

Ohio Light Opera launches 2017 season with *The Music Man*

by Kelly Ferjutz
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Steven Daigle is the mixmaster-in-chief at Ohio Light Opera, which takes up residence each summer at the College of Wooster. Running a residential repertory company makes things both easier and, at times, more difficult for the Artistic Director, now in his 18th season in that position. He's an expert at picking one show from column A, and maybe two from B, or three from C, and then building on those choices. Still, no matter how astutely he picks performance possibilities, in the end, the success of a season all comes down to the performers onstage — and in the orchestra pit.

For the vocal part of that process, Daigle primarily relies on associate artistic director Julie Wright

Costa, who, in her other life is head of the voice area at the University of Utah School of Music. After winnowing through the myriad applications and videotapes, Julie travels the country holding auditions. This year she visited seven different regions in her ever-elusive search for that perfect candidate.

The program for the following season is pretty well determined by the end of the current one. Knowing what you'll need to make the magic happen makes it easier to find just the right person who'll truly light up the stage.

Lighting up the orchestra pit is the province of music director J. Lynn Thompson. His able musical assistants include conductors Steven Byess and Wilson Southerland, and rehearsal pianist Eric Andries.

It takes the combined efforts of more than 150 talented people to get these productions up and running in order to dazzle the loyal audience members. We'll get to the other

supportive personnel, both creative and technical, in another piece. Most of them are always off- or back-stage and invisible to the audience. But without them, a show would fall flat on its face!



The repertoire for this 2017 season takes off with *The Music Man* — a delightful musical comedy that could only have been set in mid-America — in River City, Iowa on July 4, 1912, to be exact. Directed by Ted Christopher, this stunning creation by Meredith Willson won the 1958 Tony for Best Musical (besting *West Side Story* for that honor). Who doesn't love a brass band, or a barbershop quartet? Of course Hill, the "con artist," gets conned himself by the values of small-town America and Marian, its classy librarian. Too bad that conductor J. Lynn Thompson won't really have "Seventy-Six Trombones" at his command!

Any season that features Cole Porter is a winner. After last summer's *Kiss Me Kate*, this season brings us *Anything Goes*, with perhaps the most famously-named heroine ever — Reno Sweeney. This Ohio Light Opera premiere production reverts to the original 1934 version with book by P. G. Wodehouse & Guy Bolton. Daigle is stage director for this production, which is conducted by Byess. Spencer Reese is not only choreographer for the show, but also performs the role of Billy Crocker, the singing and dancing assistant to Reno, who is changing careers from nightclub singer to evangelist (!)

Of course, any light opera company is required to have at least one rollicking romp by Gilbert & Sullivan during their season, and OLO is always happy to oblige. *H.M.S. Pinafore* is the oldest piece in this year's repertoire, dating from 1878. As usual with G&S, the plot makes little sense, but who really cares? Director Daigle will make everything plain to us, ably assisted by J. Lynn Thompson and Wilson Southerland in the pit. The First Lord of the Admiralty, who has never seen a ship, will be played OLO veteran Boyd Mackus. As G&S themselves wrote: "Never mind the why and wherefore" — just enjoy the musical fun!

Music Man opens OLO's 2017 season on Saturday, June 17 in Freedlander Theatre on the campus of the College of Wooster. Call the ticket office at 330-263-2345 or book your seats [online](#).

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