



Constance Partlet (Andrea Leap, right) expounds on her romantic woes to her mother (Judith MacDonald) in this scene from "The Sorcerer."

Simply charming

LOOK's 'Sorcerer' moves to Tulsa later this month



Photos by SHERRY BROWN/Tulsa World

The common folk and the swells gather for a wedding in Light Opera Oklahoma's production of "The Sorcerer." Director Eric Gibson's staging gives each person on stage a distinct character, which adds to the operetta's comedy.

By JAMES D. WATTS JR.
World Scene Writer

It takes some time for "The Sorcerer" — literally and metaphorically — to cast his spell.

And the magic employed is not on a par with changing people into newts or making airplanes vanish. It's a little subtler, at once familiar and inexplicable — the sort of magic that makes one smile rather than gasp.

Light Opera Oklahoma opened the 2006 OK Mozart International Festival Saturday with its new production of Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Sorcerer."

This operetta, about a love-besotted groom, a wizard with a potion designed to induce amour in all and sundry, and the unintentional consequences of its application, was the first full-length work Gilbert and Sullivan created in their long and storied partnership.

The problem is, it shows. Those accustomed to the exaggerated characters, the archly satiric wit, the frenetic activity and the brightly memorable tunes of "H.M.S. Pinafore" and "The Mikado" will likely be a little surprised at how placidly "The Sorcerer" sets about its business.

If anything, the first act of "The Sorcerer" is perhaps the most conventionally operatic thing the duo ever wrote. The spoken dialogue is sparse, and the characters introduce themselves with earnest arias. The first act is nearly over before the story is truly set into motion with the appearance of John Wellington Wells, the dealer in potions and spells.

So director Eric Gibson has exploited every comic possibility in the show, and added a few extra touches of his own, to make this production of "The Sorcerer" a lot more entertaining than it has a right to be.

Gibson has traditionally used Sullivan's lengthy overtures as a way of building more physical comic business into the show. That's the case with "The Sorcerer," as the various classes of people attending the wedding of Alexis (Colm Fitzmaurice) and Aline (Michelle Jennings) make themselves known.

Every one of these characters is presented as a character rather than an anonymous member of the chorus. It adds a richness to the proceedings, and makes Gibson's other major innovation work even better.

The first act ends with everyone at the wedding succumbing to the "philtre" administered by Wells (a robust Ron Loyd). The twist of the plot is that while everyone falls in love as a result of this potion, no one falls in love with the proper person, just whomever each individual sees first upon waking.

In the intermission, the curtain is kept up as the cast slumbers — sort of. The butler keeps polishing things in his sleep, commoners drape them-

selves over members of the quality, and Wells himself moves among the supine guests, helping himself to this and that, arranging folk just so.

The second act offers a little more action, as Alexis realizes that his plan has gone horribly wrong, especially as his new bride is now in love with the vicar (A. Christian Elser), and Alexis' own father, Sir Marmaduke (Patrick Jacobs) has taken up with the common Mrs. Partlet (Judith MacDonald) rather than his new mother-in-law Lady Sangazure (April Golliver).

The story may be a little thin, but Sullivan's music here is among his richest, with passages that recall Handel and Mozart. And it was superbly played Saturday by the Tulsa Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of LOOK music director James Bagwell.

The cast is also up to LOOK's musical standards. Loyd is a commanding and mischievous presence as Wells, a kind of mirthful Mephistopheles, who nimbly handles the character's intro-

ductory patter song.

Andrea Leap, as Constance, the Olive Oyl-like commoner in love with the vicar, does a wonderful job at wringing comedy out of her character's lament, "When He is Here," while Jacobs and Golliver bring some grand touches of physical humor to their duet, "Welcome Joy, Adieu to Sadness," as they reveal the roiling passions beneath their proper facades.

Ryan Palmer's scenic design — basically a set of double doors and independently lighted pictures of flowers — nicely evoked a stately manor, while Adriana Diaz's costumes played up between-the-wars glamour.

"The Sorcerer" will open at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center June 23, as part of LOOK's summer season and the PAC Trust's SummerStage festival. For ticket information, call 596-7111 or visit www.MyTicketOffice.com.

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