

# THE MERRY WIDOW

BY FRANZ LEHÁR  
FEBRUARY 10 & 12, 2023

## Audience Preview Guide

---

**Wednesday, February 8, 2023 -**

**Student Night at the Opera**

**Friday, February 10 , 2023**

**Sunday, February 12, 2023**

**Valentine Theatre**

---

**Toledo Opera**

# Table of Contents

Setting and Characters .....	pg. 2
Synopsis.....	pg. 3
Lehar, the Composer.....	pg. 4
What to Listen For.....	pg. 6
In Lehar's Time .....	pg. 7
Activities.....	pg. 8-9

## The Setting

Setting: Paris

Act I: The Pontevedrian Embassy

Act II: Hanna's Garden

Act III: Maxim's

Time: 1900

## Characters

### **THE MERRY WIDOW**

By Franz Lehár

Libretto by Viktor Léon and Leo Stein

Hannah Glawari, a rich, young widow

Count Danilo Danilovitch, an attaché at the Pontevedrian Embassy

Baron Mirko Zeta, Pontevedro's ambassador in Paris

Baroness Valencienne Zeta, wife of Baron Zeta

Count Camille de Rosillon, a young Frenchman in love with Valencienne

Njegus, Baron Zeta's assistant

Kromov, Chief of staff at the Pontevedrian embassy

Marquis de Cascada, suitor for Hanna's hand in marriage

Marquis de St. Brioche, suitor for Hanna's hand in marriage

Bogdonavitch, attaché at the embassy

Pritschitsch, attaché at the embassy

Olga Kromov, wife of Kromov

Sylvianne Bogdonovitch, wife of Bogdonovitch

Praskovia Pritschitsch, wife of Pritschitsch

Dancers and chorus of women and men

# Synopsis

Setting: Several locations in Paris

Time: 1900

## ACT I

Setting: The Pontevedrian Embassy, Paris

The Pontevedrian ambassador, Baron Mirko Zeta, is giving a ball at the embassy. His home country is nearly bankrupt, and he hopes that their Parisian guests will help them raise the money they need. He's pleased when he sees his young wife, Valenciennie, flirting with Camille de Rosillon, a young Frenchman, assuming she's trying to win French support for Pontevedro. In fact, Camille has declared his love for Valenciennie and writes "I love you" on her fan. Zeta eagerly awaits the arrival of the guest of honor, Hanna Glawari, a wealthy Pontevedrian widow. He plans to get Danilo Danilovitch, a womanizing aristocrat and the embassy secretary, to marry her so that her millions will stay in Pontevedro. Hanna arrives, and the Parisian men shower her with compliments. Valenciennie realizes she has lost her fan with Camille's incriminating message and rushes out to look for it. Finally, Danilo arrives, fresh from a night of partying at the nightclub Maxim's. He and Hanna talk, revealing that they were once in love, but that Hanna was considered too far beneath Danilo's status for him to marry her. He tells her he's not interested in marriage and will never say "I love you." Meanwhile, Zeta's chief of staff, Kromow, finds Valenciennie's fan and thinks it belongs to his wife, Olga. Zeta, wanting to spare Olga the scandal, convinces him it is Valenciennie's. He then meets with Danilo and orders him to marry Hanna for the good of Pontevedro. Danilo tells him that he will keep all the Parisian men away from her, but will not marry her. When the ladies' choice dance is announced, Hanna selects Danilo, and after some flirtatious banter, the two finally dance.

## INTERMISSION

## ACT II

Setting: Hannah's Garden, Paris

Later that evening, Hanna hosts a party at her villa. Danilo arrives late, and Zeta commands him to return to his mission of keeping the Parisian men from Hanna—particularly Camille. The Baron's assistant, Njegus, reveals that Camille is already in love with a mystery woman. Zeta wants to know who she is in order to marry her off to Camille, leaving Hanna free for a Pontevedrian suitor. Believing the fan to be the key to her identity, he asks Danilo to find its owner. When Hanna comes across the fan and sees its inscription, she assumes it is a gift to her from Danilo, but he still won't say "I love you," and she will not accept him until he does. Zeta interrupts their dance, as he is still trying to learn the identity of Camille's secret lover. The men agree to meet in the pavilion to discuss the matter. Camille and Valenciennie finally find the missing fan, and this time Valenciennie writes "I am a respectable wife" on it. Observed by Njegus, they disappear into the pavilion. When Zeta arrives to meet Danilo, Njegus prevents him from entering the pavilion to protect Valenciennie's secret and instead sneaks Hanna in to take her place. Hanna emerges with Camille, announcing their engagement. A furious Danilo departs for Maxim's, which Hanna takes as proof of his love.

## INTERMISSION

## ACT III

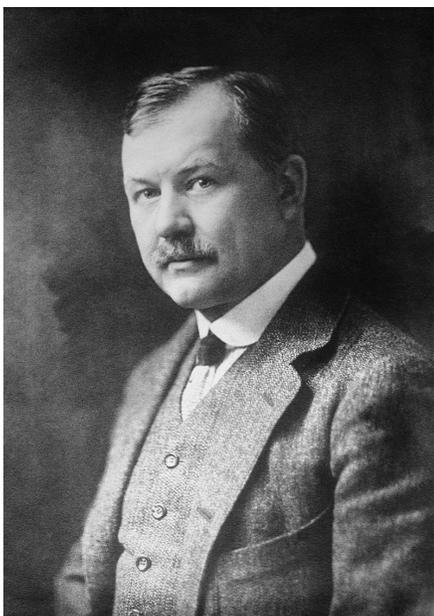
Setting: Maxim's, Paris

Arriving at Maxim's in search of Danilo, Camille and Valenciennie sneak off to one of the private rooms. Zeta and the other Pontevedrians appear, and the Grisettes—among them a dressed-up Valenciennie—entertain the crowd. Eventually both Danilo and Hanna arrive. He forbids her to marry Camille. When she explains that she was merely safeguarding another woman's reputation, he is delighted but still won't declare his love. As the guests reassemble, Danilo announces that Hanna will not marry Camille, but he will not reveal the identity of Camille's secret lover. Njegus produces the missing fan, which he found in the pavilion. Zeta finally recognizes it as his wife's, declares himself divorced, and proposes to Hanna—who informs him that, according to her late husband's will, she will lose her fortune if she remarries. At this, the other men lose interest in Hanna, except Danilo, who finally declares his love and asks Hanna to marry him. She accepts and amends her account of the will: Upon remarrying, her fortune will pass to her new husband. Valenciennie asks Zeta to read the other side of her fan—which reads, "I am a respectable wife." With the couples united, the men are left to wonder about the mystery of women.

Synopsis courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera. All rights reserved. metopera.org

# Franz Lehár 1870-1948

The Austro-Hungarian composer and conductor Franz Lehár (April 30, 1870 - October 24, 1948) was the leading composer of operetta in the twentieth century, and responsible for giving the genre renewed vitality.



**Franz Lehár**  
1870 - 1948

He wrote some 30 operettas, the most famous and enduring of which is *The Merry Widow* (*Die lustige Witwe*), which has achieved worldwide popularity.

Lehár came from a Central European musical family: his father was for 40 years a military bandmaster and composer of dances and marches, while his uncle was music director in Sternberg, where the young Lehár was sent to play violin in the town orchestra under his uncle's baton.

Following studies at the Prague Conservatory (where he received some advice from Dvorák), Lehár began his career as a theatre violinist in the Rhineland, before being called up for military service where he played under his father. In the 1890s he held musical appointments in the military before eventually moving to Vienna in 1902.

Once in the capital of the Austro-Hungarian empire and musical capital of Europe, Lehár's career as an outstanding composer of Austro-German operetta flourished.

His biggest success came early, with *The Merry Widow* in 1905, both at home and abroad, and it paved the way for a new era of Viennese operetta not only through Lehár's own works, but also those of composers such as Fall, Oscar Strauss and Kálmán.

Lehár's success continued in the 1920s with a valuable association with the tenor Richard Tauber, starting in Salzburg in 1921. In the later 1920s and 1930s, Lehár began to be involved with film versions of several of his operettas.

He remained in Vienna and Bad Ischl during the Second World War. Immersed in his music and not prepared to engage in politics by protesting at Nazi atrocities (his wife was Jewish, as were many of his collaborators), Lehár was the subject of suspicion outside Germany.



# What to Listen For

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 are often short, with frivolous stories and light music. Operettas don’t pretend at real life, they don’t present tragedies. They are created for diversion: to amuse and entertain. The Merry Widow is full of bubbly, beautiful 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.

## ***Vilja***

In Act II an old Pontevedrian song about a mythical forest fairy who enchants hunters. With its folk inspired melody and floated top Bs, it is now a favourite of the soprano repertoire.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCkHuD9izr8>

## ***Lippen Schweigen or The Merry Widow Waltz***

One of the most recognizable melodies from this operetta!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2yH7LY5SMw>

## ***I’m off to Chez Maxim’s!***

A very traditional operetta aria that uses clever rhymes to celebrate the joys of life. Chez Maxim is a real place in Paris, known for being the “most famous restaurant in the world”.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1Q1fA9Cjfc>

## ***I was born by cruel fate***

Njegus’s aria that acts as a distraction for the party guests. The lyrics describe his disappointment in not being born a Parisian!

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koTT2LWtk\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koTT2LWtk_w)



# In Lehár's Time

- 1870** Franz Lehár is born
- 1870** Construction of the Brooklyn Bridge begins and the YWCA is founded in NYC
- 1871** The Great Chicago Fire burns for three days
- 1872** NYC Metropolitan Museum of Art opens
- 1873** Levi Strauss and Jacob Davis patent the first blue jeans with copper rivets
- 1874** 1st cartoon depicting elephant as Republican Party symbol, by Thomas Nast
- 1875** Bizet's last opera, *Carmen* premieres at the Opéra-Comique in Paris
- 1876** Puccini attends a production of *Aida*, marking his first experience with opera
- 1877** Queen Victoria proclaimed the Empress of India
- 1878** American poet and biographer, Carl Sandburg is born
- 1880** Building of the Panama Canal begins
- 1881** Jacques Offenbach's opera *Les Contes d'Hofmann* premieres in Paris
- 1882** Lehár became a student at the Prague Conservatory
- 1883** 1st telephone call between New York and Chicago
- 1884** Statue of Liberty is presented to the U.S. in Paris
- 1885** Mark Twain publishes the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in the US
- 1886** Sigmund Freud opens practice in Vienna
- 1888** Vincent Van Gogh cuts off his left ear in argument with Paul Gauguin
- 1889** The Eiffel Tower officially opens in Paris
- 1890** The first Rose Parade kicks off in Pasadena, CA
- 1892** Ellis Island opens as a US immigration inspection station
- 1895** Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake* premieres in St. Petersburg
- 1899** Scott Joplin granted copyright for Maple Leaf Rag
- 1900** *Tosca* performed
- 1901** Giuseppe Verdi dies on July 25
- 1905** *The Merry Widow* premieres in Vienna
- 1907** First ever "ball drop" is held in Times Square to celebrate New Year's Eve
- 1914** World War I begins
- 1918** The Spanish flu starts a worldwide pandemic
- 1920** Puccini begins work on *Turandot*
- 1920** The 19th Amendment is ratified, granting women the right to vote
- 1928** Amelia Earhart becomes first woman to cross the Atlantic Ocean
- 1929** Lehár's *The Land of Smiles* premieres in Berlin
- 1879** Gilbert & Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance* premieres
- 1933** The Great Depression begins
- 1939** World War II begins
- 1940** A recording of *Cavalleria Rusticana* is made to celebrate its 50th anniversary
- 1943** Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma* opens at the St. James Theatre in New York City
- 1945** World War II ends
- 1948** Lehár dies

# Post-Opera Activities

## Personal Response

1. If *The Merry Widow* had a sequel, what do you think would happen?
2. Were you surprised about any aspects of *The Merry Widow*?
3. Do you think the story of *The Merry Widow* would ever happen in 2023?
4. If the opera was set in modern times, how do you imagine it would be different?
5. Compare *The Merry Widow* to any musical that you may have seen or know. How are they different? How are they similar?

# Post-Opera Activities

## Critical Response

Create Your Own Review of *The Merry Widow*

Choose one of the following aspects of the opera you saw: the costumes, the singing, the orchestra, or the set. Answer the questions with your honest review!

<b>Aspect:</b>	<b>Your Response:</b>
How did it help tell the story?	
What did you like about it?	
What could be better?	

Now, choose one of the following characters from *The Merry Widow*: Hannah Glawari, Danilo, Valencienne, Rosillon, Baron Zeta, or Njegus. Fill in the following chart with your thoughts!

What did you like about this character?	
How would the story be different if they weren't in the opera?	
What advice would you give them?	