

"Partners here in plenty!" Souvenir of the first anniversary performance in London of *The Merry Widow* (William Heinemann, 1908). Artist: Talbot Hughes
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FEBRUARY 21, 24, 26, MARCH 1 (M), 4, 8 (M), 13, 21, 27 (M)

Die lustige Witwe

(THE MERRY WIDOW)

Operetta in three acts

Music by Franz Lehár

Text by Victor Léon and Leo Stein

Sung in English • English translation by Sheldon Harnick

First performed by Sarasota Opera on February 13, 1988

New production created by Sarasota Opera

Conductor
Stage Director
Scenic Designer
Costume Designer
Lighting Designer
Hair & Makeup Designer
Chorus Master
Assistant Conductors
Surtitle Supplier
Surtitle Designer

Anthony Barrese
Katherine M. Carter
Steven C. Kemp
Howard Tsvi Kaplan
Ken Yunker
Sue Schaefer
Artyom Pak
Pierre-Nicolas Colombat, Andrew Downs
Words For Music
Victor DeRenzi

CAST

Baron Mirko Zeta, *Pontevedrian ambassador in Paris*
Valencienne, *his wife*
Count Danilo Danilowitsch, *First Secretary at the
Pontevedrian embassy, cavalry lieutenant*
Hanna Glawari
Camille de Rosillon
Vicomte Cascada
Raoul de St. Brioche
Bogdanowitsch, *Pontevedrian consul*
Sylviane, *his wife*
Kromow, *counsellor at the Pontevedrian embassy*
Olga, *his wife*
Pritschitsch, *retired Pontevedrian colonel*
Praskowia, *his wife*
Njegus, *chancery clerk at the Pontevedrian embassy*

Adam Hirama Wells *
Sara Kennedy
Jake Stamatis

Raquel González
Patrick Bessenbacher
Nathan Schafer *
Kyle Dunn *
Kevin Douglas Jasaitis **
Agnese Gallenzi **
Konstantin Jan **
Sarah Stembel **
Spencer McIntire **
Serafina Belletini **
Patrick Scully *

Sarasota Opera Orchestra
Chorus: Sarasota Opera Apprentice Artists

*Studio Artist

**Apprentice Artist

DIE LUSTIGE WITWE SYNOPSIS

ACT I

Paris, 1905, The Pontevedrian Embassy in Paris

The birthday of the King of Pontevedro is being toasted by the Ambassador, Baron Zeta and his guests. Valencienne, the Baron's wife is having a secret flirtation with the Frenchman Camille de Rosillon, who writes "I love you" on her fan after she has forbidden him to speak the words. The glamorous and very wealthy widow, Hanna Glawari enters, pursued by a throng of suitors. Count Danilo, the embassy's first secretary, has been summoned by the Baron to the party to prevent any marriage to a foreigner so that her vast wealth stays in Pontevedro. He arrives directly from his favorite haunt, Maxim's, having had too much champagne and too little sleep, and lies down for a nap. Hanna discovers him. Some time ago, the two were engaged, but Danilo's uncle would not allow his nephew to marry a commoner. Now that she is an heiress, Danilo swears that he will never marry her. A "Ladies Choice" dance is called, and Hanna's suitors all vie to be selected. Valencienne proposes that the widow choose Camille, but she selects Danilo. Danilo offers to give his dance to anyone who offers to donate 10,000 francs to charity. The suitors slink away, and Danilo claims his dance. Hanna resists but ultimately yields to the waltz.

INTERMISSION

ACT II

At the home of Hanna Glawari

Hanna hosts a Pontevedrian themed party in her home, complete with authentic costumes, dancing, and music. Hanna entertains the guests by singing the legend of the "Vilja", a wood nymph. Danilo arrives and banters with Hanna regarding affairs of the heart. When Danilo hears Hanna's suitors arguing about women, he counsels them not to bicker since at the end they will never understand women's behavior. Valencienne urges Camille to pursue Hanna. With difficulty, he tries to bid Valencienne a fond farewell and the two

James Busterud as Danilo and Martha Thigpen as Hanna in Sarasota Opera's 1988 production of *Die lustige Witwe*



slip into a pavilion in the garden. Njegus, the embassy clerk, sees this and also sees Baron Zeta and Danilo approaching. They have seen Camille enter the pavilion with a woman and spy through the keyhole to determine who it is. When Zeta sees his wife, he shouts for them to come out. But Njegus has arranged for Hanna to switch places with Valencienne, so all are surprised when the widow emerges from the pavilion. Hanna announces that she will marry Camille. Jealous, Danilo expresses his anger and stalks off to Maxim's, while Hanna plans for a Parisian wedding.

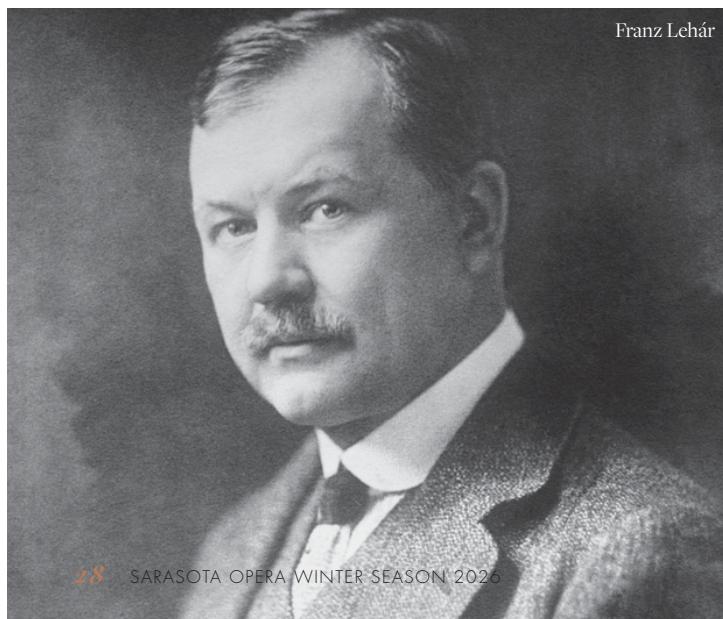
INTERMISSION

ACT III

Hanna's home

Hanna has created a replica of Maxim's in her home. Valencienne and the grisettes entertain the guests. Danilo arrives and Hanna tells him the truth about the incident in the pavilion. Each is still hesitant about their own emotions, but they hint at their true feelings as they waltz together. Hanna tells him that by the terms of her late husband's will, she will lose her fortune if she remarries. Learning this, Danilo finally admits that he loves her. She further reveals that her millions will revert to her new husband, and all ends happily.

World Premiere: December 30, 1905 in Vienna, Austria.



DIE LUSTIGE WITWE BACKGROUND



Set model for Act III by Steven C. Kemp.

Although born in Hungary, Franz Lehár was undoubtedly the father and principal inspiration of the "Silver Age" of Viennese Operetta. The beginning of this era can be traced back to one special night, that of December 30, 1905. On that date *The Merry Widow* (or *Die lustige Witwe*) was given its world premiere in Vienna. Since that night, it has never left the stages of the world. Its first performance in London in 1907 was one of the greatest theatrical triumphs that city has ever witnessed. The American premiere in the same year at New York's New Amsterdam theatre was such a sensation that it led to the creation of *Merry Widow* hats, corsets, cigarettes, trains and cocktails. The Paris premiere in 1909 continued the "Widow's" triumphant path around the world and the work has been translated into more than 25 languages.

The Merry Widow has 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.

To the glorious melodic gifts and comic brilliance of his great predecessor Johann Strauss Jr., Lehár added more romance, lyricism and intimacy. Sensual, sophisticated

overtones (in waltz tempo) replaced the fairy tale world of the older Viennese operettas. Set in and around the Parisian Embassy of Pontevedro, a mythical Balkan country, *The Merry Widow* has a score that sparkles with wit and melody from beginning to end. Three of its highlights in particular are as famous and well-loved as any moments in all operetta: Hannah's "Vilja," Danilo's entrance song "Maxim's," and of course, "The Merry Widow Waltz."

Franz Lehár sustained his fame and success for thirty years following the premiere of the *Widow* with such works as *The Land of Smiles*, *The Count of Luxembourg*, *The Czarevitch* and *Giuditta*. But it is *The Merry Widow* above all which is synonymous with the pre-World War I era and which has made Lehár's reputation eternally secure.

Ken Benson is an artist manager with a career spanning over four decades. He has been instrumental in developing the careers of many leading singers and stage directors.