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Double Bill at Ohio Light Opera: Blossom Time and A Connecticut Yankee

By [Kelly Ferjutz](#) | Published on Jul 22, 2012



Amy Maples, as Mitzi Krantz, and Justin Berkowitz, as Austrian composer Franz Schubert, star in Ohio Light Opera's production of "Blossom Time." (Photo by Matt Dilyard)

After enjoying a performance of *Blossom Time* at **Ohio Light Opera**, one is left with several opinions: Franz Schubert was one of the best melodists of all time, yet it was the mostly non-singing performance of **Boyd Mackus** that nearly stole the show, and – this should be the ‘sleeper hit’ of OLO’s 34th season!

For whatever reason, this is the first time the company has performed this 'musical play in three acts' as determined by Sigmund Romberg and his lyricist Dorothy Donnelly in 1921. Its charm is evident from the more than 500 performances given after its premiere in NYC that year.

The story itself is a bit of Viennese whipped cream – almost a farce based on too many similar-sounding names: Schubert, Shober, Franz, Kranz, etc. A father (Mackus) with three daughters is determined to keep them for himself. They, however, have a different outlook, and with the help of the Baron Shober (**Luke Bahr**) papa is made to see the wisdom of allowing Kitzi and Fritzi to marry their young men. The youngest, Mitzi, loves Schubert's music, thus setting up hope for the composer, who died much too young.

Shober, however, is much admired by the diva Bellabruna (**Caroline Miller**) who is unfortunately married to the jealous Count Scharntoff. Thanks to the intervention of Schubert and Mitzi, there is no duel, just wonderful, glorious music, most of it very familiar to the ear – but yet not quite as one's ears might recall it. (Thankfully, the program notes list the derivation of the original tunes used.) **Justin Berkowitz** was marvelous as the shy, bumbling Schubert and **Amy Maples** excelled as the love-torn Mitzi.

Directed by **Ted Christopher** (who doubles as Scharntoff) with wonderful Regency-era costumes by **Charlene Gross**, the confection might easily have come here straight from Vienna. There are waltzes and other choreography by **Carol Hageman**. Lighting by **Krystal Kenner** and the effective, yet minimal scenery by **C. Murdock Lucas** emphasize the lightness of the production. Conductor **Steven Byess** maintained a steady hand throughout.



Danielle McCormick Knox (left) and Nathan Brian in the Ohio Light Opera production of "A Connecticut Yankee." (Photo by Matt Dilyard)

Earlier in the day (Thursday, July 19) was a performance of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* by the then-fledgling team of Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart. Originally written in 1927, it was revised in 1943, yet sounds strangely up-to-date and modern in this year of 2012. This was also a premiere for OLO.

Blessed with believable, charismatic leads in **Danielle McCormick Knox** as Alice/Alisande and **Nathan Brian** as Martin, the production had no opportunity to slow down or otherwise impede the wacky stageplay. It opens in a lush hotel ball room in Hartford Connecticut at a bachelor party for Martin, who is in love with Alice, but for

some reason, has chosen to marry Fay (**Sarah Best**). When she discovers Alice on Martin's lap, Fay whacks him one over the head with an empty wine bottle, and wow!

It's now June of 528 in Camelot—King Arthur's Camelot, that is. The first person Martin sees is the lovely Alisande, whom he immediately dubs 'Sandy'. It's love at first sight, and he accompanies her back to the castle and King Arthur. **Ted Christopher** is making a specialty of Kings the last two seasons: Arthur in Camelot and George in Jubilee. Here he's Arthur again, picking up right where he left off, charming everyone with his slightly bumbling ways.



Merlin (far right) makes magic in the Ohio Light Opera production of "A Connecticut Yankee."
(Photo by Matt Dilyard)

Guinevere, his queen, (**Ruby White**) has big eyes for the Lancelot of **Luke Bahr** (and why not, I ask?) until the advent of Morgan Le Fay (**Sarah Best**) who does delicious things with absolutely the best song in the production – To Keep My Love Alive! Her final note would challenge the best basso profundo out there.

Three months later, Martin, as The Boss, has mechanized and automated Camelot, providing an astonishing platform for Sandy to entice her female companions to indulge in a bit of women's lib. It's a hilarious bit, and she carries it off with terrific aplomb. Thanks to Martin's advance knowledge of the eclipse of the sun on June 21, 528, he wins the battle of the magicians as darkness falls in mid-day, but shortly thereafter all is sunny and light once again.



Jacob Allen (left, as Merlin) and Sarah Best (as Morgan Le Fay) in the Ohio Light Opera production of "A Connecticut Yankee." (Photo by Matt Dilyard)

Eventually, just before it's too late – everyone is transported back to 1943, where Sandy and Martin are happily reunited. You'll readily recognize two of the Rodgers/Hart masterpieces: *My Heart Stood Still*, and *Thou Swell*, and once having heard it, you'll no doubt never forget the *Camelot Samba!*

Carol Hageman's choreography is amazing on the fairly small stage of Freedlander Auditorium, yet no one ever gets tripped up! The costumes of **Charlene Gross** were clever and appropriate for either era, and the lighting of **Erich R. Keil** was suitably atmospheric. **Kirk Domer** created a lovely art-deco set that lent itself well to both medieval and modern settings. **Steven Byess** was again in the pit, while the entire production was capably directed by the OLO Artistic Director, **Steven Daigle**.

You won't find better anywhere!

Photos by: Matt Dilyard

The season closes on Saturday August 11, but there are still ample opportunities to see any or each of the seven productions. For performance dates and times, visit the web-site: ohiolightopera.org, or call the ticket office (during normal business hours) 1.330.263.2345. Several of the area hostelrys offer combination deals – worth an inquiry!

Kelly Ferjutz is a busy freelance writer, editor and proof-reader in Cleveland, Ohio, has written about the arts for Music & Vision, Cool Cleveland and other local venues, both print and on-line. In addition to managing her own blog, Book Mechanic, she continues to work on her fiction output. Her books include *Secret Shores*, *Windsong*, *Ardenwycke Unveiled* and *But Not For Love*. On Valentine's Day 2009 a new category was added to her resume: photographer. Kelly studied piano, organ, French horn and voice at high school and college, and music has been the strongest constant in her life so far.