*\*  
*Rock Of Ages* \* 1/2  
*Ann* \*\* 1/2  
*Old Hats* \*\*\*  
*The Flick* \*\*\*  
*Detroit '67* \*\* 1/2  
*Howling Hilda* reading \* (Mary Testa \*\*\*)  
*Hit The Wall* \*  
*Breakfast At Tiffany's* \* 1/2  
*The Mound Builders* at Signature \*  
*Vanya And Sonia And Masha And Spike* \*\*\* 1/2  
*Cirque Du Soleil's Totem* \*\*\*  
*The Lying Lesson* \* 1/2  
*Hands On A Hardbody* \*  
*Kinky Boots* \*\*  
*Matilda The Musical* \*\*\* 1/2  
*The Rascals: Once Upon A Dream* \*\*\*  
*Motown: The Musical* \*\*  
*La Ruta* \*\* 1/2  
*The Big Knife* \*  
*The Nance* \*\*\*  
*The Assembled Parties* \*\* 1/2  
*Jekyll & Hyde* \* 1/2  
*Thoroughly Modern Millie* \*\* 1/2  
*Macbeth* w Alan Cumming \*  
*Orphans* \*\* 1/2  
*The Testament Of Mary* \*\* 1/2  
*The Drawer Boy* \*\*  
*The Trip To Bountiful* \*\*\*  
*I'll Eat You Last* \*\* 1/2  
*Pippin* \*  
*This Side Of Neverland* \*\*\*  
*A Public Reading Of An Unproduced Screenplay About The Death Of Walt Disney* \*\*\*  
*Natasha, Pierre And The Great Comet Of 1812* \*\*\*  
*Colin Quinn Unconstitutional* \*\* 1/2

*A Family For All Occasions \**  
*The Weir \*\*\* 1/2*  
*Disney's The Little Mermaid \*\**  
*Far From Heaven \*\**  
*The Caucasian Chalk Circle \*\**  
*Somewhere Fun \*\**

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**Note:** *Michael Giltz is provided with free tickets to shows with the understanding that he will be writing a review. All productions are in New York City unless otherwise indicated.*

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