

Preview**Oberlin Opera to present Britten's *Albert Herring***

by Mike Telin



"I love *Albert Herring* because these are my people," exclaimed Jonathon Field, director of Oberlin Opera Theater, in a recent telephone conversation. "I remember having tea with my grandfather in the little town of Leatherhead in Surrey, England. I know these people inside and out!" On Wednesday, March 12 at 8:00 pm at Hall Auditorium, Oberlin Opera Theater presents the opening night performance of Benjamin Britten's acclaimed chamber opera *Albert Herring*.

The opera's lively tale is filled with comic characters ranging from dully straitlaced to scandalously mischievous. Audience members will find themselves rooting for timid Albert, the most unlikely of heroes, whose secret longing for excitement turns the town upside down. "It's about knowing you need to make a change in life, and getting that push to actually do it," Field said, adding that "Britten's operas always have an oppressed innocent. By the end, Albert sort of tells everybody off and breaks the chains that bind him."



Composed in the winter of 1946 and the spring of 1947, Britten's three-act comic opera is set in the English village of Loxford in 1947. The opera opens to find Lady Billows organizing the town's annual May Day festival. Having assembled the most prominent citizens of the village to review a list of young ladies who are under consideration for the coveted position of May Queen, a problem arises. It seems that every girl on the list has something in her background that deems her unworthy to wear the May Queen's crown. But Superintendent Budd has a solution: perhaps this year the village should select a May King? And he has the perfect candidate, a young virginal man by the name of Albert Herring.

"It is always nice to find an opera composer who writes comedies that are actually funny. It's coming together quite nicely but for the cast and myself, the challenge has been to find the humor that is character-driven and not bit-driven." Field describes the opera's humor as three-dimensional comedy. "This is humor that comes way before Monty Python. I know this is going to sound unusual, but I'm trying to show restraint."

Sung in English with supertitles, *Albert Herring* is perfect for young viewers and newcomers to opera. In addition to an outstanding cast of Oberlin students, Britten's expressive musical score will be performed by the Oberlin Orchestra under the direction of guest conductor Christopher Larkin.

You can hear more of Jonathon Field's thoughts on the opera and meet cast member Eric Fischer, who will perform the role of Superintendent Budd, by listening to a recent conversation they had with Jacqueline Gerber of [WCLV 104.9](#).

Performances continue Friday, March 14 through Saturday, March 15 at 8:00 pm and Sunday, March 16 at 2:00 pm. And ticket prices are more affordable than ever: adults who purchase in advance may receive one free ticket with the purchase of a \$15 ticket. (Discount also applies to \$10 admission for seniors, Oberlin staff, and alumni; and to \$6

admission for Oberlin students.) Plus: all students age 18 and under are admitted free with a paying adult.

Tickets may be purchased [online](#), by calling 800-371-0178, or by visiting the Hall Auditorium Box Office weekdays from noon-5 p.m. *Discounts apply only to advance purchases made by phone or in person, and all tickets are \$3 more at the door.*

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