

**Ohio Light Opera:  
*Babes in Arms* (June 21)**

by Kelly Ferjutz  
Special to *ClevelandClassical.com*



If you enjoy music from the Great American Songbook or the Golden Age of Broadway, then you're already familiar with a good number of songs from Richard Rodgers' and Lorenz Hart's *Babes in Arms*.

After opening on

April 14, 1937 and running for 289 performances, the musical never again appeared on Broadway, quite possibly because of the show's politically incorrect views and language.



Although a few attempts were made to produce it after that, a PC version was not available until 1998, when the Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music presented their slightly-edited adaptation of the book. That version made its Ohio Light Opera premiere on June 21 at Friedlander Theater in Wooster.

Set during the great depression in the

somewhat wealthy enclave of Seaport, Rhode Island, Val's and Marshall's parents embark on another vaudeville tour, leaving their sons behind. Along with other young folks from the area, they decide to put on a 'Follies' show of their own, both to earn a bit of money and to forestall the Sheriff, who is determined to send them to work at the county farm until their parents return.



Sarah Best is the delightfully daffy Billie, while Alexa Devlin is winsome and coy as Baby Rose. Jonathan Heller plays Lee Calhoun, the somewhat smarmy Southerner, while his more even-tempered younger brother Beauregard is played by Stephen Walley. Cory Clines portrays the outwardly hard-nosed sheriff with an inner soft spot, and his sister is Gretchen Windt. Timothy McGowan demonstrates his versatility in two separate dance sequences: one with Sadie Spivey, and a slightly extended, exquisite ballet with Hannah Kurth. Garrett Medlock was charming as the visiting French pilot.



The fact that brothers Irving and Ivor de Quincy are not white prompts an outburst of prejudice from Lee, the neighbor, who claims that his father owns the town and offers to back the Follies only if the de Quincy brothers are not included. That notion doesn't fly with the other young people, and a fight ensues. The Sheriff appears, determined to arrest them all, but is dissuaded by his daughter, Dolores. The kids swear they were just rehearsing, not really fighting. Although they temporarily convince him to leave them alone, the Sheriff eventually gets his way and off to the farm they go.

It may surprise you to learn that "My Funny Valentine" is

actually about Valentine LaMar, aka Val, who is enchanted by the young girl Billie, who serenades him with this beloved song, but in a bit more up-tempo version than we might recall. Similarly, near the end of the show, who knew that “The Lady is a Tramp” is sung by Billie — who makes fun of herself in an adorable way?

Other well-known songs are “Where or When,” “I Wish I Were in Love Again,” and “Johnny One-Note” (sung by Alexa Devlin), which turns into a blockbuster of a dance sequence, ending the first act on a very high note.



DeShaun Tost and Adam Kirk portray the talented and gifted tap-dancing deQuincy brothers. Spencer Reese does double duty as Val and the choreographer for the production, and really let his creative muse out to play this time. There are movements this reviewer has never seen before in any production anywhere!

Stage Director Steven Daigle kept the action moving smoothly, while Steven Byess conducted the orchestra. Victor Shonk’s set was versatile, with lighting by Brittany Shemuga. Stephanie Eubank designed the period-appropriate costumes. All in all, a dandy production.

*Babes in Arms* runs in repertory through August 11. Tickets are available [online](#).

*Photos: Ben Small.*

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 26, 2018.*

*Click here for a printable copy of this article*

[Return to the Front Page.](#)