

REVIEWS FROM ALBANY

Keene Sentinel

October 14, 2015

By Frank Behrens

A 1914 Victor Herbert show given in revised format: “The Only Girl”—with less dialogue, more music

Since Victor Herbert wrote stage musicals from 1895 to 1924, it is no wonder that his music (and plots) evolved from the European operetta type (*Naughty Marietta* and *The Princess Pat*) to shows like *The Only Girl* (1914) that sound like early Jerome Kern with their ragtime numbers and contemporary plots. With available CD recordings of several Herbert works (with dialogue) from the Ohio Light Opera, it is a pleasant pastime to trace this development. Now Light Opera of New York is joining in with recordings on the Albany label like *Orange Blossoms* (1921) and now *The Only Girl*.

I must emphasize that this *Only Girl* is a “revised edition.” The original, as the very helpful program notes tell us, had more dialogue than music and seemed “more like a play with some good music.” So Stage Director Michael Phillips scuttled most of the dialogue that was filled with references to current events, revised what was left and kept but rearranged the songs.

The plot involves a temperamental lyricist nicknamed “Kim” (tenor Kyle Erdos-Knapp), who finds his perfect composer in Ruth Wilson (soprano Antoni Mendezona). He cannot bear the thought of a female partner and... Well, one can guess.

The songs are mostly light hearted and typical of their times. There is a scene in which the men compete in a song contest with the women and sing an anti-marriage song, “Bachelors don’t learn a bit of sense.” The women reply with “Ages ago, as you well know” and are given the prize. And since this is a show about “putting on a show,” a few songs from the show within the show are merely sung as part of a rehearsal.

Mendezona’s lovely voice is operatic, which is appropriate for a work with songs that would be at home in Herbert’s earlier works, while Erdos-Knapp’s sounds more like those heard in current musicals—handsome, youthful. The secondary roles include



singers with strong voices, such as Sarah Best as Jane, and fine comic voices from the other females.

The score is very pleasant without having many really memorable numbers, but it is conducted with a passion by Gerald Steichen. Well worth the hearing, especially for local theatre groups looking for something out of the ordinary to perform.

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