

Steven Daigle previews the first three shows of Ohio Light Opera's 2024 season

by Mike Telin



On Saturday, June 8 at 7:30 pm, Ohio Light Opera will launch its 2024 season with the 1937 hit musical *Guys and Dolls*. The show is the first of six titles that will run in repertory through July 28 at the College of Wooster's Freedlander Theatre. Tickets for all performances are available [online](#).

“At some level, we’ve already worked on all six of the shows,” OLO artistic director Steven Daigle said by telephone during a rehearsal break last weekend. “We’re getting to know the singers better now that we’ve had more time to work with them, and we’re excited — it’s going to be a really great company.”

Based on two short stories by Damon Runyon, with music and lyrics by Frank Loesser, *Guys and Dolls* follows a pair of big city gamblers and the women who are in love with them.

Daigle noted that OLO has been staging what he called “Golden Age Musicals” for the past eight to ten years. “We’re now at a point where we have already produced most of them. And when we were tracking some of the blockbusters, *Guys and Dolls* just came up as a fun show. It’s Americana in its own right, in the sense that the storyline deals in a very light-hearted way with gangsters, and it has a contemporary musical idiom.” He added that many of its songs have become jazz standards — Frank Sinatra’s version of “Luck Be a Lady” for example.

“I would say that *Guys and Dolls* was one of the first we picked this year because we knew it was time to do it again and we’ve had success with it in the past (*see photo above*). Also, Jacob Allen, who’s directing, directed it the last time we did it.”

Daigle said that while the OLO team was considering *Guys and Dolls*, they quickly thought of pairing it with *The Sound of Music*, which opens on Thursday, June 13 at 2:00 pm. “We had not produced it in nearly fifteen years. And it seemed like those two were the right combination because they’re so completely different.”



Daigle, who is directing the Rodgers & Hammerstein classic, said, “Sometimes musicals introduce topics in songs that over the course of time become so iconic and are sung so many times independently of the show, that people forget how they fit into the show.”

With this year’s production, Daigle looked at *The Sound of Music* in a fresh way. “I thought about how to tell the intimacy of the story, the difficulties that were going on for these people in the 1930s, and let the audience be drawn in by the relationships that are developing on the stage.”

Directed by Jacob Allen, with music by Noel Gay and lyrics by Douglas Furber and L. Arthur Rose, *Me and My Girl* tells the story of an unrefined Cockney gentleman who learns that he is the fourteenth Earl of Hareford. The show opens on Thursday, June 20 at 2:00 pm.

“It was a tremendous success in the ‘30s, and as a revival in the 1980s. I’m not sure of the exact number, but I know that in London it got over 1,000 performances when it came out in the ‘80s, and on Broadway around 1,500 performances. It’s fallen off the radar since that revival, but we’re getting a lot of people telling us that they want to see it again.”

Daigle described it as a light-hearted, full-ensemble show with tap dancing, a funny plot, and great music and orchestrations. “This is an OLO premiere although we’ve been considering it for the last five years. We’re also trying to expand the number of composers we present, and Noel Gay is not somebody who is well known. I wouldn’t say this is a one-hit show for him, but unlike Irving Berlin, he didn’t dominate the musical theater scene in the 1930s, although this show did dominate the scene during that time.”

Do the three shows that open the OLO season share any commonalities?

“I can say that what all these shows have at the seed of the conflict is a battle. Not a war battle, but relationship battles between social classes. With *The Sound of Music*, you have the Captain and Elsa and the formality of that relationship, and Maria, who is a simple young woman trying to figure out if she wants to be in the convent.

“In *Guys and Dolls* you have Sarah, who is working for the Salvation Army and finds love in a gangster, so two different classes. And in *Me and My Girl* it’s the same thing with this cockney character who doesn’t know he’s an earl, who infiltrates this high society family and kind of flips it over on its top.”

Next week we introduce *The Gondoliers* (which opens on Wednesday, June 26 at 2:00), *The Count of Luxembourg* (Thursday, July 11 at 2:00), and *The Arcadians* (Thursday, July 18 at 2:00).

Published on ClevelandClassical.com June 5, 2024

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