

The Flip Side

Reviews and More by Kevin Filipski

SATURDAY, AUGUST 4, 2012

Music Reviews: Willson in Cooperstown, Chabrier on the Hudson

The Music Man

Book, music and lyrics by Meredith Willson

Choreographed and directed by Marcia Milgrom Dodge

Performances through August 24, 2012

Glimmerglass Festival, Cooperstown, NY

glimmerglass.org

Le Roi malgré lui

Composed by Emmanuel Chabrier

Conducted by Leon Botstein; directed by Thaddeus Strassberger

Performances through August 5, 2012

Bard Summerscape @ Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY

fishercenter.bard.edu/summerscape

Summer music festivals have proliferated for years, and two of the biggest in New York State have recently changed their tune, so to speak. The Glimmerglass Festival, north of Cooperstown, was the Glimmerglass Opera for decades until being renamed in the hopes of drawing audiences for whom the word “Opera” is too daunting. The Bard Music Festival, on the Bard College campus two hours north of New York City, is now part of the more encompassing Bard Summerscape, comprising films, lectures, concerts, dance, theater and opera.



Futral (left) in *The Music Man*

The Glimmerglass Festival now includes Broadway musicals, with Meredith Willson’s *The Music Man* on stage this summer and Lerner and Loewe’s *Camelot* next year. Director Marcia Milgrom Dodge’s production of *The Music Man*—somewhat arbitrarily moved from 1907 to the 1940s, although if you don’t see it in the program, you won’t notice it—is an enjoyably old-

fashioned romp, with Willson's captivating score at center stage, particularly the daring a cappella opener, "Rock Island," which could stake its claim as musical theater's first rap song.

Dwayne Croft makes a properly slick but less than appealing leading man as Harold Hill, the title con man who should be both obnoxious and irresistible, while perennially underrated soprano Elizabeth Futral (as winsome Marian the librarian) has a meltingly lovely voice that caresses Willson's best ballads like "Good Night Someone" and the immortal "Till There Was You." The rest of the cast is adequate if unexceptional, but buoyed by tunes like "Seventy-Six Trombones" and "Pick-a-Little (Talk-a-Little)," *The Music Man* remains classic musical Americana.



Churchman (right) in *La Roi malgre lui*

Downstate at Bard, where Frenchman Camille Saint-Saens is the summer's featured composer, his contemporary Emmanuel Chabrier is represented by his grand comic opera, *Le Roi malgre lui*, or *The King in Spite of Himself*. This rollicking comedy contains Chabrier's most beguiling music, spinning its memorable melodies throughout its many arias—and they are plentiful in this three-hour, 40-minute work—as it tells the hilarious story of the new French king of Poland, Henri le Valois, who doesn't want the job.

Thaddeus Strassberger's staging slyly interpolates modernist and Brechtian touches—one character watches the royal proceedings on TV until entering the opera proper in the final act, news cameras record the goings-on and that footage is shown onscreen, and the entire opera takes place on a soundstage—that are odd but appropriate complements to the lunatic goings-on that Chabrier orchestrates (dramatically and musically) with great glee and artfulness.

The cast comprises some of the best singers yet in a Bard opera production, led by baritone Liam Bonner's regal-voiced Valois, luminous soprano Andriana Churchman's easy traversal of the torturously difficult music for the opera's romantic heroine, Minka, and soprano Nathalie Paulin as Alexina, whose duet with Churchman is the score's musical highlight. Leon Botstein paces the long opera rather erratically, but Chabrier's joyful noise still shines through.