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Wednesday, June 06, 2012

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Double feature makes a statement on modern matrimony

Rockville opera company updates Victorian wedding tales

by Cody Calamaio, Staff Writer

Gilbert and Sullivan operas usually don't include appearances by the Occupy movement or feature paparazzi and drum circles. But under the direction of husband-and-wife team Ali and Pete Oliver-Krueger, the Victorian Lyric Opera Company's double-billed production of "Trial by Jury" and "The Sorcerer" will take a modern approach to the old-fashioned stories of weddings gone awry.

"These shows, really, they transfer very quickly and easily to modern day," Pete Oliver-Krueger says. "What they're talking about and tackling in the script is what we do every day."

Opening Friday, both shows were written by famed librettist William S. Gilbert and composer Arthur Sullivan, whose work often graces the stage of VLOC productions, since the Rockville-based opera company has specialized in producing Victorian-era work. "Trial by Jury" is a VLOC favorite, having been the first show staged by the company in 1978, and produced five additional times since. "The Sorcerer" also has been produced twice, most recently when paired with "Trial by Jury" in 1997.

Ali and Pete Oliver-Krueger met during the VLOC production of "H.M.S. Pinafore" in 2004, and since have directed and starred in several additional shows. The Wheaton couple, who began their own wedding with a Gilbert and Sullivan sing-along, have enjoyed the opportunity to craft the pair of shows

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Victorian Lyric Opera Company (From left) Kellie McHugh as Aline Sangazure, David Merrill as Alexis Poindextre, and Gary Sullivan as the sorcerer John Wellington Wells, act out a scene from the Victorian Lyric Opera Company production of "The Sorcerer." The opera company will pair "The Sorcerer" with another Gilbert and Sullivan classic, "Trial by Jury."



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using their own thoughts on the subject of love.

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"We're tickled pink to be back directing a show about love and marriage," Ali Oliver-Krueger says.

In adapting the two Gilbert and Sullivan operas to take place in modern times, the directors looked to draw upon the shows' themes of love, marriage and the cynicism that erupts when a relationship goes south, Ali Oliver-Krueger says.

"We also realized that these are themes that really resonate with us today," she says.

"Trial By Jury" is a comedic opera that tells the story of a jilted woman suing her former fiancé for breaking his promise of marriage. The directors ran into the problem of needing to update the storyline so that it would be plausible today, and chose to make the woman, Angelina, a movie star who is angry that her high-profile marriage didn't happen, resulting in a media circus.

"We've been able to really make a point about the way we are increasingly playing out our romances and heartbreaks on the public stage to get validation, to get justice," Ali Oliver-Krueger says.

"The Sorcerer" is about the betrothal of Alexis Pointdextre and Aline Sangazure, a couple who are happy in their union and decide to hire a sorcerer to slip a love potion into the

Gilbert and Sullivan Double Feature
When: 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays, June 8-17
Where: F. Scott Fitzgerald Theater, 603 Edmonston Drive, Rockville
Tickets: \$20 for adults, \$18 for seniors, \$16 for students younger than 16
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tea at their engagement party so that the rest of their guests also will find love with each other. Shenanigans ensue when everybody falls in love with an odd match.

In traditional productions, many of the matches consisted of different social classes, something that was shocking and hilarious to Victorian audiences, but is not seen as odd today, says Ali Oliver-Krueger.

"When we lifted it out of the Victorian era we realized that it did not resonate with 2012 American audiences and that gave us an opportunity to examine where our social divides are today," she says.

Mismatched couples in the VLOC version differ in characteristics such as age or political interests, and also include some same-sex couples on stage, says Pete Oliver-Krueger.

"We were wanting to respect and acknowledge [same-sex couples] but it is not a focal point," he says. "It melds right in. We don't try to draw it out."

Another change the directors made in adapting "The Sorcerer" for modern audiences was to change the personality of the male lead, Alexis. Audiences generally don't want to root for him because he becomes a bit of a jerk when he tries to force his fiancée also to drink the love potion, Pete Oliver-Krueger says. Rather than making him pushy and domineering, they turned Alexis into a nerdy character straight out of a screwball romantic comedy who believes his love is out of his league and is willing to try anything to ensure she'll never leave him.

"We tried to think of what modern equivalent might match up and we thought, 'What if he is this geeky, award guy,'" he says. "You do crazy things when you're in love, especially when you're afraid of losing it."

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