

## Encore

# 'Sorcerer' at Monmouth is thoroughly delightful

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MONMOUTH -- "The Sorcerer" is conjuring a magical musical spell in Theater at Monmouth's current production of the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta.

Honoring a decades-long tradition of Gilbert and Sullivan at Cumston Hall, the talented cast and crew get it all just right from costuming to entertaining plot twists.

The singers measure up to a high standard, with particular credit to tenor Ben Mulgrew as Alexis and soprano Jamie Beth Weist as Aline. They are the betrothed couple whose nuptials lead to miss-matched lovers throughout the village of Ploverleigh. Mulgrew and Weist debut on the TAM stage in this year's customary autumn musical.

Melissa Bills as Constance also makes her first-season TAM appearance. She lends an outstanding soprano voice to the musical numbers, including a fine solo, "When he is here," which reveals her unrequited love for the village vicar.

Ryan Simpson, in his fourth season with TAM, delivers a delightfully droll performance as Dr. Daly, the vicar who feels sure that love has passed him by. Simpson is a veteran of numerous TAM shows, including memorable comic roles in several of the company's Shakespearean presentations.

Without a doubt, it's the performance of Mark S. Cartier as The Sorcerer that steals the show. He has appeared in 60 TAM productions over the past 18 years. Cartier's popularity has been earned in many roles, both comic and dramatic.

More than a dozen musicals numbers of "The Sorcerer" have passed before Cartier enters and sings "My name is John Wellington Wells," the show's signature patter song. From that point on, Cartier's impish interpretation of the title role makes him the center of attention, and rightfully so.

Alexis tries to convince Aline that the world would share their bliss if love could ignore rank, station and social distinction. He tells her he has hired Wells, a "family sorcerer," to prepare a love potion that will secretly be administered to the townspeople when they drink the Vicar's tea at the wedding reception.

Wells performs an otherworldly incantation, "Spirits of earth and air," as the brew is made ready. This a show-stopping trio featuring Cartier, Mulgrew and Weist (Wells, Alexis and Aline). It's enhanced by some appropriate lighting effects by lighting designer Jim Alexander.

An able cast of actors, many of whom are known for appearances in regional theaters as well as TAM, handle a variety of supporting roles.

David Handley plays Sir Marmaduke, father of the groom. Rebecca Beck portrays Lady Sangazure, the bride's mother. Lynette Miller is Lady Partlet, Constance's mother and the Vicar's maid.

Others in the chorus are Heather Bayley, Anne-Marie Caron, Carol Griffiths, Linda Jackson-Washburn, Karen Lipovsky, Ellen O'Brien, Peggy O'Kane Jan Reynolds, Sabrina Yocono, Jeff Fairfield, John Lipovsky, Dale McCormick, Rick O'Brien, Aaron Rowden, Andy Tolman and Ben Whitestone.

Fairfield also plays the doddering old notary who chases after Constance when the potion takes effect.

Bill Van Horn, 13-year TAM veteran, is the capable director of the show.

Choreography and costuming are important for staging a Gilbert and Sullivan play, and both work very well for this show. Adam P. Blais provided dances in the correct style for the Victorian-era operetta, and Michelle Handley dresses the cast with appropriate taste and flair.

Rebecca Caron leads a five-piece orchestra consisting of Stefanie Barley, keyboard; Blaise Spath, flute; Carol Furman, clarinet; and Ryu Mitsuhashi, violin.

"The Sorcerer" is a lesser-known operetta by W.S. Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan. However, it set the form for their highly successful shows to follow.

It has the obligatory patter song, the love interest (young and old, serious and comic), the plot complications and ultimate successful outcomes. The variety of duets, trios, quartets and ensemble numbers are a highlight of this production at Monmouth.

Remaining performances of "The Sorcerer" are at Cumston Hall, Monmouth, at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday and Friday, Sept. 25-26; at 1 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 27; and at 1 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 28.

For tickets call 207-933-9999.