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## **New troupe takes flight with 'Fledermaus'**

**By James F. Cotter**

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Blooming Grove – Under the direction of Claudia Cummings, the Opera Company of the Highlands is presenting the waltz-king Johann Strauss' comic opera "Die Fledermaus" ("The Bat") on the next two weekends. The title refers to an elaborate plan that involves a masquerade party. This allows Strauss to be at his musical best with delightful arias, duets, trios and choral singing to waltz and polka tunes. This production skips the dancing, but the highlighted singing makes the score pure listening pleasure. The voices and acting are first-rate, and Kathryn Luciana's costume designs are visually splendid.

Friday night's opening performance at the United Church of Christ in Blooming Grove featured soprano Julie Ziavras in the role of Rosalinda, soprano Sarah Rice as her servant Adele and tenor Michael Torpey as her husband, Eisenstein.

These three singers will alternate in subsequent performances with Suzanne Clune as Rosalinda, Joanna McIntire as Adele and Osvaldo Cicchetti as Eisenstein. The purpose of double-casting enables Cummings to give more singers stage time since they also sing in the chorus and in solos when not acting as leads.

Another twist to traditional casting is to have the part of Prince Orlofsky, usually sung by a female mezzo-soprano, sung by countertenor Thomas Mark Fallon.

Tenor David Pietri sings the role of Rosalinda's would-be lover Alfred, who ends up in jail instead of Eisenstein. Baritone Brian Jagde is Dr. Falke, who plots revenge on his friend Eisenstein. Baritone Jeremy Moore is Dr. Blind, Eisenstein's incompetent lawyer.

Baritone Joseph Schommer is Frank, the prison warden. Soprano Sarah Levine Simon is Sally, and soprano Kathy Lawrence is her cousin Suzie. The show is enhanced by the vigorous accompaniment of Lillie Mikesell and Joel Flowers on piano.

Some of the Strauss trios match Mozart for their wit and excitement. Rosalinda, Eisenstein and Blind team up for a rousing satire on lawyers in Act 1, and the feuding couple join Adele and later Alfred for another pair of lively trios.

Rosalinda and Eisenstein whirl through a word-chiming duet, "How engaging, how exciting," and Rosalinda sings a marvelous aria, "Voice of my homeland." Adele has several charming solos as well.

Ziavras uses her rich soprano to soar in the high ranges and fill the scenes with drama as Torpey's expressive tenor creates a sonorous exchange. Rice's Adele is clear-voiced and vivacious. Jagde's baritone adds authority as Falke manipulates the plot, while Schommer tunes his baritone to the intonations of a tipsy drinker. The outstanding voice of the show, however, belongs to Fallon, whose countertenor leaps octaves and rings with color and humor as he announces, "From time to time I entertain."

When these voices join in the ensemble finale celebrating champagne, the music bubbles with high spirits and sparkles with delight.