



SARASOTA OPERA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Sarasota Opera presents Franz Lehár's operetta *The Merry Widow*, February 21 – March 27

February 2, 2026—After opening the 2026 Winter Festival with Puccini's *La bohème* on Saturday, February 14, Sarasota Opera presents Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow*, opening the evening of Saturday, February 21 with nine performances through March 27, 2026.

Based on the comedy play *The Embassy Attaché* by Henri Meilhac, *The Merry Widow* follows glamorous and very wealthy widow Hanna Glawari as she is descended upon by an array of willing suitors from Parisian society in 1905. But plans go awry when Hanna's past paramour, Count Danilo, enters the ballroom. One of the most successful romantic operettas, *The Merry Widow* is the perfect blend of comedy, dance and unforgettable music, including the “Vilja Song,” “The Merry Widow Waltz” and “You’ll Find Me at Maxim’s.”

Sarasota Opera's cast features **Raquel González** in the role of Hanna Glawari, **Jake Stamatis** as Count Danilo, **Sara Kennedy** as Valencienne, and **Patrick Bessenbacher** as Camille. The production is conducted by **Anthony Barrese** and directed by **Katherine M. Carter**, with scenic design by Steven C. Kemp, costumes by Howard Tsvi Kaplan, lighting by Ken Yunker, and hair and makeup by Sue Schaefer. The performances are sung in English with simultaneous English titles above the stage.

Patrons are invited to explore the production through a specially-curated [Merry Widow Spotify playlist](#) and [Episode 5](#) of Sarasota Opera's [Behind the Blue Curtain podcast](#) with host Martha Collins, conductor Anthony Barrese, set designer Steven C. Kemp, and soprano Raquel González, who talks about preparing for the role of Hanna Glawari, approaching operetta as a performer, and building onstage chemistry. To access this digital content, plus a full list of performance dates, cast information, synopsis and program notes, visit <https://www.sarasotaopera.org/event/merry-widow>.

The Merry Widow had its world premiere in Vienna on December 30, 1905, and the success of the production earned it over 480 performances before it went on tour throughout the country. An English adaptation of *The Merry Widow* opened in 1907 in London to great acclaim, as did the first American production that same year at the New Amsterdam Theatre on Broadway. Ever

since, *The Merry Widow* has become one of the most frequently performed operettas of all time. *The Merry Widow* has also received three Hollywood adaptations, the first in 1925 starred Mae Murray and John Gilbert, the next in 1934 (with new lyrics by Lorenz Hart) featured Jeanette MacDonald and Maurice Chevalier, and the most recent in 1952 offered the unlikely team of Lana Turner and Fernando Lamas.

Tickets are available at the Sarasota Opera Box Office, by phone at (941) 328-1300, in person at 61 N. Pineapple Ave., Sarasota, Monday through Saturday from 10 AM through 5 PM, or online at www.sarasotaopera.org.

Performance Dates:

Saturday, February 21, 7:30 p.m. (Opening night)
Tuesday, February 24, 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, February 26, 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, March 1, 1:30 p.m. (Matinee)
Wednesday, March 4, 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, March 8, 1:30 p.m. (Matinee)
Friday, March 13, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, March 21, 7:30 p.m.
Friday, March 27, 1:30 p.m. (Matinee)

About Sarasota Opera

Sarasota Opera is in its 67th season of bringing world-class opera to Florida's Gulf Coast and celebrating 100 years of the historic Sarasota Opera House. The company was launched in 1960 in the historic 320-seat Asolo Theater on the grounds of Sarasota's Ringling Museum of Art. In 1984, the company moved into the former A.B. Edwards Theater — now the Sarasota Opera House. Since then, the company has gained an international reputation as one of the leading regional opera companies in the U.S. through initiatives such as the Masterworks Revival Series and the Verdi Cycle. The company's Sarasota Youth Opera is the most comprehensive youth opera program in the U.S. The Sarasota Opera House, which underwent a \$20 million renovation and rehabilitation in 2007, has been called "one of America's finest venues for opera" by Musical America. Since 1983, the company has been under the artistic leadership of Victor DeRenzi and the administrative leadership of General Director Richard Russell since 2012. Sarasota Opera is sponsored in part by the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Arts and Culture and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture and the National Endowment for the Arts. Programs are paid for in part by Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax revenues.

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