

Under the Gracious Patronage of the Ambassador of France, Laurent Bili

OFFENBACH'S



**LA
GRANDE**

**DUCHESSE
DE GÉROLSTEIN**

Simon Charette
Artistic Director & Conductor
www.operacomiquedewashington.org

Feb 21st, 7:30pm

Maison Française de L'Ambassade de France

Under the Gracious Patronage of the Ambassador of France, Laurent Bili

L'Opéra Comique de Washington

presents

La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein

by Jacques Offenbach

Featuring

La Grande Duchesse
Frick
General Boum
Wanda
Prince Paul
Baron Puck
Baron Grog
Népomuc
Narrator/Stage Director
Assistant Stage Director

Melanie Ashkar
Danny Leclerc
Raymond Ghattas
Hayley Abramowitz
Daniel Fleming
Joe Haughton
Christopher Fotis
Lejerian Williams
Erica Ferguson
Katherine Blobner

Artistic Director & Conductor

Simon Charette

La Maison Française de l'Ambassade de France in Washington, DC
Friday, February 21, 2025 at 7:30pm

Dear Friends of L'Opéra Comique de Washington,

It is with great joy that I welcome you to this evening's performance, presented by L'Opéra Comique de Washington. As General and Artistic Director, I am thrilled to share with you our latest production—Jacques Offenbach's brilliant and satirical *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein*.

Since founding L'Opéra Comique de Washington in 2023, my vision has been to bring the vibrant world of French operetta to life in the Nation's capital. Offenbach's works, in particular, hold a special place in our mission, blending sharp wit, infectious melodies, and theatrical charm to create an experience that is as delightful today as it was in the 19th century.

Tonight, under the Gracious Patronage of the Ambassador of France, Laurent Bili, and within the elegant setting of the French Embassy, our dedicated artists bring to life this lively tale of political satire and whimsical romance. *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* is a work that remains strikingly relevant, a playful yet pointed commentary on power and vanity wrapped in Offenbach's signature effervescence.

At L'Opéra Comique de Washington, we are committed not only to reviving these exquisite works but also to providing invaluable performance opportunities to emerging operatic talent. Your support allows us to continue sharing this extraordinary repertoire with new audiences, enriching Washington's cultural landscape.

I extend my deepest gratitude to our patrons, supporters, and the French Embassy for making this evening possible. May this performance transport you into Offenbach's delightful world, where humor, music, and spectacle reign supreme.

Bienvenue à *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein*!

Simon Charette

General and Artistic Director

Musical Numbers

ACT 1

Overture

En attendant que l'heure sonne

Allez, jeunes filles, dansez et tournez!

A cheval sur la discipline

Me voici, me voici

Portez armes

Ah! Que j'aime les militaires

Ah! C'est un fameux régiment

Chronique de la Gazette de Hollande

Ils vont tous partir

Voici le sabre de mon père

Vous pouvez sans terreur

The OCW Orchestra

Chorus

Wanda & Fritz

Général Boum

Wanda & Fritz

Chorus

La Grande Duchesse

La Grande Duchesse, Fritz & Chorus

Prince Paul & La Grande Duchesse

Chorus

La Grande Duchesse & Company

Fritz & Company

INTERMISSION

ACT 2

Né devinez-vous pas?

Max était soldat de fortune

Après la victoire

En très bon ordre nous partîmes

Oui, général quelqu'un vous aime

Dites-lui qu'on l'a remarqué

Général Boum, Prince Paul & Puck

Général Boum, Prince Paul & Puck

Chorus

Fritz

La Grande Duchesse & Fritz

La Grande Duchesse & Fritz

ACT 3 1st Tableau

Entracte

O grandes leçons du passé

Sortez, sortez de ce couloir

Tournez, tournez, manivelles

Faut-il, mon Dieu, que je sois bête

Ouvrez, ouvrez !

A cheval! Vite, Monsieur le Général

The OCW Orchestra

La Grande Duchesse & Boum

Puck, Paul, Grog & Boum

Boum & Chorus

Wanda & Fritz

Chorus, Wanda & Fritz

Puck, Paul, Boum, Fritz & Chorus

2nd Tableau

Au repas comme à la bataille

Il était un de mes aïeux

Voici revenir mon pauvre homme

Eh bien, Altesse, me voilà!

Enfin, j'ai repris mon panache

Chorus

La Grande Duchesse & Chorus

Wanda & Chorus

Fritz & Company

Company

Synopsis

Act 1

Welcome to Gérolstein, where politics take a backseat to romance, and the ruler is more interested in flirting than governing! The Grand Duchess has been betrothed to the foppish Prince Paul, but she finds him utterly uninspiring. To distract her from her boredom, her scheming chamberlain, Baron Puck, stirs up a war.

Enter Fritz, a dashing young soldier whose only real concerns are his love for the charming Wanda and his deep dislike of General Boum. But when he catches the eye of the Grand Duchess, his life changes overnight—she promotes him from Private to General at lightning speed! With his new rank comes a new responsibility: he must lead the army to victory, whether he's ready or not...

Act 2

Fritz's battle plan is as unconventional as it is effective—he defeats the enemy by getting them completely drunk with 300,000 bottles of wine. Victorious and celebrated, he returns home, but the Grand Duchess has more than just medals in mind for him. She's ready to reward him with even greater honors—if only he'd take the hint.

Unfortunately for her, Fritz is hopelessly devoted to Wanda and, to her horror, asks for permission to marry her immediately. Furious at being spurned, the Grand Duchess hatches a new plan: if she can't have him, she'll have him eliminated.

Act 3

Just as the assassination plot is set in motion, the Grand Duchess gets distracted—again. This time, her affections land on the mysterious Baron Grog. But her romantic misfortunes continue when she learns he already has a wife and four children. Resigned, she decides that maybe Prince Paul wasn't such a bad option after all. "If you can't have the one you love, you must love the one you have."

As for Fritz, rather than meeting a tragic fate, he's simply tormented with noisy serenades on his wedding night and sent off on a fake military mission—where he ends up mistaken for someone else and thoroughly beaten by an angry husband. Stripped of his flashy titles, he's free to marry Wanda and settle down as a (questionably qualified) schoolmaster. Meanwhile, General Boum gets his job back, Baron Puck regains favor, Baron Grog escapes back to his family, and the Grand Duchess, ever the pragmatist, prepares for her wedding to Prince Paul.

With its whirlwind of romantic mishaps, power plays, and laugh-out-loud moments, *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* is Offenbach at his satirical best—wrapped in music that will stay with you long after the final curtain falls.

The Artists



Lebanese-American mezzo-soprano **Melanie Ashkar (La Grande Duchesse)** is known for the “rich texture” of her voice and her “delightfully expressive” stage presence. She has performed across the United States in opera and concert with companies including Utah Opera, Utah Symphony, Central City Opera, Opera Southwest, New York City Opera, OperaDelaware, Opera Baltimore, the Oratorio Society of Virginia, and Virginia Opera. This season, she makes debuts with Opera Western Reserve, Winter Opera St. Louis, the Canton Symphony Orchestra, and the Chesapeake Orchestra. Her favorite roles include Mother (*Amahl and the Night Visitors*), Jo (*Little Women*), Olga (*Eugene Onegin*), La Ciesca (*Gianni Schicchi*), and the Fox (*The Little Prince*). Melanie has been recognized by the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, Opera Piccola, the Schuyler Foundation for Career Bridges Grant Awards, and the Gerda Lissner Foundation. A Washington, DC native, she holds degrees from the University of Virginia, Georgetown University, and Mannes College.



Tenor, **Danny Leclerc (Fritz)**’s voice is distinguished by its rich yet luminous timbre, ease in the upper register, and remarkable stamina. His fine musicianship, sensitivity, and natural stage presence make him a compelling and versatile artist. Particularly suited to the French repertoire, as well as Verdi and Puccini, he has received acclaim for his interpretations of Rodolfo (*La Bohème*) and the Verdi Requiem on Canadian and American stages. His repertoire also includes major oratorios and requiems, along with a strong commitment to contemporary opera, having premiered multiple roles in new works. A 2024 grand finalist in the CSMusic Competition, Danny is also a finalist for the 24th International Great Tenor Competition in Poland. His operatic credits include Turiddu (*Cavalleria Rusticana*), Roméo (*Roméo et Juliette*), Luigi (*Il Tabarro*), Tebaldo (*I Capuleti e i Montecchi*), and roles in the world premieres of Rabbi, the Opera and Titanic, the Opera. Upcoming engagements include opera galas, a concert at Opera na Zamku in Poland, and his role debut as Fritz in *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* with L’Opéra Comique de Washington in 2025.



Bold and versatile, soprano **Hayley Abramowitz (Wanda)** (they/them) is based in Washington, DC. This season, they debut with Bel Cantanti Opera in recital and perform as the soloist for Messiah at St. Peter's Episcopal Church. They return to L'Opéra Comique de Washington as Wanda in *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* and compete in the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition (Maryland District) and Opera Naples' Pavarotti Foundation Competition. A winner of Opera Mississippi's John Alexander National Vocal Competition, they will perform in the winners' concert. Recent highlights include debuts as Frasquita (*Carmen*, Opera Western Reserve), Queen of the Night (*Die Zauberflöte*, Loudoun Lyric Opera), and Baronne de Gondremarck (*La Vie Parisienne*, L'Opéra Comique). A 2022-23 Jan Miller Studio Artist at

Pensacola Opera, they sang Carrie (*Carousel*) and covered Musetta (*La Bohème*). A dedicated choral artist, they have sung with the Houston Grand Opera Chorus, Philadelphia Symphonic Choir, and Spoleto Festival USA. Hayley holds degrees from Indiana University and the University of Maryland and studies with Jason Ferrante.



Lebanese baritone **Raymond Ghattas (General Boum)** has enjoyed a distinguished career in opera and the performing arts for over three decades. Beginning his musical journey in Lebanon with a deep passion for classical and sacred music, he pursued formal studies in opera singing. Drawn to the works of Verdi and Puccini, he moved to Italy, where he trained under soprano Silvana Ferraro for two years. His career has taken him across Europe, the United States, and the Middle East, performing in renowned opera houses and concert venues. Beyond performing, Raymond is also an educator, event organizer, and producer, dedicated to sharing his expertise and

passion for vocal music. Since relocating to the Washington, D.C. area, he has discovered a new calling in real estate, finding parallels between the arts and helping clients find homes where they can create lasting memories. Licensed in Maryland and D.C., he expertly navigates the competitive market. When not singing or assisting clients, he manages his audio company, specializing in sound systems and entertainment services.



Joe Haughton, premiering with OCW as **Baron Puck**, is a DC-based tenor who has served 20 years in the US Air Force. He has toured every state and 12 countries worldwide, entertaining foreign dignitaries and 5 US Presidents. He has performed extensively with local theater, including INSeries, WCO, Annapolis Opera, and as a guitarist with Signature Theater, LTA, and CFCT. He also has taken over as lead producer for LaTiDo Productions, a cabaret company that brings communities together and celebrates local talent in 7 US cities.



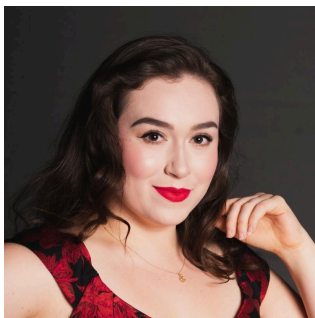
Daniel Fleming (Prince Paul), Tenor, is very excited to make his debut with L'Opéra Comique de Washington. Fleming is a DC native. He completed his Bachelors in Music from Shenandoah Conservatory and his Masters in Music from Northwestern University, Bienen School of Music where he studied with Nancy Gustafson and Steve Smith. Outside of school, Fleming has performed with the Florentine Opera Company, the Bethesda Summer Music Festival, and the Russian Opera Workshop. His roles performed include: Don Florito/*El Saboyano* in Federico Moreno Torroba's *Luisa Fernanda*, Solo Animal in Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, Eisenstein in Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*, Pat in David T. Little's *Dog Days*, Ferrando in Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*, Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*, Camille in Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow*, and the Mayor in Benjamin Britten's *Albert*

Herring. He has also performed in the Chorus for Verdi's *Rigoletto*. In addition to Opera, Fleming also performs musical theater. He has performed the roles of Charley in *Merrily we Roll Along*, Sir Marmaduke in *The Sorcerer*, Action in *West Side Story*, and Mr Erlanson in *A Little Night Music*. At Shenandoah, he was awarded the Cecilia Award in Vocal Excellence and won the Student Soloist Competition.



Christopher Fotis (Baron Grog/Bass Ensemble) has established himself as a multi-faceted teaching artist with a career spanning over 10 years. Known for his vibrant and lyrical voice, he has performed across the East Coast, from New York to Maryland to North Carolina. Christopher performed with L'Opéra Comique de Washington for their inaugural production of Offenbach's *La Vie Parisienne*, and is excited to return for another season! Christopher has recently performed in two world premieres, most notably Jeanine Tesori's *Grounded* with the Washington National Opera. Christopher is known for incorporating great clarity, legato singing, and brilliant comedy and charm into Mozart's operas in

the roles of Papageno, Figaro, and Don Giovanni. He also frequently delights audiences in Gilbert & Sullivan's operettas, and now the operettas of Jacques Offenbach! As a dedicated voice teacher, Christopher imparts his expertise, nurturing emerging talent with a focus on healthy vocal technique, artistic expression, and a student-first approach. His motto is "Nurture Excellence, Inspire Beauty." To learn about his performances and teaching, please visit: www.christopherfotis.com.



Erica Ferguson (Director/Narrator) is a stage director and choreographer based in the DC Metro area. In her 2024 season, she directed L'Opéra Comique de Washington's premiere performance of *La Vie Parisienne*. As the season continued, Erica directed new productions of *Die Zauberflöte* at Loudoun Lyric Opera and *The Gondoliers* at Duke Ellington School of the Arts. She collaborated as assistant director to David Toulson on his production of *Dead Man Walking* at Miami Music Festival, as well as Mark Ross Clark's production of *Albert Herring* at Chicago Summer Opera. This Spring, she looks forward to directing *La Bohème* at the Catholic University of America and returning to Duke Ellington for their Opera Scenes Showcase. www.ericamarieferguson.com @ericamarieferguson



Simon Charette (Conductor/Artistic Director) is a sought-after conductor, collaborative pianist, and vocal coach based in Washington, DC. Passionate about opera from an early age, Simon is the founder and artistic director of the Opéra Comique de Washington, an opera company specializing in French operetta. Recently, he made his debut conducting at Carnegie Hall and worked with the Canadian Vocal Arts Institute (Montréal), the National Music Festival Orchestra, the Mid-Atlantic Symphony Orchestra, the Montgomery Symphony Orchestra, and l'Orchestre de la Francophonie (Montréal). Simon worked as assistant conductor and pianist for the Washington Opera Society. He also served as assistant

conductor of the Chesapeake Youth Symphony Orchestra in Annapolis, MD, and of the Southern Maryland Youth Orchestra and Chorus. In 2022, he was named Artistic Director of the newly founded French Choir of Washington. Simon is also the Artistic Director of the Choir of the Embassy of France in Washington. He conducted this ensemble for French President Emmanuel Macron's address in Washington, DC, in 2018 and 2022. After receiving a Master's degree from the Université de Montréal, he furthered his training at the Dirigierakademie (Toronto, Canada), at the National Music Festival (Chestertown, MD), and the Académie Musicale de Villecroze (France).



Soprano Ashlyn Mazone (Creative Development & Multimedia Director/Ensemble) is thrilled to return for the OCW's second season! Ashlyn plays a pivotal role in shaping the company's artistic vision and expanding its reach. Beyond her administrative and creative leadership, Ashlyn also contributes on stage as the Treble Section Leader. Ashlyn holds both Bachelor's and Master's of Music degrees in Vocal Performance from the Benjamin T. Rome School of Music at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. Her background which includes notable roles such as La Contessa in *Le Nozze di Figaro* and the title role in *Suor Angelica*, extends beyond performance with experience in makeup, costume and props design, and choreography. She is also an active

member of the Frederick Chorale. Ashlyn has taught private voice with Musical Expressions, Inc. since 2011, as well as through her home studio in Hagerstown, MD. Beyond her musical endeavors, Ashlyn is a professional photographer, bringing expertise in brand creation, marketing, and multimedia production to her multifaceted role at OCW.

L'Opéra Comique de Washington Orchestra

Concert Master:	Ha-Young Kim
Violin:	Melanie Kuperstein
Viola:	Emily Lane
Cello:	Jacques-Pierre Malan
Bass:	James Peterson
Flute:	Jennifer Szabo
Oboe:	Stephanie Ying
Clarinet:	Jason Russo and Jennifer Everhart
Bassoon:	Ari Allal
Horn:	Ken Bell and Clinton Soisson
Trumpet:	Norman Blakely
Trombone:	Grace Larsen
Percussion:	Barry Dove

L'Opéra Comique de Washington Chorus

<u>Soprano</u>	<u>Alto</u>	<u>Tenor</u>	<u>Bass</u>
Ashlyn Mazone*	Anna Balchunas	Colton Smith*	Christopher Fotis*
Felicity Alexandra	Clarisse Barbier	George Cooper	Joaquim Nassar
Carissa Crofford	Claire Morange	Kevin Donovan	Yannick Réveillon
Megan Flynn	Nathalie Pouliquen	Jenellen Fischer	Jean-Luc Niel
Jade Neal	Margaret Yefimenko	Martin Lamarre	Nicholas Mounts
Océane Turker		Charles Martins-Ferreira	
Monique Vittet		Lejerian Williams	
		René Soudée	

* Section Leader

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