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REVIEW BY JOY REILLY
WOSU RADIO
OTTERBEIN SUMMER THEATRE
CAMILLE by Pam Gems
July 20-30, 1988

The most popular romance of the nineteenth century - CAMILLE - the story of the doomed love affair between a young aristocrat and a courtesan with a heart of gold, is being presented in a pithy new interpretation by Otterbein Summer College Theatre. It is a gorgeous production: beautifully acted, directed and designed.

The original play was written by Alexander Dumas, the son of the famous author of THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO and THE THREE MUSKETEERS. Young Dumas, himself the illegitimate son of a young Irish girl and the then struggling novelist, had an unhappy early childhood. He was well acquainted with the seamier neighborhoods of Paris and knew Marie DuPlessis, a famous courtesan on whose life he based his first play. Dumas the younger wrote LA DAME AUX CAMELIAS so the legend goes, in one week at the age of twenty one and showed it to his father, who proclaimed it a masterpiece.

It has since been turned into a novel, a movie starring Greta Garbo, an opera, and a variety of stage adaptations.

The author of the Otterbein version is contemporary English playwright Pam Gems, who has reinterpreted the story so that it is given a feminist point of view. CAMILLE is no longer a moral diatribe focussing on the lesson to be learned from the downfall of Marguerite Gautier, a "bad" woman. Instead it is a love story in which men take their full share of blame.

Otterbein has been fortunate enough to bring back a professional actress who is a 1984 graduate of the program. Susan Diol is a stunning Camille. Besides being a beautiful woman, she is also a tough street fighter, a cynical business woman, a passionate lover, an infatuated mother. This is a tour de force role and Ms Diol more than meets the challenge.

Opposite Diol are guest artists and Otterbein graduates Tim Gregory, who is a virile passionate young Armand and his father, played as a dastardly villain with great gusto by Dennis Romer.

Other roles are well supported by actors Cheryl Gaysunas, Meg Williamson, Cathy Lee Collins, Lori Schubeler and Ralph Scott.

The costume design by Mary Myers is exceptionally exquisite. The gowns worn by Camille are breathtaking and all the period costumes for men and women look as if they belong on those bodies, which is a considerable achievement for college theatre. The scenic and lighting design by Rob Johnson is also superior. The entire production, directed imaginatively by Carter Lewis, is a visual delight: a CAMILLE in the style of Les Liaisons Dangereuse.

And throughout the production, pianist Michael Haberker treats us to a sampling of everyone's favorite piano pieces. It is the icing on the cake of this visual and emotional feast.

CAMILLE runs through July 30 at Otterbein College Theatre.