

**Ohio Light Opera:
Offenbach's *La Périchole* (July 18)**

by Kelly Ferjutz



You've heard of "screwball comedies," right? Well, here's your chance to see a screwball comedy disguised as an operetta. The sumptuous music is by the German-French master, Jacques Offenbach, and features a sparkling new English translation by OLO's Jacob Allen. The original French libretto from 1868 is by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy. Offenbach wrote nearly 100 operettas

from the 1850s–1870s, on more than a dozen of which Meilhac collaborated, while Halévy assisted on more than twenty. Today, only half a dozen or so are still in the active repertoire.



When the widowed Viceroy, Don Andrés, sees a street singer, La Périchole, he immediately decides to add her to his court as a lady-in-waiting. However, to fill that position she must be married, so the Don sets out to find her a husband. His men bring in their candidate: a drunken Piquillo, who is in reality her singing partner and lover. He doesn't recognize her, and from this episode comes one of the most lovely and famous arias of all time — “The Letter Song,” in which La Périchole assures Piquillo of her constant love. The marriage takes place, after which poor Piquillo is then sent to the dungeon for recalcitrant husbands!



This is OLO's third production of *La Périchole* during the company's 40-year history. The sprightly stage direction is by Julie Wright Costa, and the brilliantly colorful costumes by Kim Griffin reflect the sunny climate of Lima, Peru, where the action takes place in a slightly nebulous time-frame. (It could be anytime between 1868 and now.) Conductor Wilson Southerland kept the musical pacing alert and attentive, with choreography by Spencer Reese. Kiah Kayser created the multi-faceted set, highlighted by the lighting of Brittany Shemuga.



Spiro Matsos excelled as the Marquis de Tarapote, chamberlain of the viceroy, and why wouldn't he? In addition to this year, Matsos has performed the role for OLO in 1984 and 1993. Runner-up is the suitably lascivious Boyd Mackus who played Don Andrès this year and in 1984. (In 1993 he appeared as Piquillo.) Gretchen Windt, in the title role, could hardly be blamed for accepting the Don's offer, plus she then gets to sing "The Letter Song" to her erstwhile lover, Piquillo (Daniel Neer).



Ted Christopher and Stephen Faulk were cast as noblemen, while the The Three Cousins Tavern was under the capable management of Chelsea Miller (Guadalena), Caitlin Ruddy (Berginella), and Alexa Devlin (Mastrilla). Cory Clines did double duty as Assistant Stage Director and the Old Prisoner. The two notaries who formalize the marriage were Seth Johnson and Trevor Todd.



La Périchole is now in repertory through August 9 at Freedlander Theatre on the campus of The College of Wooster.

Photos by Matt Dilyard.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com July 24, 2018.

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