

Ohio Light Opera: *Camelot* (June 14)

by Daniel Hathaway

*In short, there's simply not a more congenial spot
For happily-ever-aftering than here in Camelot*



On June 10, Ohio Light Opera opened its 44th season with the first of thirteen performances of Lerner & Loewe's *Camelot*, brilliantly time traveling its audiences in Freedlander Theater at the College of Wooster back to a legendary and evanescent Medieval era when knights in shining armor gathered with King Arthur at a round table (where all

are equal) and pledged themselves to a code of purity and chivalry.

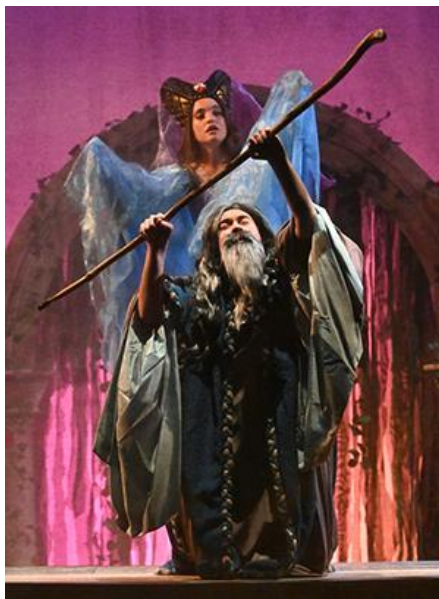
That may never have happened, but if all the famous stories surrounding Arthur and his court have a historical basis, one sure thing is that humankind's attempts to permanentize perfection rarely seem to work out.

Although even the weather in Arthur's realm of Camelot was regulated by decree, his reign of equality, peace, and justice didn't last forever. Bringing that theme into the 20th century, in a *Life* magazine interview after her husband's assassination, Jacqueline Kennedy famously quoted a song from this show: "Don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief, shining moment that was known as Camelot."



Lerner and Loewe's 1960 musical, which followed *My Fair Lady* on Broadway, is based on the Arthurian novels by English author T.H. White that came out in 1958. All the well-known characters are here — Arthur, Guenevere, Lancelot, Pellinore, Mordred, Morgan le Fay — and most of the traditional stories are threaded into the narrative, including the love triangle between Arthur, Guenevere, and Lancelot, the freeing of the sword in the stone which validated Arthur's kingship, the disruption of Arthur's reign by his illegitimate son, Mordred, the enchanted forest of Mordred's aunt, Morgan le Fay, and Lancelot's rescue of Guenevere from being burned at the stake.

Like all Ohio Light Opera productions, *Camelot* is highly photogenic, thanks to the gorgeous scenic design by Daniel Hobbs, the costume design of Suwatana Rockland, and the lighting design by Brittany Shemuga. Against this background, Steven A. Daigle's stage direction makes the most of the limited playing area and underlines the personalities of the singers and actors.



Choreographer Spencer Reese has only one real dance episode to manage, but his ebullient staging of “The Lusty Month of May” is a delightful romp around the maypole. In the pit, the OLO Orchestra gave fine support to the cast, and the score was expertly paced by conductor Michael Borowitz.

The cast is huge, with twenty-some named actors in the program book, plus a chorus of Knights and Ladies-in-Waiting. James Mitchell gave an emotionally rich portrayal of King Arthur. Guenevere and Lancelot are double-cast. I saw the performances by Sadie Spivey and Nathan Seldin, Spivey's notable for her operatic style, Seldin's for his over-assured depiction of the knight you love to hate.



Although the progress of the narrative gets bogged down a bit in the second act — not OLO's fault — the visit to Morgan le Fay's enchanted forest with Mordred (played with excellent diction by Matthew Reynolds) offers a refreshing *entremet* from Michelle

Pedersen, who might have just stepped through a scrim from other duties as the witch in *Hansel and Gretel*. The sentimental encounter between the disillusioned Arthur and a young archer who is determined to take a seat at the Round Table closes the show on a hopeful note.

It might be fun to do a study of what tunes audiences are humming on their way out of a Broadway show. To be honest, there aren't a lot of big tunes in *Camelot*, and some of the songs seem strangely dated — the lyrics of “How to Handle a Woman,” “If Ever I Would Leave You,” and “What Do the Simple Folk Do?” strike a sour note or two half a century later.

Camelot runs in repertory in Freedlander Theater at The College of Wooster through July 30.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 20, 2023.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)