

MERRY WIDOW WALTZ

Franz Lehar, 1905

This song was originally written in 1905 “*The Merry Widow*” (German: *Die lustige Witwe*“), an operetta by Viktor Léon and Leo Stein. They based the story – concerning a rich widow, and her countrymen's attempt to keep her money in the principality by finding her the right husband – on an 1861 German comedy play, “*L'attaché d'ambassade*” (*The Embassy Attaché*) by Henri Meilhac.

After attempting to write the main score for the play, they hired the Austro-Hungarian composer, Franz Lehar. The son of a military band master, Lehar had once served as the theatre's orchestra leader and had already worked with Leon & Stein on the hit “*Der Rastelbinder*” (1902) and the less successful “*Der Gottergatte*” (1904). Lehar spent the summer of 1905 working with Leon & Stein, and the score was ready by that fall. “*Die Lustige Witwe*” (*The Merry Widow*) premiered at the Theatre “*An Der Wie*” on the evening of December 30, 1905. The score was appropriately entitled, “*The Merry Widow Waltz*”.

The operetta has enjoyed extraordinary international success since its 1905 premiere in Vienna and continues to be frequently revived and recorded. Film and other adaptations have also been made. In 1907, Buenos Aires theatres were playing at least five productions, each in a different language. Productions also swiftly followed in Stockholm, Copenhagen, Milan, Moscow and Madrid, among other places. It was eventually produced in every city with a theatre industry. Bernard Grün, in his book “*Gold and Silver: The Life and Times of Franz Lehar*”, estimates that “*The Merry Widow*” was performed about half a million times in its first sixty years. Global sheet music sales and recordings totaled tens of millions of dollars. According to theatre writer John Kenrick, no other play or musical up to the 1960s had enjoyed such international commercial success.

In music and friendship,

~ Jull