

Ohio Light Opera Premiere: Franz Lehár's *Cloclo* (July 25)

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Ohio Light Opera is no stranger to the works of Franz Lehár: prior to this year, seven of his operettas had been performed by the company, the most frequent being his luscious *The Merry Widow*. Number eight, having opened at Freedlander Theatre on July 25, is *Cloclo*, which is not in the usual Viennese operetta mode. First off, it takes place in Paris, as well as the French countryside near Perpignan. And written a few years

after the end of WWI, its musical sensibility is a good bit different: it includes jazz, a tango, blues, and even a take-off on the final scene from *Fledermaus* — not originally written by Lehár. You know the one, when the inmates and jailor are happily mixed with champagne.

OLO's Artistic Director Steven A. Daigle has translated and updated Béla Jenbach's German libretto. One can only say "Bravo!" for his effort. It still has a "lighter-than-air" feel to it, but much of it has been subjected to the well-known French Farce treatment. The results prompt one to wish that Mr. Daigle might turn his pen to more such ventures.

Caitlin Ruddy takes on the title character, and it fits her like a glove. In addition to her lovely soprano voice, she's an excellent dancer, and is giddily goofy when necessary. She's a delight. *Cloclo* is in love with Maxime (Benjamin Dutton), a penniless young man who loves her in return, but doesn't seem able to support her in the manner she thinks worthwhile. Therefore, she also enjoys the company of Severin Cornichon, the mayor of Perpignan. Dutton is a very fine figure of a man — tall, dark, handsome, a

wonderful baritone, and a gracefully agile dancer.



Cornichon is married but childless. Consequently, when Cloclo sends him a “more money please” letter, which is instead opened by his wife Melousine (Yvonne Trobe), she interprets the “Dear Daddy” to mean that the letter writer is his love-child. So nothing will do but for Cloclo to come to live with them.

Hilarity ensues. Before leaving for the country, Cloclo has a slight run-in with a local policeman, who wants to arrest her. But of course, that cannot happen, now that she is presumed to be the daughter of the house in Perpignan. “Momma” engages the services of a piano teacher, Chablis (Stephen Faulk), who promptly falls head-over-heels for Cloclo. This also upsets Brigitte the cook (Sarah Best in a terrific comedic romp), as well as Rosalie the chambermaid (Chelsea Miller).



In the midst of this farce, poor Severin celebrates his birthday, with neither wife nor pretend-child to adore him as he should be, even though he gifts Cloclo with a new name — Babette. She doesn't appreciate his thoughtfulness, being still in thrall to Maxime, who suddenly appears, along with the Parisian policeman. Oops! Cloclo is promptly hauled away, setting off the gay finale in, of all places, a jailhouse — shades of *Fledermaus*, indeed. But just as in that beloved operetta, all does work out well for everyone, and all the couples are properly paired off.



Stephen Byess paced the orchestra, the music, and the dancing briskly to match the stage direction of Steven A. Daigle. As usual, Spencer Reese's choreography was brilliant, and the costumes by Jennifer Ammons were all suitably gorgeous. Daniel Hobbs designed the clever sets with great lighting by Daniel Huston.

Cloclo is now in repertory through August 8 in its usual venue — Freedlander Theatre on the campus of The College of Wooster.

Photos by Matt Dilyard.

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