



# THE MERRY WIDOW

FRANZ LEHÁR

**29 NOVEMBER – 6 DECEMBER 2018**

**ADELAIDE FESTIVAL THEATRE**

Conductor – Wyn Davies  
Director & Choreographer – Graeme Murphy AO  
Creative Associate – Janet Vernon AM  
Set Designer – Michael Scott-Mitchell  
Costume Designer – Jennifer Irwin

Lighting Designer – Damien Cooper  
Assistant Director & Choreographer – Shane Placentino  
English Version – Justin Fleming  
Sound Designer – Murray Keidge  
Chorus Master – Simon Kenway

Hanna Glavari – Antoinette Halloran  
Count Danilo Danilovich – Alexander Lewis  
Baron Mirko Zeta – Andrew Turner  
Valencienne – Desiree Frahn  
Camille de Rosillon – John Longmuir  
Njegus – Mark Oates  
Alexis Kromov – Nicholas Cannon

Dominik Bogdanovich – Norbert Hohl  
Sylviane – Deborah Caddy  
Raoul de St Brioche – Adam Goodburn  
Viscount Nicolas Cascada – Jeremy Tatchell  
Olga Kromov – Sarah-Jane Pattichis  
Konrad Pritschich – Joshua Rowe  
Praskovia – Catherine Campbell

**STATE OPERA CHORUS  
STATE OPERA DANCERS  
ADELAIDE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

Duration: 190 Minutes including two intervals

This production proudly sponsored by: TRILITY



# AUSTRALIA'S LOVE AFFAIR

Australia has had a love affair with the Widow since Carrie Moore, a Geelong-born 25-year old opened as *The Merry Widow* in 1908 at Melbourne's Her Majesty's Theatre. Over 100,000 people enjoyed Carrie Moore's 'dreamily alluring' dancing and for the next twenty years *The Merry Widow* continued to play all round the country on the Williamson circuit.

Despite being remembered today for only one role, the Maid in *The Maid of the Mountains*, Gladys Moncrieff always maintained her favourite role was *The Merry Widow*. 'Our Glad' waltzed her way through the thirties and forties in a highly corseted black velvet gown with the debonair matinee idol Max Oldaker as her Danilo.

*The Merry Widow* has never enjoyed a major revival in Australia because it has virtually never been out of the repertoire. And the Widow has been a favourite role of many great Australian divas including Dame Joan

Sutherland, June Bronhill, Madge Elliott and more recently Marilyn Richardson, Glenys Fowles and Yvonne Kenny.

The 'heart' in *The Merry Widow* is irresistible. It is in turn charming, romantic, amusing, tuneful...and sentimental. "Sentimental" is, of course, a dangerous word to use today, but remember what composer Richard Rogers (a man who acknowledged that his first experience with *The Merry Widow* began his life-long obsession with the waltz) once said in response to the charge that *The Sound of Music* is sentimental:

'Too much of anything is harmful. No one is comfortable with an excess of hearts and flowers, but there is no valid reason for hiding honest emotion...it's my conviction that anyone who can't, on occasion, be sentimental...is sadly maladjusted.'

**STUART MAUNDER AM**





# SYNOPSIS

## ACT ONE

The Pontevedrian embassy, Paris.

The Balkan state of Pontevedro is facing financial ruin. Its best hope is that Hanna Glavari, a young rich widow, should marry a Pontevedrian and keep her fortune in Pontevedro, rather than risk marrying a Parisian and losing the money to France. The Pontevedrian Embassy holds a state ball to which Hanna and her former lover, Danilo Danilovich are invited. Before her marriage into wealth, Hanna was a poor farm girl whom Danilo's uncle forbade him to marry. Now the pressure is on to reunite them in marriage. But as Danilo loved the poor farm girl, can he love the wealthy widow?

## INTERVAL

## ACT TWO

Hanna's home in Paris, the next day.

Hanna holds a Pontevedrian party. Valencienne, the young wife of the Pontevedrian ambassador, Baron Zeta, continues a fragile romance with a young Frenchman, Camille, who has written a dangerous confession of love on her fan. The intrigue deepens when Hanna and Camille are discovered in the summer house and the hope of her reunion with Danilo appears doomed.

## INTERVAL

## ACT THREE

Maxim's Nightclub, later the same evening.

Hanna has reserved the popular nightspot, where she sparks Danilo's anger by her coquettish antics with the grisettes. The various love intrigues are resolved by vital discoveries about Valencienne's fan – and the will of Hanna's late husband!

MAGE: Stephanie Do Rozario, Courtesy of Opera Queensland.

# THIS PRODUCTION

A brand new, glitzy, glamorous good time. **Graeme Murphy** waltzed his way through many a production of *The Merry Widow* for the Australian Ballet, and now turns his renown as a director and choreographer to the operetta itself.

Murphy brings the action forward just a little, from the turn of the century to art deco Paris of the 1920s. It's a dream canvas for the design team: **Michael Scott-Mitchell's** dramatic sets feature faceted mirrors, geometric screens and a stunning Monet-inspired night garden.

**Jennifer Irwin's costume designs** include elaborate braided dress uniforms for the men and elegant shapes with stunning embroidery, feathers and prints for the women. Lighting designer **Damien Cooper** creates a shimmering world for Hanna and her admirers to play in.

## WHO WAS THE COMPOSER?

Franz Lehár.

Lehár was born in 1870 to an Austrian infantry bandmaster and his Hungarian-German wife.

As a teenager, Lehár went to the Prague Conservatory to study violin. It was Antonín Dvořák who spotted his talents as a composer, and suggested he study the craft. The conservatory rules did not allow a student to have two specialties, so Lehár taught himself.

After a time as a bandmaster in the army, like his father, Lehár became a successful composer and was able to resign his commission. He was famous for his operettas, although he also wrote an opera, famous waltzes, sonatas and marches.

He died in 1948, aged 78 years, and was buried near Salzburg.





## WHAT IS OPERETTA?

Operas, musicals, operettas — these musical forms all sit somewhere on the same spectrum of entertainment. They are stories, set to music, performed on stage.

You can think of 'operetta', as the name implies, like a 'little opera'. Operettas don't present tragedies. They are created for diversion: to amuse and entertain.

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

The *Merry Widow* has been translated into more than 25 languages and transformed into a ballet.

In the first production, the theatre could only afford recycled sets and costumes and offered little rehearsal time. Luckily, the two leads believed in the project enough to order and pay for their own costumes.

by 1909 *The Merry Widow* had been performed over 20,000 times becoming an international hit and world-adored classic.

## WHAT'S THE MUSIC LIKE?

Bubbly, beautiful and full of tunes you'll be humming as you leave the theatre.

Lehár packed his score with dance tunes, from his famous waltz to marches, cancons, gallops and a polonaise. His score is more sophisticated than many operettas, which often pair the melody with a simple orchestral accompaniment. Lehár filled out his orchestration with colour and harmony — the sound is rich and full.

Listen out for eastern European folk tunes that set a Balkan scene for Pontevedro.

## FAMOUS BITS

What's the big hit?

"Vilja" closely followed by "The Merry Widow Waltz" and "Da geh' ich zu Maxim" ("You'll Find Me at Maxim's")

Where might I have heard these?

- ▷ "The Merry Widow Waltz" is a recurring theme in the 1943 films *Shadow of a Doubt*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock and scored by Dimitri Tiomkin, as well as in *Heaven Can Wait* by Ernst Lubitsch.
- ▷ The theme of "Da geh' ich zu Maxim" was quoted by Shostakovich in the first movement of his *Symphony No. 7* and also appeared in the fourth movement of Béla Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*.

## THE SILVER SCREEN AND BEYOND

The *Merry Widow* has now been adapted into five films that are based loosely on the plot of the operetta.

- ▷ Hungarian 1918 silent version by Michael Curtiz
- ▷ 1925 silent version by Erich von Stroheim, with John Gilbert as Danilo and Mae Murray as Hanna
- ▷ 1934 black-and-white version, by Ernst Lubitsch, starring Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald
- ▷ 1952 version in Technicolor starring Lana Turner and Fernando Lamas
- ▷ 1962 Austrian version by Werner Jacobs.

IMAGE: James Rogers, Courtesy of West Australian Opera.



# SPONSORS

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