

Ghent Playhouse, Ghent, NY
Lend Me a Tenor, by Mark Ludwig. Directed by Ed Dignum.
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“Nice. . .is living!”

A good comedy is the perfect antidote to a cold winter’s eve. “Lend Me a Tenor,” the current show at the Ghent Playhouse is a prime example. Farcical in nature with its six doors in the set, the play gives us people whose emotions are outsized, just like the writing in most operas and its characters, all opera-activated, match the over-stretched emotions of *Pagliacci*, the opera in question. Guest artist Tito Morelli has come to Cleveland to play the leading role but once he is in town whatever could go wrong does just that. It is up to the company’s associate manager, Max, to make things right and he manages it magnificently. However, in the course of the evening mistaken identities, enamored fans and grand dames with attitude are all given a shot at operatic triumphs.



Meg Dooley, Lara Denmark, Brian Yorck Mark Wilson;
Photo: John Shea

As in many farce-comedies mistaken identity, costumes and masks, slamming doors and superb timing are major factors Author Ken Ludwig supplies them all and director Ed Dignum applies them liberally. Clothing falls to floors. Champagne comes by way of a fan, doubled images abound and there is even a jealous Italian wife who makes noise, disappears forever only to return just when she is most needed again. It all puts the “grand” in Grand Opera.

The cast is a superb matching of talents to roles. Brian Edward is a perfect Tito. He has the opera-singer styling to perfection. Meg Dooley as the compan's economic grande-dare is simply marvelous with her grand gestures and soft-spoken subtleties. Lara Denmark as the star-struck romantic is charming, perhaps a bit too charming, in fact. Amanda Boyd's up-and-coming opera star is delicious. Wanda Libardi plays Maria Morelli with strong Italian passion, just right.



Lara Denmark, Patrick Heffernan;
Photo: John Shea

Patrick Heffernan plays Max with a bit more subtlety than is needed but his own patina of pleasantness gives his character a wonderful appeal. Brian Yorck is appropriately funny as the Bellhop. As Saunders, the man behind just about everything, Mark Wilson is beautifully blustery, appropriately devious and very funny indeed in one of the best performances I've seen him give over the years.

The two room, six door set, well designed and constructed by Dignum and Cathy Lee Visscher is excellent as is the lighting and sound design work by Michael O'Keeffe. Samantha Landy has executed wonderful 1934 costumes for this production.

I enjoy this play whenever I see it and this production, almost sold-out I understand, is a fine one, well worth getting to see. Calling the theater immediately to find what's left is what I would encourage you to do. There isn't a bad seat in this 104 seat house, so grab whatever you can get, laugh a little and put winter out of your mind for 2 and a half hours.

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Wanda Libardi, Brian Edward;
Photo: John Shea

Lend Me a Tenor plays through February 16 at the Ghent Playhouse, 6 Town Hall Place, Ghent, NY,
For information and tickets call 518.392.6264, or go to their website at www.ghentplayhouse.org