

Opera and Overdoses

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What do you do when your star tenor apparently drops dead and the opera must go on? Hilarity ensues as a stage manager tries to replace his star performer with his personal assistant in the last offering this spring from the Tulane Department of Theatre and Dance.



Dave Davis stars as Tito Merelli (in turban) and Stephen Eckhert is Max in *Lend Me a Tenor*, the humorous play that will be on stage in the Lupin Theater beginning April 13. (Photo from Shad Willingham)

In *Lend Me a Tenor* star performer Tito Merelli (played by student Dave Davis) is found unconscious in his room. Stage manager Saunders (Michael Smith) decides the show must go on ? without his lead actor. With the help of blackface and costuming, Saunders' assistant Max (Stephen Eckhert) becomes the star of the show ? until Merelli wakes up.

Set in the 1930s, *Lend Me a Tenor* by Ken Ludwig is an over-the-top comedy. Director Shad Willingham, adjunct instructor of theater, hopes it will "sweep people to another time â?¡ a time before cell phones, a time when we were not so jaded and bitter â?¡ when things were more innocent."

While Willingham speaks lovingly of the show's nostalgia, he's certain about its comedic relief. Utilizing traditional theatrical and comedic devices such as mistaken identities, sexual innuendo and physical comedy, the actors give a lesson in an underappreciated genre: controlled chaos.

"Though it's classical farce, it's sweet and sexy," Willingham says. "It's one of the top five funniest American plays of the 20th century."

Lend Me a Tenor is Willingham's first production at Tulane. He recently premiered his new original piece, *Ham for the Holidays*, in Santa Rosa, Calif., and he has performed with Summer Lyric Theatre at Tulane.

Performances are April 13-17 at 8 p.m. and April 17-18 at 2 p.m. in the Lupin Theater, 215 McWilliams Hall on the uptown campus. For ticket information, call 504-865-5106.