

entertainment/arts

Otterbein's 'Camille' opens to full house

If there was an empty seat in the Otterbein Summer Theatre for the opening night of "Camille" I could not see it from where I sat.

The audience seemed to have an air of anticipation as did I. Carter Lewis, a 1973 graduate of Otterbein, was guest directing, and Mary Myers was the guest costume designer. Costume demands were strong in this production.

Susan Dial plays the star-crossed title role of Camille and Dennis Romer plays the Marquis de Saint-Brieuc. Both establish the mood of the time and the tragedy of real love, forbidden to a courtesan and her lover, Armand Duval (Tim Gregory).

Otterbein had done the original "Camille" in a previous summer season. However, this production was sharper, cleaner, because of Pam Gem's thoughtful and knowledgeable rewrite. And what an upgraded difference!

A special touch was the music arranged and performed by Michael Haberkorn. The piano and Haberkorn were both part of the play.

The play opens on a tragic note, then flashes back to

act II

Jean Ann Wolfe-Weaver

bring the background needed to understand the story. This play takes place long before a cure had been found for tuberculosis, and tragedy was the only ending for TB.

Great strength in the casting from lead roles to bit parts. Remember, women were without rights of their own; power and money were in the hands of men.

Marguerite's women friends, and at this point of time in history women were all dependent on men, including Prudence (Cathy Lee Collins), Sophie (Meg Williamsons), and Cle-mance (Cheryl Gaysunas), all well-played roles.

"Camille" was a total theater delight. Every aspect of this production was professional and so seemingly simple, while most effective.

"Camille" runs through July 30 with evening performances at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m. in the Campus Center Theatre. Call 898-1109 for information and reservations.

"You're Gonna Love Tomorrow" is not only the title of "A Stephen Sondheim Evening" but is my reaction to the Columbus Summer Stage production of that evening. Continuity is provided by the music and lyrics of Sondheim. This production is being offered in the intimate space of the Van Fleet Theatre at Players Theatre Columbus. Seats are offered on a first-come ba-

sis, but I promise you there is not a bad seat in the house.

Twenty-five songs in one evening by the same composer could be a disaster, but not when the composer is Sondheim, and not when you are a Sondheim fan as I am.

All Sondheim's songs, including unknown/little known and even some cast-offs that never made it to an actual performance are featured. The seven singers are not only strong vocalists; they also know how to sell Sondheim's music and lyrics — which is not always easy to do.

Music from his own musicals include 1954's "Saturday Night", 1962's "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum", 1964's "Anyone Can Whistle",

1970's "Company", 1971's "Follies", 1973's "A Little Night Music", 1974's "The Frogs", 1976's "Pacific Overtures", 1979's "Sweeney Todd", 1982's "Merrily We Roll Along", 1984's "Sunday in the Park with George", and in 1987's "Into the Woods".

The company work was strong and well-balanced, solo work was exciting and satisfying. The one place I was disappointed was with Carle Grole's almost throw-away "Send in the Clowns", which happens to be a special favorite of mine.

Columbus Summer Stage closes its season with "Dear World" Aug. 4-13, with book by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee and music and lyrics by Jerry Herman. This musical is based on the play "The Madwoman of Chaillot". "Dear World" is directed by Ron Nocks with musical direction by Nancy Nocks. For tickets or reservations call 231-8552.

'Camille' may be 389 best show of season

By Michael Grossberg

Dispatch Theater Critic

New version or old, *Camille* enchants. Set within the upper-class social whirl of 1840's Paris, Alexander Dumas *filis'* true-life story about a beautiful woman stricken with disease is one of the world's great romantic tragedies.

It's a familiar story, but Otterbein College's sinuous production, based on British playwright Pam Gems' crisp rewrite, makes it seem fresh.

BRAVO FOR this Ohio premiere, which opened last night before a rapt audience. Directed with panache by guest Equity artist Carter Lewis, *Camille* may be the best show of the summer season. It's witty, sexy and achingly sad.

Like Franco Zefferelli's 1968 film of *Romeo and Juliet*, which resembles *Camille* in luxuriant romanticism, this classic has been rejuvenated by the bold stroke of youthful casting. Here is that rare occasion when a predominantly college-age cast is not merely tolerable, but adds rich perspective.

Two recent Otterbein graduates make the doomed affair between courtesan Marguerite Gautier (Susan Diol) and aristocrat Armand Duval (Tim Gregory) all the more poignant.

Gems' psychologically probing script offers us a series of languorous glimpses into Marguerite's boudoir. The "lady of the camellias" and her ardent suitor seemingly pay no attention to social barriers, illness or lack of money.

Set ^{fe.} Theirs is a giddy, feverish affair that takes full advantage of designer Rob Johnson's silk-

REVIEW

draped rotating bedroom. Torrid but tasteful love scenes invite the audience to become a voyeur. Take my advice, and grab the chance.

Diol (TV's *Hothouse*) is much more than a pretty face. In acting as well as appearance, she fits her teasing, tortured role like Gypsy Rose Lee's hand inside a long, white glove.

BALANCING HER passions with bracing astringency are Marguerite's girlfriends: Cathy Lee Collins' brittle Prudence, Meg Williamson's jaded Sophie and Cheryl Gaysunas' giggling Clemence, a Goldie Hawn forerunner. In short, this is a great show for girl-watchers.

Man-watchers, too. Welcome back to Gregory, who fills his impetuous role with forcefulness. Guest Equity artist Dennis Romer reveals a more mature suavity as the Marquis, Armand's steel-willed, class-obsessed father.

Other pluses: Doreen Dunn's elegant choreography and Michael Haberkorn's piano arrangements and accompaniment.

Camille is certainly Otterbein's best so far this year and one of the finest central Ohio theater productions of 1988. For those who love love stories, it's a must.

Otterbein Summer Theater will present *Camille* at 8 tonight through Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday in the Campus Center Theatre. Performances continue July 27-30. For tickets, call 898-1109.

Troupe breathes life into 'Camille'

Otterbein seeks phlegm, fortune with production

Everyone remembers *Camille* — in one form or another.

More than a 19th-century stage classic, Alexander Dumas' romantic tragedy about a doomed woman inspired Verdi's opera, *La Traviata*, and gave Greta Garbo one of her greatest screen roles.

But almost no one in central Ohio has seen *Camille* the way Otterbein College will stage it Wednesday through July 30. The basic story and period setting may be the same, but the psychology is deeper and the dialogue is different.

THIS NEW *Camille* had a complicated genesis. Adapted by a British feminist playwright, Pam Gems (*Piaf, Loving Woman*), the revised drama had its world premiere in 1984 at the Royal Shakespeare Company.

That's where Ed Vaughan, Otterbein's summer theater producer, saw *Camille* and fell in love with it. But that's not the precise version that Columbus will see at the Campus Center Theatre.

Gems rewrote the script for its 1987 American premiere at the Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, Conn. That production received national attention, amplified by Kathleen Turner's provocative presence in the title role.

The show was revised again last year for Actors Theatre of Louisville's "Classics in Context" festival on romanticism.



Michael Grossberg
ONSTAGE

Guest Equity director Carter Lewis said Otterbein's version combines "the best aspects" of all three productions.

"**THE OLD** version was very romantic, with a traditional story line," Lewis said. "The new version keeps the play in 19th-century Paris, but fleshes out the central character to make Marguerite Gautier more similar to her real-life counterpart."

Dumas *filis*, son of the famous *Musketeers* novelist, based his 1848 novel, *La Dame aux Camelias*, on one of his real-life lovers. Nicknamed "the lady of the camelias," Marie Plessis was a beautiful Paris courtesan who died of consumption. Among her

other lovers was composer Franz Liszt and several wealthy aristocrats.

"Our Ohio premiere takes a more accurate look at the life of a very stunning, resourceful woman," Lewis said. "Because this adaptation brings out her intelligence, it's much more absorbing. You care more about this *Camille*. So when her life is ripped away from her, it heightens the tragedy."

FOLLOWING ONE of the American productions, Lewis framed the story in flashback from *Camille's* deathbed. For a non-musical, the production is large with a 17-member cast and elaborate costumes.

"People keep going back to *Camille* because it's a classic love story," Lewis said.

Susan Diol, a 1984 Otterbein graduate who appeared on *The Cosby Show* before starring in the new television series *Hothouse* this summer, returns to her alma mater for the production.

"It's a very difficult role — one of the greatest roles available to a young woman," Diol said during rehearsals. "Playing *Camille*, to an actress, is the equivalent of playing *Hamlet* for men."

DIOL, 26, said she prefers the stage to television. While she ap-

preciates the greater fame and money in a TV series, Diol finds screen acting allows little time to deepen a role.

Which is why Diol loves the longer rehearsal time available at Otterbein, where she has the additional pleasure of working with Lewis and Dennis Romer again.

Diol starred in Otterbein's *Charley's Aunt* and *All Over Town*, both directed by Lewis. She co-starred with Romer in Otterbein's *Romantic Comedy* and *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*

Romer, who plays the Marquis in *Camille*, said he also enjoys their "reunion." Romer was directed by Lewis in Otterbein's *Plenty* two summers ago.

"Our collaboration on *Camille* is a developmental process," Romer said. "In a lot of ways, it's like working with a new play. You find new themes, new meanings."

Michael Grossberg is Dispatch theater critic.

Otterbein Summer Theater will present *Camille* at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and 2 p.m. next Sunday in the Campus Center Theatre. Performances continue July 27 through 30. For tickets, call 898-1109.