

**Ohio Light Opera:
No, No, Nanette! (June 24)**

by Daniel Hathaway



When the Freedlander Theatre grand drape rose for the first *No, No, Nanette!* curtain call on Saturday afternoon in Wooster, it revealed only the tap dancing feet of the excellent Ohio Light Opera cast. That cleverly validated both stage director Steven A. Daigle’s characterization of the 1925 hit musical as “a dancing show” and choreographer Spencer Reese’s genius in getting an entire stage full of actors to tap and create a wonderful din with their feet during several production numbers.

The charming flapper-era plot is a farce, so it makes perfect sense that Nanette (Sadie Spivey, who wants “to raise a little hell” before settling down) is the protégé of Jimmy Smith (Jacob Allen), a New York bible publisher who has secretly opened charge accounts for three pretty flappers — Betty from Boston (Elizabeth Stassen), Winnie from



Washington (Lily Graham), and Flora from San Francisco (Madison Barrett).

Jimmy has hidden his entanglements from his wife Sue (Bergen Price), their nephew and Nanette's boyfriend Tom Trainor (Alexander Spence), and the family lawyer Billy Early (the ubiquitous Spencer Reese). When Billy finds out, Jimmy promises him a handsome fee to keep the whole thing quiet.



All of this leads to a blackmail scheme, romantic mishaps, and comical misunderstandings when people who aren't supposed to know about each other meet up at a seaside cottage in Atlantic City to imbibe the salubrious ocean air. Untangling things takes all of the second act.

OLO's singing actors are terrific in character roles, especially the repentant Jacob Allen, who spends most of the show licking his self-inflicted wounds, the expressive Sadie Spivey, a woman of a thousand facial expressions, and Spencer Reese, the slimy lawyer from central casting.

The supporting cast provides a wealth of 1920s personalities (Louisa Waycott as Pauline, the Smiths' cook, is a hoot), and at the drop of a cue can fill the stage for a production number.

Nanette had a unique gestation period, having been played across the U.S. and Canada by touring companies (and on four continents including Africa and Australia) before making its way to Broadway. While rattling around in the provinces, *Nanette* also took on two soon-to-be-hit songs by composer Vincent Youmans — the one you



know (“Tea for Two”) and the one you probably don’t, but which will be ringing in your ears by the end of the show (“I Want to Be Happy”).

No, No, Nanette! closed after moving to Broadway for 325 performances. Following several revivals, including one in 1971 that introduced Canadian tap dancer Ruby Keeler, interest in the show faded. To create performing materials for this Ohio Light Opera revival, Steven Daigle went spelunking in collections of the University of Texas at Austin, emerging with thousands of pages of photocopies of scripts, scores, and orchestra parts — brought to life in 2023 by Michael Borowitz and the OLO Orchestra.

The results are the reconstruction of a 1920s musical using the same techniques scholars employ to produce historically informed performances of Baroque operas. Sets (Daniel Hobbs), lighting (Rachel Aho), and costumes (Brooke Kesler) seem true to the era — but where did they find those bizarre bathing onesies for the guys?

The only missing element is an authentic 1925 audience. Now *that* would be fun.

No, No, Nanette! runs in repertory in Freedlander Theatre at The College of Wooster through July 29.

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