

## Ohio Light Opera: George Gershwin's *Primrose*

by Kelly Ferjutz  
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George Gershwin wrote the music for the English premiere of *Primrose*, catering to the British type of lyric theater —very different from the American. It's a charming work, but has been hampered by being thought of as 'too British' for American sensitivities. Humbug!

Nevertheless, the production currently onstage in Freedlander Theatre at The College of Wooster is the very first

fully-staged and -orchestrated version to be seen and heard in the United States. (One earlier performance included just the music without spoken dialogue, while another one was just with piano.) Ohio Light Opera's production presents the entire three-act show, based on a play by Guy Bolton and George Grossmith Jr., with lyrics by Desmond Carter and Ira Gershwin.

The opening scene takes place on a houseboat moored at a dock along the upper Thames, where Hilary Vane (Nathan Brian), a famous writer, is laboring to finish his current book. He is the love object of Joan (Sarah Best), a young woman who is the ward of his near neighbor Sir Barnaby Falls (Kyle Yampiro). Sir Barnaby wants to match up his son Freddie (Benjamin Krumreig) with Joan, in order to keep the family's money intact, but the two have different ideas. Freddie is infatuated by the effervescent May Rooker (Tanya Roberts), a bouncy and gorgeous amateur golfer.

These pairings are rather obvious. The third couple is anything but. Toby Mopham, the local aristocrat (the zany Stephen Faulk), is entangled with the beauty specialist Pinkie Peach, a.k.a. Madame Frazaline, who may not be from the wrong side of the tracks, but

rather too near them for comfort. Alexa Devlin is superb as Pinkie, and has one of the two songs in the show that should have been on the hit parade all those years ago. Hers is “Boy Wanted” in Act II. The other gorgeous tune is “Some Faraway Someone,” sung by Hilary and Joan in the first act.

Act II moves to a seaside resort in France. The very short Act III (with no intermission between II and III) takes place at Pinkie’s instigation at Mopham House — disguised as The Vauxhall Club — in London’s Park Lane.

Kiah Kayser’s clever sets are enhanced by Daniel Huston’s lighting. Sound design is by Dominic Mosher, and Kim Griffin’s varied costumes are truly gorgeous.

Stage Director Julie Wright Costa keeps everyone moving about briskly, yet in a somewhat leisurely fashion — good trick, that. The marvelous and inventive choreography is by Spencer Reese, and Steven Byess keeps the OLO orchestra right in step with the folks on the stage.

*Primrose* is a brilliant production that shouldn’t be missed by any aficionado of lyric theater. It’s always fun to see how the other half lives, even if you have no desire to be part of that other half.

The show runs in repertory through August 11. For ticket information, visit the OLO [website](#) or call the box office at 330.263.2345.

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