

Opera Warhorses

An appreciation and analysis of the 'Standard Repertory' of opera

Glimmerglass Festival's Annual Salute to Broadway: Dwayne Croft in Vibrant, Affecting "Music Man" – July 24, 2012

July 29th, 2012

By William Burnett

Upon Francesca Zambello's appointment as General and Artistic Director of the Glimmerglass Festival, she announced that each year's festival season would include a classic Broadway musical. In 2011 she presented "Annie Get Your Gun" [see my review at [Deborah Voigt, Rod Gilfry Romp in Irving Berlin's "Annie Get Your Gun" – Glimmerglass Festival, August 12, 2011](#)]. For 2013 she has scheduled Lerner and Loewe's "Camelot". The choice for the 2012 season was Meredith Willson's blockbuster "The Music Man" about a flim-flam traveling salesman who arrives in a rural Iowa town (in year 1912 in the original musical; in 1946 for the Glimmerglass production) with the intent to con the locals out of their money and then make a quick getaway.

Willson's storyline (he wrote the libretto, lyrics and music) has Hill, like the Wizard of Oz, convince people that they have qualities and talents that they did not think they had. As a result, to his surprise, the town librarian, Marian Paroo, comprehends that the town is better off because of his deceptions and ultimately Hill settles down with Marian in River City, to pursue an honest life.

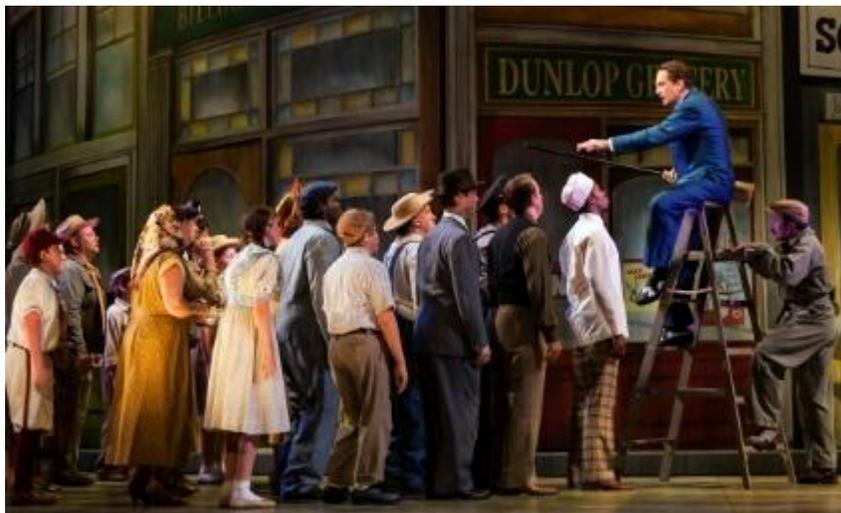
Dwayne Croft's Professor Harold Hill

Zambello has pushed for the Glimmerglass Festival to be even more connected with the surrounding communities of the Lake Otsego region. The largest community, nearby Cooperstown, has long been a tourist destination because of the location of America's Baseball Hall Of Fame there, but the Glimmerglass Festival is an important revenue source to the community as well.

Significantly, Cooperstown is the childhood home of opera baritone Dwayne Croft, who participated in the chorus of the early Glimmerglass Festivals, the very first of which (in 1975), was held at Cooperstown High School.

Pursuing an international career in opera, which included his selection as the 1996 Richard Tucker Award winner, Croft returned to Glimmerglass over two decades later in the starring role of Professor Hill.

[Below: Professor Harold Hill (Dwayne Croft, right, atop ladder) explains to the townspeople of River City that they've got trouble; edited image, based on a Karli Cader photograph, courtesy of the Glimmerglass Festival.]



In previous reviews I have praised Croft's performances in such lead roles as General Robert E. Lee (see **The Remaking of San Francisco Opera, Part I: Glass' "Appomattox" – October 14, 2007**) and Giorgio Germont (see **Runnicles' Conducting, Netrebko's Glamorous Violetta Inspire San Francisco Opera "Traviata" – June 28, 2009**).

But portraying these avuncular gentlemen give no hint of Croft's skill at portraying, as he does so effectively in this musical, a dashing and romantic scoundrel. His Hill showed Croft's comedic skills, as well as his mastery of the complex speech patters and patter songs that is a prerequisite of any artist taking on this role.

[Below: Professor Harold Hill (Dwayne Croft, right) romances Marian the Librarian (Elizabeth Futral, left); edited image, based on a William M. Brown photograph, courtesy of the Glimmerglass Festival.]



Elizabeth Futral's Marian Paroo

Marian Paroo, the librarian who despairs of River City's lack of book-learning, was nicely played by lyric coloratura soprano Elizabeth Futral, who was able to handle the wide range and tricky pitches of her song *My White Knight* with seeming effortlessness. Attractively paired with Croft's Hill, Futral delivered the more familiar standard *Till There Was You* to enthusiastic audience applause.

John DeMain and the Worlds of American Opera and Broadway

One might include the Conductor John DeMain as one of a trio of principals with Croft and Futral. He has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the American dramatic performance music, be it opera or musical comedy, and decades of experience working with many of the major Broadway musical artists, choreographers and composers.

[Below: Conductor John DeMain; edited image, based on a photograph for the Madison Symphony Orchestra.]



DeMain has had a special relationship with Zambello's projects for mainline international opera houses, including her production of Jerome Kern's "Show Boat" (see my review at **[Team Zambello Shows off "Show Boat" to Chicago's Lyric Opera – March 14, 2012](#)**). In the 2012 Glimmerglass Festival he also conducts the Kurt Weill work (see **[Eric Owens is Vocally Powerful, Dramatic and Emotional in Kurt Weill's "Lost in the Stars" – Glimmerglass Festival, July 22, 2012](#)**).

He has been associated with several different productions of George Gershwin and DuBose Heyward's "Porgy and Bess", including those by Zambello (see, for example, **[Eric Owens, Laquita Mitchell Lead Powerful "Porgy](#)**

and Bess” at San Francisco Opera – June 21, 2009) and the New York Harlemt Theater (see my review at **Seattle Opera’s Worthy “Porgy and Bess” – July 30, 2011).**

His “Music Man” orchestra was augmented with more instruments than composed for its Broadway runs, and DeMain’s Glimmerglass Orchestra sounded brilliant throughout, especially in the orchestral prelude with the irresistable orchestration of *76 Trombones*.

Notes on the Supporting Cast

As with last year’s musical, the cast consists of a mix of Young Artists and musical theater veterans.

Cindy Gold, who is Parthy in the Zambello production of “Show Boat”, seen or to be seen at several major American opera house, was hilarious as Mrs. Paroo, who is determined to get her daughter Marian married (and who is successful at the end). Gold is head of acting in Northwestern University’s Department of Theater.

[Below: Winthrop Paroo (Henry Wager, left) kisses Mrs Paroo (Cindy Gold); edited image, based on a Karli Cadel photograph, courtesy of the Glimmerglass Festival.]



Wynn Harmon is the would-be spoiler, Charlie Cowell. Josh Walden is Marcellus (in addition to his choreographic duties) and Allan K. Washington is Tommy Djilas.

In the lively opening scene, the rhythmic patter of salesmen is performed by the Young Artists Eric Bowden, Adam Bielamowicz, Thomas Cannon, Darrell Acon and Clay Hilley. The train conductor is Aaron Ferguson.

Then, in a truly bravura display of the continuous close harmony, John David Boehr joins Bowden, Bielamowicz and Acon in the recurring appearances of the barbership quartet.

Jake Gardner, from nearby Oneonta New York, has had both acting and operatic assignments at Glimmerglass.

Gardner's operatic performances in Chicago (see **Kaufmann Astonishes, Dessay Enraptures, in McVicar "Manon": Lyric Opera of Chicago – October 15, 2008**, San Francisco (see **Debuting Diana Damrau Delights as Donizetti Diva: San Francisco "Fille du Regiment" – October 13, 2009** and Glimmerglass (see, for example, **Pictures at an Exhibition: John Musto's Opera "Later the Same Evening" Brings Edward Hopper's Art to Life: Glimmerglass, August 13, 2011**) have been noted on several occasions.

[Below: Jake Gardner as Mayor Shinn: edited image, based on a William M. Brown photograph, courtesy of the Glimmerglass Festival.]



Deserving special praise is the work of Henry Wager, who plays Marian's intensely withdrawn younger brother Winthrop. Inspired by Hill to break out of his shell, Winthrop becomes an enthusiastic supporter for creating the marching band, and, to the audience's delight, sings the song *Gary, Indiana*, one of the show's highlights.

[Below: Winthrop Paroo (Henry Wager, right) is proud to have received a trumpet to the delight of his sister, Marian Paroo (Elizabeth Futral, left); edited image, based on a Karli Cadel photograph, courtesy of the Glimmerglass Festival.]



The stage direction and choreography was that of Marcia Milgrom Dodge. The sets were by James Noone and costumes by Leon Wiebers.

An obvious labor of love, this “Music Man” was truly magical, revealing Willson’s sophisticated musical writing and even streaks of poignancy in the libretto. I recommend the production unreservedly.