

Ohio Light Opera:
Fifty Million Frenchmen

by Kelly Ferjutz
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If you blink during the momentary lights-out between the end of the overture and the curtain going up, you might think you've somehow been transported to Paris in 1929. Time-travel, perhaps? Ohio Light Opera's production of *Fifty Million Frenchmen* in Freedlander Theater at the College of Wooster is very realistic, to be sure, and

totally enjoyable, but then, what's not to like in a Cole Porter creation? His insouciant music and beguiling lyrics can support just about any plot imaginable. But this one, by Herbert Fields, is downright perfect.

Although it ran on Broadway for only 254 performances, that was enough to thrust several songs from the show onto the Hit Parade, and they've stayed there ever since. "You Do Something to Me," "You've Got That Thing," "Find Me a Primitive Man," and "You Don't Know Paree" are among the songs that you'll easily recognize as they come along. So, sit back and



enjoy your tour of Paris as seen from the Ritz Bar, The Café de la Paix, the racetrack at Longchamps, and several venues at the Hotel Claridge. Your ebullient tour guide is Louis Parnasse, played by Ted Christopher.



When an American playboy decides to marry a rich French girl, it turns out not to be quite as easy as he thought, especially when the parents of the young lady who has caught his eye think she *should* marry a grand duke. Of course, such prospective husbands are not exactly thick on the ground. Complications abound, especially when it is revealed that the young lady is just as American as he is. True love wins out in the end, but not before an amazing assortment of terrific songs and fabulous dancing take place.



Mr. and Mrs. Emmet Carroll (Boyd Mackus and Yvonne Trobe) of Terre Haute, Indiana

have brought their daughter LooLoo (Sarah Best) and her friend Joyce (Joelle Lachance) to Paris to begin the search for a grand duke. They are immediately noticed by three young men — Michael (Nathan Brian), Billy (Jonathan Heller), and Peter (Stephen Faulk).

The young men hatch a plot involving a bet on a racehorse and “mistaken” identities. Alexa Devlin is fabulous as American cabaret singer Violet Hildegarde in “The Tale of the Oyster.” LooLoo and Joyce show off their tap-dancing feet in “Let’s Step Out.”



Daniel Hobbs’ set makes the tour of Paris very easy, as its movable parts are easily and quickly put into their proper positions by a few of the singers. The colorful costumes are by Charlene Gross, with sound design by Christopher Plummer and lighting by Brittany Shemuga. Stage Direction is by Steven A. Daigle, the choreographer is Spencer Reese, and the orchestra is conducted by H. Lynn Thompson.

Fifty Million Frenchmen is in repertory at Ohio Light Opera through Saturday, August 11. Call 330-263-2345 or reserve tickets [here](#).

If you’re interested in costumes, the Wayne County Historical Society presents “Ohio Light Opera: A Costume Retrospective,” showcasing four decades of OLO through costume and design. With an admission price of \$5 per person, the exhibit is open from noon to 1 pm before every OLO matinee, and during the Society’s regular tour hours, Friday and Saturday from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm. The Society is located at 546 E. Bowman, just east of Beall Avenue, an easy reach from Freedlander Theatre.

A relatively new tradition at OLO is the Festival Symposium, held from July 31 through August 3. The theme this year is “Taking Light Opera Seriously,” and will feature roundtable discussions, musical presentations, lectures, and a look to OLO’s next forty years. Tickets are available through the box office.

Photos by Matt Dilyard.

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