

Boston has opera. But Maine's got opera in lobster shacks.

Maine alternative opera group, Opera in the Pines, presents a modern twist with 'The Barber of the Cape' at the Cape Neddick Lobster Pound.

By **Haley Clough** Globe Correspondent, Updated May 16, 2025, 2:51 p.m.



John David Adams as Captain Bart in "The Barber of the Cape" at the Cape Neddick Lobster Pound. BRANDON BLINDERMAN

Boston's got opera. The city's vibrant programming ranges from robust productions from [Boston Lyric Opera](#) to eclectic and experiential operations, like [Opera on Tap](#), which seeks out unconventional venues like pubs or shoe stores.

But Boston doesn't have operas in lobster shacks (yet).

[Opera in the Pines](#), an alternative opera group based in Maine, has got that covered. Performances of "The Barber of the Cape," an original, contemporary adaptation of Gioachino Rossini's 1816 comic opera "The Barber of Seville," will run May 16-18 at [Cape Neddick Lobster Pound](#), a seaside seafood restaurant in York, Maine.

Friday and Saturday each have one evening show, accompanied by three-course dinners, and Sunday's matinee features a two-course lunch. Reservations, all prior to the start of the performance, are staggered in consideration of the kitchen staff. Meals are prix fixe and feature classic Maine fare including New England clam chowder and lobster rolls.

It's a night out at the opera with an accessible, modern twist that is a pillar for Opera in the Pines. Previous performances have included "Bar Crawl Bohème," (an adaptation of "La bohème" staged at Maine Beer Company, Three of Strong Spirits, and Oyster River Winegrowers) in May 2023, and an "operatic dating show," called "Pining for You," at the Maine Beer Company this February. This weekend marks the kickoff of the Maine-roaming opera's fourth season.

"There's so much of opera that can feel really intimidating," said Lauren Yokabaskas, the general director and cofounder of Opera in the Pines. "It's presented in a concert hall, which can sometimes come with certain expectations. It's presented in a different language ... it does present a barrier. It can feel like you have to do homework in order to be there, and we like to flip the art form to present it in a way you haven't seen it before, in a way that's going to be more accessible for you."

For "The Barber of the Cape," the audience will be seated at tables, simultaneously customers and production extras. The opera will be performed in English, as opposed to

Italian, like in Rossini's "Barber". The show has also been reduced from nearly three hours to an 80-minute runtime without an intermission.





From left: Lauren Yokabaskas, Sable Strout, Kellie Moody, and Aaren Rivard. BRANDON BLINDERMAN

Opera in the Pines was founded in 2021 by Yokabaskas, artistic director Sable Strout, and technical director Aaren Rivard, all longtime friends. The Maine-raised, classically trained opera singers first met in 2011 while cast members of Opera Maine’s “The Daughter of the Regiment.” They quickly “bonded together in that way that only theater kids can,” Yokabaskas said.

The group’s inaugural performance was of Grigory Frid’s 1972 mono-opera “The Diary of Anne Frank” at the Maine Jewish Museum in May 2022. In May 2024, the group welcomed another old friend, Kellie Moody, as music director during their production of Robert Ward’s opera of “The Crucible.”

This season marks the first in which Opera in the Pines operates under a [nonprofit status](#), said Rivard; the majority of funding comes from private foundations, individual donors, and ticket sales.

In the original “Barber of Seville,” Count Almaviva yearns after Rosina, the ward of Dr. Bartolo. In “Barber of the Cape,” Rosina is Rosie, a quirky waitress hustling amid Maine’s tourist season. She crosses paths with Chief (Count Almaviva), a Manhattan tourist. Much to the chagrin of her tourist-hating uncle, Bart (Bartolo), who owns the restaurant Rosie works at, Chief quickly becomes enamored with Rosie. In Pines’ renditions of the show, the character Figaro maintains his name and role as a trusted confidant. Strout calls their Figaro, however, “the man about town who has too many jobs” — therapist, ice cream scooper, priest, rabbi, and, of course, barber.

Strout, who oversaw casting and character development for the production, wanted to keep “the core of the story,” while making the show feel both Maine and modern. In addition to the updated setting and names, she reduced what she called “the creepy

sexual element” of Rosina and Bartolo’s relationship, instead supplementing with the power dynamic of an employee and boss, niece and uncle.

Preparations began in the summer of 2024, with casting decisions and painstaking hours spent cutting down the score. After the cast was finalized last fall, performers prepared for their roles individually; in-person rehearsals began on May 7.

Despite the time crunch, “[We] finished staging the entire opera in four days of rehearsal,” said Moody. “By day five, we were stumbling and running the show, and on day six, we moved into our restaurant venue.”

The six-person cast intentionally features three local “Mainers” and three “tourists” who are “joining us from away,” Yokabaskas said.

“We’re really lucky to have that mix and that sense of community onstage,” she continued. “We’re highlighting the theme of ‘love thy neighbor.’”

The Mainers in the cast are tenor Jared Vigue as Chief, bass-baritone John David Adams as Bart, and mezzo-soprano Joëlle Morris as Bertha (Berta). Other members — baritone Matthew Cossack as Figaro, soprano Kaileigh Riess as Rosie, and baritone Jacob O’Shea as Basil (Basilio) — primarily hail from New York.

The group knew they wanted to do the show in a coastal Maine restaurant, and found commonality with Cape Neddick Lobster Pound, who saw the production as “a great example of how local arts and hospitality can support one another,” said Yokabaskas.

Rivard didn’t want the viewers to feel like “a show is being brought in. We wanted it to feel like this is something that’s actually happening within the space.”

Luckily, he said, the restaurant gave the group fairly free rein on design. The Lobster Pound is currently operating on an off-season schedule, meaning “they didn’t have to close at all during our tech week,” Yokabaskas explained. “This made it an ideal window

for us to load in, rehearse, and prep in the space without disrupting their regular business.”

The centerpiece of the production is a full custom bar, a focal point for the show’s immersive experience, crafted by Rivard and set designer Tomas Amadeo.

“We’ve really tried to transform everything to fit the scope of the show,” he said. “The moment that people walk in, the audience is meant to really feel like ‘I’m both in a real space and I am within the show’ and to have that sort of dual experience of reality and artifice.”

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