

Comedy Tonight: Cleveland POPS to premiere new Broadway review

by Mike Telin



On Friday, November 14 at 8:00 pm in Severance Hall, Carl Topilow will conduct the Cleveland POPS Orchestra and Chorus in the world premiere of “Comedy Tonight,” a revue of musical theatre’s more light-hearted moments. The show features Broadway award-winning stars Christine Pedi, Christiane Noll and Jason Graee.

Why did Cleveland POPS decide to create a new Broadway review? “That’s an interesting question,” Carl Topilow said during a recent telephone conversation. “We’ve been working with John Such of Bravo Broadway for many years, and we realized that we have already performed all of his programs.”

But audiences need not worry, Cleveland POPS is a creative team of people, and Topilow credits Gordon Pettitt in their marketing office for coming up with the idea of creating the new show.

“We told John Such about the idea, and he thought it was a great one,” Topilow said. “John expanded the idea a little bit and came up with this program. It’s a great collection of songs that spans the many eras of Broadway. It’s going to be a fantastic evening.”

Christiane Noll, who has received Tony and Drama Desk Award nominations for her outstanding work on the Broadway stage, will be featured in Gershwin’s “Nice Work If You Can Get It” from *By Strauss*, “Diva’s Lament” from *Spamalot* and “Glitter and Be Gay” from *Candide*.

The multi-talented Christine Pedi — who can be heard every day on Sirius/XM Satellite Radio’s “On Broadway” channel, where she hosts “The Broadway Breakfast with Christine,” and “Dueling Divas” — will perform “Adelaide’s Lament” from *Guys and*

Dolls, “When You’re Good to Mama” from *Chicago* and the classic 70’s disco hit “I will Survive” from *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*.

And the award-winning singer/actor Jason Graae, whom critics applaud for the way he infuses all of his work with a “manic mischief” exclusively his own, will add some of that mischief to “Popular” from *Wicked*, “You’ve Got Trouble” from *Music Man*, “Brotherhood of Man” from *How to Succeed...* and “You and Me, But Mostly Me” from *Book of Mormon*.

“I think the pieces we’re doing make for a very nice and fun assortment of songs,” Topilow said. “They’re all upbeat. The Trio is also singing “Friendship” from Cole Porter’s *Anything Goes* and “Easy Street” from *Annie*. Of course they will do their comedy thing too, and they do it very well. They’re excited because this is a new show for them as well.”

The evening also includes “Sit Down, You’re Rockin’ the Boat” (*Guys and Dolls*), “You Can’t Stop the Beat” (*Hairspray*) and “76 Trombones” (*Music Man*).

And no Cleveland POPS concert would be complete without Carl Topilow bringing out his clarinet. “Clarinetist on the Roof” includes a medley of tunes from *Fiddler* like ‘Rich Man’, ‘Wedding Music’ and ‘Bottle Dance.’ I’ll throw a couple of cadenzas in there too,” Topilow promised.

With so many classic Broadway songs to choose from, how did the creative team go about narrowing down the list? “There were certainly a lot of possibilities,” Topilow said with a laugh. “There must have been at least fifty pieces on the first list that Gordon put together, and John had suggestions as well.

“It was a process, but we tried to choose a combination of the classic shows like *Guys and Dolls* and *Music Man* along with some more modern ones like *Book of Mormon* and *Hairspray*.”

They also wanted to give each soloist equal opportunity along with some trios and duets. “It did turn out to be a nice combination of pieces. Some of them are unbelievable like “*Getting Married Today*” from *Company* — I do think that is the original rap song. And I find it so interesting that Meredith Willson wrote everything for *Music Man* — the script, the music, and he even did the orchestration. It’s incredible!”

Published on ClevelandClassical.com November 11, 2014.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)

