

**Ohio Light Opera:
The Student Prince (June 30)**

by Peter Feher



Gilbert & Sullivan might be the Ohio Light Opera signature, but the company in residence at the College of Wooster each summer has made other traditions out of its love for lyric theater. One curious case is the 1924 operetta *The Student Prince*, which OLO reprises for a seventh time in a production running through July 29 at Freedlander Theatre.

From the start, the work's popularity has resembled something of a groundswell. Ignoring early objections from producers, composer Sigmund Romberg and librettist Dorothy Donnelly wound up securing their reputations with this hit. *The Student Prince* became the longest-running Broadway show of the decade and spawned two film adaptations, including a 1954 version with a star cast of its time.



The piece's success ebbed in the years that followed. Today, you're most likely to encounter this sort of sentimental stage story as parody, never done better than the infamous "Springtime for Hitler" sequence from Mel Brooks' *The Producers*.

And *The Student Prince* can't help but invite the comparison. The plot, taken from a 1901 play, *Old Heidelberg*, follows a German royal who's comically torn between love and duty. OLO's production, directed by Jacob Allen, is complete with Tyrolean dress, militaristic ensemble numbers, and a beer garden set.



Throughout the opening performance on June 30, the young professional cast stayed in complete musical control. Michael Borowitz conducted the orchestra, which was sometimes relegated to the role of oompah band and sometimes given the chance to shine. A highlight was the "Serenade Intermezzo" that begins Act 4, full of sensitive wind and string playing, beautifully accompanied by harp.



The tune for that instrumental moment, “Overhead the Moon Is Beaming,” stands out as one of the score’s best. Its large, intervallic leaps really take a trained voice to pull off, and Benjamin Krumreig as the title character, Prince Karl Franz, gave his delivery of the song in Act 1 a burnished tenor sound. Lauren Nash Silberstein as the local waitress and love interest, Kathie, flashed considerable coloratura skill in the work’s other memorable number, “Come Boys, Let’s All Be Gay, Boys.”

Of course, a century after its premiere, not everything about *The Student Prince* has translated. Karl Franz, accompanied everywhere by a royal retinue, appears less conflicted by love and more just plain petulant. He kisses Kathie in Act 1, and they bid farewell in Act 2 — all before sadly, maturely, and altogether unbelievably saying goodbye for a second time in Act 4.



It was the comedic actors who commanded the stage. Vincent Gover as Lutz and Michelle Pedersen as the Grand Duchess Anastasia committed to ridiculous roles and slapstick bits that less confident performers would shy away from. They helped keep Act 3 alive, even as the plot faded.

Which puts *The Student Prince* in a funny position. No great story emerges from this piece, but audiences can expect a high level of music-making and an amusing time — which is the tradition of light theater after all. And OLO carries the mantle year after year.

Photos by Matt Dilyard.

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