

## Ohio Light Opera: three key players discuss this season's repertoire and some bittersweet changes ahead

by Stephanie Manning



This summer, Ohio Light Opera artistic director Steven Daigle is crossing not one, but two shows off his bucket list.

“I would’ve loved to direct all six of the shows this summer,” he said. But after dividing up assignments between him and his three fellow directors, eventually he had to choose.

So what drew him to Rodgers & Hammerstein’s *Carousel* and Noël Coward’s *Bitter Sweet*? These shows aren’t just visual and musical spectacles — they also grapple with some complicated emotions.

On June 14, the OLO season opened with *Carousel*, which runs through August 1. Set in late 19th-century New England, this show centers on a couple that are in a dysfunctional, abusive relationship. “On one level, it’s a very hard show to watch or participate in,” Daigle said. “But I knew that I would want to do this show, and it’s the right time in my life to do it. It’s going to be therapeutic, I’ll say, for me.”

While keeping the script, songs, and dance numbers unchanged, this production frames certain moments differently. Take the role of the Starkeeper, which is typically played by an older, male actor. Here, the person who tells Billy he hasn’t yet done enough to make it to heaven is a young girl — one who slightly resembles Billy’s own daughter. Additionally, Daigle said, “we tried to question the redemption of Billy at the end. Is he really redeemed?”

He added that the conceptual nature of the production encourages the audience to find their own interpretation. “Good theater makes people think on their own about what they’re watching, instead of giving them all the answers.”

The director will also get to play with a conceptual staging in Noël Coward’s *Bitter Sweet*, which opens on July 17. The story, about a pianist who falls in love with an aristocrat while giving her music lessons, cuts back and forth between flashbacks and the

present day. “The text is very funny, but there’s also a very sentimental story,” Daigle said.

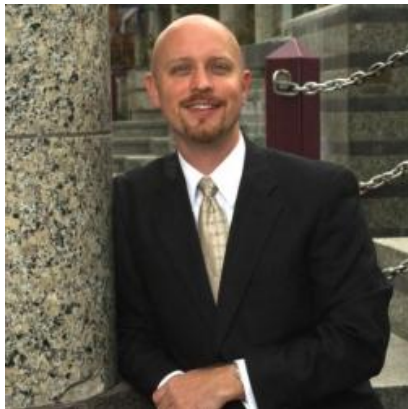
This show sticks out in his memory from his early years working at the company. “It’s one of the shows I first watched here from backstage with some really amazing artists on stage and in the pit, and it really galvanized what I love about operetta.”

*Bitter Sweet* also holds many treasured memories for Julie Wright-Costa, OLO’s former associate artistic director. She performed as the leading lady, the Marchioness of Shayne, in the company’s two previous stagings (‘93 and ‘98). So when Daigle asked her to return this year to guest direct one of the shows, that show was his initial offer.



But “I’m just too close to the material,” Wright-Costa said. “My fear was that I might make it more about my memory instead of creating something that honored the work, because that is a really cherished piece of theater and music for me.”

Instead, she took on Gilbert & Sullivan’s *Patience*, which will run from July 2 through August 2. “It’s such a witty, wonderful book, and I think there’s some really interesting music too,” she said. The opportunity to lead a Gilbert & Sullivan piece, “which is what the company was founded upon, was an incredible honor and frankly just too good to pass up.”



Returning to work at OLO after some time away is a common theme within the company. Michael Borowitz, who served as music director from 2007 to 2011, returned to that post in 2022. His fourth year back features “one of the finest orchestras we’ve had in a while,” he said. “They are playing beautifully.”

Borowitz will conduct both of Daigle’s shows — *Carousel* and *Bitter Sweet* — as well as George and Ira Gershwin’s *Tip-Toes*. “*Tip-Toes* has been a lot of fun,” he said. “I’ve always loved the whole Vaudeville era, and I love that kind of quirky, percussion-heavy music.”

Directing that show is Jacob Allen, OLO’s current associate artistic director and the man who will step into Daigle’s role when he steps down at the end of the 2026 season. “Steve’s last year as artistic director is really on our minds and on our hearts a lot,” Borowitz said. “He creates an atmosphere that is so welcoming, and we just love him.

It's hard to imagine that he won't be doing all that. But I am super excited to see what Jacob comes up with in the next couple of years."

When Daigle's 26-year stewardship comes to an end, it won't be the end of his involvement with OLO. "Wooster's been my home, so I'm never going to let that completely go," he said. But he has confidence in Allen, who he taught at the Eastman School of Music and has known for 20 years. "This rep is in his soul, it's in his heart," he said. "So it's in really good hands."

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com July 1, 2025.*

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