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Troupers Light Opera performs Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Sorcerer* in Norwalk

I didn't need the premiere performance of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Sorcerer* by the Troupers last Saturday afternoon to remind me how very much I enjoy this work, for I've loved it since the days of my misspent youth. I still very much do. Rather at every minute I was reminded how much the Troupers Light Opera has been and, with this season, continues to be an essential part of our region's musical landscape. This is their 71st season.

Time was when Gilbert and Sullivan's innocent merriment was a household part of our musical culture over here, certainly over there. The D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, the source of it all, toured the USA every once in a while; folks dropped one liners from the operas in conversation,

my father sang Ko-Ko in a high school G & S review; Groucho Marx himself sang Ko-Ko on national TV. Today it's more likely "Groucho who?" Cocoa is a drink; the only sorcerers we know are Harry Potter et al.

But, back to the moment, this Troupers *Sorcerer* continues the conspicuous rebirth of the Company as witnessed over the past seasons. It's a happy mix of energetic and talented newcomers, some already seasoned from elsewhere in the G & S style but only recently with the Company, others just fine singers on a steep learning curve with it, each group resting on the bed rock of dedicated regulars of Troupers who, when you read their bios, perform so many roles for the Company both on and off stage, why, it just makes your head spin, and it's all for the love of performing G & S.

The premise of *The Sorcerer* is simple enough. It's the mid-19th century in England: Alexis, son of a well-heeled family, engaged to the equally well-heeled Aline, espouses the at-the-time absurd philosophy that true love should know no restrictions created by distinctions, be they class or beliefs, age, nation, whatever. To aid his cause, he's hired a local sorcerer to spike the tea so that all in the village will fall in love with the first person he or she sees upon waking the next morning, thus shuffling the matrimonial deck, so to speak. The first act establishes the intended unions, elaborates his philosophy, and introduces, in a spoof of Donizetti's Dr. Dulcamara, the sorcerer John Wellington Wells, head of firm J. W. Wells & Co., the old established Family Sorcerers at No. 70 St. Mary Axe; the second act has everyone randomly in love with someone else, Alexis by this time really peeved because he hadn't thought too far ahead, and then in the end they all tell Wells to go to hell. After he rights all the mix-ups that is.



Jefferson Osborn as John Wellington Wells

A poised and accomplished musical comedienne, Tanya Roberts as Aline made me smile throughout the performance, particularly in the scene in Act II in which she has taken the love potion, only to happen upon Dr. Daly, the local curate, a polite and retiring gentle fellow who is also under the spell. Cling to the columns of the portal though she might, Aline begins to exhibit every symptom of being hopelessly in love with him, literally drawn towards him. Ah, rapture! Roberts is a gifted musician and a pleasure to watch throughout.

Imagine Alexis's reaction to the mad delight of this coupling: it was his 'noble' idea to let love level all ranks (sound familiar?) through the potion's magic, but now in Act II his aristocratic father Sir Marmaduke is in love with Mrs. Partlet, in this *Sorcerer* a bit too much taken to the

local drink. Equally unfortunate, Lady Sangazure, Aline's mother, has the hots for John Wellington Wells, but then threatens to join her ancestors in the family vault if he remains obdurate and unavailable. David Richy plays the prig well, his anger ringing out in a rich tenor voice. Not much on self-reflection and stubborn, Alexis seems unwilling to take responsibility for the mess he's caused, but, as Aline points out, what's to become of her if he takes the descent instead of Wells?

Brett Kroeger's Constance spends much of the evening bemoaning the unavailability of Dr. Daly, whom she has been shyly in love with since her very opening number. Through the potion's power, she is temporarily united with the Notary, one who is particularly hard of hearing, which makes for a humorous duet to a lovely waltz melody with Jim Cooper. Though her role doesn't permit many opportunities to let it all out, Kroeger's contributions are conspicuous every moment she is on stage. She sobs well too.

A welcome addition to the company, Jefferson Osborn's Wells was well sung and articulate, a person clearly in control of things most of the time. Osborn's composed stage presence is quite evident at every turn. Bravo!

Sir Marmaduke, sung by Frank Sisson, and Lady Sangazure, sung by Wendy Falconer have many humorous touches about them involving stethoscopes, walking sticks, and other accoutrements of the needs of the elderly, all of which dissolve at the potion's power. Deborah Connelly's Mrs. Partlet recalls the great Madeline Kahn facially and behaviorally. Not much of a role model for good mothering really, she's more the saucy minx and giddy, less the clean and tidy widdy, despite her claims to the contrary. John Matilaine's Dr. Daly, also well sung, is comically energized by the potion too. Rob Strom is the Solicitor.

I'll bet most of the voices are strong enough so as to render amplification unnecessary at least for the bigger musical numbers in acoustically-alive Norwalk Concert Hall. Tanya Roberts, Brett Kroeger, David Richy, and Jefferson Osborne had no problem sailing over the orchestra when they wanted to. However it helps the others and, overall, makes the sung text more intelligible, though even on this dimension the singers articulated well. But amplification works quite well

for the dialogue and it'd be an extra burden on the sound technician to keep adjusting the aural picture throughout the performance. It's not really broken, so don't fix it.

Director Dan Montez recreates his signature style, which is funny, busy, if sometimes to excess, and touching when the moment presents itself. I liked the bits with the walking sticks a lot, the potion induced love duets, less the conjured demons running around. He knows how to involve all on stage, often giving brief vignettes for members of the chorus. There is little standing around in a Montez production. It's all better.

Jun Nakabayashi's control of the orchestra, his tempi, and his dynamics are admirable throughout, save, in Act II, a little desynchronization of the musical components during this very first performance. But these things get ironed out. Both he and Montez are a large part of the rejuvenation going on here.

Don't miss the Troupers production of *The Sorcerer*! You never know when you'll get a chance to see it again! This is only the fourth season they've performed it since the beginning in 1946.

The Troupers Light Opera production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Sorcerer* is performed again at the Norwalk Concert Hall, 125 East Avenue, Norwalk, CT, matinee/evening on April 23. Matinee time is 2:30 p.m.; evening is 7:30 p.m. Tickets may be purchased at the company's website (www.trouperlightopera.org) or by calling 800-838-3006.

Below this review on this page on **OperaMetro**, please find the interviews with Tanya Roberts, Brett Kroeger, and David Richy.

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JRS

