

## Steven Daigle previews Ohio Light Opera July openers

by Mike Telin



Now that the Ohio Light Opera is just past the midpoint of its 2024 season, there are still two titles to add to its repertoire. Franz Lehár's *The Count of Luxembourg* opens on Thursday, July 11 at 2:00 pm, and the curtain rises on Lionel Monckton's and Howard Talbot's *The Arcadians* on Thursday, July 18 at the same hour. Both are staged by OLO's artistic director Steven Daigle and will be conducted by Wilson Southerland.

"I always gravitate to operettas," Daigle said during a telephone interview earlier this summer.

"I think it's because when I started here at OLO, my first show was Emmerich Kálmán's *The Gypsy Princess*. Because of my background in directing opera and as an educator dealing mostly with classical music, it really represents the diffusion of all things wonderful about lyric theater."



Daigle said that *The Count of Luxembourg* belongs to the category of mistaken identity pieces. "It deals with arranged marriages, finding true love, and it has an opera singer as a main character. They were not considered high class in the 1900s, but here's an opera that centers around one."

The director noted that although Lehár's *The Merry Widow* was an international hit, the composer was still developing his formula as a composer. "And the leads, maybe by design, don't seem very romantic to us. By the time of *The Count of Luxembourg*, he fully connected the two main characters with a lot of pathos in the music and multiple romantic duets. And

he's established secondary roles. Musically, it's just a superb show and the orchestrations are fantastic."

Even though *The Count of Luxemburg* was very popular, Daigel believes it would have been even more so if it hadn't been only four years removed from *The Merry Widow*, which was still going strong.



Lionel Monckton's and Howard Talbot's *The Arcadians* recounts the tale of a group of idealized country dwellers who decide to transform the wicked city of London into one of truth and simplicity.

"It was a very popular show, but again, it's one that has sort of fallen off the face of the earth. James Stuart did a production of it here in 1998, the summer I was in Italy. I came back to see it, and I loved it. And we have had many people request that we bring it back."

He noted that at the time it was written, Europe was entering a mechanical age. "People were gambling more, so horse racing was big, and airplanes were coming into play. So there were a lot of things that were changing Victorian society."

The plot centers around a restaurant owner, James Smith, who crashes his plane into Arcadia. He's attracted to a young woman. He tells her a lie and the Arcadians are appalled and toss him into the well of truth. He emerges as a youthful shepherd and decides, along with a small group of the shepherds and shepherdesses, to go back to London to see if they can transform the city.

"It's very much like Gilbert & Sullivan — it has hints of pathos, but most of it is upbeat and in keeping with the musical style and formula of an Edwardian musical. It's a very interesting gap genre that falls between G&S operetta and American musical theater. It feels like Gilbert & Sullivan but also leans a little bit toward Jerome Kern. It's a fun piece, very light-hearted, and has this silliness in it."

Although Daigle is not sure how many people were around to see the 1998 production, he is hoping audiences will take a chance on it this summer.

"I know that the cast loves the piece because of how silly it is, so everyone — cast, orchestra, designers, and audience — is going to have a really good time."

Ohio Light Opera runs in repertory through July 28 at the College of Wooster's Freedlander Theatre. Tickets for all performances are available [online](#).

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