

O|PERA AUSTRALIA

# *The Merry Widow*

*Franz Lehár*



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Opera Australia  
State Theatre  
Arts Centre Melbourne  
November 15, 16, 17,  
18 (evening and matinee),  
19 (matinee), 21, 22, 23, 24,  
25 (evening and matinee)



Franz Lehár

## *The Merry Widow*

Opera in three acts by Franz Lehár  
Libretto by Viktor Leon and Leo Stein adapted from the  
play *L'attaché d'ambassade* by Henri Meilhac in the German  
translation by Alexander Bergen

Translation by Justin Fleming

*The Merry Widow* was first performed at the Theater an der  
Wien on 30 December 1905.

This production was first performed by West Australian Opera  
on 15 July 2017.

Sung in English with surtitles

*The Merry Widow* production was commissioned by the Opera  
Conference, Australia's national partnership of professional  
opera companies (Opera Australia, Opera Queensland, State  
Opera of South Australia and West Australian Opera).

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# *The Merry Widow*

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Conductor **Vanessa Scammell**  
Director and Choreographer **Graeme Murphy**  
Associate Director and Choreographer **Janet Vernon**  
Set Designer **Michael Scott-Mitchell**  
Costume Designer **Jennifer Irwin**  
Lighting Designer **Damien Cooper**  
Sound Designer **Tony David Cray**  
Assistant Director/Choreographer **Shane Placentino**  
Assistant Director **Matthew Barclay**

Hanna Glawari **Danielle de Niese, Julie Lea Goodwin (matinees)**  
Count Danilo Danilowitsch **Alexander Lewis**  
Baron Mirko Zeta **David Whitney**  
Valencienne **Stacey Alleaume**  
Camille de Rosillon **John Longmuir**  
Njegus **Benjamin Rasheed**  
Kromow **Richard Anderson**  
Bogdanowitsch **Christopher Hillier**  
Sylviane **Jane Ede**  
Raoul de St. Brioche **Graeme Macfarlane**  
Vicomte Cascada **Luke Gabbedy**  
Olga Kromow **Agnes Sarkis**  
Konrad Pritschitsch **Tom Hamilton**  
Praskowia **Dominica Matthews**

Musical Preparation **John Haddock, Stephen Walter**

Production Manager **Chris Potter**

Stage Manager **Crissie Higgins**  
Deputy Stage Manager **Benjamin Lynch**  
Assistant Stage Manager **Miranda Summers**

Lighting Supervisor **David Parsons**

## **Opera Australia Chorus**

Chorus Master **Anthony Hunt**  
Assistant Chorus Master **Michael Curtain**

## **Orchestra Victoria**

Concertmaster **Roger Jonsson**

The performance lasts approximately two hours and fifty minutes including  
two intervals of twenty minutes each

Casting correct at time of publication but subject to amendment

Scenery, properties, costumes, millinery and wigs by **Opera Australia Workshop**



**Vanessa Scammell** - Conductor

**Background:** Graduated from Melbourne Conservatorium and Sydney Conservatorium of Music. Recipient of the Brian Stacey Award for Young Conductors and The Robert and Elizabeth Albert Conducting Fellowship for The Australian Ballet.

**OA repertoire:** *The Merry Widow, My Fair Lady, The Divorce, South Pacific, La Traviata*

**Other Companies:** *The Merry Widow* (West Australian Opera), *The Phantom of the Opera* (Really Useful Company), *West Side Story* (Farrelly Productions), *Chicago* (GFO), *The Producers, Damn Yankees, Hello Dolly* (The Production Company), *Fiddler on the Roof* (TML Enterprises), *The Light in the Piazza* (Adelaide Fringe Festival), *From Broadway to La Scala* (Andrew McKinnon Presentations), *David Bowie Tribute Concert* (Melbourne Symphony Orchestra), *Swing on This* (West Australian Symphony), *Magic of the Musicals* (Auckland Philharmonia), *Body Torque, The Nutcracker and The Dream* (Australian Ballet)



**Graeme Murphy** - Director and Choreographer

**Background:** Studied at The Australian Ballet School, danced with The Australian Ballet, Sadler's Wells Ballet (London), Ballets Felix Blaska (France); was Artistic Director of Sydney Dance Company for 31 years, creating over 60 works. Choreographed for The Australian Ballet, Universal Ballet Korea, Bayerisches Staatsballett, Shanghai Ballet, Royal New Zealand Ballet, Tasdance, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Torvill & Dean, film *Mao's Last Dancer* and Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Love Never Dies*. Awards include: AO, Distinguished Service to the Performing Arts (2012), AM, Services to Dance (1982), Hon. D. Lit. Tas (1990), Hon. D. Phil. Qld (1992), Hon. D. Lit. UNSW (1999), Cultural Leader of the Year, ABAF (2004), Award for Contribution to Cultural Exchange, Ministry of Culture, People's Republic of China (2008), Fred & Adele Astaire Award for Excellence in Choreography, *Mao's Last Dancer* (NY, 2011)

**OA repertoire:** Directed *Metamorphosis, Turandot, Salome, The Trojans, Aida*

**Other Companies:** Directed *Turandot* (Opera de Montreal), *Ainadamar* (Adelaide Festival of Arts); choreographed *Death in Venice* (Canadian Opera Company), *Samson et Dalila* (Metropolitan Opera)



**Janet Vernon** - Associate Director and Choreographer

**Background:** Born, Greece. A former ROH Jette Parker Young Artist. Nominated for two Helpmann Awards. Trained as a violinist at the "Mousikoi Orizontes" Conservatory in Athens, studied Musicology at Sorbonne University, opera staging at Paris 8 - Saint Denis University and physical theatre at the International Theatre School Jacques Lecoq

**Other Companies:** *Vanessa* (Wexford Festival Opera), *Queen of Spades* (Opera Holland Park), *Cenerentola* (Teatro Verdi di Trieste), *Tosca* (Xi'an Concert Hall China), *Così fan tutte, Cenerentola* (Greek National Opera), *L'isola disabitata* (ROH - Linbury Studio, Hobart Baroque), *Ariane, Alexandre bis, San Giovanni Battista, The Cooper* (Guildhall School of Music and Drama), *Riders to the Sea, Savitri, The Bartered Bride* (British Youth Opera), *Betrothal in a Monastery* (RCS/Scottish Opera), *Carmen* (London's King's Head), *Dichterliebe* (ROH Linbury Studio), site-specific performance of *Rusalka* (Opera North), devised youth opera *Where is The Love* (Arcola Theatre), *Suor Angelica* (MOC), *Orfeo, Das Lied von der Erde* (Paris 8 Opera)



**Michael Scott-Mitchell** - Set Designer

**Background:** One of Australia's most outstanding designers, known for the Cauldron, Sydney Olympics; Cauldron, Ceremonial Stages, Cultural Segments, Asian Games Doha 2006. Founding director of D4DESIGN (Rockpool Restaurant, Regents Court). Awards: Helpmann - *The Ring Cycle, Green Room - Ying Tong, The Elixir of Love, Adelaide Theatre Critics - Il Trovatore, Glug - Les Parents Terrible*, APDG Award - *La fanciulla del West, Dr Zhivago, Tosca, Arms and the Man*. His photographs for *The Ring Cycle* are held by the National Library. NIDA Deputy Director, Head of Design

**OA repertoire:** *La fanciulla del West, Tannhäuser, Rinaldo, The Elixir of Love, Andrea Chénier, Il Trovatore, Don Giovanni, Tosca, Carmen*

**Other Companies:** *The Ring Cycle* (SOSA), Opening Ceremony of CHOGM, Perth; *Shout!* (Jacobsen Entertainment), 37 STC productions including *Arcadia, Arms and the Man, Switzerland, Storm Boy; Dr Zhivago* (Broadway), *Freeze Frame* (LA and Kennedy Center, Washington DC), *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Bell Shakespeare's inaugural designer, 11 productions including *Troilus & Cressida, Merchant of Venice*



**Jennifer Irwin** - Costume Designer

**Background:** Career spans 36 years designing for drama, opera, dance, ballet and events. Multiple Helpmann, Green Room, Australian Dance, Australian Production Design Awards & nominations. Awarded Centenary Medal - Service to the Arts.

**OA repertoire:** *Romeo & Juliet, Merry Widow*

**Other Companies:** *Dirty Dancing the musical* (international), 26 year repertoire Bangarra Dance Theatre; 36 ballets Sydney Dance Company, The Australian Ballet, Australian Dance Theatre, Queensland Ballet, West Australian Ballet, TasDance, Belvoir Street (*Keating! the Musical, Stuff Happens, My Zinc Bed, Gethsemane, Gates of Egypt, The Laramie Project, The Great Fire*), Sydney Theatre Company (*Cyrano de Bergerac, Soulmates, Up for Grabs, Virgin Mim, Stockholm, Bloodland*), Melbourne Theatre Company (*Don Parties On*), Adelaide Festival (*Ainadamar*), Sydney 2000 Olympic Opening & Closing Ceremonies, Official ceremony marking the Federation of Australia. Costume designs have been staged in over 70 countries, at venues including Royal Opera House, Lincoln Centre, City Centre, Brooklyn Academy of Music NYC, Kennedy Centre Washington

**Film:** *Spear*, AACTA Awards Nominated Best Costume Design Feature Film (2016)



**Damien Cooper** - Lighting Designer

**Background:** NIDA graduate. Winner of four Green Room Awards; three Sydney Theatre Awards; Mike Walsh Fellowship and two APDG Awards

**OA repertoire:** *Peter Grimes, Così fan tutte, Aida, Alcina, The Magic Flute, The Ring Cycle*

**Other Companies:** worked with Australian and international leading directors: Neil Armfield, Benedict Andrews, Eamon Flack, Graeme Murphy, Jim Sharman, Simon Stone, Kip Williams, Howard Davies, Des McAuff, David Pountney, Phillip Seymour Hoffman, Stephen Soderberg. Career highlights include: *Exit the King* (Broadway), *Swan Lake* (The Australian Ballet in NY, London, Paris, Tokyo), *Keating! the Musical*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Chicago Lyric Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Canadian Opera Company), *Peter Grimes* (Canadian Opera Company), *Peter Grimes, Chorus!* (Houston Grand Opera), *Dr Zhivago* (GFO), *The Lost Echo, Women of Troy, The Cherry Orchard, Disgraced, The Golden Age* (STC), *Peter Pan, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Strange Interlude, Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, Neighbourhood Watch, The Seagull, The Great Fire, Radiance, The Glass Menagerie* (Belvoir)



**Tony David Cray** - Sound Designer

**Background:** Australian-born Grammy Award-winning audio engineer/producer. Composed music and provided sound designs for many of Australia's performing arts companies as well as teaching sound design in film and theatre at NIDA and AFTRS. Recipient of the Churchill Fellowship and a Helpmann in 2012 for Best Sound Design for Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour - *La Traviata*

**OA repertoire:** Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour - *La Traviata, Carmen, Madama Butterfly, Aida, Turandot, Die tote Stadt*. Audio Director for live broadcasts and cinema releases

**Other Companies:** Recordings include Sydney Symphony Orchestra, The Australian Ballet, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Sir Charles Mackerras, Burt Bacharach, Olivia Newton-John, The Whitlams, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Darren Hayes, John Farnham, Paul Kelly, A to Z, Baz Luhrmann's *Australia*, Bell Shakespeare, Chick Corea, The Cure, Lou Reed and Brian Eno



**Shane Placentino** - Assistant Director / Choreographer

**Background:** Graduated from The Australian Ballet School in 1990

**Other companies:** Member of The Australian Ballet 1991 - 2000: Murphy's *Nutcracker, Beyond Twelve, Swan Lake, The Sleeping Beauty, Giselle, The Merry Widow, Kylian's Sinfonietta, Duato's Jordi Tancat, Welch's Red Earth, Cranko's Romeo and Juliet* and MacMillan's *Manon*. Joined Sydney Dance Company in 2002: *Ellipse, Air and other invisible forces, Salome, Free Radicals, Tivoli, Underland, Random Play, Some Rooms, Grand, Hua Mulan, Berlin and Ever After Ever. Inuk2* with Meryl Tankard.



**Anthony Hunt** - Chorus Master

**Background:** Royal Academy of Music, London (ARAM); Elder Conservatorium of Music, University of Adelaide; Symphony Australia Conductor development program

**OA repertoire:** *Aida, Carmen, Così fan tutte, Der Rosenkavalier, Die Fledermaus, Die tote Stadt, Don Carlos, Don Giovanni, Don Pasquale, Falstaff, Faust, Götterdämmerung, La Bohème, La Traviata, Lakmé, The Elixir of Love, The Marriage of Figaro, The Pearlfishers, Luisa Miller, Macbeth, Madama Butterfly, Of Mice and Men, The Barber of Seville, The Divorce, The Magic Flute, The Merry Widow, The Mikado, The Turk in Italy, Otello, Eugene Onegin, The Pirates of Penzance, Rigoletto, Tosca, Turandot, The Eighth Wonder*

**Other Companies:** SOSA (Young Artist): *Sunday in the Park with George, Candide, L'enfant et les Sortilèges* (conductor)

**Recordings/Videos:** *Lakmé, Rigoletto, The Marriage of Figaro, Madama Butterfly, La Traviata, Aida* (OA Cinema/DVD)



**Roger Jonsson** - Concertmaster

**Background:** Born in Sweden. Began violin studies at the age of eight. His first teachers were Karin Mansson at the local music school and Gunnar Crantz at Falun Music Conservatory. In 1994, Roger was accepted to Edsbergs Music Institute where he studied with Endre and Jennifer Wolf. In 1998, he graduated with a Solo/Chamber music Diploma. Before joining Orchestra Victoria in 2006, Roger worked with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Stockholm's New Chamber Orchestra, the Stockholm Sinfonietta and the Opera Australia Orchestra. Member of the Firebird Trio since 2011 and a guest concertmaster with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Trondheim Symphony Orchestra and the Melbourne Ring Orchestra



**Stacey Alleaume** - Valencienne

**Background:** Born, Australia. Studied: Bachelor of Music (Music Performance) The University of Melbourne; Performance Program, The Opera Studio Melbourne; Istituto Italiano (Firenze, Italia); Music Academy of the West (Santa Barbara, U.S.A). Awards and Scholarships: Winner - The Herald Sun Aria (2013), Winner - Sydney Eisteddfod McDonald's Aria (2012), Winner - Waiariki Institute of Technology New Zealand Aria (2011), Winner - The Australian Youth Aria (2009). Scholarships: Australian Opera Awards Committee - Joan Sutherland Scholarship (2016), The Dame Nellie Melba Opera Trust (2010), Amelia Joscelyne Reserve Scholarship, Ruskin Family Opera Award (2012)

**OA repertoire:** Violetta Valéry: *La Traviata*, Micaëla: *Carmen*, Léïla: *The Pearlfishers*, Page: *Rigoletto*, Alexandra Mason: *The Eighth Wonder*, Gretel: *Hansel and Gretel*, Pamina/Second Lady: *The Magic Flute*, Rosina: *The Barber of Seville* (tour)

**Other Companies:** Nannetta (cover): *Falstaff* (Teatro Pergolesi, Italy)

**Stacey Alleaume is a member of the Moffatt Oxenbould Young Artist Program and is supported by The Robert Lomax Young Artists Scholarship**



**Richard Anderson** - Kromow

**Background:** Studied Canberra School of Music, 1988-95. Moffatt Oxenbould Young Artist, 2003-04  
**OA repertoire:** Sarastro/Speaker: *The Magic Flute*, Figaro/Dr Bartolo: *The Marriage of Figaro*, Quince: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Don Alfonso: *Così fan tutte*, Tereus: *The Love of the Nightingale*, Colline: *La Bohème*, Zuniga: *Carmen*, Ashby: *La fanciulla del West*, Sparafucile/Ceprano: *Rigoletto*, De Brétigny: *Manon*, Swallow: *Peter Grimes*, Raimondo: *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Ratcliffe: *Billy Budd*, Dottore Grenvil: *La Traviata*, Publio: *La clemenza*, Masetto: *Don Giovanni*, Achilla/Curio: *Giulio Cesare*, Hermann/Schlemil: *Hoffmann*, Biterolf: *Tannhäuser*, Ribbing: *The Masked Ball*, Noble: *Lohengrin*, Cascada: *Merry Widow*, Officer: *Madeline Lee*, Ormonte: *Partenope*, Marchese: *The Force of Destiny*, Montano: *Otello*, Wagner: *Faust*, Flemish Deputy: *Don Carlos*

**Other Companies:** Ariadeno: *L'ormindo*, Achis: *David et Jonathan* (Pinchgut), Ashby: *La Fanciulla del West* (MSO,SOSA); *The Mikado*, Don Alfonso, *Fidelio* (OQ), Piffalah: *Angelique*, Puccini *Messa di Gloria*, Mozart's *Coronation Mass*, *Requiem*, *Great Mass in C minor*, Handel's *Messiah*, *Dixit Dominus*, Bach's *St. John Passion*, *Mass in B Minor*, *Verdi Requiem* (ASO)

**Recordings:** *David et Jonathan* (ABC Classics)



**Danielle de Niese** - Hanna Glawari

**Background:** Youngest ever member of the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program.

**Other Companies:** Donna Elvira: *Don Giovanni* (Semperoper Dresden), Adina: *The Elixir of Love* (Opera National du Rhin, Glyndebourne Festival), both lead roles in the Ravel Double Bill (Glyndebourne Festival), Norina: *Don Pasquale* (Wiener Staatsoper), Title role: *Cleopatra* (Glyndebourne Festival, Metropolitan Opera), Title role: *Partenope* (San Francisco Opera), Susanna: *The Marriage of Figaro* (Metropolitan Opera), Poppea: *Agrippina* (Theater an der Wien), Rosina: *The Barber of Seville* (Glyndebourne Festival, BBC Proms), Title role: *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (Teatro Real Madrid), Ariel: *The Enchanted Island* (Metropolitan Opera), Despina: *Così fan tutte* (Metropolitan Opera), Title role: *Semele* (Théâtre des Champs-Élysées), Title role: *Rodelinda* (Theatre an der Wien). Concert appearances at Ravinia Festival in Chicago, Barbican, Last Night of the Proms at Royal Albert Hall, Proms in the Park at Hyde Park, Philharmonie de Paris

**Recordings/TV:** Handel Arias, The Mozart Album, Diva, Beauty of the Baroque (Decca); Diva Diaries (BBC Four); Popstar to Operastar (ITV1)



**Jane Ede** - Sylviane

**Background:** Bachelor Creative Arts Wollongong University, Diploma of Opera Sydney Conservatorium of Music. Finalist Metropolitan Opera Award, Covent Garden Award, New York Study Award and McDonalds Aria. Winner inaugural OA Young Artist Competition, member Moffatt Oxenbould Young Artist Program 2010-11

**OA repertoire:** Pat Nixon: *The Nixon Tapes*, Masetto: *La Bohème*, Countess Almaviva: *The Marriage of Figaro*, Donna Elvira: *Don Giovanni*, Alice Ford: *Falstaff*, Adina: *Elixir of Love*, Pamina/First Lady: *The Magic Flute*, Lady Billows: *Albert Herring*, Helena: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Berta: *The Barber of Seville*, Frasquita: *Carmen*, Wellgunde: *The Ring Cycle*, Diana: *Orpheus in the Underworld*, Ellen: *Lakmé*, Countess Ceprano: *Rigoletto*, Lucy/Nurse: *Bliss*, Title Role and Kate Pinkerton: *Madama Butterfly*, Fiametta: *The Gondoliers*, Isabel/Edith: *The Pirates of Penzance*, Witch/Gretel: *Hänsel und Gretel*

**Other Companies:** *Flight of Les Darcy* (Music Theatre Sydney), Sydney Youth Orchestra, Willoughby Symphony, Wollongong Symphony, Macquarie University

**Recordings:** *Lakmé*, *Rigoletto* (OA CD/DVD); "A Poet's Composer" (Wirripang)



**Luke Gabbedy** - Vicomte Cascada

**Background:** BMus, WA Conservatorium. WAO Young Artist 2002. Second place - Metropolitan Opera Award (2002) and National Operatic Aria (2003)

**OA repertoire:** Richard Nixon: *The Nixon Tapes* (Vivid LIVE), Escamillo/Dancairo: *Carmen*, Gunther: *Götterdämmerung*, Pantaloon: *The Love for Three Oranges*, Papageno: *The Magic Flute*, Danilo: *Merry Widow*, Frederic: *Lakmé*, Ping: *Turandot*, Slim: *Of Mice and Men*, Zurga: *The Pearlfishers*, Demetrius: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Guglielmo: *Così fan tutte*, Figaro/Fiorello: *The Barber of Seville*, Silvio: *Pagliacci*, Jupiter: *Orpheus in the Underworld*, Pish-Tush: *The Mikado*, Aeneas: *Dido and Aeneas*, Yamadori: *Madama Butterfly*, Donald: *Billy Budd*, Marco: *Gianni Schicchi*, Mercutio: *Roméo et Juliette*, Marullo: *Rigoletto*, Giuseppe: *Gondoliers*, Sacristan/Sciarrone: *Tosca*, D'Obigny: *La Traviata*, Flemish Deputy: *Don Carlos*. Title role: *Don Giovanni*, Narrator: *Midnite* (tour)

**Other Companies:** Yamadori: *Madama Butterfly* (SOSA), Silvio, Almaviva: *The Marriage of Figaro*, Figaro: *The Barber of Seville*, Marcello: *La Bohème*, St. Bricoché: *The Merry Widow*, Paris: *Roméo et Juliette*, Commissioner: *Madama Butterfly*, Riccardo: *The Sound Garden* (WAO)



**Julie Lea Goodwin** - Hanna Glawari

**Background:** Two Sport and Tourism Youth Foundation Scholarships, Australia Day 'Young Citizen Award', Farleigh Vocal Scholarship, 4MBS Outstanding Student Award, Member of Moffatt Oxenbould Young Artist Program 2015-16

**OA repertoire:** Giroflé/Giofla: *Two Weddings, One Bride*, Susanna: *The Marriage of Figaro*, Voice from Heaven: *Don Carlos*, Musetta: *La Bohème*, Ninetta: *Love for Three Oranges*, Woodbird: *The Ring Cycle*  
**Other Companies:** Christine Daae: *The Phantom of the Opera* (Really Useful); Maria: *West Side Story* (Ambassador Group); Grace: *Annie* (Gordon Frost); Title role: *The Cunning Little Vixen* (Sydney Chamber Opera); Heroine: *Pleasure Opera* (Adelaide Fringe Festival); Lucy: *The Telephone* (Harbour City Opera). Concertwork: *Opera in the Alps*, *Opera in the Market*, *Gershwin American Songbook*: Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, Guest Artist: Ch9 Schools Spectacular, Australian Youth Olympics Festival, *Carols by Candlelight*, *Carols in the Domain*, Bravo Tour - Renaissance of the Seas, Cole Porter Celebration Concert: Sydney Philharmonia Choirs

**Recordings:** *Annie* (Australian cast recording) and *Love Went a-Riding* (Skylark Classics)

**Julie Lea Goodwin is supported by Marianne and Warren Lesnie**



**Tom Hamilton** - Konrad Pritschitsch

**Background:** Born, Australia. Voice Queensland Conservatorium. Queensland Lyric Opera Chorus. VSO Chorus. VSO Young Artist, 1996

**OA repertoire:** Belcore: *The Elixir of Love*, Sharpless: *Madama Butterfly*, Roo: *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, Leporello: *Don Giovanni*, Don Alfonso: *Così fan tutte*, Arthur Jones: *Billy Budd*, Benoit/Alcindoro: *La Bohème*, MacGrave: *Gypsy Princess*, Ceprano/Marullo: *Rigoletto*, Pinellino: *Gianni Schicchi*, Noble: *Lohengrin*, Fiorello/Ambrogio: *The Barber of Seville*, Hermann: *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, Jonas Fogg: *Sweeney Todd*, Eachus/Mars: *Orpheus in the Underworld*, Police Commissioner: *Il Signor Bruschino*, Kromow: *The Merry Widow*, Pish-Tush: *The Mikado*, Figaro/Antonio: *The Marriage of Figaro*, Steward/Waiter: *Death in Venice*, Foreman: *Eighth Wonder*, Giorgio Germont/Marquis/Baron: *La Traviata*, Pickpocket: *Lakmé*, Henchman: *Batavia*, Mayor: *Jenufa*, Soldier: *Il Trovatore*, Naval Captain: *Manon Lescaut*, Soldier: *Salome*, Herald: *Otello*, Gaoler: *Tosca*, Papageno: *The Magic Flute*

**Other Companies:** Haushofmeister: *Capriccio*, Weill Seven Deadly Sins, Duruflé *Requiem* (MSO), Boniface: *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame* (Ballarat Opera Festival), *The Medium* (Port Fairy). Concerts include QPO, QSO, MSO, Mozart's *Requiem* and *Solemn Vespers*, *Carmina Burana*, *Opera on Yarra*



**Christopher Hillier** - Bogdanowitsch

**Background:** B. Mus. with 1st class honours from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. Studied at National Opera Studio, London. Winner of the Opera Foundation Covent Garden award in 2006 and finalist in the Italian Award

**OA repertoire:** Belcore: *The Elixir of Love*, Zurga: *The Pearlfishers*, Moralès: *Carmen*, Christian: *A Masked Ball*, Malatesta: *Don Pasquale*, Count Ceprano: *Rigoletto*, Fiorello: *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Innkeeper: *Manon Lescaut*, Macbeth's Servant: *Macbeth*, Marquis: *La Traviata*, Jupiter: *Orpheus in the Underworld*, Title role: *Don Giovanni*, Germont: *La Traviata*, Papageno: *The Magic Flute*

**Other Companies:** Germont: *La Traviata*, Zurga: *The Pearlfishers*, Sid: *Albert Herring* (National Opera Studio). Concert repertoire includes *Carmina Burana*, Monteverdi *Vespers* (Sydney Philharmonia), Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *Creation*, Fauré and Duruflé *Requiems* both in Australia and overseas. Christopher has toured with Musica Viva, and has sung with Welsh National Opera, and in concert in the UK, Italy, Singapore and Germany



**Alexander Lewis** - Count Danilo Danilowitsch

**Background:** Graduate of Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts' Music Theatre Program and the Merola Opera Program in San Francisco, member of the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program. Winner of the New York Study Award and The National Operatic Aria Competition

**OA repertoire:** Danilo: *The Merry Widow*; Title Role: *The Nose*; Anthony Hope: *Sweeney Todd*, Cobweb: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

**Other Companies:** Title role: *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, Gritsko: *The Fair at Sorochyntsi* (Komische Opera Berlin), Title role: *The Nose* (Royal Opera House, Metropolitan Opera, Met HD Live), Danilo: *The Merry Widow*, Tamino: *Die Zauberflöte* (West Australian Opera), John Wormley: *Crossing* (American Repertory Theater - World Premiere, BAM), Enoch Snow: *Carousel* (Houston Grand Opera), Title role: *Sunday in the Park with George* (Victorian Opera), Flask: *Moby Dick* (Washington National Opera), St Brioche: *The Merry Widow*, Borsia: *Rigoletto* (Metropolitan Opera, MetHD Live), Raoul: *The Phantom of the Opera* (Really Useful), Frederick Barrett: *Titanic - The Musical* (Sea Biscuit Productions). Concert appearances include Tenor solo: Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* (Omaha Symphony), *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings* (Bangalow Music Festival), *Petite Messe Solonelle* (Philadelphia Chamber Music Society), *Carols at The House* (Sydney Philharmonia Choir), The Met's 2012 Summer Recital Series, 2012 Manchester Music Festival, Poisson: *Adriana Lecouvreur* (The Opera Orchestra of New York, Carnegie Hall)

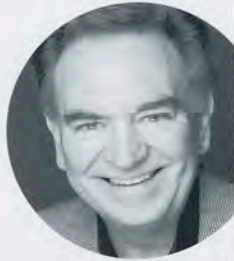


**John Longmuir** - Camille de Rosillon

**Background:** Born, Scotland. Graduated Australian Opera Studio in 2008. Winner of the 2009 Herald-Sun Aria, Opera and Arts Support Group Scholarship and inaugural Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyngé Bel Canto Award

**OA repertoire:** Narciso: *The Turk in Italy*, Ernesto: *Don Pasquale*, Tamino: *The Magic Flute*, Almaviva: *The Barber of Seville*, Italian Tenor: *Capriccio*, Ballad Singer: *Of Mice and Men*, Camille: *The Merry Widow*, Snout: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Fenton: *Falstaff*, Messenger: *Aida*, Mr Upfold: *Albert Herring*, Don Ottavio: *Don Giovanni*, Pong: *Turandot*, Gastone: *La Traviata*

**Other Companies:** Almaviva: *The Barber of Seville*, Camille: *The Merry Widow* (West Australian Opera); *La Naisance de Venus* (Konzerthaus Berlin), *Israel in Egypt* (Berliner Cappella), Grimoaldo: *Rodelinda* (Sydney Lyric Orchestra under Richard Bonyngé), Handel's *Messiah* (Royal Melbourne Philharmonic), Rossini's *Stabat Mater* (West Australian Symphony), Gala Concert (Shinjuku Bunka Centre, Tokyo)



**Graeme Macfarlane** - Raoul de St.Briche

**Background:** Born, Australia. Graduate of Sydney Conservatorium (Operatic Art). Sydney Sun Aria, 1979; studied: Royal Northern College of Music. Sang with Scottish, Welsh, North Ireland Opera Companies

**OA repertoire:** Includes Goro: *Madama Butterfly*, Benoit: *La Bohème*, Leicester: *Maria Stuarda*, Flute/Snout: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Beppe: *Pagliacci*, Roderigo: *Otello*, Caius/Fenton: *Falstaff*, Basilio/Curzio: *The Marriage of Figaro*, Maintop/Squeak: *Billy Budd*, Monostatos/Priest: *The Magic Flute*, Spalanzani: *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, Sailor: *Tristan und Isolde*, Beadle Bamford: *Sweeney Todd*, Guillot de Morfontaine: *Manon*, Gregorio: *Roméo et Juliette*, Dr Caius: *Falstaff*, Hadji: *Lakmé*, Gastone: *La Traviata*, Ruiz: *Il Trovatore*, Tinca/Gherardo: *Il tritico*, Remendado: *Carmen*, Normanno: *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Dancing Master: *Manon Lescaut*, Spoletta: *Tosca*, Landlord/Struhan: *Der Rosenkavalier*, Monsieur Taupe: *Capriccio*, Mime: *The Ring Cycle*, Albazar: *The Turk in Italy*

**Other Companies:** Major roles with SOSA, Canberra Opera. *The Barber of Seville*, *Fledermaus*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Così fan tutte*, *Falstaff*, *Don Giovanni* (WAO), Alfredo: *La Traviata* (Perth), *Messiah*, *Childhood of Christ*, Bach's *St Matthew Passion* (WA Choral Society)

**Recordings/Videos:** Broadcast recordings (ABC)



**Dominica Matthews** - Praskowia

**Background:** Australian. Studied: Sydney Conservatorium, Royal Northern College of Music, UK

**OA repertoire:** title roles: *Cenerentola*, *Orlando*; Romeo: *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, Marcellina/Cherubino: *The Marriage of Figaro*, Hermia: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Rosina: *The Barber of Seville*, Sonyetka: *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (Helpmann Award), Nicklausse: *Les contes d'Hoffmann* (Green Room Award), Third Lady: *Die Zauberflöte*, Edith/Ruth: *The Pirates of Penzance*, Flora: *La Traviata*, Wood Nymph: *Rusalka*, Eunice Hubble: *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Tessa: *Gondoliers*, Mamma Lucia/Lola: *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Pitti-Sing: *The Mikado*, Mallika: *Lakmé*, Lucienne: *Die tote Stadt*, Suzuki: *Madama Butterfly*, Mistress Quickly: *Falstaff*, Florence Pike: *Albert Herring*, Flosshilde/Schwertleite: *The Ring Cycle*, Larina: *Eugene Onegin* (Green Room Award), Maddalena/Giovanina: *Rigoletto*, Marthe: *Faust*, Deaconess: *King Roger*

**Other Companies:** Sister Berthe: *The Sound of Music* (Gordon Frost), Suzuki: *Madama Butterfly* (Isle of Man Opera Festival, Clonter Farm Opera, UK), Angelina: *Cenerentola* (Ryedale Festival, UK). Concerts with Sydney Philharmonia, ASO, Royal Melbourne Philharmonic

**Recordings/DVDs:** *Rusalka* (Chandos), *The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Mikado*

**Dominica Matthews is supported by Professor Barbara van Ernst AM**



**Benjamin Rasheed** - Njegus

**Background:** Born, Australia. Studied at the Elder Conservatorium of Music and Australian Opera Studio. Former member SOSA's Young Artist Program

**OA repertoire:** Includes Don Basilio: *The Marriage of Figaro* Emperor: *Turandot*, Young Collector: *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Jamie/Freddy Eynsford-Hill: *My Fair Lady*, Samuel: *The Pirates of Penzance*, Mr Erlanson: *A Little Night Music*, Tenor Chorus: *The Love of the Nightingale*, Goro: *Madama Butterfly*, Remendado: *Carmen*, Messenger: *Aida*, Hindu: *Salome*, Notary: *Don Pasquale*, Spoletta: *Tosca*. Monostatos/Mummy: *The Magic Flute*

**Other Companies:** Ferrando: *Così fan tutte*, Tamino/Monostatos: *The Magic Flute*, Beppe: *Pagliacci*, Flute: *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Ring Cycle*, Paris: *Roméo et Juliette* (SOSA); Conservationist: *Undertow* (Finnish National Opera/Adelaide Festival of Arts), Soloist: St John's, Smith Square, London (English Chamber Orchestra), Quint: *The Turn of the Screw*, Oronte: *Alcina*, Tito: *La clemenza di Tito* (AOS), Cinderella's Prince: *Into The Woods*, Harry the Horse: *Guys and Dolls* (Adelaide Festival Centre/ASO), Maltby and Shire's world première of *Take Flight*, *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change!* (Singular Productions/SOSA), Tenor soloist *Messiah* (MSO)



**Agnes Sarkis** - Olga Kromow

**Background:** Born, Iran to an Armenian family. Advanced Diploma of Opera at Sydney Conservatorium, 2011 and Graduate Diploma in Music (Opera), 2012. Studied with Barry Ryan. Winner of the Joan Carden Award and highly commended for the McDonald's Operatic Aria in 2014

**OA repertoire:** Cherubino: *The Marriage of Figaro*, Third Lady: *The Magic Flute* (Tour), Great Opera Hits

**Other Companies:** Daisy Bates: *Daisy Bates at Ooldea*, Public Opinion: *Orphée aux Enfers*, Balkis: *La Rencontre Imprevue*, Dinah: *Trouble in Tahiti*, Syron: *King Arthur*, La Soeur Ainée: *Les malheurs d'Orphée*, Frau Reich: *Die Lustigen Weiber von Windsor*, Madama Rosa: *Il Campanello di Notte*, Andronico: *Tamerlano*, Marianna: *Il Signor Bruschino*, Mrs Herring: *Albert Herring* (Sydney Conservatorium), Hen: *The Cunning Little Vixen* (Sydney Chamber Opera), *The Best of G & S* (Sydney Opera House)



**David Whitney** - Baron Mirko Zeta

**Background:** Graduated from the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) in 1982

**OA Repertoire:** Zoltan Karparthy in *My Fair Lady* directed by Dame Julie Andrews

**Other Companies:** *Woman In Mind*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Darlinghurst Nights and Summer Rain* (Sydney Theatre Company); *Hamlet*, *Henry 4*, *As You Like It*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *The Tempest*, *The Alchemist*, *The Duchess of Malfi* (Bell Shakespeare); *Relatively Speaking* (Ensemble Theatre); *Power of Yes* (Belvoir Street); 1984, *Dracula* (Shake and Stir); *Monkey: Journey To The West* (Theatre of Image); *The Winter's Tale*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, *On Our Selection*, *The Real Thing*, *Filumena*, *Medea*, *A Fortunate Life*, *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Melbourne Theatre Company). Musicals: Dentist: *Little Shop of Horrors*, Walter: *Chess*, Baker: *The Hunting of the Snark*, Tin Man: *The Wizard of Oz*, Andre: *The Phantom of the Opera*, Zach: *A Chorus Line*, Ernst: *Cabaret*, Vernon: *They're Playing Our Song*, Anselmo: *Man of La Mancha*, Sheldrake: *Sunset Boulevard*, Jack Lepidus: *The Producers*, Sir Bedevere: *Monty Python's Spamalot*, Joe Boyd: *Damn Yankees!*, Hertz: *Rock of Ages*, The Constable: *Fiddler on the Roof*, Sharpless: *Cho Cho* (National Theatre of China, Arts Centre Melbourne and Playking Productions)

**TV:** *Blue Murder/Killer Cop*, *Love Child*, *Wonderland*, *Penelope K by the Way*, *Legend of the Seeker*, *McLeod's Daughters*, *Home and Away*, *White Collar Blue*, *Play School*, *Water Rats*, *Backberner*, *Cody*, *Fatal Honey*, *A Wreck A Tangle*, *Doomrunners*, *Silent Predator*, *After the Rain* and *Marriage Acts*



# Synopsis

## **Act I**

*The Pontevedrian embassy, Paris.* The Balkan state of Pontevedro is facing financial ruin. Its best hope is that Hanna Glawari, a young rich widow, should marry a Pontevedrian and keep her fortune in Pontevedro, rather than risk marrying a Parisian and losing the money to France. The Pontevedrian Embassy holds a state ball to which Hanna and her former lover, Danilo Danilowitsch are invited. Before her marriage into wealth, Hanna was a poor farm girl whom Danilo's uncle forbade him to marry. Now the pressure is on to reunite them in marriage. But as Danilo loved the poor farm girl, can he love the wealthy widow?

## **Act II**

*Hanna's home in Paris, the next day.* Hanna holds a Pontevedrian party. Valencienne, the young wife of the Pontevedrian ambassador, Baron Zeta, continues a fragile romance with a young Frenchman, Camille, who has written a dangerous confession of love on her fan. The intrigue deepens when Hanna and Camille are discovered in the summer house and the hope of her reunion with Danilo appears doomed.

## **Act III**

*Maxim's Nightclub, later the same evening.* Hanna has reserved the popular nightspot, where she sparks Danilo's anger by her coquettish antics with the grisettes. The various love intrigues are resolved by vital discoveries about Valencienne's fan - and the will of Hanna's late husband!

# Director's Note

My first formal dance step was definitely a waltz. It was most certainly in a community hall in country Tasmania and my mum Betty was, as always, at an upright piano pumping out the 3/4 rhythm of a progressive barn dance. I was perhaps 9 years old and would have stepped on the toes of many a farmer's wife.

The first time I heard the iconic Merry Widow waltz was on a tinny music box at my Uncle Hinton's house in the big smoke, Launceston. Little did I know how often that waltz and I would get together! Fast forward and I am waltzing in one of The Australian Ballet's most successful ballets, *The Merry Widow* - choreographed by Ronald Hynd, directed by Sir Robert Helpmann, with a wordless score adapted by and conducted by John Lanchbert, and starring, among other luminaries, Dame Margot Fonteyn.

With The Australian Ballet, I waltzed through countless performances and thousands of miles, from the London Palladium to Broadway's Shubert Theater and beyond. I remember joking with Janet Vernon, my sometimes dance partner, my current creative associate, and my always life partner, that we were doomed to waltz in 'The Weary Meadow' till our legs became stumps!

Fast forward to now and...SHE'S BACK, once again filling my life not just with lush orchestration but this time with vocal magic and sparkling dialogue. What a pleasure to be working again with OA and, for the first time, with conductor extraordinaire, Vanessa Scammell. How thrilling to have Justin Fleming's new adaptation which respects the original while injecting pace and clarity. This clarity is reflected in the elegant Art Deco set design by Michael Scott-Mitchell, which transports us to a world far from the babble of the now. Costume designer Jennifer Irwin drapes the cast in dreams that float through subconscious memory and lighting design Damien Cooper paints this lost world with faceted mirrors and shards of impressionistic gossamer.

If this all sounds escapist, how right you are! Yet, there is at the heart of this operetta a grounding force: our protagonists Hanna and Danilo, who because of proud vanity risk losing the great love of their lives - each other. *The Merry Widow* touchingly reminds us of the universal and all-pervasive need to love and be loved.

To you, dear audience, I offer a warm invitation to submit to an amazing cast in the service of a timeless musical gem.

GRAEME MURPHY AO  
Director & Choreographer

## Who was the composer?

Franz Lehár was born in 1870 to an Austrian infantry bandmaster and his Hungarian-German wife.

As a teenager, Lehár went to the Prague Conservatory to study violin. It was Antonín Dvořák who spotted his talents as a composer, and suggested he study the craft. The conservatory rules did not allow a student to have two specialties, so Lehár taught himself.

After a time as a bandmaster in the army, like his father, Lehár became a successful composer and was able to resign his commission. He was famous for his operettas, although he also wrote an opera, famous waltzes, sonatas and marches.

He died in 1948, aged 78 years, and was buried near Salzburg.

## What's the music like?

Bubbly, beautiful and full of tunes you'll be humming as you leave the theatre.

Lehár packed his score with dance tunes, from his famous waltz to marches, cancons, gallops and a polonaise.

His score is more sophisticated than many operettas, which often pair the melody with a simple orchestral accompaniment. Lehár filled out his orchestration with colour and harmony - the sound is rich and full.

Listen out for eastern European folk tunes that set a Balkan scene for Pontevedro.

## A little history

How many hit operettas nearly didn't make it because of nervous theatre managers? We'll never know, but we do know that the Theater an der Wien offered Franz Lehár quite a bit of money to withdraw his unusually colourful score upon completion.

Lucky for us, Lehár was sure of himself and his work, and flatly refused.

He came to the project after another composer had pulled out, and was so inspired by the witty libretto of Leo Stein and Victor Leon, he produced a brilliant gallop tune within hours. (The theatre loved it, but the finished score, with its sophisticated orchestral parts, made them nervous.)

The theatre could only afford recycled sets and costumes, and offered little rehearsal time. But management did spring for two stars to play the leads - and Mizzi Gunther and Louis Treumann believed in the project enough to order and pay for their own costumes.

*The Merry Widow* premiered on 30 December 1905, and word-of-mouth fast propelled the brand new operetta from minor success to runaway hit. It ran for 483 performances. The Theater an der Wien finally shelled out for new sets and costumes after 300 shows.

## Conversation starters

- *The Merry Widow* has been translated into more than 25 languages, transformed into a ballet and inspired several films.
- Lehár's music was popular with Hitler and other Nazis. However, the composer frequently worked with Jewish librettists and was married to a Jewish woman. The Nazi regime awarded his wife, Sophie, the status of 'honorary Aryan'.
- Lehár was a savvy businessman, and went into publishing towards the end of his career. He bought back the rights to his hits to ensure he and his estate would continue to profit from them.

# The Making of *The Merry Widow*

Operetta: how well has the genre travelled over the last few decades? There are plenty of arguments to the effect that it is trapped in its gilded cage, that it refuses to speak to the 21st century, that it is stuck in its land of pre-WWI make believe. So yes, you could argue that operetta is nothing more than romantic fascism with good tunes, that the politics of operetta do not withstand contemporary critical scrutiny. Set in highly hierarchical societies, operettas usually present us with the nobility - and/or the extremely wealthy - at play, using their considerable spare time to create romantic excitement for themselves, but never, ultimately, at the expense of their social standing, for a truly transforming experience would not be operetta.

The genre has some golden rules - at the final curtain class is paired with like class, nationality with like nationality. If you are going to break the rules - as composer Emmrich Kálmán did in *The Gypsy Princess*, in which the cabaret artiste Sylva Varescu is allowed to marry Prince Edwin - you need to devote an entire show to the idea.

Operetta was popular entertainment, created at a time of kings, queens and emperors, to be performed in major theatres which needed to make a profit; not surprisingly, it reflects the conservative values of its times and places. Even with so satirical a composer as Offenbach, operetta was essentially comforting. The Grand-Duchess of Gerolstein (1867) falls in love with a lowly private and makes him a general but by operetta's end has demoted him back to private and married a Prince. The Baron and Baroness who visit Paris in *La vie Parisienne* (1866) are safely re-united with each other at the final curtain despite potentially life-altering entanglements with courtesans and gigolos.

Go forward 40 years to *The Merry Widow* and you find that, in terms of how to define a happy ending, not much has changed. As the Widow's curtain falls, all the major characters have paired off within the acceptable boundaries of "operetta-land" regulations. What Lehár and his librettists did change, however, were the genre's priorities. The secondary characters who appear largely for the sake of comic relief, the revue and vaudeville elements that give many operettas their free-wheeling structure, were pared back or absorbed into the story, in favour of something more linear, more lyrical and yes, more erotic.

This did not seem so epoch-making at first. Yes, *The Merry Widow* was an immediate success but, as it turned out, it was also an enduring one. In fact, with Johann Strauss' *Die Fledermaus* as its sole surviving companion, *The Merry Widow* is Viennese operetta the world over. In central Europe it's still possible, occasionally, to see, say, Ralph Benatzky's *White Horse Inn*, Carl Millöcker's *Gasparone* or Richard Heuberger's *The Opera Ball*, but elsewhere in the world these works are usually distant memories or something you look for on CD or DVD from Ebay.



Stacey Alleaume as Valencienne  
and John Longmuir as Camille (photo: Jeff Busby)





Danielle de Niese as Hanna (photo: Jeff Busby)



Alexander Lewis as Danilo (photo: Jeff Busby)



*Barely 16 months after its premiere, virtually every city in German-speaking Europe had presented its own production – as had Budapest – and in 1907 in Buenos Aires, five theatres were presenting The Merry Widow in five different languages.*

So how did the Widow come to be such a spectacular success outside its own cultural milieu – and for so long? Actually, how did it become one of the most frequently performed theatre pieces in the world?

You could not have predicted *The Merry Widow's* future from its singularly unpromising start to life. In 1905 the Viennese dramatist Leo Stein came across a copy of the comedy *The Attaché* (1863) by Henri Meilhac. It concerns a wealthy widow from a small German duchy who was to marry a handsome attaché from her country's embassy so that her tiny country could keep her fortune within its boundaries. Stein would certainly have known Meilhac as the co-librettist for *Carmen*, *Manon* and many of Offenbach's successes. As he read the play he thought it would make a splendid operetta libretto. Besides, it had been a success and was still being performed here and there.

So Stein took *The Attaché* to his frequent collaborator Victor Leon, who agreed that it was perfect operetta material. They made a number of changes to the original to make it more suitable for music. Among these, the small duchy became a Balkan principality (more opportunity for musical colour) and the two lovers were given a back-story to their romance, which gave their duets more poignancy.

So far so good. But at this point the Widow (you should excuse the expression) became rather pear-shaped.

Leon and Stein wanted Richard Heuberger to write the score. Heuberger, a leading Viennese musical identity, had succeeded Hanslick as chief music critic at the influential Viennese newspaper the *Neue freie Presse* and had written the hit operetta *The Opera Ball* (from which comes the lilting waltz 'Gehen wir ins Chambre séparée', much better-known than the operetta itself).

Heuberger was sent the first act libretto and, a short time later, played his music for Leon, Stein and the director of the Theater an der Wien (where *The Merry Widow* was to be produced), Wilhelm Karczag. They weren't impressed with Heuberger's efforts; in fact they were so deflated that the composer found himself "de-commissioned."

It would be good to say, at this point, that Lehár was given the libretto and went off to write his first great masterpiece, but it was not that easy. Lehár had been a military bandmaster for most of his professional life and had only been in the operetta business since 1902; he had enjoyed mixed fortunes since then. His *Der Rastelbinder* (*The Tinker*, 1902) was a significant success, and, from it, the *Nechledil March* had been a hit with bands and salon orchestras. But his next two operettas did not fare well at all and, to make matters worse for him, his most recent work, *Die Juxheirat* (*The Mock Marriage*) was presented at the Theater an der Wien. After such a resounding flop, Karczag was hardly enthusiastic when Lehár was suggested as the new composer

of *The Merry Widow*. Moreover, Karczag had now read the libretto and found it rather radical, very romantic, overly stylised and not at all hilarious. It was the Theatre's secretary, Emil Steininger, who suggested that the libretto's Balkan connections would find a ready response in Lehár's gift for depicting local colour in music. Against the initial wishes of Karczag, Leon and Stein – none of whom wanted another failure on their hands – Steininger finally persuaded them to let Lehár set a few numbers as a kind of audition.

Lehár was duly sent the libretto and immediately wrote the "Such a silly soldier boy" duet ("Dummer, dummer Reitersmann") from Act II. The same day he rang Leon and played him the song over the telephone – and got the job of composing the score for *The Merry Widow*. Opening night was set for December 30, 1905. Still, Lehár was not out of the woods yet. With the complete score delivered, Karczag was somewhat stumped by the music's sensuality – too much Richard Strauss, not enough Johann – and was convinced that the piece was going to fail. So the theatre management presented the cheapest possible production, providing no new sets or costumes. (Operetta historian Richard Traubner suggested that part of the Act 2 set may have been created for a 1901 production of Sidney Jones' *The Geisha*.) To give some semblance of festivity to the proceedings, Leon purchased as many paper lanterns as he could find to make the backcloths look less tatty.

In accordance with what he felt would be, at best, a stop-gap show, Karczag did not schedule sufficient rehearsal, so that the cast was run ragged before opening night. On the morning of the premiere, Karczag told a critic:

"We'll try to keep the operetta going until we've rehearsed thoroughly for another show." Only the composer and the two leads, Mizzi Günther and Louis Treumann, kept faith with the work.

Despite an almost overpowering institutional will for it to fail, the first night of *The Merry Widow* was quite successful, although it should be noted that Viennese satirist and critic Karl Kraus called it "the most distasteful production I have ever seen in the theatre." Business was slow for the first few months, but, gradually, tunes from the show made their way through Vienna's parks, cafes and private homes. Sold-out houses were soon the norm and, for the 300th performance, Karczag actually commissioned some new costumes and décor.

By this time word had spread about the work's many felicities. Barely 16 months after its premiere, virtually every city in German-speaking Europe had presented its own production – as had Budapest – and in 1907 in Buenos Aires, five theatres were presenting *The Merry Widow* in five different languages. In June that year it conquered London in a production starring the luminous Lily Elsie – soon to be London's Queen of Viennese operetta – and ran for 778 performances. Edward VII saw it there four times. In October 1907 it opened in New York and caused a riot of commercial exploitation, with Merry Widow hats, corsets, cocktails, cigarettes and so on fuelling the success of the show. (There was even a Merry Widow train). In 1907 it became the first operetta to receive a substantially complete recording, and the first of many film versions was made a few months later, in Sweden.

In May 1908 J. C. Williamson presented the first Australian production, a faithful copy of the London staging, in Melbourne's Her

*Leon's and Stein's libretto lives in a world of desires, sighs, whispers, waltzes and embraces, and Lehár brings the text to life with music that can still be described as curvaceous, both in its melodic line and scoring.*

Majesty's Theatre, starring Geelong's own Carrie Moore in the title role. By the end of 1910 this production had been presented in regional Victoria, in Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, Hobart, Adelaide, Kalgoorlie/Boulder and New Zealand. The Widow conquered Paris in 1909.

Barely a year has since passed when the work is not being staged somewhere: it has been translated into more than 25 languages, has been filmed three times in Hollywood alone, once in Egypt and many times in Europe, has been adapted for TV (frequently), enjoyed countless recordings – including a swing version of “Vilja” by clarinettist Artie Shaw – been performed al fresco, on ice and, as Australians well know, as a ballet. The sales of sheet music alone made Lehár a wealthy man. Apart from the international conflicts that made it unpatriotic to perform German-created works on the stages of combatant countries, *The Merry Widow* has never been “revived” as such; it has simply never gone away. Even during WWI, when most things German were banned in Australia, Williamsons toured the Widow again, with great success.

*The Merry Widow* came into the world well before radio, when sales of printed music meant much more than sales of gramophone records.

Music, on the whole, was played more by hand than by machine, was sung around a piano or performed on the park bandstand. With the geographical conquest of popular music taking far longer then than it does today, the rapidity with which *The Merry Widow* and its music spread around the world is astonishing.

If it was the independent success of the music that brought people to the theatre to see *The Merry Widow* in the first place, is it the music that has kept the work so popular?

To its advantage, the libretto does away with some of the extraneous comedy that can date a musical or an operetta quickly. For example, a Broadway musical comedy of the 1920s may have a sensational score but would probably be unperformable in 2017 without wholesale re-writing. The comic characters in the Widow – including Baron Zeta, the gigolos and Kromow – are all given crucial roles to play in the story, and the “second couple,” Valencienne and Camille, are not there merely to throw the principle couple's story into relief, but to intersect with it. These factors alone give the story of *The Merry Widow* a linearity that has kept it strong. This is one of those rare operettas in which, with the exception of the grisettes in Act III, the humour flows purely from the story.

The relationship between Hanna and Danilo is surprisingly clear-eyed for a piece of this period. Hanna knows that, as an available, attractive woman with a lot of spare cash, she is “on the market.” When we meet Danilo he pretty much admits that he can't sustain a real relationship and that all his romances are paid for. The idea of marrying Hanna for her money not only hurts his pride but demands genuine love from him – and sure enough it takes him until the very end of Act 3 for him to declare his feelings for Hanna openly.

But the golden rule in music theatre is that, no matter how good the plot, the music's the thing. Lehár's score is memorable, original, exhilarating, graceful and sensuous, never more so than in the surprising and elegant manner with which he introduces us to the four major characters. The first musical conversation between Valencienne and Camille – a duet of flirtation, essentially – is sly rather than flighty; on her entrance the Widow is greeted by a flurry of palpitating male excitement, to which she responds with a musical greeting of understated charm. Danilo's entrance number is perhaps the best-known. He is upon us, musically speaking, before we know it, typically devil-may-care, and then sings swaggeringly of the women whose affections he can purchase at Maxim's.

More than a century after it first appeared, it's easy to take the richness of the music for granted. Lehár's orchestral palette is velvety and colourful, from the bustle of the opening prelude to the intertwining violin and cello solos – so redolent of intimacy – in the Act 3 waltz duet. (Lehár was a fine violinist himself.) The passionate orchestral sounds that characterise the Valencienne/Camille music in Act 2 suggest Puccini more than they do any of Lehár's contemporary operetta composers. Everywhere Lehár's considerable compositional technique enriches the piece: in the way he intensifies a musical idea by laying it out across multiply divided strings, the way the harp has a far more interesting part to play than its traditional arpeggio tasks, making it a distinctive musical colour; and in his subtle writing for woodwinds, which so often in theatre scoring simply reinforce the strings.

Leon's and Stein's libretto lives in a world of desires, sighs, whispers, waltzes and embraces, and Lehár brings the text to life with music that can still be described as curvaceous, both in its melodic line and scoring. In fact the elegance of the piece has come to symbolise a particular vision of fin-de-siecle Vienna, a vision of champagne and flirtation caught just before the Great War blew it all – the prancing nobility, the picture-postcard principalities, the subtle power of the waltz – into the dustbin of history.

This in no way ensures *The Merry Widow's* durability for generations to come. Having come to symbolise a never-never land of schlagobers and sparkling wine, its allure also seems to be more fragile with each passing year. Lehár's Vienna it may once have been, but – as Stephen Mould points out elsewhere in this program – the Vienna of this period is just as much Freud's, Schnitzler's and Mahler's city, a metropolis of neuroses and a birthplace of modernism, a birthplace too of the horrors that would, in time, force the composer to allow his wife to be declared an "honorary Aryan", of the many performances during the Nazi period in which the names of *The Merry Widow's* Jewish librettists were removed, of the murder of the original Danilo, Louis Treumann, in Thereisenstadt concentration camp in 1943.

If *The Merry Widow* endures it will be because it speaks of the power of love in a way we continue to understand. Danilo's relief in the last act at discovering that Hanna never had a rendezvous with Camille tells us how far he has come from the live-for-today creature of Act 1. And when Hanna sings the sad story of Vilja, we know that this widow, despite her apparently self-knowing attitude about the desirability of her wealth, needs to be loved again – and not for her money.

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Phillip Sametz presents Classic Breakfast each weekday on ABC Classic FM

# Franz Lehár and Vienna

The annual Neujahrskonzert (New Year's Eve concert) of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra showcases music from a Golden Era of Viennese culture, which was ushered in by the introduction of a constitutional, liberal government during the 1860's. The concerts feature works by the Strauss family, notably Johann Strauss II (The Waltz King), creator of glorious and elegant musical fictions, evocations of an apparently perfect world where the Danube was always blue, where tales emanated from the Wienerwald, where everyone danced in perfect step to the Kaiserwaltz, and where society in general all celebrated Wine, Women and Song, within the confines of 3/4 time. This vision of the past, still celebrated and occasionally longed for by those with a bent towards nostalgia, was in fact a Potemkin village, a kind of Viennese masquerade that sought to hide the inner malaise that was spreading its infection even as Strauss was plying his confections: the decadence and failure of a society that was imploding upon itself.

By 1905 this crisis was all too obvious to writers and commentators such as Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who found the social fabric of Vienna to be on the verge of collapse. Hofmannsthal noted that in the face of civic failure, the arts, in particular the theatre, had become a place to retreat to, and in 1905 (the year of the premiere of *The Merry Widow*) wrote: 'We must take leave of the world before it collapses'. Acerbic social critic, writer and cynical pessimist Karl Kraus identified an equally destructive undercurrent in the world

that surrounded him when he dubbed Vienna 'an experimental laboratory for the end of the world.' By 1913 such prophecies were on the brink of fulfillment and it is no coincidence that in that year Adolf Hitler, Sigmund Freud, Leon Trotsky, Joseph Tito and Joseph Stalin all lived within close proximity in Vienna.

It may be conjectured that the Viennese came to enjoy their decadence, their long, comfortable decline, and that they acclimatized to living in a state of crisis as they turned away from the reality of everyday events to take refuge in culture. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was painfully long and slow in collapsing but it was well and truly defunct by the end of World War I. In 1906, French composer Maurice Ravel began to compose a tribute to the waltz, and to Johann Strauss II, called *Wien*. The work was laid aside and Ravel was conscripted into the army during WWI, when he was injured and severely traumatised by his experiences. Returning to the sketches of *Wien* in 1919, Ravel took his composition in a new direction, effectively deconstructing the Viennese waltz, thereby charting the death cries of the old Vienna.

Between 1890 and 1910 Viennese culture flourished to an extraordinary degree - the era of so-called Viennese Modernism, a phenomenon that has been described as "a Silicon Valley of the mind", where, against a background of social and political disintegration, culture bloomed and thrived, providing an intriguing mirror of, but also an escape from, everyday life. Reality could be magnified, distorted, or completely avoided.

The enormous, ongoing popularity of the two most popular operettas of all time - Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* (1874), along with Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow* (1905) - must be considered in the context of the Zeitgeist. Strauss's infectious melodies and dance-infused music are but one factor in the ongoing popularity of *Die Fledermaus*. Unlike many operettas, including French precursors, such as Offenbach's *Orphée aux Enfers*, *Die Fledermaus* did not offer a scathing, pointed critique of contemporary society, rather it presented a straight-forward domestic farce, with minor infidelities being dismissed as an inevitable part of life, all of which can be effectively anesthetised by champagne. *The Merry Widow*, composed thirty years later, evokes a world of aristocracy, wealth and privilege, where domestic and marital harmony is constantly threatened by amorous whispers, and the erotic playground of Maxims exists as a less complicated sexual outlet for the immediate needs of men. A heady amalgam of music derived from Richard Strauss, Alexander Zemlinsky and Puccini provides a colorful and atmospheric underpinning to the indiscretions of the privileged classes.

So what were the first audiences thinking when they witnessed *The Merry Widow* in 1905? Did they find escape, validation, sublimation? Did they see their own circumstances mirrored in Lehár's operetta? How did married couples react as they sat together, witnessing the fickle paths of love and desire being portrayed openly onstage?

This period in Viennese society was one of crisis at many levels. The liberal period of the 1860's, with the associated development of the Ringstrasse and an enormous population growth, brought with it many challenges, as the new government along with the rising bourgeoisie tried, and ultimately failed, to achieve its aims, due in no small part to an ossified aristocracy and an imperial bureaucracy inertly stifling change and growth.

Among the resulting crises included one of Jewish identity, as the government became increasingly oppressive and anti-Semitic, along with a crisis of male identity and the oppression of female identity and sexual expression. This was a world where daughters of the upper echelons of society lived cloistered away from day to day reality, in a protective isolation that mirrored the Victorian era in Britain. Stefan Zweig noted that the era 'anxiously evaded the sexual problem out of an inner feeling of uncertainty.' At the turn of the century Freud articulated that living out one's sexual drive in contemporary society was tabooed.

The tensions surrounding gender at the time can be seen in a letter that Gustav Mahler wrote to his fiancée, Alma Schindler, a talented composer who had been forbidden to continue this activity upon her marriage to Mahler. "How do you envisage such a

*In Vienna at this time, a woman scarcely existed as a human being in her own right and a 'merry widow' such as Hannah Glawari portrayed on stage must have created complex resonances for audiences.*

married couple of composers? Have you any idea how ridiculous and degrading such a strange rivalry would certainly be for both of us? What if you are just 'in the mood' but I need you to look after the house, or to run an errand for me, or to – as you write – look after the details of life for me? .... there can be no doubt that, if we are to be happy, you have to become what I need you to be, my wife and not my colleague ... do you believe you will have to renounce the indispensable fulfillment of your being if you totally renounce your music in order to possess mine, and to be mine? Henceforth you have only one vocation: making me happy! ... You must surrender yourself to me unconditionally, structure your future life in all its details according to my needs, to my person, and desire nothing in exchange but my LOVE! ...”

In Vienna at this time, a woman scarcely existed as a human being in her own right and a 'merry widow' such as Hannah Glawari, portrayed on stage, must have created complex resonances

for audiences. The idea of a creative woman in search of self-actualisation (such as Alma Schindler) posed a threat to society and to men – that threat can be clearly divined in Mahler's words. Attitudes towards women were openly misogynistic (such as those espoused by Otto Weininger), and in general a woman was regarded as a decorative background or a mirror into which a man might gaze and find what he desired. A man's need for an erotic outlet was tacitly acknowledged, and it has been said that the streets of Vienna were littered with prostitutes to an extent that it was 'more difficult to avoid them than to find them.' This fuelled a brewing crisis in which prostitution 'constituted a dark underground vault over which rose the gorgeous structure of middle-class society with its faultless, radiant façade.'

It was in Vienna (once described as a 'wonderfully orchestrated city') that Sigmund Freud found fertile ground in which to delve into the hidden recesses of the human mind, in his *Studies in Hysteria* (1895) and *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). A fascinating visual parallel to Freud's work exists in the paintings of

of fresh and new ideas. This culminated in the movement known as the Secession, and also the Wiener Werkstätte, both attempts to establish new cultural ideals. In particular the Wiener Werkstätte, essentially an arts and crafts movement (the idea being imported from Britain) sought to exist on an equal footing with painting and sculpture. With all the arts thus aligned, there was a push towards the Wagnerian notion of Gesamtkunstwerk, a symbiosis of the arts, an idealistic quest for a sense of unity carried out against a backdrop of a society on the brink of disintegration. Architects such as Adolf Loos (author of 'Ornament and Crime') and Josef Hoffmann were influential in eschewing mere decoration and creating austere spaces in which furnishings and artworks could be organically incorporated.

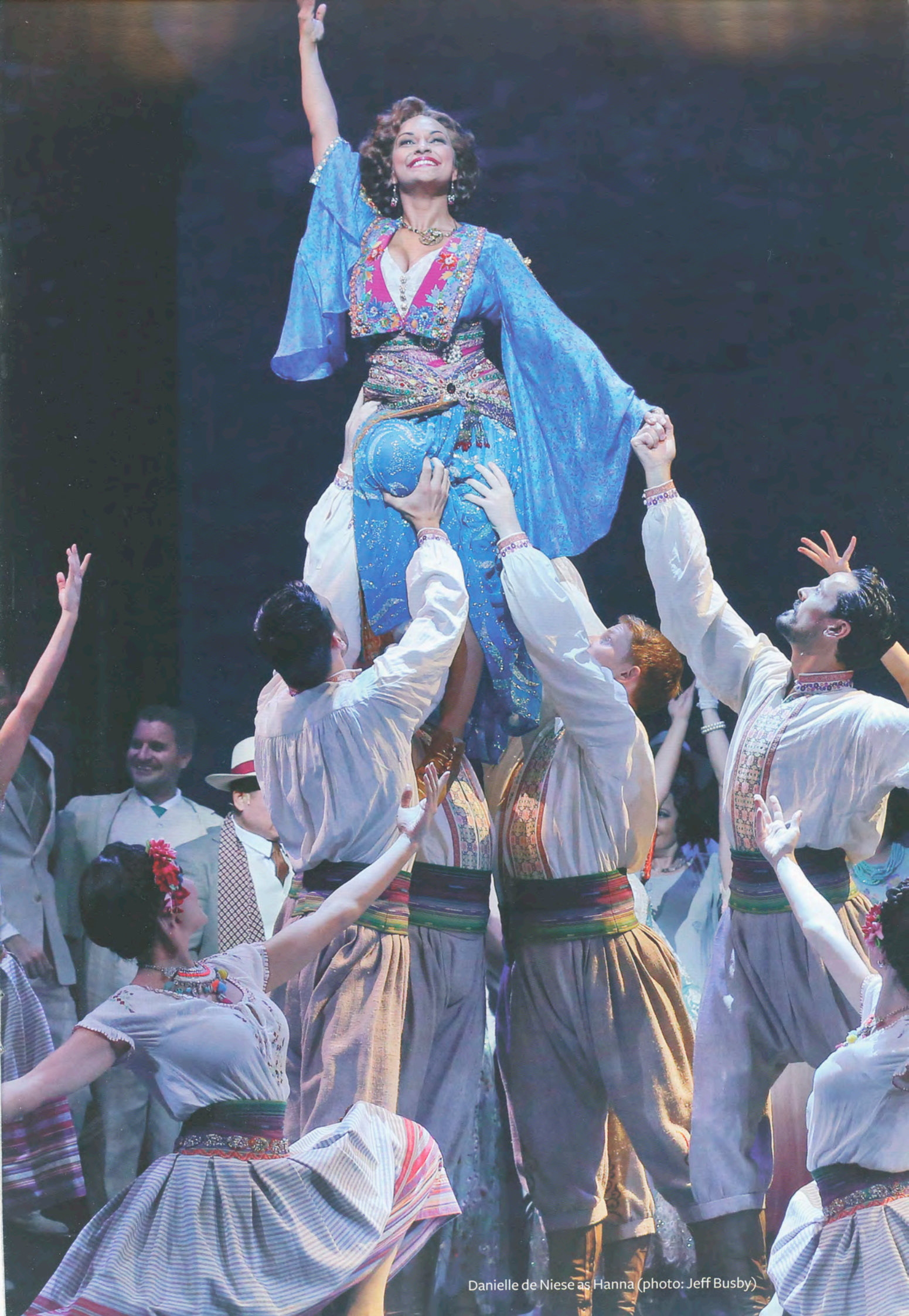
A unique aspect of the artistic and literary communities in Vienna was the popularity of the café house, more influential meeting places for artists than aristocratic salons. The café became a hotbed of idealistic discussion, where social classes were able to mix freely, sharing ideas. At the famous Griensteidl Café, eccentrics such as Peter Altenberg (whose artistic credo was 'Get thee to a coffeehouse!') mixed with Karl Kraus, a satirical and harsh critic of the times who was critical of a group he dismissed as being the representatives of 'decadent coffee-house Modernism' the so-

Gustav Klimt (1862-1918), who focused almost exclusively upon the female form, which in his hands gradually transformed from a decorative subject, into one where he reveals the inner lives and desires of women, depicted against beautiful, rich, decorative and ultimately oppressive backgrounds. Klimt's work complements Freud's as, full of passion and desire, the inner lives of his female subjects emerge from his canvases – marking a passage in the portrayal of women from the decorative to the psychological.

As society continued to crumble and fragment, the arts, which had always been a prominent part of Viennese life, assumed an overwhelming significance. The notion of art as panacea became almost pathological, and when the famous Burgtheater (where Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* had been premiered) held its final performance, due to impending demolition, the patrons raced to the stage, determined to take home some holy relic to evoke the theatre's extraordinary history.

The enormous weight of Vienna's unique and rich cultural legacy was deeply felt, and historicism was an ever-present inhibitor





Danielle de Niese as Hanna (photo: Jeff Busby)







Danielle de Niese as Hanna  
and Alexander Lewis as Danilo (photo: Jeff Busby)



Left to right: Luke Gabbedy as Cascada, Tom Hamilton as Pritschitsch,  
Christopher Hillier as Bogdanowitsch, Richard Anderson as Kromow,  
Brad Cooper as St. Brioche, Alexander Lewis as Danilo  
and David Whitney as Zeta (photo: Jeff Busby)

called Young Vienna group, which Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Arthur Schnitzler and Hermann Bahr belonged to. Hofmannsthal and Schnitzler were both social critics – chroniclers of a society in decline.

Schnitzler was a practicing doctor with a strong interest in psychology, and his literary works are informed by his medical practice, forming a study of the ‘vast landscapes’ of the soul. Schnitzler’s view of society was cynical and ironic, he saw a superficial and hedonistic world around him which, by building a façade of appearances barely concealed a pervading melancholia. One of his best-known works, *Der Reigen*, portrays an imploding world, inhabited by a repugnant collection of society types, caricatured by their own vanity, and headed towards their own private hells, like puppets.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal had a great interest in the glorious Hapsburg past, which he could never quite move beyond, as though reality was not quite worth responding to. He believed that Viennese society had reached a zenith, and sought to hold that moment in a static paralysis, as though set in aspic. It was Hofmannsthal who created the libretto of *Elektra* (1905) for Richard Strauss, engendering Strauss’s most musically avant-garde work. He then influenced Strauss

to draw back from the precipice (Expressionism) he had guided him to, retreating again into the past with the libretto for *Der Rosenkavalier*, evoking an imaginary Vienna as unreal as that chronicled by Johann Strauss.

At the time of the première of the *Widow*, Gustav Mahler had two more years to serve as the General Director of the Vienna State Opera. The decade that he spent in that role has gone down in history as one of the most significant in the history of opera performance. Mahler took a conservative, outdated institution, weighed down by routine, and transformed it with the introduction of new technologies (working with Alfred Roller), and introducing new musical approaches to the repertoire. Mahler’s tenure in Vienna was controversial, and his readings of the operatic repertoire caused a considerable stir in many circles. In the spirit of the Secession, Mahler sought, with revolutionary zeal, to recreate the past in the present, often going to excessive lengths to re-orchestrate and even re-arrange the music of past masters. With hindsight, it may be seen that Mahler applied a Wagnerian aesthetic to the works of earlier composers (the operas of Mozart and

Beethoven, for example) in his role as operatic custodian, and that his radical work belied a struggle to redefine the past.

The artistic aims of the Secession generally led to stasis, the notion of progress was ultimately an illusion, and a more radical movement developed to voice the resulting crisis - Expressionism. In music, this was exemplified in the work of Arnold Schoenberg, who was also a painter, and whose series of 'visions' provide a haunting series of self-portraits that illuminate the music that he began to compose around the time of Lehár's operetta. In his Chamber Symphony (1907) Schoenberg experimented with what he called the 'emancipation of dissonance', and in 1908, he added a soprano voice to the final movement of his Second String Quartet, setting a poem by Stefan George that began 'Ich fühle luft von anderem planeten' ('I feel the air of other planets'). Surrounded by a cloying decadence and inertia, Schoenberg conceived of a music that broke away from any anchor, any tonal centre, where all tones become equal, where he could find a new way through the oppression of a musical

tradition that he felt had imploded. In the visual arts, this apparent break with tradition is exemplified in the work of Oskar Kokoschka and Egon Schiele. Schiele makes an interesting comparison with the Secessionist, Klimt, who created no self-portraits, while Schiele created a body of raw, confrontational self-portraits of great psychological intensity. Although Klimt's portraits of women explore eroticism and sexuality, they are always cocooned in an opulent casing of design and colour. Schiele focused directly upon the female nude, in blatantly realistic renderings, creating visions of people torn between existential extremes, embracing eros and death.

With hindsight, Expressionism can be seen as prophetic of the two world wars that were to be unleashed during the twentieth century. This period in the arts in Vienna reveals an extraordinary dichotomy between a public façade of genteel luxury and conservatism, pitted against the dark undercurrents that rose up from within the collective human psyche. *The Merry Widow* functioned for its first audiences as a kind of anesthetic, an alternative reality, but one that has transcended its times and has gone on to hold a prime place in the canon of operetta for over 100 years.

STEPHEN MOULD



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*Human Resources Director* Mahua Das  
*HR Business Partners* Bill Koukoumas,  
Nitya Ramaswamy

## Operations

*Chief Operating Officer* Joe Martorana  
*Government Relations Manager*  
Anne-Marie McGinty  
*IT Manager* Ann Noblett

## Finance

*Finance Director* Helen Lindsay  
*Finance Manager* Susan Casali  
*Assistant Finance Manager* Ann Wang  
*Financial Accountant* Becky Prodanovic  
*Payroll Manager* Jason Brown  
*Accountant* Nelson D'Souza  
*Assistant Accountant* Ethel Wong  
*Accounts Payable Officer* Anu Nair  
*Planning and Analysis Manager* Ban-Foo Leong  
*Production Analyst In Theatre* Silvana de Oliveira  
*Production Analyst Musical Theatre*  
Maudy Worung  
*Production Analyst Major Projects* Ashley Dai  
*Finance Transformation Lead* Aoife Dennison

## Sales and Marketing

*Head of CRM and Digital Marketing* Adriana Law  
*Head of Marketing and Tourism* John Quertermous  
*Head of Sales, Ticketing and Customer Service*  
Byron McDonald  
*CRM Manager* Jake Shavikin  
*Digital Content Editor* Jennifer Williams  
*Tourism Sales Coordinator* Shirley Truong  
*Marketing Manager* Lara Mahood  
*Customer Service Representatives* Catherine  
David, Jenny Horler, Emma Kersey, Christine Robb  
*PR Managers* Janet Glover  
*Publicity and Social Media Executive* Brock Goodhill

## Corporate Partnerships

*Manager Corporate Partnerships and Events*  
Bronwyn Wood  
*Business Development Manager* Sean Coristine  
*Corporate Partnerships Coordinator*  
Greta Stevens  
*Partnerships Events Coordinator* Georgie Parker  
*Partnerships and Events Administrator* Linh Tran  
*Corporate Partnerships Coordinator*  
Christina Blanco

## Procurement

*Procurement Manager* Tracie Cordeiro  
*Facilities Manager* Neal Hughes  
*Facilities Assistant* Joshua Peacocke  
*Receptionist* Susie Bennetts

## Philanthropy

*Executive Director, Philanthropy* Liz Nield  
*Patron Managers, Sydney* Anna d'Ersu,  
Miranda Davis  
*Patron Manager, Melbourne* Catherine McElhone  
*Philanthropy Coordinator, Sydney* Caroline Davis  
*Philanthropy Coordinator, Melbourne* Rosie Howell  
*Special Events Manager* Sue Hackett  
*Events Consultant* Susie Gibson

## Opera Australia Capital Fund

*General Manager* Neroli Hobbins  
*Melbourne Manager* Sally Percival  
*Administrator* Jennifer Meek