

BATH
OPERA

presents Franz Lehar's
sparkling comic operetta

www.bathopera.com

The Merry Widow

7.30 pm February 16th 17th 18th 2023
The Royal Theatre, Bath

by arrangement with
GLOCKEN VERLAG
LTD

Tickets £20- £30
www.bathboxoffice.org.uk
01225 463362

Dispel Winter Gloom

Who likes February nights? They're cold, dark and make winter feel like it's been hanging around for far too long. So what better antidote to shake off winter blues than being transported to a glittering Gay Paree at the 'Fin de Siècle' to attend a Grand Summer Ball at the Embassy of Pontevedro.

This is the tempting promise offered by Bath Opera's latest production, The Merry Widow by Franz Lehar. This most popular operetta is a delight for the eyes and ears. It is a sharply observed witty farce with beautiful music and colourful costumes.

Anna Glavari, a Pontevedrian, is in Paris and has been invited to the Ball at her country's Embassy by the Ambassador. He is very well aware of her attributes - not only that she is young and attractive but more importantly that she recently married an elderly and wealthy banker who conveniently died a week later, leaving his wife twenty million. This money is in the Bank of Pontevedro and without it the nation would be bankrupt. So the Ambassador's task is to prevent her at all costs from marrying a Frenchman who would then get the money - She MUST marry another Pontevedrian. Thus starts a frantic sequence of events with mistaken identities between lovers, enforced matchmaking, questionable marital fidelity, pride and jealousy until of course it is all resolved and everyone lives happily ever after.....Well it is Operetta not Grand Opera where the stage is often littered with bodies at the end!

Operetta vs. Opera

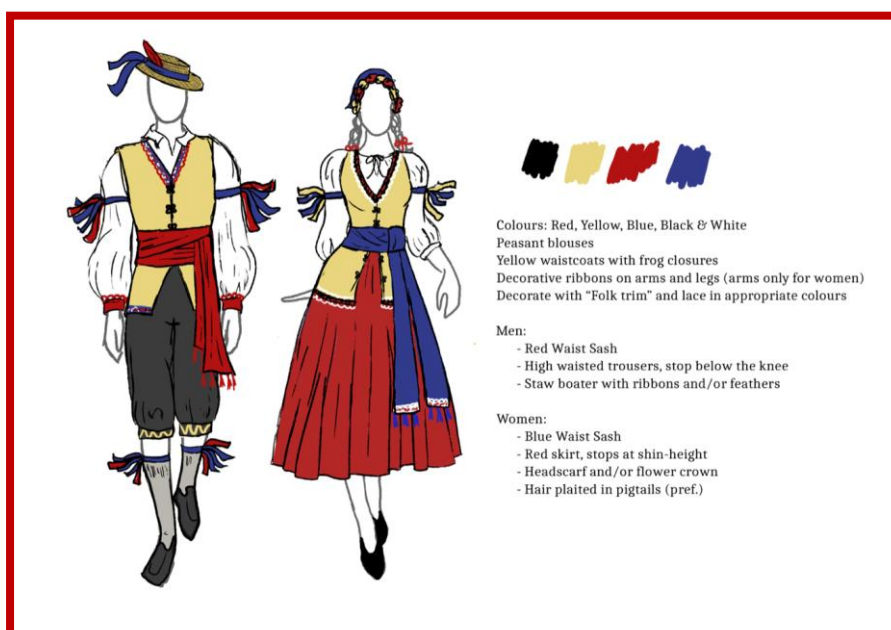
Bath's resident Opera company usually produces works at the heavier end of the scale and so an Operetta brings fresh challenges. Firstly the voices can be lighter and singers have to master moving from a singing to a spoken voice as there is a lot of dialogue between the music. This English translation is deliciously sharp and very funny. Secondly there is a great deal of dancing involved for both Chorus and Principals. Talented as Bath Opera's Chorus is, not all fancied singing whilst doing a Can Can and so they will be joined by a very talented group of dancers.

Weaving all these elements together into a cohesive performance takes great skill from the Production Team.

This year's Director Alison Paine is a Theatre Director and Stage Actor with over 40 years' experience, but this is her first time directing an Opera Company in an Operetta, bringing in her musical theatre skills. Alison says "I am hugely enjoying working with Bath Opera who are cheerfully allowing me to transform them into the Pontevedrian world". She is joined by choreographer Hayley Fitton-Cook, set designer Anthony Paine and costume designer Scarlett Hayler-King. Musical Director is Rupert Drury whose baton will direct the orchestra and singers in a steady stream of beautiful well known tunes.

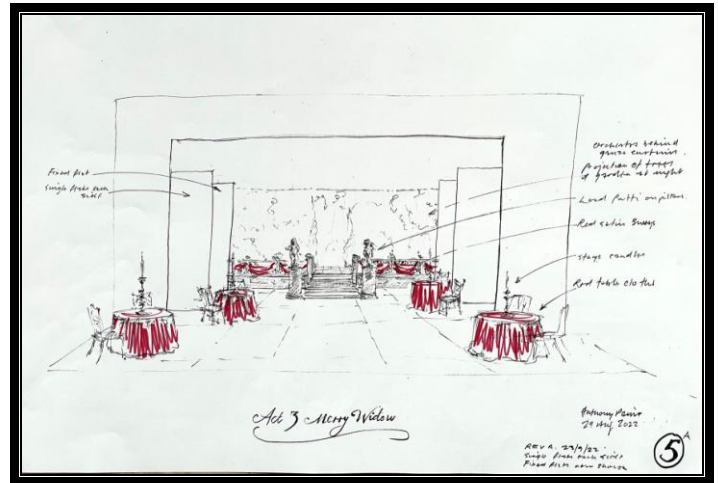
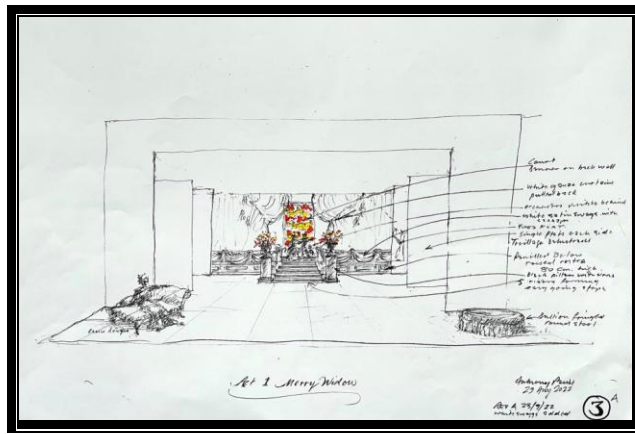
The Planning

As with any big event involving lots of people, the secret of success lies in the planning. Months ahead of rehearsals starting, the production is hard at work. Auditions have to be held and sets and costumes have to be designed. Only then can the detailed stage plotting start to be worked out.



Example costume design for the Pontevedrian folk dancers

Set Design Drawings



Franz Lehar 'The King of the Operetta'



Franz Lehar in 1906, the year after the first production of The Merry Widow

Franz Lehar was a prolific Austro Hungarian composer who wrote more than forty operettas between 1903 and 1943. He hit gold early in his career 1905 with the Merry Widow which has been a firm favourite worldwide ever since.

Wikipedia quotes a delightful anecdote..

"[Gustav Mahler](#) and his young wife [Alma](#) went to see Lehar's *The Merry Widow* in Vienna and loved it so much that they danced to its tunes as soon as they were home. From memory they played the waltz on the piano, but could not remember the exact run of one passage. The next day they went to Vienna's main music shop [Doblinger](#) [de], but hesitated to admit that they were looking for the score of what would be considered a "popular" operetta. While Mahler distracted the staff by questioning them about the sales of his own compositions, Alma browsed through the music score of *The Merry Widow*. As soon as they were out on the street, Alma sang the complete waltz to Mahler.

In 1935 Lehar took the bold commercial step of founding his own music publishing company - Glocken Verlag in order to protect the rights to his music. Today we are using Glocken Verlag scores and the Company still maintains tight control over its rights.



Franz Lehar at the piano
in his Vienna apartment
c. 1918

As a sad postlude to the original performance in 1905, Louis Treumann, the singer who created the role of Danilo, was Jewish and in 1942 Lehar personally tried to intervene with Hitler to stop Treumann being sent to a concentration camp. Sadly he failed and both Treumann and his wife died at Theresienstadt.

New young singers join Bath Opera's production

Following on from the enormous success of Eugene Onegin in 2022, the company has once again opted to cast young but very talented singers for the key roles of Anna Glavary and Count Danilo.



Kezia Robson
from London
plays Anna



Charlie Morris from
Bristol plays Danilo.


They are supported by a superb cast of experienced Bath Opera performers too many to mention here.

Women's Lib and the Merry Widow

Taken at face value the storyline of this Operetta, which was first performed in 1905, is somewhat at odds with our modern view of female equality.

But, despite what some of the words may say, it is patently apparent, (as this background image from Bath Opera's poster shows), just who is actually pulling the strings!

Without exception the attitude of all the men would be regarded now as chauvinist but we must remember that this work was written just as Emeline Pankhurst was starting to think about women's suffrage, so Lehar and his librettists were merely reflecting the attitudes of the time .

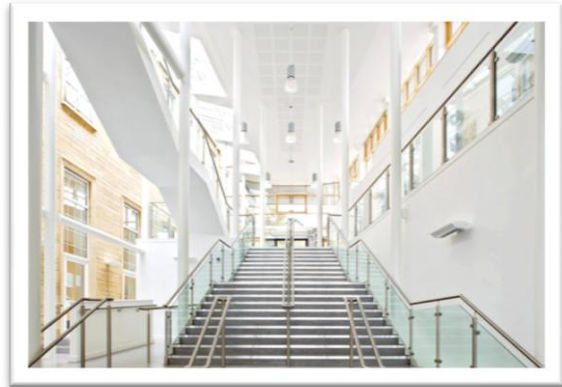
A woman in a black dress with a white lace collar and a large, ornate black hat is shown from the waist up. She is holding a string that goes down to a miniature scene where two men are being pulled up and down. The background is a light yellow with a starburst in the top left and a yellow frame around the text box on the right.

The wit of this work is that although the men have everything stacked in their favour, they are constantly outmanoeuvred by the women.

Best known melodies.

The reason this work is so popular is that from start to finish it is packed with memorable melodies which everyone loves...Vilia, oh Vilia... You'll Find me at Maxim's...It Goes to Show...Driving in the Park with You ...A Highly Respectable Wife...Women! Women! Women! and of course the luscious Merry Widow Waltz.

The Roper Theatre



For those who haven't yet experienced it, **The Roper Theatre** is an exciting, and comfortable theatre adding a valuable new resource to the cultural life of Bath.

Huge, airy public spaces and an effective forced air ventilation system make the Roper Theatre one of the most Covid- safe and comfortable venues in Bath....and there is free on street parking!

Bath Opera's production of **The Merry Widow** is
on **February 16th, 17th and 18th** at 7.30pm. at

The Roper Theatre, Hagesfield School

Upper Oldfield Park BATH BA2 3LN

Tickets www.bathboxoffice.org.uk 01225 463362