

## Ohio Light Opera: Offenbach's *La Vie Parisienne* (July 16)

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Screwball comedies of the mid-20th Century may well have been inspired by the zany 1866 operetta *La Vie Parisienne*, which ran for 136 performances. Judging from Ohio Light Opera's wildly entertaining production (I saw the show on Saturday, July 16), composer Jacques Offenbach

surely knew what he was doing. If you want to laugh a lot and have your mood lifted by fast-paced dancing and singing, this show is for you.

Stage Director Julie Wright Costa chose to move her production to the *Belle Époque* era when, as she notes, "Paris was at its most gay and beautiful. Plus, 1889 was the year of the *Exposition Universelle*, for which the Eiffel Tower served as entrance to the Fair. It still maintains a 'period' feel, without becoming too contemporary. After all, this show is the ultimate love letter to all things Parisian." *Vive l'amour!*

Daniel Hobbs' sets and Stefanie Genda's colorful period costumes certainly did their part in setting the scene, ably assisted by Daniel Huston's lighting. Choreographer Spencer Reese created magical



effects and the dancing of the cast was spectacular. Conductor Wilson Southerland set the mood with the overture, featuring the OLO Orchestra raised to the stage level, before being lowered again — a delightful spectacle.

The opening scene of *La Vie Parisienne* takes place at the Gare de l'Ouest in Paris one morning when the arrival of the beautiful demimondaine Métella, along with visiting Swedish nobility, is expected. Two local men, Gardefeu (Benjamin Krumreig) and Bobinet (Kyle Yampiro) are both in love with Métella (Gretchen Windt), and hope to be the one to capture her attention. However, she arrives in the company of another man. What to do? Gardefeu decides to try his wiles on the Swedish Baroness (Meagan Sill), and bribes a former servant to deliver her to his apartment, thinking it to be her hotel.



Strangely, she would much prefer other company than that of the baron (Ted Christopher). At this point a rich Brazilian (Clark Sturdevant) enters the scene, threatening to spend all his gold on the ladies of Paris. Meanwhile, at Gardefeu's house, the shoemaker Frick (Spencer Reese) flirts with the glove-maker Gabrielle (Tanya Roberts). All the servants are immediately recruited to be 'guests of the hotel' when the Baron informs his host that a table d'hôte is essential. A letter of invitation is sent off to Métella at the Baron's insistence.

Bobinet calls by and offers to stage a party for the Swedes at his absent aunt's mansion the following night, with the baron invited. The baroness finds remnants of Gardefeu's affair with Métella in her room. Métella herself now arrives hoping for a reconciliation with Gardefeu and ends by offering to entertain the baron in a few days. The guests

arrive for the table d'hôte; Frick as a major and Gabrielle as a war widow, and after another rousing dance, everyone retires to supper.

At Bobinet's party the next evening, his servants dress up as the crowd of aristocrats. The Baron arrives and is quite taken with 'Madame l'amirale' (Hilary Koolhaven) who is in fact Pauline, the chambermaid. Gabrielle arrives with Bobinet, posing as a Swiss admiral. As Bobinet rises to greet the crowd with a drinking song, his uniform splits up the back, and as the champagne flows, all become intoxicated.



For the next evening's entertainment, the Brazilian decides to offer a masked ball at the *Café des Anglais*. Although he is growing suspicious, the baron arrives for his assignation with Métella. She tells him to be patient, for she is not to be his entertainment. She is in love with someone else, but has brought a friend for him. The baron is furious when he discovers that her lover is Gardefeu. The Brazilian then arrives, followed by Bobinet and Gardefeu, and a duel is threatened, but avoided. After showing Métella the letter, she and Gardefeu are reconciled, and the baron's fury only stops when the baroness intervenes. They all toast Paris.

Fast-paced comedy and spectacular dancing is the order of the day and night, interspersed with mistaken identities. However, by the last musical notes, everyone ends up with the proper partner, to the accompaniment of champagne corks popping!

For ticket information, visit OLO's [website](#) or call the box office at 330.263.2345.

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