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Lawrence University

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# Lawrence University Presents Benjamin Britten's Comic Opera "Albert Herring"

January 28, 2013

In commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Benjamin Britten, Lawrence University brings the great British composer's hilarious coming-of-age comic opera "Albert Herring" to the stage Feb. 14-17. Performances in Stansbury Theatre of the Music-Drama Center are scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Feb. 14-16 with a 3 p.m. matinee performance Sunday, Feb. 17. Tickets, at \$10 for adults and \$5 for seniors and students, are available through the Lawrence University Box Office, 920-832-6749.



Originally set in 1900, guest director/choreographer Nicola Bowie transports the production to 1947, the year Britten wrote the opera. "It is a period that resonated with me, and I believe further serves to accentuate the characters, making them more relevant to an audience in 2013," said Bowie, an accomplished director who has staged operas with the New York City Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago and Washington Opera, among others. "It proved to be a perfect fit, emphasizing that life in many rural areas of Britain and probably elsewhere has changed very little over the last few hundred years."

**Intricate and Witty**

Pairing an intricate but “listenable” score with a witty libretto, “Albert Herring” parodies life in a rural British village, poking fun at puffed-up politicians, flighty school teachers, vapid vicars, bumbling police officers and an assortment of other eccentrics. But his treatment of shy young Albert’s coming of age has an underpinning of sensitivity and genuine emotion.

When the village committee fails to find a local girl virtuous enough to be crowned queen of its May Day festival, Albert, a virginal “mama’s boy,” is crowned May King instead. Unhappy with his prudish reputation and with the help of with the help of a little spiked lemonade, Albert breaks away from his mother’s domination and the suppressive morals of his elders for a night of debauchery and adventure. While comic in tone, the opera is as musically complex as any the more serious works penned by Britten, named the most frequently performed opera composer born in the 20th century by *Opera America*.

“‘Albert Herring’ is a wonderful learning experience for our students because it features a large cast of characters, each of whom has significant musical, dramatic and vocal challenges,” said Bonnie Koestner, associate professor of music at Lawrence and vocal coach for the production. “With its theme of a young man’s awkward journey to manhood and independence, it is an ideal dramatic subject for college students. This opera is a major undertaking for undergraduates, but our students have risen to the challenge admirably and are prepared to give our audience a very entertaining evening of musical theatre.”

The double-cast production features junior Ian Koziara and senior Issa Ransom as the titular character. Junior Zoie Reams and sophomore Elizabeth Vaughan play Albert’s overbearing mother. Senior Cayla Rosche and junior Gabriella Guilfoil play Lady Billows, an elderly autocrat, while senior Susan Borkowski and junior Graycie Gardner play Florence, Lady Billows’ companion.

Octavio Mas-Arocas conducts a 13-piece orchestra. Karin Kopschke served as the production’s costume designer and Steve Barnes designed the set. Dave Owens served as technical director while 2004 Lawrence graduate and New York City-based consultant Aaron Sherkow served as the production’s guest lighting designer.