



**BALL STATE
UNIVERSITY**

**College of Fine Arts
School of Music**

Ball State Opera Theatre

presents

Die lustige Witwe

Music by Franz Lehár

Libretto by Victor Léon & Leo Stein

**Saturday, November 23, 2024 | 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, November 24, 2024 | 3 p.m.
Sursa Performance Hall**

BIOGRAPHIES



Equally at home in vocal and instrumental repertoire, **Cara Chowning** is in demand as a coach, music director and collaborative artist. She has performed extensively throughout the United States, South America, and Europe as a duo partner, chamber musician and orchestral pianist. A frequent guest coach and conductor, Chowning is the music director for the vocal series of the Bar Harbor Music Festival, and regularly performs at conventions of the National Flute Association, NASA and the International Double Reed Society. Chowning's piano and wind trio, the Trio Village, is dedicated to bringing works by women and other lesser-known composers to national and international audiences.

Chowning has served on the faculties of the Cleveland Institute, Simpson College, Oklahoma City University, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the American Institute of Music Studies in Graz, Austria. She has been a guest artist at the ABRAF festival in Sao Paulo, Brazil, the Teatro Bicentenario in San Juan, Argentina, and the Mitad al Mundo Flute Festival in Quito, Ecuador. She has lectured and performed for Road Scholars and Uniworld cruises and has been broadcast on Public Television and Radio. Her discography as collaborative pianist is available on all paid musical platforms.

An accomplished coach and music director, Chowning has prepared opera and musical theater productions at the professional, young artist, and collegiate level. She has served on the music staff of Cleveland Opera, Lyric Opera Cleveland, Opera Cleveland, Finger Lakes Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, Kansas Lyric Opera, and Starlight Amphitheater. Her students and singers from her private coaching studio appear in young artist programs, opera houses, and on cruise ships worldwide.



Jon Truitt has directed more than 30 professional productions including *Falstaff* in 2022, *Barber of Seville* in 2021, *Fanciulla del West*, in 2020, *Norma* and *The Elixir of Love* in 2019, and *Die Zauberflöte* and *Beatrice et Benedict* in 2018. He looks forward to upcoming productions of *Desert Song*, *Fidelio*, and *Don Pasquale* around the US in the next year. His work has been seen at opera companies across the U.S., including Indianapolis Opera, Asheville Lyric Opera, Union Avenue Opera, Winter Opera (St. Louis), and St. Petersburg

Opera. His original script translation of *Die Zauberflöte* was featured in Opera America and has been remounted frequently around the country. He appears as a baritone across the country at companies such as New Orleans Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, Asheville Lyric Opera, Mobile

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Opera, Pensacola Opera, St. Petersburg Opera, and Opera Illinois. Jon Truitt is the Associate Director, Director of Opera, and Professor of Voice at Ball State University. He has sung with the Evansville Philharmonic, Jacksonville Symphony, Acadiana Symphony, and Muncie Symphony, and several concert performances have been broadcast on Public Radio and Television. Additionally, he was a two-time apprentice artist with the Des Moines Metro Opera, and a Metropolitan Opera Regional finalist.



Kerry Glann, associate director of choral activities at Ball State, conducts the Concert Choir and Vox Anima treble chorus, prepares opera choruses, and teaches conducting and graduate choral literature. He previously taught at Kent State University and in the public schools of Ohio. He holds degrees in music education and conducting from Bowling Green State University, Kent State University, and the University of North Texas. Dr. Glann is also artistic director of Masterworks Chorale and director of music at First Presbyterian Church, both in Muncie. He served two seasons as conductor of the Evansville Philharmonic Chorus and is a past president of the Indiana Choral Directors Association. Choirs under his direction have appeared at conferences of the Indiana Music Education Association, Ohio Music Education Association, and American Choral Directors Association. Internationally, he has conducted in Argentina, Europe, and South Africa.

An experienced theatre conductor, Glann spent seventeen seasons as musical director of The Huron Playhouse, a professional summer theatre in Huron, Ohio, where he led performances of over thirty productions. He is now on the directing staff of the Bigfork Summer Playhouse in Bigfork, Montana. While running the opera program at Kent State, he conducted both university and professional productions.



Lilly Dorton (choreographer) is a senior musical theater major from Tampa, Florida. She is so excited to be helping choreograph her first opera at Ball State! She would like to thank her professors that she has worked with so far and her family who have always loved and supported her.



Originally from Mobile, Alabama, and new to Ball State University, LeeArron Klosterman serves as the Coordinator of Collaborative Piano in Music and Musical Theatre. His duties include playing for Opera Theatre, Instrumental Studios, Introduction to the Singing Actor, and Musical Theatre Studio Classes. At Ball State, LeeArron is dedicated to fostering a collaborative and engaging environment that supports his students' growth as individuals and artist-musicians.

Prior to joining Ball State, LeeArron lived in North Carolina, where he is pursuing his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Collaborative Piano at UNC Greensboro, studying with Dr. Jim Douglass. During his time there, he worked extensively with the UNCG Opera Theatre, serving as répétiteur and diction coach for productions such as Viardot's *Cendrillon*, Rimsky-Korsakov's *Mozart and Salieri*, Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, and Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, and served as a pianist for the university's nationally acclaimed Summer Music Camp. He also collaborated with Greensboro Opera as the pianist for their Youth Opera Summer Camp and the chorus rehearsal pianist for their 2022 production of *La Bohème*.

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Cast Biographies



Bass-baritone **Nathan Anton** (Baron Zeta) is a third-year Doctor of Arts student in Vocal Performance studying with Dr. Mei Zhong. He has performed the title role in *Don Pasquale*, the Page in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, Falke in *Die Fledermaus*, and Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte* with Ball State Opera Theater. He made his operatic debut in 2019 with Illinois State's Opera Practicum as Capital IV in Virgil Thomson's *Capital Capitals*. He graduated from Illinois State University with a Bachelor of Music Education in 2020.



Colleen Tiernan(Valencienne) is a Sophomore Vocal Performance student under the instruction of Dr. Daniel Narducci. She has appeared in three operas so far at Ball State, including *The Tender Land* as Beth and *Suor Angelica* as a Lay Sister. She is so excited to perform in another Ball State Opera Theatre Production and hopes you enjoy the music!



Gabrianna Bruestle (Valencienne, cover) is a second-year vocal performance major and is covering the role of Valencienne in *Die lustige Witwe* this semester. Previously, she had been in Ball State University's Opera productions of *Suor Angelica*, *Il Campanello De Notte*, and *The Tender Land* as part of the cast and chorus. She is thankful for her family and friends who have supported her thus far and looks forward to what the future may bring.



Holding degrees from Louisiana College and the University of Denver, **Benjamin Swain** (Count Danilo) has performed the roles of Antonio (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Dr. Gregg (*Gallantry*), Vogelsang (*The Impresario*), and Bob (*The Old Maid and the Thief*) with Louisiana College Opera Theater. He also performed *The Grinch (Seussical the Musical)* with Theater Louisiana College. After joining the University of Denver's Lamont Opera Theater in 2022, Benjamin appeared as The Pilot (*The Little Prince*) in 2023 and Demetrius (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) in 2024. He made his European premiere in 2023 singing Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*) with Berlin Opernfest. Most recently, Benjamin sang

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Conte (*Le nozze di Figaro*) with Prague Summer Nights in the historic Estates Theater and returned to Berlin Opernfest to reprise Conte. In addition to stage experience, Benjamin has performed numerous times in concert. In 2014, Benjamin joined Seicento Baroque Ensemble where he performed multiple concerts as a chorus member and featured soloist. He also was a founding member of the chamber ensemble SoundCity Singers of Seattle, WA in 2019. Benjamin was the soloist for a recent performance of Vaughn Williams' *Five Mystical Songs*.

Jared Slothower (Count Danilo) is a lyric baritone, passionate music educator, and collaborative pianist based in Indianapolis. Jared has sung with the Indianapolis opera, Opera D'arte, CCM opera, Rock Valley College orchestra, the Rockford symphony pops orchestra, and the Second Presbyterian celebration orchestra. Jared currently works as the baritone section leader at Second Presbyterian church, staff accompanist at Anderson University, and has a thriving vocal

studio in the greater Indianapolis area. He is thrilled to be making his mainstage debut at Ball State in this production of *Die Lustige Witwe* and would like to thank his husband Dennis for his unwavering love and support.



Maggie Smith (Hanna Glawari) is a second-year graduate student in voice from Howell, Michigan. She is a voice student of Dr. Daniel Narducci. Maggie has performed several roles with BSOT throughout both her undergraduate and graduate career such as Laurie in Copland's *The Tender Land*, Suor Genovieffa in Puccini's *Suor Angelica*, Emmie in Britten's *Albert Herring*, Spirit 1 in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, and Mabel in *The Pirates of Penzance*. She has also had the opportunity to cover roles including The Fairy in *Cendrillon* by Massenet as well as Younger Alice

in Tom Cipullo's *Glory Denied*. Maggie looks forward to learning the roles of Hanna in *Die lustige Witwe* and Cinderella in *Cendrillon* to finish her last year of study at Ball State.

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Sara Shuffitt (Njegus, Hanna cover) is a third-year vocal performance major at Ball State University. As a singer, Sara has had the opportunity to perform in four operas here, including *The Pirates of Penzance* (Chorus), *Giulio Cesare* (Chorus), *The Tender Land* (Mrs. Splinters/Chorus), *Il Campanello* (Chorus), and *Suor Angelica* (the Nursing Sister). Earlier in her career she also performed in numerous musicals and plays such as *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (Johanna), *Little Women* (Jo March), *Lost in Yonkers* (Bella Kurnitz), and more. Sara has loved every minute of her time in this show and hopes that everyone enjoys the magic!



Conductor and singer **Spencer Domer** (Camille) is a Masters student in Choral Conducting at Ball State University. As a singer, Spencer has been fortunate to perform in nearly 20 operas in Leading, Comprimario, and Ensemble roles at the University and Professional level. Roles performed and covered include; Martin (*The Tender Land*), Frederic & Samuel (*The Pirates of Penzance*), Ferrando (*Così Fan Tutte*), Rinuccio (*Gianni Schicchi*), Spiridione (*Il Campanello*), Prunier (*La Rondine*), and Ernesto (*Don Pasquale*).

Companies he has performed in productions with include; Union Avenue Opera, Raylynmor Opera, MIOpera, Opera Edwardsville and served as a chorister with the Fort Wayne Philharmonic, Five Cities Baroque Festival, and in residency at St. Albans Cathedral in England. Spencer is proud to serve as the Founding Artistic Director of the Riverbend Youth Chorale in Alton, Illinois, a Nonprofit choral program that allows singers of all levels of music experience to create excellent choral music. He is also on staff as the Assistant Choir Director at High Street United Methodist Church in Muncie, Indiana. He would like to thank his friends, family, mentors, and his beloved cat, Henry, for their unending support.



Damian Davis (Cascada) is a 3rd year Vocal Performance major. He has been involved in the opera program at Ball State since his first year, starring in *Amahl and The Night Visitors*, *Don Pasquale*, starring as Top in *The Tender Land*, and Enrico in *Il campanello di notte*.

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Kaida Collard (St. Brioche) is a sophomore at Ball State University, majoring in Vocal Performance. She grew up in Monticello, Indiana, and in her high school years, participated in Concert and Marching band, Concert and Show Choir, and the many musicals they presented. She is very proud and excited to be a part of Ball State's Opera, *The Merry Widow* as St. Brioche!



Michael Gant (Bogdonovitch) is a first-year Freshman Vocal Performance Major and a first-year performer for the Opera Theatre and for Ball State University Singers. Michael has performed for 4 years in the Lawrenceburg Shakespeare Company and in Lawrenceburg High School's Tiger Pizazz as well as in Voices of Indiana's Young Voices. He is hoping to perform one day all over the world.



Ayrice Wilson, (Sylviane) a third-year Doctor of Arts in Vocal Performance student hails from the beautiful twin-island state of Trinidad & Tobago. This year Ayrice will sing the role of Sylviane in Ball State Opera Theatre's production of Lehar's *Die Lustige Witwe*. At BSOT, Ayrice has performed the roles of Venus in Offenbach's *Orphée aux enfers* and 1st Lady in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. She has also performed the roles of Frasquita in Bizet's *Carmen*, Mademoiselle Silberklang in Mozart's *Der Schauspieldirektor*, Adele in Strauss II's *Die Fledermaus*, and Mother in Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. Ayrice is also an experienced chorister and soloist performing soprano solos in Fanshawe's *African Sanctus*, Jenkins' *The Armed Man*, and Gabriel Faure's *Requiem*.



Jordan Gortner (Sylviane) is a freshman in Vocal Performance at Ball State University. Though they have performed in numerous musicals, recitals, and opera scene programs, this is Jordan's first fully staged opera, and they are so excited! Jordan would like to thank their family and friends for their love and support.

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Lawson Chrisman (Kromow) Audio Engineer and Musician, Lawson Chrisman is a fourth-year student at Ball State and is set to graduate in the Spring 2025 semester with a degree in Music Media Production with an emphasis in Audio Engineering Technology. Lawson has performed in two other Operas (Il Campanello and Giulio Cesare) as a chorus member and will be performing for the first time in a roll this semester. At Ball State, Lawson has worked on a Netflix critical listening exam, 5.1 and 7.1.4 surround mixes, DSP, and other stereo mixes.

Lawson is a proud member of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia fraternity and seeks to elevate music in any way he can in the community, whether that be holding fundraisers or singing for Westminster Village Retirement Community in Muncie. He would like to thank his family, friends, professors and everyone else who has mentored him to become a better musician, performer, and person.



Emily Sanders (Olga) is a senior music education major taking her final bow with BSOT. She enjoyed her time studying voice under Dr. Smith, and can't wait to spend her last semester student teaching at Cherry Tree Elementary in the spring. You've seen her as Amahl (*Amahl and the Night Visitors*), Serafina (*Il Campanello di notte*), Beth (*The Tender Land*), and in the chorus of *Don Pasquale*. Emily was the NATS State Champion in

fall of 2022, and placed 3rd in her first international solo competition in 2023. This summer she represented BSOT at Oxford University's Music Across the Pond as a festival singer. 2 leading roles, 3 competitions, 5 operas, and 8 masterclasses later and she's got a lot of wonderful memories to look back on. She'd like to say thank you to her professors, family, and friends for their constant support. "Enjoy the show! Here's to a great four years. One final time - ROCK ON!"



Gabriella Ramonell (Olga) is a third-year international student at BSU, pursuing a Bachelor of Music Performance (voice). Previously, Gabriela has performed with BSOT as Mrs. Jenks (*The Tender Land*), as Sorella Conversa II, and Sorella Cercatrice II (*Suor Angelica*), and has participated in the Fall Workshop Scenes Program and in the 2023 and 2024 Spring Gala. Gabriela attended Grand Rapids Community College and earned an

Associate of Music degree. She would like to thank her family and mentors for their encouragement and support while pursuing her studies.

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Cameron Tyo (Pritschitsch) is a senior Journalism/TCOM (news concentration) and Spanish major. While at Ball State, he has been involved in the choruses of *Giulio Cesare*, *The Tender Land*, *Il Campanello di Notte*, and *Suor Angelica*. This is his first named role. Along with his performances with BSOT, he has been involved in Cardinal Chorus and University Choral Union for four years.



Franny Church (Praškowia) is a sophomore vocal student studying in the commercial department as well as participating in Vox Anima Women's Chorus and other classical and opera events held at Ball State University. She started her music career at 12, singing in rock bands, then moving on to choir and playing leaves in middle school musicals, such as Rapunzel in *Into the Woods*. In high school, Franny was in show choir placing first in best solo in a set, and was a part of the ensemble in their high school's production of Chicago. Franny has participated in multiple Opera Productions at BSU, including her first named role in the spring production of *Suor Angelica*, and is now excited to sing in *Die lustige Witwe*.



Qiaolan Wang (Praškowia) is a lyric coloratura soprano and a second-year doctoral student in vocal performance. During her undergraduate and graduate studies, she participated in numerous opera performances, showcasing her strong artistic foundation and profound understanding of her roles. Her performances are not only technically outstanding but also emotionally rich, capable of touching the hearts of the audience.

In her performances, Wang Qiaolan has successfully embodied several classic roles, demonstrating her versatility and depth in operatic interpretations. Her voice is clear and penetrating, allowing her to master various styles of repertoire. As she continues to progress in her singing career, Wang Qiaolan's artistic prospects are bright, and we look forward to more captivating performances from her in the future.