

October 2002

The Merry Widow

## Pontevedro? What is Pontevedro? Where is Pontevedro?

by

Don Tull, Stage Director and author of the English Performing Edition



Since December 30, 1905, millions of eager operetta lovers have been transported for two hours at a time to the mythical land of Pontevedro. In some versions the name may be slightly different but the effect is still the same. Audience members are whisked off to a

small Balkan province and upon returning home they cannot quite seem to locate it on the map of reality. But no matter - it is firmly instilled in their imaginations forever.

It may be helpful firstly to put the origins of Pontevedro in perspective. As mentioned above, *The Merry Widow* (*Die Lustige Witwe*) had its debut on December 30, 1905. (For those who are interested in historical events, this debut was just three weeks after Richard Strauss' *Salome*, two works that could not be further apart in intent or means of execution.) The story of *The Merry Widow* is based on a French play, *L'Attaché d'Ambassade* (Paris, 1861) written by Henri Meilhac, best known to current operetta lovers as one of the celebrated pair of Meilhac and Halévy, who wrote many of the libretti for Jacques Offenbach's operettas, including that of *La Belle Helene*, which Lyric Theatre will be proud to present next June at the Montgomery Theater.

Since its debut, *The Merry Widow* has been translated into countless languages and probably should rank as the most popular operetta written in the Twentieth Century! So, you can see that for almost 98 years, the mythical country of Pontevedro has captivated audiences worldwide.

Which returns us to the original question: "What is Pontevedro and where is it?"

As defined in this performing edition, expressly written for Lyric Theatre's current production, Pontevedro is a postage stamp-sized principality somewhere on the Balkan Peninsula between Trieste on the west, Bucharest on the east, Budapest on the north and Athens on south. If this seems a bit vague, Pontevedro finds its own special place in each audience member's imagination, and individual imaginations need as much latitude as possible.

However, there are some defining elements that are not vague. The first is that the residents of Pontevedro are fiercely proud of their homeland. They speak with great pride of 'its broad valley, its rolling hill, its treacherous cliff, its polluted river, its great man-eating swamp'. It should not be lost on the reader that these are all in the singular, befitting a postage stamp-sized country.

Of course, there are real problems in living in such a small country. The overriding one is that it is very poor. And it so small that it cannot qualify for 'foreign aid'. For those readers who are familiar with the motion picture, *The Mouse That Roared*, starring Peter Sellers, there is a close parallel here.

The entire bank deposits of Pontevedro total 20,001,175.90 francs. Pontevedro cannot afford its own currency and so its economy is based on the French franc. While twenty million francs may sound like a lot of money, it all rests in the hands of one person - Hanna Glawari, also known as The Merry Widow, who is the title character of our operetta.



Continued on Page 3



## The President's Tuppence

by

Steve Austin

Just imagine... Thirty years ago, a small group of Gilbert & Sullivan aficionados were meeting in San Jose to launch a tiny new community theater company. Little did they know how successful they would be in building a family which would in turn grow into a first class performing group. This year we celebrate our 30th birthday, and as we do I think it's important that we say "thank you" to those intrepid souls who spent the time and energy to create the Gilbert & Sullivan Society of San Jose, and who had the courage to appear on stage, to the delight (we assume) of their friends and neighbors in our first production, *The Pirates of Penzance*, in early 1973.

Our growth since that humble beginning has been phenomenal. Within the first ten years, we graduated from two pianos to a full orchestra, we gained a foothold as one of the four "home" groups at the Montgomery Theater, and we acquired a devoted base of performers and audience who just couldn't get enough of our Gilbert & Sullivan productions. By the age of 20, we had established our capability to weather the storms of San Jose theater politics and, as a result, our capability to work in larger spaces and get our devoted fans to follow, and we had improved our production values

to the point that better performers sought us out for the chance to work their way up the performing arts ladder. Now, at 30, we have firmly established our role as THE purveyor of operetta in the South Bay, as a stepping stone to the big leagues for singers and others who in-



tend to make a career in the performing arts, and as a group that is capable of handling the ups and downs of community theater.

Through all of this, we have worked hard to maintain our family atmosphere. The fact that our family seems to be growing again, as evidenced by the new faces amongst our casts, our audience and our membership, leads me to believe that we have largely succeeded in that effort.

So, here we go for another season - proud of our 30 years of being a great place to see theater and a great place to do theater, yet just as anxious as ever as we hear those first notes from the orchestra, and wait for the curtain to rise and the lights to go up.

## *Odds and Ends*

The wish list: Items we are particularly interested in receiving as a tax deductible in-kind donation:

- paper folding machine
- construction materials for use in warehouse improvements and set construction - call us for details
- drafting printer (e.g. HP DesignJet)
- radiant heating equipment suitable for large spaces

Save the date! The second edition of our highly successful black tie gala fundraiser *Encore!* will be held on Saturday evening, January 25, 2003. Watch for your invitation in November.

Lyric Theatre is currently considering a plan to either relocate or upgrade our shop space, which includes rehearsal space, set and costume construction shops and storage areas, as well as meeting/office space. Would you consider a special donation to help us with the extra expense in this transition effort? Would you consider volunteering some time to assist in moving or upgrading? Please contact Steve Austin at (650) 712-1509 if you can help.

**Editor:** Rick DeJulio

**Contributors:**  
Steve Austin  
Cheryl Blalock  
Marsha Sims  
Don Tull  
Jan Turnage



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The entire plot of *The Merry Widow* revolves around saving that twenty million so that it doesn't disappear from the national boundaries of Pontevedro. The problem is that Hanna is not only a merry widow (she has thoughtfully passed through the traditional Pontevedrian mourning period for her late, rich husband) but a very rich widow and a very young widow as well. Her arrival in Paris (Did I forget to mention that we never actually go to Pontevedro? But how could we - it is mythical!) sets off the alarm bells of every woman-hunting impoverished nobleman in the city.

Baron Zeta, the Pontevedrian Ambassador to France, has his work cut out for him. He must somehow prevent any Frenchman from marrying Hanna, so that Pontevedro will not lose the twenty million. He assigns this job to Count Danilo, a dashing and debonair young Pontevedrian who is attached to the embassy 'in much the same way as gold braid is attached to a uniform'. Count Danilo tries to fulfil the function of gold braid: he tries to 'shine'. However, unbeknownst to the Baron, Hanna and Danilo have known each other in a way which complicates Danilo's assignment. But I don't want to give away the entire story.

Suffice it to say, that despite the fact that Pontevedro is a poor (and mythical) country, the people who inhabit its embassy in Paris are very real and have the real issues of love and betrayal, greed and magnanimity, incompetence and corruption, etc., to deal with and they deal with these issues in both a comic and dramatic manner that has delighted audiences for almost a century.

By the way, when you see the show, if you should wonder how such a poor country as Pontevedro can afford such a posh embassy, they can't and they didn't. Baron Zeta very wisely married a young French woman, Valenciennes, whose obviously wealthy father has loaned one of his grand townhouses to Pontevedro for its use. You can take comfort in knowing that Pontevedro did not squander its resources on building a grand staircase and installing crystal chandeliers. As I said the characters in our play are very real and do very real things, such as marrying to advantage, for the sake of the 'Fatherland', of course.


Oh, and did I mention that you might enjoy the music, too?

LYRIC THEATRE PRESENTS

*Franz Lehar's timeless masterpiece*

# The Merry Widow

*English Translation by Don Tull.*




A fully staged production with orchestra.

October 5 - 6; October 10 - 13  
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30TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON



## ***Franz who?***

Franz Lehár was born on April 30, 1870 in Hungary. Being born into a musical home (his father was a military bandmaster and composer), Franz learned to play the violin and piano before he could read or write. By the age of eleven, Franz had composed his first lied on the piano and was sent to attend the conservatory of Prague for six years, where he studied the violin.

In 1888, Franz began his military service in the band of the infantry regiment conducted by his father and in 1899 he was transferred to Vienna and became the youngest ever military bandmaster. In 1902, he gave up the military for good and received the position of musical director at Vienna's Theater an der Wien. There he met Viktor Leon, a noted librettist and one of the most important and successful personalities of the Viennese operetta scene. They sparked and began working together!

Already a well-known character around Vienna, Lehár announced a new work to be produced for the Theater an der Wien in 1905 entitled *Die Lustige Witwe* (*The Merry Widow*). The libretto was written by Viktor Leon (and Leo Stein after Henri Meilhac's comedy *Der Gesellschaftsattache*). The operetta was an instant success with the public and continued to be performed until 1907, celebrating 400 performances. In its first year *The Merry Widow* was performed over 5,000 times in the United States, along with five simultaneous productions in five languages in Buenos Aires. As a result of all this, Lehár became a millionaire by the age of thirty five.

After the success of *The Merry Widow*, Lehár no

longer needed to worry about composing for a living. Royalties made him a rich man and he soon purchased a summer home in Bad Ischl, the playground of the wealthy. It was in Bad Ischl that Franz met Sophie Meth, the daughter of a Viennese carpet dealer. Unfortunately, she was already married. However, in 1906, they began a love affair that ended with Sophie's eventual divorce from her husband and subsequent marriage to Lehár in 1921.

Lehár continued to write operettas although none achieved the same success as *The Merry Widow*. In 1921, Lehár became a friend of famed tenor Richard Tauber whose interpretation of Lehár's work attracted the composer as well as the public. During the remainder of the 1920s, Lehár wrote for Tauber's voice in the operettas *Paganini*, *Der Zrewitsch* (*The Czar*) and *Das Land des Lachelns* (*The Land of Smiles*).

In 1933, Lehár composed *Giudetta*, a full fledged comic opera, which became Lehár's final work. His wife Sophie died in 1947 and Franz returned to Bad Ischl to give his villa to the city on the condition that they turn it into a Lehár museum. Franz Lehár died there in 1948. A monument dedicated to the composer was created in Bad Ischl in 1958, and the theater in town is named after him.

Where his contemporaries presented farcical social types, Lehár sought greater realism and individualism. "I want to write music for and around human beings: their hearts and souls, their emotions and passions, their joy and sadness", he said.

Great tunes were less frequent in later works, and lightheartedness was to give way to a more "serious" tone. But *The Merry Widow's* melodic genius is Franz Lehár's permanent Romantic legacy to the musical world.







## **Thirty Years!!**

by

**Marsha Sims**

*[Marsha Sims, besides being a valued performer, is a member of our board and the marketing committee. This anniversary being a significant one, she pulled together a comprehensive set of facts about Lyric Theatre and its people. I think it's fascinating to consider how far we've come and to give recognition to her efforts, so I'm including it here, See what you think! -Ed.]*

### **Fact Sheet:**

#### **30th Anniversary Season of Lyric Theatre**

Lyric Theatre,  
P. O. Box 6741,  
San Jose, Ca 95150

<http://www.lyrictheatre.org>  
408-986-8631

Silicon Valley is the world's undisputed center of high tech. But these days Silicon Valley is more than just techies, electron cowboys and gigahertz chips. Culture is thriving and blossoming right here in the valley. One such flower is Lyric Theatre, now celebrating its 30th Anniversary with cast and performances better than ever!

### **30th Anniversary Season Performances**

\* *The Merry Widow* by Franz Lehàr: Our 2002-2003 seasons begins with *The Merry Widow* by Franz Lehàr. This is a comic romance concerning a wealthy widow with wit and beauty and a cavalier of amazing pride. Our English Performing Edition was translated and arranged by Don Tull and our performances will be October 5-13, 2002 at the Mayer Theatre, Santa Clara University.

\* *H.M.S. Pinafore* by Gilbert and Sullivan is a delightful view of how love can try to level all ranks of Victorian English society. It is coming March 22-30, 2003

to the Montgomery Theater, downtown San Jose.

\* *La Belle Helene* by Jacques Offenbach is the classic tale of Helen of Troy with a decidedly French twist. Our production will be a new English adaptation by Ruth. Stein. Performances will be June 21-29, 2003, at the Montgomery Theater.

\* New "Lost Operetta" series: In addition to our three fully staged productions per year, we are planning to launch a series of rarely performed, but once extremely popular, operettas, which will begin in the Spring of 2003. This series will provide a rich cultural opportunity for Silicon Valley audiences to experience lilting music from operettas that are rarely heard in the U.S. The performances in English will be in concert style and dress, and semi-staged with piano accompaniment.

### **Who Are We?**

\* Lyric Theatre, headquartered in Santa Clara County, stages light opera and operetta for Bay Area audiences of all ages. We are the performing arm of the non-profit Gilbert & Sullivan Society of San Jose, California (GSSSJ).

\* Lyric Theatre is a group of over 150 dedicated volunteers who have committed themselves to the art of stagecraft. Community members, students and professional performers grace our stage with their talents.

### **Our Role in Silicon Valley**

\* Because of us, residents can get a quality cultural experience that's enjoyable without having to travel to San Francisco.

\* Lyric Theatre's repertoire provides an important bridge between musical theater and opera which enhances the cultural ambience and education of Silicon Valley. Gilbert and Sullivan and operetta are truly the precursors of the American musical comedy.

\* We serve the Bay Area community at large by providing quality entertainment, suitable for all ages, in a regular season of fully staged and orchestrated productions.

### **Cultural Educational Service and Outreach for the Community**

\* Every year we perform a special fully staged matinee from our season, just for school children.

\* Our productions, together with our workshops in local schools, libraries, and service clubs, provide

singers, instrumentalists, and theater technicians with a stepping stone into professional theater and an outlet for artistic expression.

\* Several of our performers and directors have gone on to San Francisco Opera, the New York Metropolitan Opera, Julliard School of Music, Eugene Opera, Chicago Lyric Opera, and Hollywood.

\* We have open auditions and participants from all ages, ranging from six through eighty years.

\* Our Michael Multer Scholarship Fund promotes music and theatre arts training to promising performers and technicians.

\* We have received generous grants from the City of San Jose, the Arts Council of Silicon Valley, the David & Lucile Packard Foundation, other foundations and several corporations.

### **Our Repertoire**

\* Our operettas have lighthearted comical stories that poke fun at society and human nature. The situations are cheerful and the music is snappy and tuneful. We figure you get enough negativity and violence on TV, the movies, and in the newspaper and could use a "happy break".

\* Sometimes, depending on when the operetta was written, jazz, ragtime or other popular music styles of the day will appear in the orchestral scoring. The light operas of Gilbert and Sullivan remain a cornerstone of our repertoire.

\* All of our shows are presented in English and we take particular care with translations, using local specialists, such as Ruth Stein and Don Tull. Some of our dialogue is even updated to fit in with modern tastes and social perspectives where appropriate and allowable.

### **Our History**

\* The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of San Jose (GSSSJ) was founded in 1972 as a result of a notice placed in the local newspapers by John P. Healy, Jr. He called for a meeting of persons interested in works of the Victorian music era while still in his early 20s. At the tender age of 17 years he founded San Jose Children's Musical Theater.

\* A small but enthusiastic turnout decided that we wanted to be a producing company and a board of directors was elected. Dr. Michel Stein was elected as our first president.

\* The first production was *The Pirates of Penzance*. Assembled cast was a mixed bag, some of the cast members were adults and other were drawn from the San Jose Children's Musical Theater, of which John Healy was director. The leading comic role of Major General Stanley was portrayed by a talented 14-year old who aged half a century with makeup, and as part of the show, a 12-year old policeman arrested a 55-year old pirate. Dr. Ruth Stein, Michel's wife and a life-long Gilbert and Sullivan buff, sang in the chorus. She has been from the beginning a prominent member and visionary for GSSSJ.

\* During the first five years, GSSSJ grew from a small but passionate group of about forty talented volunteer doctors, engineers and housewives to a close-knit theatrical company, playing to sold-out houses. By the end of this period we were mounting two to three productions per year, had money in the bank, sets, lights, costumes, props, a technical crew, directors, musicians, designers, and a loyal audience.

\* We're an extremely inventive group. Right in the middle of a performance of "The Mikado" at Saratoga Civic Center, a transformer was blown and the theater lights went out. This didn't daunt our capable group. Our creative tech staff went out into the parking lot, took the head lights out of their cars, attached them to batteries and used them as stage lights, and the show went on.

### **Important Elements of Our Production**

\* Virtue of our organization: Our directors, technical people and performers are often as talented as people working in professional theater, but have chosen to pursue different careers, so join us for an artistic outlet. We're fortunate to be able to tap the incredible bank of talent here in the San Francisco Bay Area.

\* We place special emphasis on assembling an excellent technical staff and always have quality productions from a technical point of view.

\* Orchestra: Back in the 70s our productions began with a two-piano orchestra, and evolved to include a percussionist, next a cellist was added, and before we knew it had grown to its current size of twenty-five to thirty-five musicians.



\* Costumes: The original costumer's job included making a set of instructions and doling out parcels of fabric to the cast who sewed their own costumes. We now hire a professional who works with a volunteer group of cast members on Saturdays and Sundays in our warehouse.

\* Our volunteers also work on set construction. Our policy is to have lots of good food around the warehouse lobby and cold drinks in the refrigerator, all of which makes our volunteers work tirelessly. It is scientifically proven that set construction nullifies the effect of cholesterol and calories, and that group singing has a similar effect on chips and cookies.

\* Community theater spirit: Being a part of a production is like participating in a family project and making lots of friends and having even more fun. Lyric Theatre thrives on the volunteer effort of our passionate members. As a prerequisite to being cast in a show, everyone commits to pitching in to help with all aspects of the productions. There is no room for prima donnas.

## ***The New Season!***

There have been mentions here and there in this issue about our new season, but just on the off chance that you may have missed them (Hah!) I'll tell you about it one more time. After all, this is our 30th Anniversary season and we want to make it a bang-up special one for all of us, so you might want to make an extra effort to see it. And, if you're going to do that, you would be utterly foolish to not buy a season ticket. After all, look at the benefits: You get early choice of seats so you can be sure of getting good ones, you get a substantial discount on the individual show prices (a season ticket is \$55, as opposed to three individual tickets which would cost \$72), and you get the warm feeling which comes from having done something smart, as well as supporting your favorite (if I may be so bold) theater organization! And buying a season ticket is a snap! One phone call or a visit to our web site, or using the form which is in the season brochure you received in the mail and you're done! Yes, it's just that easy!

But, to our season. *The Merry Widow* starts us off and since this entire issue is about it, I won't bother telling you about the plot. However, I will tell you that Don Tull (the Stage Director) and Michael Taylor (the Music Director) are among our best and brightest at what they do. Both of these gentlemen have been responsible for some of our most popular shows and that, coupled with the brilliance of Lehàr's showmanship promise

an outstanding evening's entertainment!

The second show is *HMS Pinafore*. Just in case you recently discovered Gilbert & Sullivan and don't know it, this is one of what afficianados call "The Big Three" (*Pinafore*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, and *The Mikado*), and for good reason. At the time *Pinafore* was written, Gilbert and Sullivan were inventing the idea of an integrated show, where themes in dialogue and music tied the show together, rather than the show consisting of separate and unconnected scenes. *Pinafore* was the success that it was because of this, as well as the cleverness of its ideas and dialogue and the catchiness of its music. Who, after all, has not heard or participated in the "What, never?", "No, never!", "What, never??", "Well, hardly ever" dialogue? *Pinafore* is a wonderful entertainment not only because it fires broadside after broadside at the British class system, but because it's funny and because you'll love the music! Trust me on this!

The third show, *La Belle Helene* is an Offenbach piece which is thought by many to be his best comic operetta. The themes of bureaucratic pettiness, dishonesty, and bungling somehow never go out of style and the humor in the show is as timely as when it was written. All in all, this is a fine show to end the season, right?

Ah, but no - there is more! Things are still in the planning stages, but we plan to open a new season series we are calling "The Lost Operettas". If things go well, it will work like this: An ensemble group of a dozen performers or so will perform three "lost" (i.e., rarely-performed these days) operettas. The performances will be semi-staged concert style versions in that the performers will be in formal dress with occasional costume pieces, like a hat or scarf, to distinguish characters in the show. There will be no scenery, no orchestra (pianos will be used for accompaniment) and the performances will take place in smaller theaters than we normally use. Also note that this series will be entirely separate from our regular series.

Perhaps you are thinking that you aren't interested in seeing an obscure operetta that is probably obscure for good reason, done by only a dozen people with no sets, costumes or orchestra? Perhaps you are thinking that it will be boring and dull? Well, you would be wrong! First, these operettas were extremely popular in their day. For instance, *Dorothy* opened at the same time as *The Mikado* and outran it by a wide margin! And no sets? Or orchestra? Believe me, and I speak from long experience, your imagination works wonderfully well in filling in details like this and I guarantee that you will be caught up if you just give it a chance! We plan to stage the first show, "Merrie England" in April, 2003, so watch for it and come see it! What can you lose but a little time?

## Contact Us

To make it easier for you to contact us, we will maintain this permanent listing of addresses, phone numbers etc. here in the Patter Post.

### Information:

(408) 986-9090  
www.lyrictheatre.org

### Tickets:

PO Box 2855 Sunnyvale 94087  
408-735-7292  
online at www.lyricstore.com

### Warehouse/Rehearsal Hall:

860 Walsh Avenue Santa Clara  
408-986-8631

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## ***So, What's The Show?***

# *The Merry Widow*

opens on

October 5, 2002

at

the L. B. Mayer Theater

with performances on  
Saturday Oct 5 & 12 at 8 PM,  
Sunday Oct 6 & 13 at 2 PM,  
Thursday Oct 10 at 8 PM,  
and Friday Oct 11 at 8 PM

Admission is \$24 for adults,  
and \$22 for students and seniors.

**Lyric Theatre is a proud member of the Silicon Valley Arts Coalition and Theatre Bay Area!**