



## The Music Man delights at Glimmerglass Opera

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By **David Lowenstein**

There may be “trouble in River City,” but not on stage at the Glimmerglass Festival’s enchanting production of Meredith Wilson’s *The Music Man*. The talented cast, technical design, music, direction and choreography work in perfect barber shop harmony, blending together seamlessly from overture to bows.

Director/Choreographer Marcia Milgrom Dodge sets this production in 1946 rather than the usual 1912. The action remains in small town Iowa so all of the colloquialisms still work. But the update gives the audience a more relatable nostalgic look back at a simpler time and realistic rural place. She also has a color blind eye for casting the right actor/singers in the right roles. The story telling through the scenes, songs, and inventive choreography is clear, entertaining, energized, and appropriately broad where a Broadway classic should be broad.

Often when opera companies attempt musical theater the result is stuffy and stiff. As this story begins we meet the stuffy and stiff town’s people of River City. Conman/Salesman Harold Hill (Dwayne Croft) arrives and takes comic advantage of everyone but the spinster librarian, Marian (Elizabeth Futral). Selling himself as a band leader, he sells instruments, uniforms, and instruction booklets all the while transforming the stuffy and stiff into a band of caring neighbors. As you would expect, Hill and Marion butt heads, then end up falling in love causing Hill to change his conniving ways. There are subplots involving the Mayor’s daughter and the boy from the wrong side of town and Marian’s meddling mother and lisp-plagued brother Winthrop. All are tied together by Wilson’s delightful book, music and lyrics.

It’s a big musical with a big cast all of whom, including the ensemble, achieve that delicate balance between entertainment and believability. Notable among the notables are Cindy Gold as Mrs. Paroo, Henry Wager as Winthrop, Jake Gardner and Ernestine Jackson as the Mayor and his wife, and the very nimble Josh Walden as Marcellus.

In the leads, Croft and Futral are marvelous singing actors. Croft had just the right manipulative swagger, charisma, and charm. Not to mention, his was the richest baritone Harold Hill I have ever heard. Matched with Futral, the gorgeous “Till There Was You” was one of many thrilling highlights. Marion, in the hands of Futral, was compelling, heartwarming, fun, feisty, and full of life. For the first time I really understood Marion falling for Harold, accepting his flaws, without her coming off as a desperate doormat. And the voice was sublime. The over the bar, breath controlled “phrase-ology” she found in the beautiful ballads was breathtaking. There were, however, a few moments of operatic vowel manipulation that took me out of the moment.

As always at Glimmerglass it was a thrill to hear the score masterfully played by a full orchestra under the baton of John DeMain. And to hear the voices live, without amplification. Quoting Dodge, "The story of Harold Hill, who schemes to bamboozle a town and then finds true love, urges contemporary audiences to set aside their problems and surrender to the adventures of the heart." The sentiment sounds naively simplistic and yet that was the exact effect achieved. The Glimmerglass Festival presents Meredith Wilson's *The Music Man* 7/14 – 8/24 at The Alice Busch Opera Theater, Cooperstown, NY Ticket info: 607-547-0700 or [www.glimmerglass.org](http://www.glimmerglass.org)