

Ohio Light Opera: *One Touch of Venus* (June 27)

by Kelly Ferjutz, *Special to ClevelandClassical*



It's a little bit sassy, a little bit bawdy, and a whole lot of musical fun! What is it, you ask? Why, it's *One Touch of Venus*, now onstage in repertory through August 8 at the Ohio Light Opera in Wooster. It's totally fabulous.

One Touch of Venus is one of half-a-dozen or so musicals written by the eminent classical composer Kurt Weill, but the music is anything but strictly classical in orientation. There's jazz, boogie-woogie, and jitterbug, in addition to beautiful melodies such as "Speak Low," and "I'm a stranger here myself." Weill, having been classically trained in his native Germany, also orchestrated his own work, unlike many other Broadway composers of his era. When played by a full orchestra, such as that heard at OLO, it just sneaks up out of the pit and grabs you!

As you might expect, the singing, dancing, and acting are superb as well, making this a must-see production. *Venus* is a great example of the Golden Era of Broadway musicals of the '40s and '50s. The necessity of a large cast and orchestra is probably what holds it back from receiving more productions. The witty lyrics are by Ogden Nash, who also collaborated on the book with the noted writer S. J. Perelman.

Kudos to OLO's artistic director Steven Daigle, who directed this production of *One Touch of Venus*, bringing it out of the mothballs and putting it on stage. Musical director Steven Byess was firmly in charge of the full orchestra.

Whitelaw Savory, a wealthy New Yorker played by Brad Baron, is infatuated with ancient artworks, particularly those depicting Venus, the goddess of love. He has finally found and purchased a statue of Venus, which is due to arrive in his studio today. Just as Rodney, his barber (played by Benjamin Krumreig), arrives to shave him, the statue also

arrives in a large wooden crate. Rodney, who has just become engaged and anticipates seeing his fiancée later that evening, has the ring in his pocket. Savory is called out of the office, and Rodney becomes intrigued by the statue, now free of her crate.



He thinks his beloved's fingers are more slender than that of the statue, and gently slips the ring on Venus's finger, only to be confronted by a flash of lightning, and whoa! Venus is now a real, living, breathing woman! A gorgeous woman, in fact. She is somewhat ditzy, which is only to be expected of someone who is perhaps 3000 years old, and she promptly falls in love with Rodney. Venus is played by Sarah Best, who is dazzling when merely standing still. But her singing and dancing are also divine, as she ably demonstrates in the two big tunes: "Speak Low," and "I'm a Stranger Here Myself."



The plot includes some shenanigans involving natives of Anatolia, where the statue originated, as well as some miscellaneous New Yorkish gangster types. All of this inspires lots of singing and dancing by the huge cast, some of whom bring two or three

characters to life. Among the standouts are Gloria, Rodney's fiancée, performed by Gretchen Windt, and her Mom, sung by Sandra Ross. Hannah Kurth as Savory's secretary, Molly, is Miss Efficiency, herself.

Rodney is now entirely captivated by Venus, and in a burst of enthusiasm, he takes her to Staten Island to show her Ozone Heights, a new development in the works. She quickly realizes it's not for her, and after more dashing around, Venus returns to the city and decides she's better off as a statue. Another flash of lightning grants her wish.



The original production was famously choreographed by Agnes de Mille, which may account for the numerous dance sequences. This time around, OLO's resident choreographer Carol Hageman has done her magic, and the dance numbers are superbly wrought. The colorful costumes were designed by Stephanie Genda. Those for Venus are truly spectacular. The versatile and clever set pieces were designed by Daniel Hobbs, with lighting by Erich Keil.

One Touch of Venus runs in repertory at Ohio Light Opera through August 8. Click [here](#) for the schedule and ticket information.

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