

Successful Merry Widow

Franz Lehar's *Merry Widow* marks the beginning of what appears to be the Edmonton Opera Association's new policy of performing one operetta per season (next season will supposedly feature Johan Strauss' *Der Fledermaus*). The policy, probably initiated in an attempt to attract a wider audience, was, in respect to *Merry Widow*, successful, as all three performances were sold out, an unusual phenomenon in Edmonton operatic circles. My only objection is quantitative. In a centre where operatic performances are sparse, reducing them by one-third demonstrates a drastic curtailment. Next season, however, rumor has it that the EOA will again be featuring three operatic productions with the operetta forming an additional fourth (rather than a replacement) production, which will strike a more effective balance for a city of this size and cultural standing.

Although not a confirmed addict or disciple of the operetta tradition, I found that *Merry Widow* did in fact make a thoroughly pleasant change from what one music critic so aptly described as the "damned dames and looney ladies" who one frequently encounters in grand opera. The libretto of *Merry Widow* does not scale any dramatic heights; it can best be described as insipid and trite, to a point that it makes the absurdities found in Verdi's *Il Trovatore* appear as models of lucidity. *Merry Widow* was designed as light entertainment, and, as such, it is successful. Its tunes are pleasant, it provides

numerous opportunities for agreeable dancing and singing, and it makes no demands upon the intellect.

The recent EOA production, at the Jubilee Auditorium (January 16, 18 and 20), was performed in English (again, probably with the intention of attracting a greater audience) with some topical humour introduced into the text. Many people seem to have taken strenuous exception to this topical humour; I personally did not find it offensive. A piece as loose and informal in design as the *Merry Widow* lends itself readily to this sort of tampering. As a matter of fact, textual changes of this sort are an important feature of the operetta tradition, a fact which might stick in a purist's craw, but we are not, after all, dealing with *Die Gotterdammerung*.

Purely for edification (as it made very little, if any,

difference), the production was not, as advertised, uncut. For example, one of the Act II dances for Anna and Danilo was omitted; so, for that matter, was the mandolin, which lends considerable charm and atmosphere to the operetta. Although all of the notes which had been assigned to the mandolin were accounted for in the EOA production, the character of that production suffered from the mandolin's absence.

The sets, designed by Murray Laufer, and enhanced by the effective lighting of Phillip Silver, were a pleasant surprise and a refreshing change from many of the EOA's painted two-dimensional attempts from the past. A single basic framework proved sufficiently versatile and effective for all three acts; the sets in turn were filled with the colourful gowns

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Theatre Passe Muraille visits U of A

A touring company from Toronto's highly acclaimed Theatre Passe Muraille appears on the University campus later this month in a presentation entitled *Almighty Voice*. Performed in Toronto last fall and soon to be heard on CBC Radio's "The Bush and the Salon", *Almighty Voice* is a collective creation developed in part from an original short story by Rudy Wiebe and an authentic tale from Canadian history concerning a young Indian and his two companions who eluded the Mounties for two years before their massacre on a tiny bluff in Saskatchewan by a force

of 150 armed men and two cannons. The original crime was the alleged theft of a cow.

Fully researched from the archives of Canada, Royal Canadian Mounted Police journals, popular legend and eye-witness reports, *Almighty Voice* is not a story of the good guys against the bad guys, but a story for two different cultures that don't understand each other. The play is an unusual combination of history, theatre, music and dance, by a talented group of actors whose work has received rave reviews wherever it has been seen.

Theatre Passe Muraille visits

arts

Stratford Festival

The Stratford Festival's first Canadian Tour since Centennial year went into rehearsal in December with Opening Night scheduled for the Playhouse Theatre in Winnipeg Feb. 10.

Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* are the Touring plays for '75. Stratford's new Artistic Director Robin Phillips will direct both productions.

Visit Seven Cities in West

The Tour will take in seven centres in Western Canada with Saskatoon the second stop, followed by appearances in Regina, Edmonton, Calgary, Vancouver, and Victoria.

Festival-goers will have the

opportunity of seeing both productions in Stratford next summer as part of the 1975 season.

New Acting Company

The Tour marks the debut of a new Stratford acting Company, being formed under the direction of Mr. Phillips. Among the players in the Company will be such Festival favourites as Nicholas Pennell, the romantic lead in *Love's Labour Lost* and *Pericles* this year; Eric Donkin, featured in eight Seasons of Festival productions in such roles as Don Pedro in *Much Ado* and Oswald in *Lear*; and Barry MacGregor who scored a hit as Hastings in *She Stoops to Conquer* for two years running and as Bobinet in this year's *Life in Paris*. Actresses in the Company will include such distinguished performers as Jackie Burroughs, Mia Anderson and Gale Garnett. Douglas Chamberlain and Richard Whelan, who are both presently appearing in successful Toronto revues at Old Angelo's and the Dell Theatre, are also joining the Touring company, as is Pat Bentley-Fisher, who was Jaquenetta in *Love's Labour's Lost* this year.

Alan Lain, the Festival's director of music for drama is composing music for *Comedy*, with arrangement by Berthold Carriere, who was conductor of the Festival Theatre orchestra this summer.

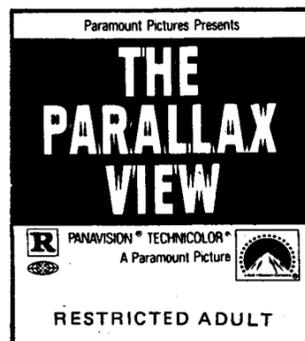
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