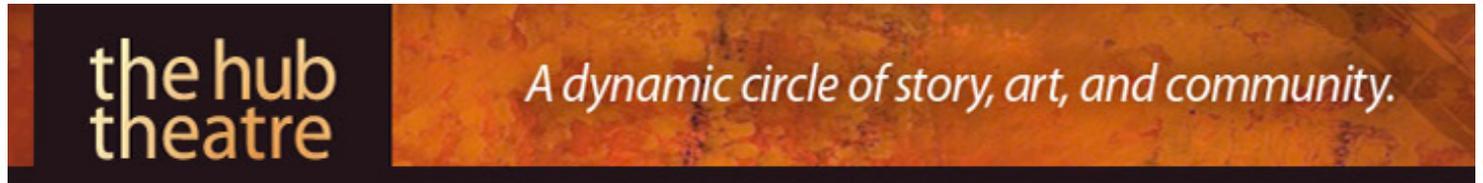


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## 'The Sorcerer and Trial by Jury' at The Victorian Lyric Opera Company by Lauren Katz

June 18, 2012 Lauren Katz

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Last night, I was introduced to the classical world of Gilbert and Sullivan, but with a twist. The Victorian Lyric Opera Company decided to take a modern perspective on the traditional stories of *The Sorcerer* and *Trial by Jury* that in the end, proved to be refreshingly new, and based on the applause at the end of the show, very

successful.

Directed by Ali and Pete Oliver-Krueger and musically directed by Joseph Sorge, the production featured two shows. *Trial by Jury* follows the case of Edwin (David Merrill), and explores his reasons for leaving his fiancé, Angelina (Courtney Kalbacker), for another woman. *The Sorcerer* follows the romance between the newly wed couple Alexis (Merrill) and Aline (Kellie McHugh). The love they share fills them with such bliss, that they decide to release a love potion throughout the village so that everyone can share their happiness. The couple quickly learns however, that magic can lead to complicated results.

Rebecca Meyerson created a different set for each production that switched at the first intermission. Because there was so much happening on stage, such as the subtitles projected on a screen, I appreciated the simplicity of the set. *Trial by Jury*'s set is fairly traditional, and closely resembles a typical courtroom with benches and an elevated chair for the judge. *The Sorcerer*'s set consisted of brick arches and windows. There were also three different levels that the directors cleverly used in the staging. For example, at various points in this play, Alexis and Aline hide behind the windows in order to quietly observe the outcomes of their choice to use magic.

Ali and Pete Oliver-Kruegers' contemporary vision for the production added to the humor of Gilbert and Sullivan's absurd writing. In *Trial by Jury*, Angelina sues Edwin for leaving her, which is already ridiculous, but the directors added to the spectacle by embracing modern day's obsession with reality shows and celebrity trials. The directors transformed Angelina's character into a famous movie star, and much of the ensemble became members of the press. I enjoyed the defiance of traditional Gilbert and Sullivan expectations, and the choice even created new opportunities for amusing staging. In order to express the Judge's (Blair Eig) indifference towards the case, the directors had him whip out random appliances throughout the trial, like a coffee maker and an iPad.



*Trial by Jury*: Joshua Milton, Emma Jensen, Denise Young, Rand Huntzinger, and Courtney Kalbacker. Photo by Harvey Levine.

The directors took a slightly different approach to *The Sorcerer* through an altered portrayal of Alexis' character. They took the egotistical Alexis, and turned him into an intensely insecure man who bases all of his decisions on his love for Aline. I appreciated the decision to transform Alexis into a relatable character that I wanted to see succeed. The choice to increase his self-consciousness made it easier to understand his poor decisions and harder to blame him, such as when he requested that Aline take the love potion to ensure that she would never leave him.

The orchestra was fantastic, but I was disappointed to find that their volume drowned out a lot of the vocals on stage. Both *Trial by Jury* and *The Sorcerer* are ensemble based shows, but I found it difficult to hear what they were singing. Thankfully, the subtitles helped this issue.

There were, however, some vocalists who held their own, which allowed me to appreciate their talent. Merrill's tenor voice hit some brilliant high notes in his portrayals of Edwin and Alexis. I loved Emma Jenson with her sweet and light soprano voice as Constance in *The Sorcerer*. Her rendition of "When he is here" was beautiful and she had a great ability to convey her desperation and longing for her true love. Thomas Miranda (Sir Marmaduke Pointdextre) wowed me with his baritone vocal skills in "Welcome Joy," and McHugh hit high notes I did not even think possible.

Syril Kline was hilarious as Mrs. Partlet in *The Sorcerer*. She created the perfect obnoxious mother who could not stop meddling in her daughter, Constance's, affairs. As a result, she and Jenson created a very believable mother-daughter relationship. Gary Sullivan, (John Wellington Wells) in *The Sorcerer*, showcased excellent use of his physicality. He had fewer singing parts than some of the other performers, but he conveyed the sketchy sales-man character through his physical movements.



The cast of 'The Sorcerer.' Photo by Harvey Levine.

I always love to see directors take risks with their work, which I am glad to say was the case with Ali and Pete

Oliver-Krueger. They took the traditional stories and turned them around to make them accessible to a modern-day audience of all ages.

Creative and energetic, *Trial by Jury* and *The Sorcerer* defied my expectations. I had a great time!

Running Time: Three hours, with two intermissions.

[The Sorcerer and Trial by Jury](#) closed on Sunday June 17, 2012 at The Victorian Lyric Opera Company – at the F. Scott Fitzgerald Theatre – at 603 Edmonston Drive, in Rockville, MD.

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### About Author [Lauren Katz](#)

Lauren Katz is a rising sophomore at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio. She is a staff writer for the Arts and Entertainment Section of the Kenyon Collegian, a student-run newspaper, and has performed in many productions at Act Two Performing Arts, Musical Theater Center, and Wootton High School. Recent productions include: Wootton the Musical: A Decade of Hits (Soloist), Oliver (Assistant Stage Manager), Rent: School Edition (Assistant Choreographer), and Children of Eden (Snake and Dance Line Member).

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