

Ohio Light Opera: *Can-Can* (June 20)



by Kelly Ferjutz, *Special to ClevelandClassical*

If you're among the millions who love Paris, whether it drizzles or sizzles — or even if you're not — you're bound to love the new production of *Can-Can* at the Ohio Light Opera. It's bright and colorful, and, with the witty lyrics of Cole Porter, it's totally sassy as well. It's also a huge show, technically, as nearly everyone other than the principals plays double and triple roles, complete with numerous costume changes. This energetic production, helmed by artistic director Steven Daigle, never missed a beat. Act One has ten scenes, while Act Two has seven — daunting indeed. The colorful, bright costumes were designed by Charlene Gross, and the multi-purpose set and picturesque scrim by Cassie King. Lighting design is by Erich Keil.

The overture offers up smidgens of Cole Porter's wonderful tunes to come. The orchestra, led by Steven Byess, sounded twice its size, leading up to the fast-paced opening number, "Maidens Typical of France," in which a full complement of can-can dancers tangle with numerous of policemen in a high-energy romp through a courtroom in 1893 Paris. The story itself may not be much, but you won't care, once you've heard and experienced the wonderful music and very talented performers in this production.

Aristide Forestier, a newly-appointed judge wonderfully portrayed by Ted Christopher, is

determined to enforce the laws of France until he discovers they're not very enforceable. This is primarily because of the inimitable charm of the owner of the Bal du Paradis (in Montmartre), La Môme Pistache, displayed in a dazzling performance by Sarah Best. The various 'maidens' are also employed by Pistache as laundresses in an attempt to keep them out of jail. Of course, the policemen like the girls so much they are reluctant to testify against them, frustrating the efforts of the courts. It's the age-old battle between morality and 'obscenity.' In this instance, however, love is the winner!



Choreographer Carol Hageman worked absolute magic with this production. The rambunctious kick-lines brought down the house, as well they should have. A change of pace is provided by the "Garden of Eden Ballet" near the end of Act One. But the show also includes are also many famous songs that populated the Hit Parade at various periods between 1953 and the mid-'70s: "C'est Magnifique," "Allez-Vous En," "I Love Paris," and my favorite, "It's All Right with Me," as sung so well by Forestier to his unexpected love, Pistache. She then returns the favor with the hilarious "Every Man Is a Stupid Man."

So, Aristide sets off to find the truth, by himself, if necessary. But even back then, ever-present media photographers were ever-present, and off they all go to jail. In the meantime...

Longtime OLO favorite Boyd Mackus (who has definitely discovered the Fountain of Youth) excels as Hilaire Jussac, an art critic who has an eye out for dancer Claudine (Jessamyn Anderson). She, in turn, is in love with the struggling Bulgarian sculptor Boris Adzinidzinadze, adroitly performed by the rubber-legged Stephen Faulk. This trio garners a laugh every time appears throughout the entire performance.

In a move that many current-day performers might wish to emulate (but hopefully won't),

Boris challenges Jussac to a duel after a scathing review of his sculpture exhibit. Two less capable swordsmen there have not been seen since before the days of Errol Flynn. As a gesture of apology, Jussac offers to host an elaborate ball at the Bal du Paradis. Just one little snag: Pistache has lost her license and cannot legally host such a function.



Aristide somehow sets all to rights, the ball is indeed hosted by Pistache and in the midst of it all — Oops! — another raid by the police, this time armed with photos of all the miscreants. Once again, Aristide and Pistache are among the folks to be found in the courtroom, only this time, the jurors decide that because all the dancing girls are found to be innocent, everyone else should be freed as well. A superb kick-line brings the wonderful dancing, music, and comedy to a rousing conclusion. Vive la France! Vive l'amour! C'est magnifique, indeed.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 23, 2015.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)