

**Ohio Light Opera opens 47th season
with *My Fair Lady*, directed by Jacob Allen**

By Mike Telin



When Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe's *My Fair Lady* debuted on Broadway in 1956 it was an instant success, winning six Tony Awards including Best Musical.

Indeed, the story about Eliza Doolittle, a Cockney flower girl who is magically transformed into a lady by the phonetics professor Henry Higgins, is filled with songs that will keep you humming for days.

On Saturday, June 13 at 2:00 pm in the College of Wooster's Freedlander Theatre, Ohio Light Opera will open their 47th season with the iconic musical. Jacob Allen directs

and Michael Borowitz conducts the OLO Orchestra. *My Fair Lady* runs in rep through August 2. Tickets are available [online](#). View a season calendar [here](#).

I caught up with Jacob Allen by phone and began our conversation by asking him about his history with the musical.

Jacob Allen: This is my sixth production of *My Fair Lady*. I've directed four of them, and acted in two of them. In fact, I directed the last *My Fair Lady* that Ohio Light Opera produced. So I have both a love for the piece and a lot of experience with it.

Mike Telin: What do you love about it?

JA: Coming from the '50s, it represents the evolution of the Golden Age of American Music Theater, and the evolution of the craft of creating these pieces.

It's very apt that OLO is doing it, in that we are a company that champions European and American comic and light opera. Frederick Loewe's father was a famous singer who

was specifically known for his portrayal of Danilo in *The Merry Widow*, which is part of our season as well.

So Frederick Loewe grew up steeped in the operetta tradition, and a sweeping sense of romance can be heard in all of his scores. Most especially in *Brigadoon*, which was on our season last year. But you hear that in *My Fair Lady* as well, especially when you get to “Accustomed to Her Face” at the end of the show.

MT: It's based on the George Bernard Shaw play Pygmalion.

JA: I don't know that you could ask for better source material than Shaw.

MT: Do you think Henry comes to love Eliza?

JA: I do. I think there is a question for the audience to decide as to what their future together is going to be. The ending leaves it rather open-ended — she returns, but then there is that last line, “Eliza, where the devil are my slippers.” You wonder, is this going to become a romantic relationship or is she going to return to being subservient to him? Or has he changed and been transformed over the course of the piece?

MT: Do you have a favorite song?

JA: Oh, gosh, they're all great. There's the epic “On the Street Where You Live,” and “Show Me.” But if I'm going to choose something outside the obvious I would probably say “Ascot Gavotte.”

MT: You're also directing The Boys From Syracuse, (opens June 25) the first musical based on a Shakespeare play.

JA: This is my second *Boys From Syracuse* separated by exactly 20 years. In the summer of 2006, I played the role of Antipholus of Ephesus, so I've been familiar with it for a long time. It's a bit of a dark horse in that I think a lot of people don't know the show, but if they are told some of the numbers that are in it, they recognize those.

Probably the two most famous pieces are “This Can't Be Love” and “Sing for Your Supper,” which is so spectacular that it's reprised four times in the show.

I'm excited for audiences to have the opportunity to become familiar with this piece that has mostly fallen out of the canon. That's a real shame, because it's very, very funny.

This is pre-Golden Age of American Music Theater, and it's one of the pieces that shows like *Oklahoma* came from. And Shakespeare is pretty great source material.

MT: You're also performing onstage this season.

JA: I'm going to play Mr. Applegate, the devil in *Damn Yankees* (opening June 18). And continuing the excellent source material, this is loosely based on a Faustian tale — with a happier ending.

I'm excited to play Mr. Applegate, who's the devil and the one pulling all the strings in the piece. And he gets that fabulous number "Those Were the Good Old Days,"

MT: Switching topics on you: next year you will also step into the role as the Company's artist director.

JA: This is a transition that is three years in the making. I think Steve Daigle and the rest of the company leadership has been really intentional about how to make this transition work. I've been working right alongside Steve and executive director Laura Neill for the last couple of years. And while I'm not ready to divulge any titles, we are already working on the 2027 season.

MT: What excites you about taking over? I know you have a long history with OLO. Steve often says that you grew up with the company.

JA: I have a tremendous appreciation and deep love for the mission of this company, both in terms of the literature that it champions, but maybe even moreso, for the role that it plays for its young artists.

Growing up with the company, OLO played an important role during my formative years. It's really lovely to be able to pay that forward with our young artists who get fantastic experiences here. So that's what I'm excited about.

I feel a real calling because the state of regional theater across this country right now is fairly bleak — companies are disappearing left and right. I want to be clear, Ohio Light Opera is on very stable ground, but all it takes is for a rocky transition in leadership to seriously upend a company's stability. So I feel a significant calling to provide a very smooth transition so that OLO can move into the next 50 years.

MT: This is season 47?

JA: 47 since the company was founded, depending on how you count the COVID year. I count it because we did present an entire season, just remotely. So this is the 47th season, 46th in residence. And we are creeping up on 50 very quickly.

MT: Congratulations on the longevity. Is there anything more you'd like to tell me about this season?

JA: I think it's going to be a fantastic lineup. And we are looking forward to celebrating Steve and his significant legacy with the company in this, his final season.

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