

Franz Lehár
THE MERRY WIDOW

conducted by Iwan Davies



★★★★★

**'This bold adaptation makes for
a delightful evening's opera'**

- The Telegraph

★★★★★

'A dizzying theatrical tsunami'

- The Scotsman

★★★★★

- The Times

★★★★★

- The Herald

THE MERRY WIDOW

Franz Lehár (1870–1948)

Libretto by Viktor Léon and Leo Stein, based on L'attaché d'ambassade (The Embassy Attaché) by Henri Meilhac

Script by John Savournin & Lyrics by David Eaton

Sung in English with English side-titles

An Opera Holland Park, Scottish Opera and D'Oyly Carte Opera co-production, featuring the Buxton International Festival Orchestra.

DATES AND TIMES

Friday 10 July	7.15pm
Tuesday 14 July	7.15pm
Friday 17 July	7.15pm
Tuesday 21 July	2.00pm
Friday 24 July	7.15pm

VENUE

Buxton Opera House

DURATION

2 hours and 40 minutes, including a 20-minute interval

OPERA TALKS

For evening performances at 6pm
in the Opera House

For the matinee performance at 12.45pm
in the Opera House

CREATIVES

Iwan Davies
John Savournin
Bence Kalo
takis
Ben Pickersgill
Kally Lloyd Jones
Merry Holden
Rebecca Warren

Conductor
Director
Revival Director
Set & Costume Designer
Lighting Designer
Choreographer
Revival Choreographer
Repetiteur

CAST

Paula Sides
Dominic Sedgwick
Richard Burkhard
Elizabeth Karani
Luke Sinclair
Matthew Kellett
Phil Wilcox
John Ieuan Jones
Eleri Gwilym
Harry Thatcher
Christopher Nairne
Amy J Payne
George Roberts
Catrine Kirkman

Hanna Glawari
Danilo
Don Zeta
Valentina
Camille
Nicky Negus
Mr Kromow
Mr Bogdanovitch
Sylvia
Sam Briochi
Carmelo Cascada
Olga
Mr Pritschitsch
Paulina

CHORUS

Soprano

**Fiona Finsbury, Chloé Hare-Jones,
Daniella Sicari**

Mezzo-Soprano

**Rebecca Anderson, Cara Blaikie,
Sophie Clarke, Helen Maree Cooper
David Karapetian, James Liu,
Samuel Mills, Harry Thatcher,
Moses Torto**

Tenor

Baritone/Bass

**John Rhys Liddington,
George Roberts**

ORCHESTRA

Violin I

**Eleanor Corr, Laura Custodio,
Laura Embrey, Cathy Studman,
Paula Smart, Shirley Richards**

Violin II

**Simon Gilks, Rebecca Thompson,
Laura Concar, Jody Smith,
Sarah Whittingham**

Viola

**Carol Ella, Henrietta Hill, Mike Dale,
Florence Corr**

Cello

**Tim Smedley, Barbara Grunthall,
James Heathcote**

Bass

**James Manson, Thomas Betts
Sarah Whewell, Hugues Roberts**

Flute

Rees Webster, Alec Harmon

Oboe

Matthew Dunn, Daniel Bayley

Clarinet

Georgina Powell, Rachel Whibley

Bassoon

Horn

Naomi Atherton, Jenny Cox

Trumpet

Tracey Redfern, Pete Mainwaring

Bass Trombone

Tony Boorer

Timpani

John Melbourne

Percussion

Harry Percy

Harp

Angharad Huw

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

A 1950s New York penthouse

Don Zeta's birthday party is in full swing in his Manhattan penthouse, with flowing champagne and a stealthy rendezvous or two. Among the guests are the Don's many connections through New York's Mafia world, including the widow Hanna Glawari – inheritor of her late husband's \$20 million fortune, held in a Sicilian lemon grove. The Don is prepared to do anything to make sure Hanna's fortune is swept up by one of his own so he can gain control of one of Europe's most powerful families. He sends his capo Nicky Negus to fetch the only man he trusts for the job – his consigliere Danilo. When Danilo arrives the Don tasks him with a new assignment: marry Hanna and secure the fortune for the Family.

Little does he know that Danilo and Hanna have a romantic – and difficult – history, Danilo's uncle having forced him to give her up when she was a simple Tennessee farmer's daughter. Now, making her appearance at Zeta's, she is impossibly glamorous, swarmed by suitors, and ready to leave her mourning behind. Danilo refuses to woo Hanna but promises the Don he will eliminate any unwanted suitors.

Zeta's wife Valentina has been carrying on an amorous affair with Camille de Rosillon, the famous French jazz singer. Valentina tries to end this dangerous relationship, and Camille writes a love note on her fan – which they promptly lose. Russian mobster Mr Kromow picks it up; suspecting his own wife Olga has been cheating, he shows it to Zeta who promises to find its owner and deliver a little warning to whoever wrote on it, despite Valentina's insistence that she could do this more discreetly – and keep the fan.

Hanna and Danilo remember their previous affections – and the abrupt end to their relationship – and swear any love is behind them. As a dance begins Danilo begins to pair the ladies off with men to spare Hanna their unwanted advances – and to do as he promised to the Don. But as the ladies go off to relax the mob persists and Hanna picks the one man with no interest in dancing, Danilo. A plan forms – he offers to sell his dance for an impossible price and, of course, has no takers. Finally left alone, with the guests going home, the two begin to dance and it soon becomes clear their past feelings are not as distant as they hoped.

ACT II

A Sicilian villa, some days later

Hanna has invited everyone to her Sicilian villa for a good old-fashioned knees-up. She entertains them with an old country song that Danilo listens to, longingly. Zeta worries that Camille has designs on Hanna, having spotted them together at his birthday party, and wonders how he might put a stop to his suspected advances. Nicky joins the dots on whose handwriting is on the mysterious fan and a plan forms: 1. Zeta gives the fan to Danilo to help him find out the identity of the singer's mistress; 2. they will then tell her husband; 3. he will in turn take Camille out. Problem solved.

Danilo cannot find the fan's true owner, though he discovers several infidelities among the party members along the way. Hanna and Danilo remember old times, but when she sees the writing on the fan she assumes it is Danilo's own declaration of love – which he denies. He leaves the fan in the garden, none the wiser.

Later that evening, Camille and Valentina meet for a secret rendezvous on the balcony. Valentina insists they must break things off. Finding the fan, Camille insists Valentina let him keep it as a memory of her. She writes a final note to him on it. They go into the house for a private goodbye. Nicky Negus arrives and, seeing that one of the people inside the room off the balcony is Camille, keeps watch to trap them inside. He clues in Zeta and Danilo but, when he realises who is actually with Camille, he quickly arranges for Hanna to swap places with Valentina in order to save her skin. When Zeta and Danilo see Camille and Hanna – not Valentina – Hanna reinforces Camille's alibi, announcing a plan to marry him, leaving Danilo heartbroken. Danilo sets off for his favourite distraction back in New York – Maxim's. Hanna, noticing this reaction, realises Danilo really loves her even if he refuses to say it.

ACT III

Maxim's club, Manhattan, some days later

A wild party is in full swing at Zeta's cabaret bar, with showgirls dancing – Valentina, a former dancer, among them – and guests in all sorts of glamorous debauchery. Danilo arrives, steaming drunk. When he finds Hanna, he tells her to break things off with Camille for the sake of the Family. Hanna replies that the two were never engaged, she was merely protecting a married woman. Danilo tells her the truth about what Zeta wants from her and, when pressed for how he really feels, he still cannot say it, concerned she will think it is all about the money. Hanna walks out, upset and enraged.

They soon have bigger problems – the Don learns that the fan is his wife's and swears to get rid of her so that he can marry Hanna himself. However, Hanna says this will not solve his problems as, according to her late husband's will, she will lose her fortune if she remarries. Hearing this, Danilo promptly declares his love and asks for her hand, which she accepts gladly – only to tell him the reason why she will lose the fortune is because it will belong to her new husband. As everyone rushes off to their happily ever after, Hanna and Danilo are left alone, finally able to let their hearts speak.

A MODERN MERRY WIDOW

Discovering a new setting for Lehár's world

If updating an original setting of an opera (or any theatre piece for that matter) it is important that the updating still allows the original to shine. It's about forging a new lens through which to see it for what it is, in an accessible and, above all, enjoyable way.

When starting to work on *The Merry Widow*, I was chatting with my co-librettist David Eaton over a cup of hot coffee (while we were both working at Opera Holland Park on *The Yeomen of the Guard*), and we were both struck by the amusingly neat fidelity between the Mafia high-life and underworld, and Lehár's original setting. The story is built around a displaced people – originally the fictitious Pontevedrians in Paris – so the world of Italian-American Mafia families finding their place in New York felt like a good modern-day comparison.

The characters fit the hierarchical mould nicely and neatly. Baron Zeta (who originally puppeteers the Pontevedrian campaign to secure the Widow's funds) becomes Don Zeta, head of the powerful New York families. Danilo becomes his number two – his consigliere. We meet a maelstrom of other 'mafioso' characters that are all part of Zeta's world. And the female characters who, having been placed in an even more male-dominated setting than the original, have real agency and can hold their own in this dangerous world.

Once we started to put all this through a comedic lens, something very satisfying started to emerge. The stakes are raised across the board, which is ideal for comedy; it's not just about avoiding scandal, but often about life or death. The Mafia world gave us a playful 'hook' – a way in – which also allowed the set and costume designer to build an opulent, rich look for the opera (which is a big part of *Widow's* original appeal) while relishing the fresh opportunities that this new playground afforded.

But above all, I hope audiences will enjoy a fantastic afternoon or evening, full of humour, visual spectacle, dancing, a moving central love story that tugs at your heart strings, and wonderful music-making. *The Merry Widow* boasts a perfect balance between comedy and pathos, beautiful music that is by turns heart-rending and toe-tapping.

It is a shining example of a well-rounded evening at the theatre. And that is all we are all looking for at the end of the day, isn't it?

John Savournin

*Reproduced with the kind permission of Scottish Opera





Iwan Davies

Conductor

Iwan Davies is Artistic Director of Aberystwyth Musicfest, one of Wales's leading music festivals. At the Salzburger Landestheater he conducted repertoire ranging from Rossini to Philip Glass, and at the Buxton International Festival he has conducted numerous works, including *La voix*

humaine and *Trouble in Tahiti* in 2025. He has worked with the Welsh National Opera orchestra, including conducting the opera film *Fires of the Moon* by Gareth Glyn, premiered at the Edinburgh International Film Festival, with English Touring Opera and Music Theatre Wales.



John Savournin

Director

John is the Artistic Director of both Waterperry Opera Festival and Charles Court Opera. As a director, he has created productions and projects for RBO, ENO, Scottish Opera, Opera Holland Park, D'Oyly Carte and others, including *The Yeomen of the Guard* (OHP), *Trial by Jury* (Opera North & Scottish Opera), *The Merry Widow* (Scottish Opera/OHP/D'Oyly Carte). He

is an advocate for new work and work for young audiences, recently creating two projects for the RBO, including *Dewi in the Deep* and *Arion and the Dolphin*. As a singer, he has performed roles for ENO, Opera North, Scottish Opera, OHP, BBC Proms, WNO and Nederlandse Reisopera, most recently appearing at Captain Corcoran in *HMS Pinafore* for ENO.



Bence Kalo

Revival Director

Bence is an opera, theatre and movement director based in Cardiff. His directing credits include the Young Artist production of *Hansel and Gretel* (Opera Holland Park), *Acis and Galatea* (Dorset Opera Festival) and *Ya'akobi and Leidental* (UK and Israel). He has worked as movement director on *The Barber of Seville* (Opera Holland Park) and

A Dozen Things I Would Rather Be (Streatham Space Project). He has assisted at Glyndebourne, Scottish Opera, Opera Holland Park and Dorset Opera Festival. He trained at L'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq and the University of Kent and was a semi-finalist in the 2023 European Opera Directing Prize.



takis

Set and Costume Designer

takis is an international performance designer across theatre, opera, circus, and fashion, and a nominee for both the Laurence Olivier and the International Opera Awards. Born in Greece and based in London, his career spans landmark

West End productions, major opera houses, and non-replica musicals across Scandinavia. He has designed long-running circus residencies in Las Vegas and Atlantic City, and the world's first 3D projection ballet for the Finnish National Ballet.



Ben Pickersgill

Lighting Designer

Recent lighting designs include *Don Quichotte* (Opéra de Lausanne), *Rodelinda*, *Fidelio* (Garsington Opera), *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci* (Greek National Opera), *The Merry Widow*, *Il Trittico* (Scottish Opera), *Falstaff*, *La Rondine*, *Trouble in Tahiti* (Opera North), *Odyssey*:

A Heroic Pantomime (Jermyn Street Theatre) and *A Christmas Carol* (Theatre by the Lake). As associate Lighting Designer, projects include *Macbeth* (Palau de les Arts, Valencia), *The Inheritance* (West End and Broadway), *The Lehman Trilogy* (West End) and *Elizabeth* (Royal Ballet).



Kally Lloyd Jones

Choreographer

Kally has worked extensively as choreographer, director, movement director and dancer in the UK and internationally, with companies including the Royal Swedish Ballet, The Royal Ballet School, David Hughes Dance, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Scottish Opera, The Citizens Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Bristol Old Vic, The Traverse, Royal Lyceum, Welsh National Opera,

Glyndebourne, Royal Swedish Opera, Danish National Opera, Liceu Barcelona, Opera Holland Park, D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, National Theatre of Scotland, and Pitlochry Festival Theatre. She is founder and Artistic Director of Company Chordelia, and has created over 14 full-length dance theatre productions for the company.



Merry Holden

Revival Choreographer

Merry trained at London Studio Centre and has worked extensively as a dancer and choreographer in the UK and internationally. Revival credits include: Revival Choreography: *Saul* (Glyndebourne); *Adelaide Festival*; *Houston Grand Opera*; *Théâtre du Châtelet* and *The Royal Danish Opera*). *Patience* and *The Magic Flute*

(Charles Court Opera). Choreography: *Ruddigore*, *Acis and Galatea*, *Yeomen of the Guard* (Opera Holland Park). *Iolanthe* and *Pirates of Penzance* (Charles Court Opera, G&S Festival, Buxton), *The Sorcerer* (Wilton's Music Hall), *Napoleon: Un petit pantomime* (Jermyn Street Theatre) and *Orpheus in the Underworld* (Royal College of Music).

Rebecca Warren

Repetiteur & Chorus Master

Rebecca Warren is an Irish repetiteur, collaborative pianist, Musical Director and choral conductor. She has been a regular member of the music staff at Buxton International Festival since 2023. In demand as

a recitalist and collaborative pianist throughout Ireland and the United Kingdom, her work spans established repertoire and rediscovered operatic works.



Paula Sides

Hanna Glawari (Soprano)

Paula studied at the Royal College of Music, where she received the Tagor Gold Medal. She recently recorded Poulenc's *La Voix Humaine* and *Fiançailles pour rire* with Sergey Rybin. Recent roles include: Hannah Glawari *The Merry Widow* (Scottish Opera and Opera Holland Park), Cunegonde *Candide* (Scottish Opera); the title roles in *Lucrezia Borgia* and

Tosca; Mimi *La bohème*; Lauretta *Gianni Schicchi*, Elettra *Idomeneo* (ETO), and Donna Anna *Don Giovanni* (Longborough Festival). She has performed in the USA, Italy, France and Budapest. Concert highlights include Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with the Philharmonia Orchestra at the Royal Festival Hall.

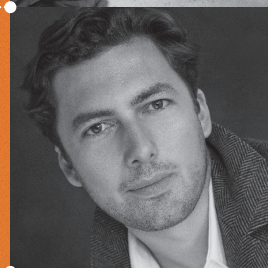


Dominic Sedgwick

Danilo (Baritone)

British baritone Dominic Sedgwick's recent highlights include Mercurio *La Calisto* (Opéra de Rennes, Angers-Nantes Opéra, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, and Théâtre de Caen), Ned Keene *Peter Grimes* (Welsh National Opera), and Robin Oakapple *Ruddigore* (Opera North).

On the concert platform, highlights include Marullo *Rigoletto* and Baron Duphol *La Traviata* (Le Cercle de l'Harmonie at the Philharmonie de Paris), Second Apprentice *Wozzeck* (London Philharmonic Orchestra), and Dr Falke *Die Fledermaus* (Les Musiciens du Louvre).



Richard Burkhard

Don Zeta (Baritone)

British/Swiss baritone Richard Burkhard is a previous recipient of the Decca Prize at the Kathleen Ferrier Vocal Awards, and winner of the Royal Over-Seas League singing competition. Recent highlights include

Dulcamara *L'elisir d'amore* and Don Fernando *Fidelio* (Garsington Opera), Ford and Forester *Cunning Little Vixen* (Opera North) and Count Gil *Il segreto di Susanna* (Opera Holland Park).

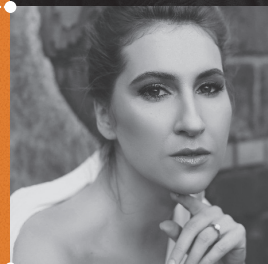


Elizabeth Karani

Valentina (Soprano)

Elizabeth Karani studied at the RNCM, Guildhall and National Opera Studio. Her performances include world premieres as Nanna/Embla *The Monstrous Child* (ROH), Jahanara *Taj Mahal* (Grange Park), Pamina in Damon Albarn's *Magic Flute II* (Lido, Paris), Musetta *La bohème*,

Susanna *Le nozze di Figaro*, Amy *Little Women*, Galatea *Acis & Galatea* (Opera Holland Park), Gretel *Hänsel und Gretel* (ENO), Gismonda *Ottone*, Drusilla *L'incoronazione di Poppea* and Female Chorus *The Rape of Lucretia* (English Touring Opera).



Luke Sinclair

Camille (Tenor)

Luke Sinclair trained at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and Lyon Opera Studio, and is currently a soloist at the Salzburg State Theatre. Recent highlights include Max *Der Freischütz*, Erik *Der fliegende Holländer* and Macduff *Macbeth* (Festival Theatre, Salzburg), the title role in *Faust*, Don José *Carmen*, Lensky

Eugene Onegin, Alfredo *La traviata*, Tamino *Die Zauberflöte* and Zamoro *Alzira*. In concert, he has recently appeared with the Bavarian State Orchestra as the tenor soloist in both Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* and Verdi's *Requiem*.



Matthew Kellett

Nicky Negus (Baritone)

Matthew Kellett is a graduate of the Royal Northern College of Music. Recent roles include Jack Point *The Yeomen of the Guard*; Robin Oakapple *Ruddigore* (Opera Holland Park); Papageno *The Magic Flute*, Bartolo *The Barber*

of Seville, KoKo *The Mikado* (Charles Court Opera). His appearances with other companies include English National Opera, Opera North, Wexford Festival Opera, English Touring Opera and Blackheath Halls Opera.





Phil Wilcox

Mr Kromow (Baritone)

Phil Wilcox's career is a patchwork of opera, concert performance, choral conducting, and education leadership. He has performed roles with Buxton International Festival, English Touring Opera, Grange Park Opera and Waterperry Opera in roles ranging from Dulcamara to Sir

Thomas Bertram and Major General Stanley. Phil has performed as soloist in major concert works with ensembles from across the UK. He conducts several choirs and is the Learning and Participation Manager for Leeds Song.



John Ieuan Jones

Mr Bogdanovitch (Baritone)

John Ieuan Jones is a Welsh baritone and graduate of the RNCM. Recent highlights include Antonio *The Gondoliers* and Silvio (cover) *Pagliacci* (English Touring Opera), Trio 3 in *Trouble*

in *Tahiti* (Mid Wales Opera), Fosseyer *Hamlet* (Buxton International Festival), and guest soloist appearances at the Lerici Festival and the BBC Proms UK Tour.



Eleri Gwilym

Sylvia (Soprano)

Eleri Gwilym hails from Swansea and graduated from Cardiff Law School before undertaking postgraduate studies at the Royal Academy of Music. In 2024, she won the Audience Prize at the Welsh Singer of the Year Competition. Roles include Königin der Nacht *Die Zauberflöte*

(Charles Court Opera and Merry Opera), Jude Lofte and Roshanna Wing *Itch* (Opera Holland Park), Donna Clara, the Infanta *Der Zwerg* (Wexford Festival Opera), Angharad *Fires of the Moon* (Tanau'r Lloer), an opera-film, *Dido Dido* and *Aeneas* (Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields).



Harry Thatcher

Sam Briochi (Tenor)

Harry graduated from The Royal College of Music International Opera School and was a Young Artist at Glyndebourne in 2019. Baritone engagements include Schaunard *La bohème* (Opera Holland Park); Escamillo *Carmen* (Scottish Opera (access

performances) and jump-ins for Waterperry Opera Festival); Riff *West Side Story* (Gobierno de Aragon Lyric and Dance Festival), and Silvio *Pagliacci* (OHP).



Christopher Nairne

Carmelo Cascada (Baritone)

Scottish baritone Christopher Nairne is a Samling Artist and graduate of the Alexander Gibson Opera School at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. In 2025 he made his Scottish Opera (co production with Opera Holland Park) debut as Cascada *The Merry Widow*. Other roles include Marcello *La bohème* (Nevill Holt Opera),

Count Carl-Magnus *A Little Night Music* (Leeds Playhouse/Opera North), Albert *Werther* (Lyric Opera Productions, Dublin), and covered Morales *Carmen*, Horemhab *Akhnaten*, Marchese d'Obigny *La traviata* and Earl Mountarat *Iolanthe* (English National Opera).



Amy J Payne

Olga Kromov (Mezzo-soprano)

Recent appearances include The Old Woman *Candide* (WNO), Arnalta *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, Mother Goose *The Rake's Progress* (English Touring Opera), Dame Carruthers *The*

Yeoman of the Guard (Opera Holland Park), Petra *A Little Night Music*, Tisbe *La Cenerentola*, Cornelia *Giulio Cesare*, Third Lady *The Magic Flute*, Olga Olsen *Street Scene* and Annina *La traviata* (Opera North).



George Roberts

Mr Pritschitsch (Baritone)

George Roberts is the winner of the 2025 Lotte Lenya Competition, awarded by the Kurt Weill Foundation. Opera highlights include Luiz *The Gondoliers* (English Touring Opera), Count Almaviva & Leporello *Don Giovanni* (Cumbria

Opera), Junius *The Rape of Lucretia* (BYO), and Bottom *The Fairy Queen* (Longborough). He has sung in recitals alongside Graham Johnson and Felicity Lott.



Catrine Kirkman

Paulina (Mezzo-soprano)

Welsh Mezzo-Soprano Catrine Kirkman, a Guildhall School graduate, is a former Britten Pears Young Artist and award winner at the John Kerr English Song Competition. She

has performed with Scottish Opera, English Touring Opera and the LSO, and creates original performance work including her shows *Ms Midlife* and *Unbreakable Bond*.