



THE MUSIC MAN - Glimmerglass Festival

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Glimmerglass Festival revives The Music Man.



Reviewed by James Karas

The 2012 Glimmerglass Festival presents two operas and two Broadway musicals. The lighter of the two musicals is Meredith Willson's *The Music Man* whereas Kurt Weill's *Lost in the Stars* has more serious content.

The Music Man opened on Broadway in 1957 and is about a travelling salesman who is a charming con artist. He lands in a town in Iowa after World War I in the original production but in this production, the story is set after World War II. He sells musical instruments and uniforms to the unsuspecting townspeople for a brass band that he intends to form. He pretends to be a professor of music but he is nothing of the kind.

The musical has a considerable amount of humour, some wonderful melodies and a love story. In other words all the ingredients for a Broadway hit. The success of any production of *The Music Man* depends to an inordinate degree on the talent of the charlatan Professor Harold Hill. He needs to convince the town people and more importantly Marian, the town librarian (Elizabeth Futral), that he is the genuine article. This becomes a tough undertaking when Marian finds out that Professor Hill's claim that he graduated from the Gary Conservatory is not true. The Conservatory did not exist at the time of his supposed graduation.

We meet the travelling salesman, the loveable townspeople and follow the budding romance of the two leads. The humour is there and we enjoy most of it and the musical numbers are still good.

But all of this leads to my view that the production directed and choreographed by Marcia Milgrom Dodge, to put it simply, did not grab me. The reason is that Dwayne Croft's Professor Hill lacked the magnetism and conviction of the impostor with the heart of gold to keep us on his side even though we know that he is a fraud.

For some reason, the director decided to make Marian unattractive at the beginning. Why is Hill attracted to her if she looks like an old maid? She is not. She is spruced up in the end but her homeliness in the opening scenes is unnecessary. Futral is fine vocally.

What saves Hill (and keeps the plot moving) is the touching story of Winthrop (Henry Wager), Marian's painfully shy, withdrawn and lisping young brother. Hill gives him a cornet and the kid comes out of his shell. Well done performance by Wager.

The broad humour belongs to the foolish Mayor (Jake Gardner), his wife Eulalie (Ernestine Jackson) and the townspeople.

The ensemble pieces generate considerable energy and in the end a marching band does appear just in time to save Hill from being tar and feathered but we are not convinced why Marian falls for the crook.

The *deus ex machina* appearance of the band at the end to wrap up the show is unconvincing but we can't blame the Glimmerglass production for that.

In the end you get a decent production of a very good, if not great, musical that unfortunately does not achieve all the possibilities of the show.