

# The Post Journal

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### Chautauqua Opera Shows Its Lighter Side

By Robert W. Plyler

CHAUTAUQUA- Chautauqua - Two weeks ago, Chautauqua Opera's brilliant production of "Werther" might have broken your heart.

This week, their production of "Once Upon a Mattress" promises to have you rolling in the aisles.

The show's music was composed by Mary Rodgers, daughter of the famed Richard Rodgers and mother of the young man who composed last year's successful "The Light in the Piazza."

Her music is light and brassy, yet has the occasional rich melody which makes musical comedy our nation's favorite form of entertainment.

The light plot, by Jay Thompson, Dean Fuller, and Marshall Barer, is based on the classic fairy tale of "The Princess and the Pea." A dominating queen is determined that no woman will ever be good enough for her precious son, so she insists that any candidates for his hand must pass some impossible test.

Meanwhile, she has ruled that no one in the kingdom may marry until the prince has done so. Sir Harry and Lady Larkin are beginning to hear the ominous flapping of stork wings, so he goes out to find the princess to marry the prince.

The role of the princess he finds, made a star of Carol Burnett, who played the role in army

boots, if I remember correctly. The princess is put to bed on 20 soft mattresses with one small pea under the bottom one. The queen says if the girl is true royalty, she will be too sensitive to sleep with the pea in place.

At Chautauqua, Princess Winnifred the Woebegone is portrayed by Sara Wordsworth. She can belt out her songs as the role was intended, and can mug and clown as well. It's a fine portrayal.

Carolann Page was a driving force as the whining, belittling Queen Aggravain. Her scenes, especially with Keith Jurosko as her suffering husband, King Sextimus, were always a lot of laughs.

The supporting roles in this show are numerous and important. Sir Harry and his expectant Lady were well performed by Kevin Vortmann and Ava Pine. Poor brideless Dauntless the Drab was a very funny Gregory Zavracky.

Throughout the show, the suffering king is supported in his hiding from his wife's fury by a jester, powerfully sung by David Crawford, and a minstrel, well done by Frank Vlastnik.

The queen's partner in crime was her wizard, played with glee by James Lawson.

Conductor Braden Toan and the Chautauqua Opera Orchestra went from symphony orchestra to pit band in the shake of a baton, and they were delightful,

strong and wonderfully versatile. And, it is precious and rare to have a pit full of skilled musicians. Musical comedy can rarely succeed without it.

Director Jay Lesenger pulled out all the stops, creating a production which was fun to watch, and wonderfully paced so that the laughs stopped only when the music turned pretty.

It is inevitable when an opera company does musical theater that a few roles will be somewhat over-sung, but this never sounds like Placido Domingo, teaming up with John Denver. It works very well.

Steven Capone's set was suitably magical, and the elaborate costumes of Helen E. Rodgers clearly matched the fairy tale fantasies of the many children who were present in the invited audience.

Choreographer Bill Fabris was charged with having a stage full of singers suddenly become dancers, and while most of them weren't Broadway hoofers, I saw many toes tapping in the seats.

If you like a musical comedy, you're not going to see a better one around here, anytime soon.

*Once Upon A Mattress* was reviews in dress rehearsal at the company's request. It will be performed at 2 p.m. Sunday and 7:30 p.m. Monday at Norton Hall.