

CALGARY opera

THE MERRY WIDOW

BY FRANZ LEHÀR



THE MERRY WIDOW STUDY GUIDE

IN PERFORMANCE AT THE SOUTHERN ALBERTA JUBILEE AUDITORIUM
JANUARY 27TH, DRESS REHEARSAL

JANUARY 29TH, FEBRUARY 2ND, 4TH, MAINSTAGE PRODUCTIONS

2021-2022 SEASON

WELCOME BACK

Thank you for joining us for our first mainstage dress rehearsal since February of 2019. I don't think anyone could have imagined it would take this long to get back to our beloved stage at the Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium. We at Calgary Opera are so happy to have you, whether this is your first opera or you've joined us before.

I cannot think of a more joyous and lighthearted opera, in fact operetta, with which to welcome everyone back. *The Merry Widow* is a treat for the eyes and ears and has everything; dancers, singers, and royalty and at the centre of it all, the love story of Hannah Glawari and Count Danilo. This opera does what opera does best, fills your senses and imagination with a tale that is so very human but so wrapped in glitz and glamour that we have the opportunity to forget the outside world for a moment.

This guide will give you a backstage tour of all that is opera - terminology, inside information on the production, the history behind the opera and the composer, as well as ideas for including opera in your classroom learning.

We hope that this guide will assist you in making opera connections in fun and interesting ways as well as to use *The Merry Widow* as a point of departure for learning. Exposure to performing and fine arts helps students develop critical analysis and problem solving skills, perseverance, and a drive for excellence. The creative skills developed through the arts carry us toward new ideas, new experiences and new challenges. Plus, there's nothing like the excitement and magic of a live professional performance!

A big shout out to the teachers, for organizing students and supporting them in their opera experience, thank you.

See you at the theatre,

Patricia Kesler

Education and Community Engagement Manager

Calgary Opera

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PREPARING FOR THE OPERA

WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

PART I: PREPARING FOR THE OPERA EXPERIENCE

The more students are prepared for this experience, the more they will get out of it and enjoy it. Knowing the story, the life and times of the composer and the music is very important to make their opera experience a sensational one!

BEFORE THE OPERA

Teachers and students may review the study guide and all of the suggested activities and discussions. Some of the activities/discussions should be started prior to seeing the opera. Preparing students ahead of time gives them a chance to view the opera within the context of what they will be working on after i.e. history, reviewing, character studies, discussions, etc.

- Read the enclosed synopsis of *The Merry Widow*, which provides a background and helps familiarize students and teachers with the story
- Listen to the music excerpts found on page 15
- Read the history of the opera on pgs 8, 9, 11, composer and director on pg 10, and familiarize your group with the language of the opera on pg 15, all items in the guide can be reproduced
- Familiarize students with the characters and their opera voice types (i.e. soprano, bass, and tenor) on pg 6. A discussion can be held afterwards to see if students were able to discern between the different voice types
- Discuss the characters and plot, and engage students in discussion around the suggested themes
- You may wish to assign students to write a review on the opera – a guideline for writing reviews is included in this study guide on pages 16-17

ATTENDING THE OPERA

There's nothing more exciting than attending an opera! You'll be a guest at the final dress rehearsal of *The Merry Widow*. The preparation for this opera began a long time ago, several years ago in fact, when the opera was chosen and the artists were asked to perform in the opera. From costume construction to singers memorizing their lines to putting the lighting and set together at the Jubilee Auditorium, countless hours of creative work have gone into making this production possible for you. Here's what you'll need to know about attending the opera:

At the Jubilee Auditorium, you may notice a long table with lights and people sitting behind it in the centre of the main floor of the auditorium. Seated in this area is the production team: Director, Lighting Designer, and Choreographer (among others). They'll be taking notes and communicating with the many people backstage who help make all of the operatic magic happen. They'll be able to talk to the crew so changes can be made. Should anything need some adjustments, the rehearsal might be stopped or a part repeated to make sure that it is perfect.

PREPARING FOR THE OPERA

WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO, CONTINUED

DURING THE OPERA

Unlike actors on television or in the movies, performers onstage are very aware of the audience. They want to share their love of performing with you. Everything you do in the audience affects what happens on stage. You can show them how much you appreciate their work and the opportunity to come to the rehearsal by being as quiet as possible and not talking or sharing your opinions with your friends or teachers until the intermission or after the show.

Give the artists and the production your full attention!

HERE'S A LIST OF THINGS TO DO AT THE THEATRE:

Please Do...

- Use the bathrooms before the rehearsal begins or at intermission
- Enter and exit the theatre in an orderly fashion, Dress Rehearsals are General Admission, which means you can sit wherever you would like
- Turn off your cell phones and all electronic devices, no photography or video recording is allowed during the performance
- Applaud when the conductor enters and bows, then again after the overture, the 5-10 minute musical introduction played only by the orchestra that begins the show
- Applaud after the arias as well as after the performance; you can shout "Bravo!" for a man, "Brava!" for a woman, and "Bravi!" for more than one person, or the whole performance.
- Enjoy the rehearsal! It is a wonderful feeling to be in theatre with other audience members experiencing a live performance, especially after so many months of not being able to!
- Have a discussion with your family, friends and teachers during the intermission and after the show is over about what you liked best, what you didn't like, parts that surprised you and more. The more you talk about and think about the show after you have seen it, the better you will remember it later on

CHARACTERS IN THE OPERETTA

CHARACTER	PRONUNCIATION	VOICE TYPE	PLAYED BY
Hanna Glawari - The “Merry Widow”, a beautiful, charming, and rich young widow	HAH-nah GLAH-vahr-ee	Soprano	Aviva Fortunata
Count Danilo Danilovitch - Secretary at Pontevedrian Embassy, a ladies' man who was once in love with Hanna	DAH-nee-loh dah-NEE-lo-vich	Tenor	Andrew Love
Baron Mirko Zeta - Pontevedro’s Ambassador in Paris, an older man married to a lovely young woman, somewhat pompous	MEER-koh ZEH-tah	Baritone	Hugh Russell
Valencienne - Young and beautiful wife of Baron Zeta, in love with Camille but wants to retain her respectability as a married woman	vahl-en-SYEHN	Mezzo-Soprano	Jaqueline Woodley
Camille de Rosillon - A young Frenchman, a charming suitor who is in love with Valencienne	cah-MEEL duh roh-see-YOHN	Tenor	Colin Ainsworth
Raoul de St. Brioche -A suitor for Hanna’s hand in marriage, only wants her for her money	Ra-ool duh SAN bree-OSH	Tenor	Tayte Mitchell
Vicomte Cascada - A rival (to St. Brioche) suitor for Hanna’s hand in marriage, only wants her for her money	CAH-scah-dah	Baritone	Jeremy Dubé
Bogdanovitch	bog-DAHN-oh-vich	Baritone	Clarence Frazer
Sylviane (wife of Bogdanovitch)	sill-vee-AHN	Soprano	Juliana Krajčovič
Kromow	KROH-mohv	Baritone	Jeffrey Strand
Olga (wife of Kromov)	OHL-gah	Mezzo-Soprano	Simran Claire
Pritschitsch	PRIT-chitch	Baritone	Dominic Veilleux
Praskowia (wife of Pritschitsch)	prahs-KOH-vee-ah	Mezzo-Soprano	Alanna Fraize
Njegus - Baron Zeta’s assistant, a comedic character who helps the action move along	NYEH-goosh		Devon Dubnyk
The Grisettes: Lolo, Dodo, Jouvou, Froufrou, Cloclo, Margot - Dancing girls at Maxim’s			

SYNOPSIS (OR, THE PLOT)

AN OPERETTA IN 3 ACTS

COMPOSED BY FRANZ LEHÁR, LIBRETTO BY VIKTOR LÉON AND LEO STEIN

FIRST PERFORMED: VIENNA, DECEMBER 30, 1905

ACT I

Baron Zeta, the Pontevedrian ambassador in Paris, gives a party. Camille declares his passion for Valencienne, but she reminds him she is Zeta's devoted wife. Everyone awaits the rich widow, Hanna Glawari. Since her money represents the entire capital of the National Bank of Pontevedro, there is concern that her marrying a foreigner would bankrupt the country. Hanna is unimpressed by the men's compliments, suspecting that everyone is after her money. Hanna invites everyone to a party. Valencienne wants Hanna to marry Camille. Prince Danilo arrives. Hanna rebukes him for deserting her when she was poor. Danilo says he had no choice - and points out that she quickly married a rich banker. Valencienne sends Camille in search of her fan - on which he had written "I love you." Kromow finds the fan and thinks his wife Olga is having an affair. To pacify Kromow, Zeta claims the fan belongs to his wife. Zeta tells Danilo he must marry Hanna to keep her money in Pontevedro. Danilo refuses, but agrees to keep all eligible foreigners away from Hanna. All the men beg for a dance with the widow. Hanna chooses Danilo, who scares the other men off by offering to sell the dance for ten thousand francs.

ACT II

Hanna entertains her guests. Dinner is served. Zeta is furious to hear that Danilo does not plan to attend. However, Danilo does come. They worry that Camille is after Hanna and determine to learn the identity of Camille's mistress. Danilo flirts with Hanna. He inadvertently gets Olga to confess to an affair with St. Brioche, and Sylviane confesses to a fling with Cascada. Praskowia thinks Danilo is in love with her. Danilo blackmails Cascada and St. Brioche into leaving. Hanna asks Danilo whom she should marry, but he pretends not to care. When Danilo drops the fan, Hanna picks it up and thinks the words of love are meant for her. The two dance the Kolo (a traditional Pontevedrian folklore dance) and reminisce. The Pontevedrian government presses Zeta to end the crisis. Valencienne recovers her fan. When she bids Camille farewell, Zeta sees Camille in the pavilion with his wife. Hanna takes Valencienne's place and convinces Zeta he was mistaken. Hanna announces her engagement to Camille. Danilo storms off to Maxim's.

ACT III

Valencienne, Sylviane and Olga go to Maxim's to persuade Danilo to marry Hanna. The grisettes dance and sing. Cascada and St. Brioche fight over a grisette. Zeta tells Danilo that Hanna loves him. Danilo and Hanna bribe the maitre d'hôtel to clear out the restaurant. Hanna admits she has no intention of marrying Camille. She says that by her husband's will she would lose her money if she married again. Danilo is overjoyed and confesses he loves her. She explains that she would lose her money because it would go to her new husband. All drink a toast to love.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF OPERA, AND OPERETTA!

The word opera comes from the Italian “opera in musica,” which means “works or plays in music.” Simply put, opera is a play in which the characters sing their lines rather than speak them, with music as its driving force. It is a mixture of many different types of art, combining music, drama, dance, elaborate costumes and scenery.

The first completely sung musical drama (or opera) developed as a result of discussions held in Florence in the 1570s by a group of intellectuals, poets, artist, scientists and humanists who called themselves The Florentine Camerata. One particular point of their focus was the joint belief that music, in particular vocal works, had become over-embellished and complex, and that returning to a more pure form would be a powerful way to tell stories and express emotions. Gathering inspiration from Classical Greece, its dramas, and



the idea of the Greek chorus, they evolved the idea of a single vocal line with simple instrumental

support. They called this new style of singing-declamation *recitativo* — At the time, it was argued that *recitativo* was far superior to spoken verse since the musical inflections intensified the implied emotions. In English, we use the word *recitative*.

The first opera, *Dafne*, was composed by Jacopo Peri in 1597 and tells the story of the nymph who fled from Apollo and was turned into a laurel tree as a way to save her virtue. The opera was a through-composed musical work comprised of

recitative sections (to reveal the plot of the drama) and arias, which develop the emotions of the character. Sadly, most of the music for the opera has been lost. However, Claudio Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo*, composed in 1607 and based on the Orpheus myth, was very successful. To this day we can hear the music in performance and recordings:

<https://youtu.be/sKD1qUVJBU>



While opera was initially written for the noble courts, once it moved to Venice in the mid-17th C it exploded in popularity and became an art form for all people.

Italy carried on with Giacomo Puccini through to 1924, as well as Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi and Leoncavallo who all developed the art form through clearly defined periods that produced *opera buffa*, *opera seria*, *bel canto* and *verismo*. While Italians were the originators of opera as we know it, many other countries quickly excelled in their own right. Mozart (1756-1791) wrote operas in Italian as well as German and championed the *Singspiel* (sing play), which combined the spoken word with music (*The Magic Flute* 1791, *Abduction from the Seraglio* 1782), a form also used by Beethoven in his opera *Fidelio*.

Bizet (*Carmen*), Offenbach (*Les Contes D’Hoffmann*), Gounod (*Faust*) and Meyerbeer (*Les Huguenots*) led the adaptation by the French which ranged from the *opéra comique* to the grand full-scale *tragédie lyrique*. German composers von Weber (*Der Freschutz*), Richard Strauss (*Ariadne auf Naxos*) and Wagner (*Der Ring des Nibelungen*) developed diverse forms such as *Singspiel* to through-composed spectacles unified

A BRIEF HISTORY OF OPERA, AND OPERETTA!

CONTINUED

(opera history cont.)

through the uses of *leitmotif*, a musical component that repeats itself throughout the opera. The English *ballad opera*, Spanish *zarzuela* and Viennese *operetta* helped to establish opera as a form of entertainment which continues to enjoy great popularity throughout the world.

With the beginning of the 20th century, composers in North America diverged from European traditions in order to focus on their own roots while exploring and developing the vast body of the country's folk music and legends. Composers such as George Gershwin with *Porgy and Bess*, Douglas Moore with *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, Carlisle Floyd with *Suzanna*, John Adams with *Nixon in China* and Gian Carlo Menotti with *The Medium* have all crafted operas that have been presented throughout the world to great success.



Laura Whalen as the title character in Calgary Opera's *Filumena* (2003)

In Canada, composer John Estacio and librettist John Murrell were commissioned by Calgary Opera to create *Filumena*, based on a true Canadian story of the last woman to be hanged in Alberta, which premiered in 2003 in Calgary to great success, and is one of the most pro-

duced Canadian grand operas in the world.

A LITTLE MORE ON OPERETTA

Operetta, a type of comic opera, literally means little opera and is a general designation for musical plays

with light subject matter and happy endings. As a result of these characteristics, operetta has often not been taken as seriously as grand opera, even though it is its own distinct artistic style that requires just as much talent and skill to write and perform. The dialogue is usually spoken, rather than sung and the story line is often romantic with a nationalistic feeling. During its development, two popular styles were French and Austro-Hungarian, or Viennese.

French operetta was generally more in style of *opéra comique*, which was largely spoken with intermittent singing, much like the musicals of today. French composer Hervé (1825-1892) was the original creator of operetta with his work *L'ours et le pacha* (1842). Viennese operetta has always been better known and characterized more by melodious passages, biting humour and nostalgia. The leading composers of Viennese operetta were Franz von Suppé (1819-95) and Johann Strauss, Jr. (1825-99), who wrote the most famous operetta of all time, *Die Fledermaus* (*The Bat*, 1874), a work which to this day is performed in all major opera houses along side grand operas. There was a lull in operetta creation after the death of Strauss, Jr. Along came Hungarian-born Franz Lehár (1870-1948) who was credited with reviving the art form. He had great international success with *Die Lustige Witwe* (*The Merry Widow*, 1905) and *Das Land des Lächelns* (*The Land of Smiles*, 1929).

Operetta was forever changed by the powerhouse librettist W.S. Gilbert (1836-1911). He wrote thirteen entertaining and witty texts that were set to music by Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900) such as *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878), *The Pirates of Penzance* (1880), *The Mikado* (1885). These works were very popular in England and proceeded to gain a huge following in America as well. They influenced the development of the Broadway musical and the musical theatre we know and love today.

THE COMPOSER & LIBRETTISTS

FRANZ LEHÁR, VICTOR LÉON & LEO STEIN



Lehár sometime from 1900-1930. Image avail. From U.S. Library of Congress's Prints + Photographs division

FRANZ LEHÁR : [FRAH-nts LAY-hahr] (1870-1948)

Franz Lehár, was born April 30, 1870, in Komárom, then Hungary, now Slovakia, and died October 24, 1948, in Bad Ischl, Austria. A Hungarian composer of operettas who achieved worldwide success with *Die lustige Witwe (The Merry Widow)*[dee LOOST-ee-guh

VIT-vuh]

He was the eldest son of Franz Lehár Sr, an Austrian bandmaster and Christine Neubrandt, a Hungarian woman from a family of German descent. He studied violin at the Prague Conservatory where he was encouraged by Antonín Dvořák to follow a musical career. Lehár traveled in Austria as a bandmaster himself from 1890 in the army but left to join the navy in 1894. In 1896 he produced his operetta *Kukuschka*, to poor acclaim. In 1902 he took the position of conductor at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna, where his *Widow* later premiered. He married Sophie (née Paschkis) and although she was Jewish by birth, converted to Catholicism upon marriage.

In *The Merry Widow* (1905), Lehár created a new style of Viennese operetta, introducing waltz tunes and imitations of the Parisian cancan dances as well as a certain satirical element that created a nostalgia in audiences of the time.

Many other operettas by Lehár followed and became well known in England and the United States under their English titles. Among them: *The Man with Three Wives* (1908), *The Count of Luxembourg* (1909), *Gypsy Love* (1910), and *The Land of Smiles* (1923).

Several of his works were filmed,

including *The Merry Widow* and *The Land of Smiles*. He wrote a single grand opera, *Giuditta* (1934), which was less successful.

LIBRETTISTS VICTOR LÉON & LEO STEIN

Victor Léon was born Viktor Hirschfeld in Vienna on January 4, 1858. He began his career as a journalist before becoming interested in theatre work. Between 1880-84, he wrote one-act libretti for several theatres across the Austro-Hungarian empire, moving on to longer 3-act libretti in 1886. All of his works were received with poor to middle acclaim until 1898 when he collaborated with Heinrich von Waldberg and composer Richard Heuberger on *Der Opernball (The Opera Ball)* produced at the Theater an der Wien. His profile significantly raised, he continued on to another success with *Wiener Blut (Vienna Blood)* in 1899. This was his first collaboration with Leo Stein, his co-librettist on *The Merry Widow*.

Leo Stein, was born Leo Rosenstein in Lemberg, which today is Lviv, Ukraine on March 25, 1861. He studied Law and became first a railway official before changing his name and involving himself wholly in theatre as a playwright and librettist. He was involved with many composers but it is assumed that his collaboration on three operettas with Adolf Müller led to his work with Léon.

After *Wiener Blut*, the two worked together on another Heuberger operetta, *Ker Sechsuhrzug* (1900). They each went on to other collaborations before coming back together, this time with Lehár for his operetta

Der Göttergatte (1904), and then, amongst other projects, for *Die lustige Witwe* in 1905. This was the work that would indelibly print their names on opera history. The two came together one last time on Leo Fall's *Der Nachtschnellzug* in 1913.

Both died in Vienna; Stein on July 28, 1921 and Léon on February 3, 1940.



(l to r) Stein, Lehár, Léon from <https://www.musicals101.com/widowhist.htm>

HISTORY AND CONTEXT OF *THE MERRY WIDOW*

Franz Lehár's *Die lustige Witwe* (*The Merry Widow*) for many needs little in the way of introduction. Several of its musical passages and arias have made their way into popular culture so successfully that they are recognized by those who have never attended an opera or an operetta.

The work was conceived during the Viennese Operetta revival period and had, as most did, a Baron and Baroness, various state characters, and drew upon the folk music and customs of the many Austro-Hungarian regions that existed before World War I. It began with Viennese librettists Victor Léon and Leo Stein who wanted to adapt a comic play popular at the time (1861) called *L'attaché d'ambassade* by Henri Meilhac into an operetta. They convinced the manager of the Theater an der Wien "Theater an der Wien" to be [tay-AH-tuh ahn day-uh VEEN, literally "Theatre on the banks of the Wien River" located in Vienna, Austria] to support the project and wrote the libretto, changing details to suit their purposes, such as setting the story in Paris instead of Germany and making the nationality of the characters Pontevedrian, in fact a made-up Balkan country which was modelled after Montenegro.



Louis Treumann and Mizzi Günther on the piano-vocal score, 1906. Photo by Ludwig Guttman—collections Walter Anton

Stein and Léon had intended the libretto for the eminent academic composer Richard Heuberger, but it entirely failed to inspire his muse and a new composer was urgently needed. The theatre secretary suggested Lehár but the theatre director was hesitant as Lehár's previous works had been box office failures. Léon

himself, who had provided the libretti for those same failed efforts, was equally wary.

Lehár was also unwilling to take up another composer's cast-off, until he remembered that Heuberger

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had said that Lehár knew nothing about waltzes and operettas; indeed an opportunity for sweet revenge pushed him to compose it.

Léon and Stein were quickly won over when they heard the first of the finished arias however the theatre management remained unimpressed, providing the finished operetta with poor marketing and even worse scheduling. The opening night was placed on the eve before New Year's eve. They gave so little production budget that the artistic team had to borrow costumes and buy paper lanterns to brighten the dingy set. Everyone, including the singers, believed the operetta was doomed to failure. The dress rehearsal, which normally opened to the critics as an opportunity to preview the work, was closed to all. One famous critic, Ludwig Karpath, did manage to sneak in and after the first act shouted out that they were ridiculous to be so concerned—they had a triumph on their hands!

The operetta premiered at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna on December 30th, 1905. Productions quickly followed in many other cities around Germany before moving to Hungary, Argentina, Sweden, Italy, Russia and Spain, in English translation to England and America, and onwards internationally. The work was such a success it inspired merchandise and fashion across the world and continues to delight audiences to this day.

Although *Die lustige Witwe* had the dubious honour of being Hitler's favourite stage work of all time, even though Lehár was married to a Jewish woman and worked with Jewish artists, Lehár managed to remain apolitical and asserted, "My *Merry Widow* was Hitler's favourite operetta. That's not my fault."



Donald Brian and Ethel Jackson in the original Broadway production (1907). Image courtesy of Theatre Magazine company: White Studio, December 1907.

THE MERRY WIDOW ARTISTIC TEAM

CONDUCTOR, DIRECTOR & CHOREOGRAPHER

CONDUCTOR TANIA MILLER



Image: <https://www.taniamiller.com/gallery>

Maestra **Miller** is a Canadian Conductor who was Music Director of the Victoria Symphony for 14 years. She has since been named Music Director Emerita of

the organization. A visionary leader and innovator with a deep commitment to contemporary repertoire and composers and connecting people to music, she is also an avid writer about music and the arts. She holds a Doctorate and Masters degree in Conducting from the University of Michigan. This is her debut with Calgary Opera. Learn more at Taniamiller.com.

STAGE DIRECTOR OMER BEN SEADIA



Image: <https://www.calgaryopera.com/21-22/season-artists/>

Israeli director **Omer Ben Seadia** has been establishing herself as one of the fresh new voices in opera. After working for the Israeli Opera for over a decade, Ms. Ben Seadis moved to the US in 2012 to begin her international career. With a varied repertoire

spanning from the operatic canon to world premieres, her work has continuously been committed to creating relevant and thoughtful productions that are socially conscious. This is her debut with Calgary Opera. Learn more at Omerbenseadia.com

Conductor:	Tania Miller
Stage Director:	Omer Ben Seadia
Assistant Director:	Elizabeth Stepkowski-Tarhan
Choreographer:	Yukichi Hattori
Chorusmaster:	Mark Morash
Repetiteur:	Jack Olszewski
Scenery designed by:	Michael Yeargan for Utah Symphony & Opera
Lighting Designer:	David Fraser
Costumes Designed by:	Susan Memmott Allred for Utah Symphony & Opera
Stage Manager:	Amy Lippold
Assistant Stage Manager:	Shelby-Jai Flick
Assistant Stage Manager:	Nicole Bergen
Wardrobe Manager:	Heather Moore
Make Up Artist:	Gail Kennedy
Wig and Hair Artist:	Franca Vaccaro
Head of Props:	Laura Anderson

CHOREOGRAPHER YUKICHI HATTORI

Yukichi Hattori began his training in Tokyo, Japan before attending the Hamburg Ballet School in Hamburg, Germany. Upon graduation he joined the Hamburg Ballet where he became Soloist. During his time in Hamburg he returned to his homeland of Japan to study Japanese traditional folkdance. Under the mentorship of John Neumeier he began exploring choreography, then in 2006, Yukichi joined the Alberta Ballet as a principal dancer. There he choreographed several productions; *Tubular Bells*, *Seven Deadly Sins*, *Carmen*, *Rite* and more. Most recently he opened a new ballet school in Calgary called the H/W School of Ballet where he is Artistic Director. Find him at hwballet.com.



Image: <https://www.balletedmonton.ca/profile/yukichi-hattori>

Director of Production:	Bonni Baynton
Technical Director:	Cody Stadel
Production Assistant:	Brett Johnson

MAIN CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES



AVIVA FORTUNATA—HANNAH GLAWARI

Canadian-Italian soprano **Aviva Fortunata**, named twice as one of CBC’s Top 30 Canadian Classical Artists Under 30, is earning international attention with her “velvety timbre” and “gleaming tone”.

In the 2019/20 season, Ms. Fortunata sang the title role in *Norma* with Calgary Opera in a triumphant company debut with “where her vocal strength, brilliant top register, and excellent coloratura singing were heard to thrilling effect.” She headlined *Il tritico* at Pacific Opera Victoria (2019) before joining the ensemble of Deutsche Oper Berlin for their productions of *Die Zauberflöte* (First Lady), *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (Berta), and *Nabucco* (Anna).

In recent seasons, Ms. Fortunata has been a notable presence on the stage of the Canadian Opera Company. In addition to covering Norma for Sondra Radvanovsky, she sang Clotilde (*Norma*), First Lady (*The Magic Flute*), and stepped in last-minute to sing Third Norn and Guttrune in *Götterdämmerung*.

ANDREW LOVE—COUNT DANILO DANILOVITCH

Calgary native **Andrew Love** is in the enviable position of balancing his time between engagements on Broadway and on the opera stage. Heard as the Bishop in *Les Misérables* in the Mirvish production in Toronto, he was also engaged – and re-engaged! – for the same role in the Broadway run of the show and the national tour which was curtailed by the coronavirus pandemic.

Before setting off on his extensive tour of the Victor Hugo-based musical, Andrew was featured by Pacific Opera Victoria as Schaunard in *La bohème*, the Regina Symphony in the Fauré *Requiem*, and appeared as Baron Duphol in *La traviata* for Manitoba Opera. In St. John’s, Newfoundland, he made his company and role debut singing Hannah Before in *As One* for Opera on the Avalon and later re-joined the company for the role of Nangle in John Estacio’s *Ours*.



JACQUELINE WOODLEY—VALENCIENNE

Canadian soprano **Jacqueline Woodley** has been praised for her fearless versatility, changing styles fluidly from early music to contemporary, from opera to art song. Sought after for her “exceptional talent” in performing modern works, Jacqueline created the role of Milice-Bride in the première of Ana Sokolovic’s opera *Svadba- Wedding* with Queen of Puddings Music Theatre. This production toured Europe and Canada and Ms. Woodley was also chosen for the San Francisco and Philadelphia premieres of this remarkable work. Most recently, she was hailed for her searing performance as Natalia in the world premiere of *Oksana G* for Tapestry New Opera and earlier appeared in the premiere of that company’s production of *M’Dea Undone* which won a Dora award.

In addition to being an active coach in her home studio and conducting an amateur women’s chamber choir, Jacqueline was recently at Opera Nuova as part of their 20th Anniversary Alumni Mentorship Program, where she taught lessons, gave masterclasses and performed in the gala. Ms. Woodley recently recorded works by Canadian composer Norbert Palej for the Canadian Art Song Project and she holds a master’s in opera from McGill University.

MAIN CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES CONTINUED



COLIN AINSWORTH—CAMILLE DE ROSILLON

Canadian tenor **Colin Ainsworth** has distinguished himself as an exceptional singer with a diverse repertoire.

Acclaimed for his interpretations of the major Classical and Baroque tenor roles, his many roles have included the title roles in *Orphée et Eurydice*, *Pygmalion*, *Castor et Pollux*, *Roberto Devereux* and *Albert Herring*; Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*, Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*, Almaviva in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Ernesto in *Don Pasquale*, Rinnucio in *Gianni Schicchi*, Fenton in *Falstaff*, Tonio in *La Fille du Régiment*, Nadir in *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*, Pylades in *Iphigénie en Tauride*, Renaud in *Lully's Armide*, Tom Rake-

well in *The Rake's Progress*, and Lysander in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. An avid supporter of new works, he has appeared in the world premieres of John Estacio's *Lillian Alling* at the Vancouver Opera, Stuart MacRae's *The Assassin Tree* at the Edinburgh International Festival, Victor Davies' *The Transit of Venus* with the Manitoba Opera, and Rufus Wainwright's *Prima Donna* at Sadler's Wells in London and at the Luminato Festival. Other past opera engagements have included appearances with the Canadian Opera Company, Chicago Opera Theatre, Seattle Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, L'Opéra de Français, Opera Atelier, Pacific Opera Victoria, Edmonton Opera, and the Greek National Opera.

Also a prolific concert singer, Mr. Ainsworth's growing discography includes Vivaldi's *La Griselda* (Naxos), *Castor et Pollux* (Naxos), Schubert *Among Friends* (Marquis Classics), *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* with the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra (CBC Records), the collected masses of Vanhal, Haydn, and Cherubini with Nicholas McGegan (Naxos), and the premiere recording of Derek Holman's *The Heart Mislaid* which was included on the Alderburgh Connection's *Our Songs* (Marquis Classics). He also appears in a live DVD recording of Lully's *Persée* with the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra (Euroarts).

HUGH RUSSELL—BARON ZETA

Baritone **Hugh Russell** has performed with The Philadelphia Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Pittsburgh Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, Houston Symphony, National Symphony, Detroit Symphony, Milwaukee Symphony, Dallas Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Israel Philharmonic, Danish Radio Symphony, Toronto Symphony, Vancouver Symphony, Orchestre Métropolitain (Montréal), Cincinnati Symphony, and Kansas City Symphony, among many others. He has been honored to work with many eminent conductors, including Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos, Jaap van Zweden, Charles Dutoit, Leonard Slatkin, Manfred Honeck, Edo de Waart, Kent Nagano, Donald Runnicles, Stuart Bedford, Michael Christie, Hans Graf, Carlos Miguel Prieto, and Rossen Milanov.

In the coming season, Hugh will be featured in performance with pianist Craig Terry, and will return to North Carolina Opera to perform Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte*. He will also return to the New Mexico Philharmonic to perform his signature work, Orff's *Carmina Burana*.



PREPARING FOR THE OPERA

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Merry Widow is famous because the music of Franz Lehár is melodic, catchy and romantic. For many listeners, it feels familiar because much of it is based on folk music of the Austro-Hungarian empire.

Many of the songs from the operetta are world famous and a great way to prepare for seeing the opera is listening to them in advance. When we familiarize ourselves with a musical passage or aria (a song from an opera) we actually enjoy the opera more. When the aria we know is performed in the theatre, it is like meeting an old friend; you know what to expect, but experiencing it in person is better than you could have imagined.

I recommend listening to these selections several times:

First, just listen for everything at once. You can record your impressions afterward including things like: what kind of voice did the singer have? Which instruments did you notice? Was the music slow or fast or did it move from slow to fast, or the other way around? Did the music make you feel anything, sad or happy? Did it make you imagine anything, or remind you of anything? Are there different sections? Do they repeat or all they all different?

Next, read the text, if you were listening to a piece that had singing in it. This is found in the libretto, or the text of the opera. See if you caught some of the meaning on your own, or maybe you thought something totally different was happening! If it was just a musical passage then read the history or synopsis of the story (on pg 10 of this guide) so that you have some context for the music you are hearing.

Then, listen again. Do you notice different things? Do you anticipate what is coming next? Do you understand it differently now?

MUSICAL EXCERPTS, *THE MERRY WIDOW*:

1. “Vilja” is the most famous aria from the opera. It is sung by Hanna Glawari (the rich widow) and is about a Pontevedrian folk story.

[soundcloud.com/operaaustralia/vilja-the-merry-widow?](https://soundcloud.com/operaaustralia/vilja-the-merry-widow?in=tracklist)

Performed here by Opera Australia with Joan Sutherland and the Elizabethan Philharmonic orchestra, conducted by Richard Bonyng. Recorded live at the Sydney Opera House in 1988.

2. “Oh, the Women!” The operetta very obviously deals with women and their rights. Valencienne is in love with a different man (Camille) but must maintain her respectability as a married woman, as without Baron Zeta she loses her status and has nothing. Also, Hanna is in demand because she has money, very few women in her time had her freedom to do as she pleased. This song is actually from the point of view of the men, about how to keep them faithful, so serves to highlight the disadvantageous situation women were in at the time. Listen to the song, “Oh, the Women!”

<https://youtu.be/hM7GBtXaE7U>

Sung here by Alan Oake, Julian Moyle, Paul Parfitt, Mark Curtis, Leon Berger, Steffan-Paul Sanchez and Ian Comboy, New Saddler's Wells Opera, released on November 30, 2017

3. “The Merry Widow Waltz”, considered by many as the most famous waltz ever written. Listen to it here on YouTube:

<https://youtu.be/lvN5z6BQHpQ>

Music played by Mantovani and his Orchestra with images from the 1934 movie starring Jeanette MacDonald and Maurice Chevalier. From the album the Magic of Montovani, Vol 3.

ACTIVITIES & IDEAS TO CONSIDER

1. Write a review or critique of the performance

One of the best ways to encourage critical thinking of a performing arts production is to encourage students' honesty and draw out detailed opinions. A productive evaluation session - spoken, written, visual or dramatized - should follow this basic 'how-to' outline below.

On the Internet, students can find many reviews of *The Merry Widow* from other opera companies' performances to use as a guideline.

Excerpts from a 2019 review of *The Merry Widow* production in London, England by the English National Opera (ENO)

"It's all there. High kicks and tight corsets; silk and sequins and shenanigans in a broom closet; hot pinks and still hotter can-can girls; waltzing, scheming, sparring, and a bit with a banquet table. There's even a dancing beaver. So why don't I feel more elated?"

ENO's new *Merry Widow* can't be faulted for effort. But in comedy, as in seduction or sales, trying too hard can be almost as destructive as not trying at all. Gripping Lehar's crystal champagne flute of an operetta in a hot fist only leads to spillage and a swift loss of bubbles.

A cast of ENO regulars give it their all. Andrew Shore does what he does best as the wheezing cuckold Baron Zeta, and Robert Murray and Rhian Lois are a fabulous Camille and Valencienne. Veteran Nathan Gunn ambles and shambles his way genially through as playboy Danilo, though there's a bit of a void where the central chemistry should be. Tynan likewise delivers an absolutely efficient performance, doing everything that is asked of her (and everything is) and more, but never quite holding either stage or score in her hand as a true Hanna should. "

- Review by Alexandra Coghlan for www.theartsdesk.com on March 2, 2019

- Guidelines for writing a review

When writing a theatre review you must remember four main components: the acting, the singing, the technical, and the overall view. The acting and singing are probably the most important aspects of the opera. It is a good idea to familiarize yourself with the opera and its characters before you see it.

Make sure you know all of the characters and the singers who are playing them; this study guide or the Calgary Opera website is an ideal place in which to find all this information. Did the singers bring life to the music? What did they do to bring their particular character to life? Could you see and hear the emotion while they sang? Did they interact well with others on stage? Did any particular performer stand out to you and why? Keep in mind that everyone has a very unique style of acting and maybe comment on that. How well are they giving and taking focus? Is there any one person who sticks out in your head as "hogging" all the attention?

The next aspect to look at is the technical. This includes everything from the lights and sound to the costumes and make-up. How well do you think the set works? Does it help to tell the story?

The costumes and set should portray the time period and part of each character's personality. Do the costumes properly illustrate the story and the characters? The make-up should do the same, but keep a look out for shadows and lines on the face. All these things are very important to the performance of the show. Again, familiarizing yourself with the opera before you go will assist with making these decisions.

ACTIVITIES & IDEAS TO CONSIDER CONTINUED

The appeal of the music is often a matter of opinion because everyone likes different kinds of music; however, keep in mind the following general concerns:

- the singers' voices should always be heard above the orchestra
- you should be able to hear and understand the text (spoken and sung) if it's in a language you speak
- their singing should sound pleasant, beautiful, and exciting, but never harsh or shrill
- although the music can be quick or slow or in between, it should never rush (feels too fast) or drag (feels too slow)
- the music and the action on stage match well – the music should help convey the story and the blocking should help bring out the emotional power of the music at this production.

The audience is also a major part of your theatre experience. Was the audience big? Did your classmates seem to enjoy the show? Did the singers seem to connect with the audience? Remember, you shouldn't make this the main point, but it would be good to comment on it. This entire portion should convey your opinion and feeling of how the show went.

In conclusion, remember the singing and acting, the technical, and the overall view, and you'll have written a successful theatre review. Oh, and one more thing: don't ever lie so as not to hurt someone's feelings. Constructive criticism can be helpful, as long as you are kind and considerate in your commentary. Keep all these things in mind when writing your review and it will be great. Have fun!

2. Engage students in meaningful discussions or debates using the following questions:

- Status of women in the 19th Century, why was the widow merry?

In the 19th century, and long before, the identity of European women was largely determined by their marital status. Unmarried women were typically viewed as being the property of their fathers and married women were the property of their husbands. A married woman's identity was contained within her husband's, and anything she owned immediately became his property. A woman did not have the right to separate from her husband, only men held this privilege and if she had the misfortune of being separated from, she was left with nothing. European women could not buy or sell property, nor could they engage in any financial transactions on their own behalf.

If a woman became a widow, however, she had the opportunity of being left with her own fortune, assuming the late husband had been of good means. In many European societies, widows were fully independent. They often inherited their husbands' riches, and they usually were not forced to return to their fathers' homes. As such, a wealthy widow was a rare breed: a woman with the money and power to determine her own future. Some widows went so far as to take over their husbands' businesses and, exercising their intelligence and financial acumen, considerably increased their personal wealth.

Very few widows ended up merry. Most women suffered hardship and poverty when they lost their husbands, as they now had no means of independent financial support. Even wealthy widows, such as our Merry

ACTIVITIES & IDEAS TO CONSIDER CONTINUED

Widow, risked losing both their money and independence if they ever remarried. The idea of the merry widow as a wealthy, powerful, and independent woman remains just as appealing now as it did then, and reappears frequently in European art and literature.

- **Should the political and personal beliefs of the artist affect how we experience their work?**

As mentioned in the “History & Context of *The Merry Widow*”, pg. 11 in this study guide:

“Although *Die lustige Witwe (The Merry Widow)* had the dubious honour of being Hitler’s favourite stage work of all time, even though Lehár was married to a Jewish woman and worked with Jewish artists, Lehár managed to remain apolitical and asserted, “My *Merry Widow* was Hitler’s favourite operetta. That’s not my fault.”

By the time Hitler was in power, during the Second World War, the *Merry Widow* was famous around the world. It is said that it is the only musical work that Hitler allowed to be played during the last years of his life. Even though Lehár refused publicly to either support or oppose Hitler, he certainly benefitted financially from Hitler’s support and promotion of his work. Hitler and the German state generously paid for the staging of the operetta multiple times across Germany and other Nazi-occupied territories.

Lehár’s wife Sophie was Jewish but Hitler ensured that she was protected as Ehrenarierin (Aryan by marriage) because of his fondness for Lehár’s work. This status did not protect her from being investigated, however. Many of the artists and longtime collaborators Lehár worked with, including Viktor Léon, the *Merry Widow* librettist, librettist Fritz Löhner-Beda and singer Louis Treumann, the first singer to portray the main *Widow* character Danilo Danilovitch, were Jewish. Lehár campaigned to save them from the fatal concentration camps across Europe, and while Léon was saved, Löhner-Beda was murdered in Auschwitz III Monowitz concentration camp. In 1943, Hitler invited friends to watch a production of *The Merry Widow* in Munich, and Lehár gave him a signed copy of its original 1905 program as a birthday present. The program featured a picture of Louis Treumann on the cover, who had just been murdered in Theresienstadt.

The question remains, knowing what we know about Franz Lehár and his association with Hitler and the Third Reich, should we judge his work solely on its’ artistic merit, should we consider it to be inextricably linked to his actions and beliefs, or should our reception of his work lie somewhere in between, as educated audience members looking at his work through the lens of his circumstances and time in history?

LANGUAGE OF OPERA & VOICE TYPES

THE LANGUAGE OF OPERA

Act - Main sections of a play or opera

Aria - A solo song sung in an opera

Ballet - Dance set to music within an Opera, particularly common in French opera

Blocking - the precise movement and positioning of actors on a stage in order to facilitate the performance of a play, ballet, film or opera

Character - Person who is part of the opera's story

Chorus - Music composed for a group of singers or the name of a group of singers in an opera, the chorus support the story

Conductor - Person who rehearses and leads the orchestra & the singers in time with each other

Duet - A song performed by two singers, usually to set up a relationship between the two or illustrate their differences

Leitmotif A melodic theme associated with a particular character, place, thing or idea in opera or a recurring theme

Libretto - the words of the opera

Opera - a musical work in one or more acts, made for singers and instrumentalists

Opera Buffa - Funny, light opera, Italian in origin

Opera Seria - Serious, dramatic opera, Italian in origin

Operetta – Light, comic with some spoken dialogues

Orchestra - A group of musicians who play together on various musical instruments

Overture - A piece of instrumental music played at the beginning of an opera, sets a tone or feeling for the opera and often introduces musical themes that will be heard throughout the work

Program - Booklet that contains information about the opera, composer, performers, and the opera company

Quartet— A song performed by four singers, often with an individual story or viewpoint being expressed by each

Recitative - Words that are sung in the rhythm of natural speech, serves the purpose of carrying the action of the story forward in a timely manner

Rehearsal - Time when singers/actors practice with or without the orchestra; time when musicians practice together with the conductor.

Répétiteur – Plays piano for all rehearsals leading up to the opera, prior to the orchestra taking over

Scene - Segments of action within the acts of an opera

Synopsis—an abbreviated version of the plot or story of the opera or play, written in the program for the audience to familiarize themselves with the action on stage

Trio—A song performed by three singers, generally used to illustrate the relationship between the three characters, as in a love triangle, or their differences

VOICE TYPES

Soprano - Highest pitched female voice

Mezzo-Soprano - Female voice between soprano and contralto

Contralto – Lowest pitched female voice

Counter-tenor—the equivalent male form of the contralto, highest pitched male voice

Tenor - Second highest pitched male voice

Baritone - Male voice between tenor and bass

Bass - Lowest pitched male voice

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