

Franz Lehár – THE MERRY WIDOW

NAPLES PHIL CENTER - MERRY WIDOW

“In its confection of happy music, incredible characters and inane premise Teatro Lirico D’Europa which presented **MERRY WIDOW** at the Naples Philharmonic Center for the Arts Thursday, has been attentive to the music, staging and costumes. The sustained ambience was **major opera house quality**. **MERRY WIDOW** challenges most soloists to dance as well as sing, and emote operatically in characters better suited to Broadway. A troupe of tenors and baritones are needed to surround heroine Hanna Glawari, recently widowed and rich as Croesus. The melodies that made **MERRY WIDOW**, the most lasting of Lehar,'s 38 operettas far overshadow the wooden dialogue and silly plot. Christin Molnar has the stamina and vocal appeal to play an engaging Hanna. Snejana Dramcheva, was a treat, in bubbly character as the come-hither Valencienne, and in fine lyric soprano voice, both for love duets with the smitten de Rosillon and as backbone to the ensemble numbers. The sets were evocative of Gallic countryside without being intrusive.” *Harriet Howard Heithaus NAPLES DAILY NEWS*

Chalk this one up as a huge success for this memorable show and this remarkably busy company. All deserve a robust well done for their superb performances. BOSTON

“Last night, in its eighth seasonal tour of the United States, Teatro Lirico D’Europa gave its **Boston audience** a grand, lively and

pleasingly colorful rendition of Lehar's social satire. **THE MERRY WIDOW.** Lehar's music - almost Broadway-like in its easy composition and melodic passages - is fun and is meant to be enjoyed. Much of the credit for last night's solid performances has to go to Maestro Krassimir Topolov, who led the orchestra, from beginning to end, with confidence and good style, each phrase and cadenza of musical score delivered wonderfully, evenly and with sensitivity throughout. Well done! As for the cast, this is one group of people who have been uniformly praised over the years for their talent and stamina. Teatro Lirico D'Europa brings a regular troupe of singers along on these busy tours and they never fail to amaze me when I see and hear them in performance. Those of us who have attended performance of this organization have grown familiar with many of the names and the dependable, underrated vocal deliveries of uniformly solid casts, and last night this cast headed by baritone Hristo Sarafov, singing the role of the Baron; tenor Orlin Goranov, singing the role of the Count; and sopranos Christin Molnar, who sang the role of Hanna Glawari, and Snejana Dramcheva, who sang the role of the baron's wife, Valencienne, were in top form and voice, delivering lively and raucous performances, both spoken and sung. In short, there is much to praise for this show, these musicians and this wonderful cast. And lest we forget, hats off to the team of artistic director and, of course, some pretty deft lighting from Giorgio Bajukiev. All contributed to the evening's fun and enjoyment, as did a superb chorus that melded beautifully, moved about deftly and naturally, and sang with verve and delight to all in attendance. Chalk this one up as a huge

success for this memorable show and this remarkably busy company. All deserve a robust well done for their superb performances!"

Paul Walkowski - OPERAONLINE.US

DAYTONA MERRY WIDOW

"It (**MERRY WIDOW**) was really well done! The singers were great, the scenes were beautiful, the comedic aspects were great, the orchestra was excellent. Everyone in the audience seemed to respond with enthusiasm and I think "a good time was had by all." We appreciate all of the great effort that went into carrying this production around the country and presenting it."

*Dallas Weekly, booking agent – Daytona Symphony Society
Performance at Peabody Auditorium, Daytona Beach, FL*

LIVELY WIDOW - Schenectady, NY

"Teatro Lirico D'Europa brought Franz Lehar's **THE MERRY WIDOW** to Proctors Theatre Friday night. The large cast got into the swing of things to give the three acts a lively quality. The production was also visually attractive with a soft pallet of beiges and roses - a good stage direction and blocking for the frequent dance numbers, which provided some of the happiest moments of the evening. The two soprano leads, Christin Mollnar and Snejana Dramcheva were quite cute and sang quite well. Dramcheva surprised in the final act when she appeared as one of the cancan dancers and even managed a cartwheel. Dramcheva and Gueorgui Dinev and Camille were a

winsome couple. Hristo Sarafov as the Baron didn't sing but his German diction was immaculate and his comedic acting had great edge. He seemed a seasoned actor. Tenor Orlin Goranov as the Count was very urbane and elegant and sang quite well. His famous aria about dancing at Maxim's coupled with some fancy footwork were charming. The chorus provided solid backing and the seven men sang their second act aria about betrayed husbands with verve and danced in a Rockettes-style line with cheerful abandon. Martin Mazik kept a steady pace and the orchestra energetically followed."

THE DAILY GAZETTE (Schenectady, NY) - Geraldine Freedman

BOSTON - MERRYW WIDOW

"Last night Kathy Boyce, Bill Fregosi, and I were happy to attend Teatro Lirico D'Europa's **THE MERRY WIDOW** at Boston's Majestic Theater. This was a buoyant production that must have had Franz Lehar waltzing in his grave. Sung in well-pronounced German by the largely Bulgarian cast, this LUSTIGE WITWE is one of Teatro Lirico's best paced and orchestrally best played productions, under the direction of TLE's principal conductor Krassimir Topolov. Acts II and III were especially exciting, but there was energy in Act I, too. Topolov kept singers and orchestra together, no mean feat since he was perched at the rim of the very deep orchestra pit--a real pit--and his abundant cues to singers did not leave the orchestra behind. The cast was uniformly very good. German soprano Christin Molnar sang widow Hanna Glawari with a focused, clear voice that projected well. She benefits from experience singing Hanna in German theaters. Tenor

Orlin Goranov dominated his scenes as a theatrically adept, richly sung, maturely handsome Danilo. Snejana Dramcheva used her big soprano and radiant glamor to great advantage as an also dominating Valencienne. Her Camille de Rosillon, Dutch tenor Paul Hörmann, came over from Germany to step in for this one performance. Tall and handsome, he looked the part, and had learned his stage business well. Unfortunately, his sweet tone lacked volume and seemed a bit pallid next to Dramcheva's rich sound. TLE regular Hristo Sarafov sang and acted Baron Zeta with fine voice and good humor. Guergui Dinev's Nejgus was hilarious and well vocalized. Smaller roles were all very well handled. Three professional dancers did wonderful work with the "Pontevedrin" dances in Act II and the Act III grisette scene. They added to the festive nature of this production, which festiveness is a must for an operetta all three acts of which occur at grand parties. The physicality, active movement, and interaction of all the actors were obviously part of the concept that Pontevedrins are a robust, gregarious Balkan people, and Frenchmen too. Goranov, Dramcheva, and Sarafov in particular were all over the stage making big, expressive gestures. The costumes were more elegant than is the norm in TLE productions. The women wore beautiful colors, and Molnar had a printed headband and a wonderful Pontevedrin dress for Hanna's ethnic party in the second act: white with colorful printed fringes. The men tended to be in white tie and tails. It was an exciting night of operetta, and I'm happy to have experienced it."

John Deredita – OPERA L

MERRY WIDOW - Naples, FL

"It was **THE MERRY WIDOW**, or *Die Lustige Witwe* that made Franz Lehár (1870- 1948) a familiar name among operetta composers. Lehár, the son of an army bandmaster, was born in Komárno in what is now Slovakia. In 1905 he hit the jackpot with *The Merry Widow* that brought him fame and fortune when it took Central Europe by storm. Two years later it was at Daly's Theatre in London and at the New Amsterdam theatre in New York City. This happy show, full of melodic singing and rhythmic dance music, takes the audience back to a more carefree era and requires a cast that can both sing and dance to its happy tunes. Teatro Lirico D'Europa is steeped in the traditions of Lehár and Central European operetta. Their singers can dance as well as sing and under the direction of Martin Mazik, the Naples Philharmonic Orchestra played with the idiomatic lilt that marks a fine performance of this Lehár work. Christin Molnar was an enchanting Widow with a smooth lyric voice. Her characterization was intriguing as she gradually reeled in her prey, Danilo. She enchanted the audience with her singing of the 'Vilja Song.' Danilo, who had been in love with Hanna, the widow, before her marriage to a rich elderly banker, insists he will have none of her. He likes to fall in love often. He even gets engaged once in a while, but he says he will never marry. Hanna, however, is on a mission and she charms him right into her net. Mario Nikolov was a charming, urbane Danilo with a commanding voice that made the listener realize that he is a fine opera tenor as well as a good actor. Baron Zeta, the ambassador from Hanna's homeland, Pontevedro, was played with great style by veteran singer and actor,

Hristo Sarafov. Snejana Dramcheva who proved to be quite a capable cancan dancer beautifully sang his fun-loving wife, Valenciienne. Her would be lover; Camille was the suave Ivailo Ghurov. His portrayal led you to think that he preferred a woman who would never be his, to a more demanding fiancée. Veteran singing actor Guergui Dinev was an energetic Njegus and Elvis Ztenkov was an amusing Cascada. Merry Widow was a wonderful piece of Viennese "pastry" that left the audience feeling happy and satisfied with no addition to their caloric intake." *Susan Hampton for MVDAILY.COM*

NEW LODNON, CT WIDOW

"Our patrons were thrilled with **MERRY WIDOW!** I have received phone calls and emails and have been stopped in the street - how wonderful to hear!!! Now, a patron has called to see if there is a CD available of this MERRY WIDOW. I know there was a gentleman taping the performance, could she buy a copy?"

Jeanne Sigel - Garde Arts Center, New London, CT

MERRY WIDOW LIVES UP TO ITS FIRST CLASS BILLING

Lawrence, KS

"It was publicized as "the Dom Perignon of champagne operettas" and Saturday,'s performance of Franz Lehar's **THE MERRY WIDOW** lived up to the billing. Bright costumes, lively dancing and an excellent orchestra complemented the vocal efforts of the cast, with timing so brisk that the intermission came as a surprise. Familiar tunes pleased the near-capacity audience. The cast of

capable singers was easily topped by soprano Christin Molnar as Hanna in the title role; her luscious tones and effortless delivery kept the audience always waiting for her next song. She was equally at ease throughout her range and showed wonderful control in pianissimo passages in the upper register. Molnar also played her role convincingly, with exactly the blend of independence, impatience and emotional resourcefulness for which the part calls. Snejana Dramcheva as the flirtatious Valencienne was an audience favorite as well; her lighter soprano handling the vocal role well while her frisky acting enlivened every scene. Alternately betraying and reassuring her husband, she played the part with a fine nervous edge and showed a talent for dancing as well, especially as the fourth Grisette in Act 3. The ambassador Baron Zeta was played with comic aplomb by Hristo Sarafov, sliding easily from imperious command to pathetic confusion as diplomatic and marital events spun out of control. His droll delivery, especially in comic interludes with his factotum Njegus, kept the audience amused. The Bulgarian tenor Gueorgui Dinev owned the role of Njegus, the tricky servant, always one step ahead of his master. Dinev appeared with this company at the Lied two years ago as Frosch in *Die Fledermaus*, and then as now showed his mastery of the comic idiom. Orlin Goranov played the role of Count Danilo. He managed the Count's dissolute swagger rather well. Choral work was robust throughout, and in the second and third acts a seven-member men's chorus sang two rollicking numbers, complete with a dancing kick line. Equally spirited but much more accomplished dancing skill was shown by the Grisettes

in their third-act cancan, joined by Valencienne (Dramcheva). The opera was performed in German with English super titles. Good costuming enhanced the show, with the women in cream and pink silken ball gowns, the men in tails. Christin Molnar made an impressive entrance in Act 2 in an elegantly simple Pontevedrin native costume with fillet. Curtain calls were enthusiastically received." *Dean Bevan - LAWRENCE JOURNAL WORLD*

A MERRY WIDOW VISITS CERRITOS CENTER FOR THE PERF. ARTS

"While additional lengthy reviews of opera performances by the San Francisco and Houston Grand Operas are prepared, as a change of pace, we are posting Tom's review of a delicious presentation of Lehar's **THE MERRY WIDOW** at the Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts. This organized by the husband and wife team of Jenny Kelly and Giorgio Lalov. The Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts is a lovely European style theatre with all of the amenities, set in a leafy park-like environment with fountains and sculptures - most civilized indeed! The Cerritos Center hosts a wide sample of the performing arts, from the Juilliard Quartet to country music, from ballets (such as the Moiseev Classical Ballet) and symphonies to headliner personalities such as Bill Cosby and Garrison Keillor. Cerritos will also host two Teatro Lirico D'Europa performances of Puccini's TOSCA, scheduled for February 2008. The USA tours of the Teatro Lirico D'Europa, the Mozart Festival Opera and the Moiseev Russian Classical Ballet and Orchestra are the brainchildren of former Teatro Lirico opera singer Jenny L. Kelly who, with her husband, Giorgio Lalov (also a former opera singer), have developed second careers as promoters of touring European companies to less traditional venues for opera, operetta

and ballet performances. **MERRY WIDOW** was presented in German October 19 and 20. The cast was elegantly and traditionally costumed, had excellent physical sets and a fine orchestra conducted by a 35-year old Slovakian, Martin Mazik.

Teatro Lirico is successful without any government support. Private sector entrepreneurship and opera production have not usually been thought of together, but it is clear that Kelly and Lalov have developed an artistic package for which there is a considerable demand!" *OPERA WAR HORSES.COM*