

# Dal Opera: best tickets in town

Story and photos by Geoff Ineson

The Dalhousie University Music Department's Opera Workshop is proud to present *Die Fledermaus*. Written in 1874 by Johann Strauss, the second act of this Viennese operetta has been revised to incorporate scenes from *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *Carmen*, *Don Giovanni* and *Martha*.

It's New Year's Eve (late nineteenth century) and the place is Prince Orlovsky's ballroom. There is a party in full swing and we learn quickly that there are some important and interesting guests expected this night. What takes place is a spectacular, comedic and wonderful night of entertainment. I honestly did not want them to come out and bow. Had I been else but a sole arts reporter sitting in on their rehearsal, I would have stood, clapping and shouting, 'encore! encore!'

What a potential viewer is in store for is being witness to a brilliant collaboration between the Dal Music Department and the Dal Theater Department. I am led to understand that Jamie Jordon, on a shoestring budget, designed the fantastic set for *Der Fledermaus*. The equivocally and truly spectacular costumes are no less than glamorous.

Lots of imagination, scrounging around and hard work went into this magical atmosphere. Helen Murray's piano accompaniment and many unsung hours of rehearsal have certainly helped to highlight *Der Fledermaus* as the 1993 hallmark billing for the Dalhousie University Arts Centre.

*"...hallmark billing for the Dalhousie University Arts Centre."*

Director Dr Gregory Servant describes this particular arrangement as a "great ensemble piece to develop a sense of team work within the cast". Dr Servant also adds that this performance doesn't just focus on singing skills, but acting and dancing as well. All the roles are double-cast, "...most student opera situations have kids doing the leads and other kids doing the chorus, and then next year they might get a chance to do a lead. But here they do both, so they're learning both aspects of the art: what it's like to be a soloist and also that it's important to be part of the ensemble.

Everybody in the ensemble performs a specific and important function... it's difficult, but they're really rising to the challenge and doing very, very well".

Dr Servant is a Dalhousie Music alumnus that had went on to Hartford University, in the states, to earn his masters degree and then complete his dissertation. As an opera singer himself, he has performed with a



Zurich opera house in Switzerland, toured Europe, New York and elsewhere. "In a sense it's a coming home for me. It's exciting on a lot of different levels: just to put on a good show but also to be back in my hometown, and hopefully bring a whole new generation of singers along to do their jobs as singers."

Tiffany Jay, President of the Dal Music Society, and member of the ensemble, describes working with Dr Servant as "...great, he's really fresh. He has a doctorate in performance, and he's a teacher I've found really easy to understand. He can communicate his ideas very easily and he always gives a history as to what we're doing. Even in voice class he'll say what's going on here in this piece. He's really good that way, by expressing his feelings he gives you an idea of what is actually happening at a given time. He knows theory and history: a completely well rounded musician".

Tiffany Jay also emphasizes how much work the costume department did to find matching period costumes and fit them to the performers. Some of which came from the Nova Scotia International Tattoo, and some of which were modified graduation dresses. She describes, "A real pulling of efforts. Especially on behalf of the theatre department and costume department."



I think however that the true aesthetics of the evening will lay on the smaller narrative movements, or arias, contained within the single, larger narrative movement of this operetta. This is a brilliant, if not, then by definition ingenious endeavour of build-meister Dr Servant. Seriously though, how many performances contain Rossini, Mozart, Flotow, and Bizet? [*L< trans- beyond, over + scander to climb*], I say.

There is an all around level of discipline and passionate commitment that really comes across, with Helen Murray's mellifluous piano accompaniments, with world class

directing. The ensemble's hours and hours of rehearsals; on top of their regular recital schedule (which incidentally is a regular chance to catch terrific talent here on campus); their studies and writings of original works for classes; their weekly workshops; anon.... and for whose aforementioned efforts, I am forever appreciative for the enriching experience. I bequeath my word as critic that the audience will literally devour *Der Fledermaus*.

The opera runs February 5 and 6, at the Sir James Dunn Theatre, 8:00pm, Dalhousie University Arts Centre. Tickets are \$10.



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