

A Note to Auditionees for *The Sorcerer:*

If you are auditioning for any principal roles,
after singing your audition selection
you will be asked to read from the dialogue vocal score
with the Artistic Director.

You may pick the character you wish to read,
and the scene you wish to read.

See the LAST page of this document for suggestions.

(If you do not pick a scene, one will be assigned to you inside.)

**See the following pages for notes on the show, character descriptions,
and suggested scenes for reading.**

TIPS FOR AUDITIONEES:

1. **Project your voice** as if you were on the largest of stages
(even though you will be close to the Artistic and Music Directors).
2. **Use stage diction, or an “English” accent** (as you understand it),
or at least standard American English, with clear (“crispy”) enunciation/articulation.
3. **Feel free to move** (though your reading partner will remain seated downstage of you).
4. **Project your personality**—or the personality of the character as you understand it.
(We realize that you may *not* be well acquainted with the character today.)

5. ***Relax and have fun!***

We will see you at your best if you do so.

We want to enjoy the auditions, and we want *you* to enjoy your audition, too.



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Audition Notes on *The Sorcerer*

The Sorcerer (1877) is one of the early Gilbert & Sullivan operas; it was composed between the two shows GSSA produced last year, *Trial by Jury* (1875) and *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878). It was the first feature-length G'n'S production of the ambitious impresario Richard D'Oyly Carte, and it proved to London audiences not only the promise of *Trial by Jury*, but also D'Oyly Carte's belief that comic opera written in England by Englishmen on an English subject could be as effective as a French import— if not more so.

Set in the rural village of Ploverleigh, it's a charming tale of Sir Marmaduke Poindextre's son Alexis' betrothal to Lady Sangazure's daughter Aline. Pretty conventional stuff— except that Alexis wants the rest of the world to be as happy as he is, so he engages a London tradesman, John Wellington Wells (of J. W. Wells & Co., Family Sorcerers) to provide a love philtre. This potion, administered in innocent-appearing cups of tea to all in the village, would make the villagers as deliriously happy as he is by falling in love with the first *unmarried* person of the opposite gender they meet. (Mr. Wells's potion is of course, a very *respectable* one.)

And this is where the fun begins: from this innocent (not to say naïve) notion, topsyturvy reigns as the villagers, under the influence of Wells's elixir, fall in love—but with people out of their own social class. (Think of it as plot strands in *Downton Abbey* a century and a quarter before its time.) *The Sorcerer* is filled with Gilbert's wit, clever and romantic lyrics and of course the wonderful and tuneful musical situations one expects to find in a Sullivan score.

My purpose below is to provide information for auditionees concerning the auditions and also concerning the characters in *The Sorcerer*.

If *The Sorcerer* is not in your library, you can download the libretto from The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin's website (www.gilbertsullivan.org; click on "Summer Production"). The Gilbert & Sullivan Archive has additional material; call on <http://math.boisestate.edu/gas/>, where you will be able to read a plot synopsis, see vintage images, or download audio files. Go to GSOpera (www.gsopera.com/opera/51/lexicon) for other good information on the work.

The Sorcerer is filled with roles that are fun to play, and several of them have serious sides—and challenges—too; the work not as familiar as the two we presented last year, and thus it is deserving (as is all of Gilbert & Sullivan) of careful characterization and effective singing and acting. Gilbert & Sullivan are both on record as saying that when

they produced *The Sorcerer* they were looking for good actors who could sing well: Gilbert wanted his words heard and understood and Sullivan wanted them well sung.

THE CHORUS is composed of the men: **The Male Villagers of Ploverleigh** (12 gentlemen, of various ages, in rather rustic or “service” attire); and the women: **The Female Villagers of Ploverleigh** (12 females, idealized Victorian maidens of various ages, also in rather rustic or “service” attire).

THE PRINCIPALS: Here are brief character sketches, with a nod of gratitude to the writings of Harry Benford, Peter Kline—and a certain W. S. Gilbert*:

Sir Marmaduke Poindextre (an Elderly Baronet) (Bass-Baritone): “Poindextre” is an heraldic term suggesting his “top-of-the-tree” status, as does his rank of Baronet.¹ Kline calls him a “paragon of dignity and ancestral snobbery” and notes that he “sets the tone of the whole opera.”³ He has been in love with Lady Sangazure for years, but has never declared it. Love finds its way, eventually, but not before the philtre makes him fall—for his housekeeper, Zorah Partlet! Gilbert paints him as a generous and hospitable lord of the local manor.

Alexis (of the Grenadier Guards—his son) (Tenor): his position in the Grenadier Guards is evidence of his aristocratic status, since such soldiers needed a private income.¹ Kline doesn’t mince words: “This is in some respects the most difficult part in the opera. Vocally it is not terribly demanding, and a good strong A is the highest note needed. But the part requires an actor capable of giving charm to a basically unsympathetic character whose lines can be tedious if they are now well handled.”³ I see him as so blinded by his love for Aline that he’s not aware of his own silliness.

Dr. Daly (Vicar of Ploverleigh) (Light Baritone): The clergyman of the local parish.¹ This loveable character has a couple charming songs to sing and his nostalgic ruminations that his time for love has passed him by are invariably audience-pleasers. “The part requires a warm, light baritone voice with a strong high F-sharp. The most attractive music in the opera is his, and the quality of his singing will tend to set the musical tone of the whole production.”³ (No pressure!) The good doctor is probably slightly past his middle age.

Notary (Bass): As in this country, a Notary (Public) authorizes documents and records the fact that certain persons swear something to be true¹; Benford also notes that his presence may be Gilbert’s “take-off of similar scenes in grand opera, such as *The Barber of Seville* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*.”¹ Peter Kline offers a succinct over-view of this small but memorable role: “He must be capable of a low E-flat that can be clearly heard. . . . He has no spoken lines, and his part in the first act does little to develop his character, since he merely supervises the signing of the marriage contract.” But this part, like Mr. Bunthorne’s Solicitor, can be made a memorable part of the show through excellent characterization.

John Wellington Wells (of J. W. Wells & Co., Family Sorcerers) (Light Baritone): This “dealer in magic and spells”² needs a good singer-actor-comedian to portray him as a magician in the guise of a middle-class tradesman—and a Cockney to boot. George Grossmith created the role, and went on to create Wells’s descendants: Sir Joseph Porter, Major-General Stanley, Bunthorne, etc. etc. etc. Our JWW won’t perform “magic tricks”—he’s not *that* sort of magician! But as the “title character,” he

carries a lot of weight under his top hat—and is willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to restore the status quo (or *is he???*).

Hercules (Mr. Wells's Page) (Male child of ten-ish; speaking role): “This character has three lines, two of which are ‘Yes, sir.’ If he is a cheerful young boy in a fancy costume who lisps, he should be able to get a laugh.”³

Lady Sangazure (a Lady of Ancient Lineage) (Contralto): Her family name means, of course, “blue blood” (see *Iolanthe*), but her lineage may not be quite as lengthy as Pooh-Bah’s (see *The Mikado*). (Her lineage only goes back to Helen of Troy—not a protoplasmal primordial atomic globule.) “This is the first of the aging contraltos that are so often objected to by critics of Gilbert’s libretti. Lady Sangazure is a woman of dignity and passion. She has no spoken lines, two duets, and one recitative.”³ And that magic potion she imbibes makes her fall head over ears in love for J. W. Wells Himself.

Aline (her Daughter—betrothed to Alexis) (Soprano): “Aline is perhaps the most sympathetic of all Gilbert’s sopranos. She is, throughout, the victim of Alexis’ narrow-mindedness, yet she never complains or wavers in her love for him, strong as her misgivings are.”³ She “has no opportunities for comedy,” and “She is perhaps the only character in the opera who maintains the audience’s unqualified sympathy throughout.”³ Of course she needs a glorious and clear soprano. (And you’ll *never guess* whom she falls for while under the potion’s spell!)

Mrs. Partlet (a Pew Opener) (Mezzo-Soprano): Her name, according to Benford (citing the *OED*) is “A word used as the proper name of any hen, often *Dame Partlet*; also applied like ‘hen’ to a woman.”¹ (Benford also notes that “a pew-opener was an impoverished parishioner who was allowed to gather tips by escorting the well-heeled worshipers to their family pews and holding the pew doors open for their benefit.”¹ “The role is confined to one scene in each act, but Mrs. Partlet is the focal point of interest much of the time she is onstage. . . . Like Lady Sangazure, she is an aging woman, but she should contrast with her as much as possible in style and manners. . . . She is warm and loving, and in her attempts to marry off her daughter she reminds one a little of one of Jane Austen’s characters.” She also appears in the finales, of course. It’s a *wonderful* character role.

Constance (her Daughter) (Mezzo-Soprano): Constance “has some good comic business in the second act with the Notary. . . . She is young, pretty, and lovesick. Her melancholy shyness contrasts strongly with Mrs. Partlet’s down-to-earth aggressiveness, and one feels that she is completely dependent on her mother.”³ *Actually*, she has some good comic business in the first act with Dr. Daly, too!

I’ve said perhaps too often that there’s only one G’n’S activity more fun than seeing one of their operas—and that’s actually *working* on one. If you need a little push to encourage you to audition, please consider this it. Jeffrey and I do all we can to make the auditions fun and relaxed.

If you have questions, please contact me: RafeMacPhail@Yahoo.com.

I've said perhaps too often that there's only one G&S activity more fun than seeing one of their operas—and that's actually *working* on one, so thank you for coming today to auditions. Jeffrey and I both wish you well.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rose MacHale". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

*Bibliography

¹Harry Benford, *The Gilbert and Sullivan Lexicon* (Houston: Queensbury, 1999) and online at www.GSOpera.com/lexicon.

²W. S. Gilbert, *The Savoy Operas: I* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

³Peter Kline, *Gilbert & Sullivan Production* (The Theatre Student Series) (New York: Richards Rosen Press, Inc., 1972).

THE SORCERER
Dialogue for Auditions

See Next Pages

THE SORCERER

Dialogue for Auditions

All of the dialogue in *The Sorcerer* is in the Lulu vocal score, and auditionees for principal roles may read a scene of their choice. (If they do not select one, they will be assigned one.) The following are the scenes with the characters involved. (Names in parenthesis have less to say in the particular scenes than the others named.) [The words in brackets give a general idea of the subject or function of the scene.] The index at the bottom is arranged by character: start there! (This document may also be used as a “finding guide; though the dialogue sequences are designated with a D following the number of the musical selection they follow, they are listed in libretto order.

Scenes: (names in parenthesis have less to do in these scenes than the others named):

Act One:

2aD (p. 20): *Mrs. Partlet, Constance* [Constance tells her mother about her love for the local vicar]

Page 26—actually 28: *Dr. Daly, Sir Marmaduke, Alexis* [Dr. Daly blesses Alexis’ forthcoming nuptials]

3aD (p. 26): *Dr. Daly, Mrs. Partlet, Constance* [Mrs. Partlet attempts matchmaking for her daughter with the vicar]

4D (p. 26—actually 28): *Sir Marmaduke, Alexis, Dr. Daly* [Dr. Daly blesses Alexis’ forthcoming nuptials]

4D (p. 29): *Sir Marmaduke, Alexis* [Father and son explain their motives regarding Alexis’ and Aline’s marriage]

10D (p. 56): *Alexis, Aline* [Alexis explains to Aline his idea of love]

11D (p. 60): *Mr. Wells, [Page], Alexis, Aline* [Alexis introduces J. W. Wells and the reason for his engagement]

12D (p. 69): *Alexis, Mr. Wells, Aline* [Preparations are made for the incantation]

Act Two:

16D (p. 140): *Aline, Alexis* [Alexis induces Aline to take the potion]

17D (p. 144): *Dr. Daly, Aline, Alexis, Sir Marmaduke, Mrs. Partlet* [Mixups revealed!]

23D (p. 183): *Dr. Daly, Alexis, Mr. Wells, Aline* [A resolution!]

Suggestions by Character (See Next Page)

Suggestions by Character

Sir Marmaduke Poindextre: 4D, 17D

Alexis: 4D, 10D, 11D, 12D, 16D, 17D, 23D

Dr. Daly: 3aD, p.26[28] 4D, 17D, 23D

Notary [has no spoken lines]

John Wellington Wells: 11D, 12D

Lady Sangazure [has no spoken lines]

Aline: 10D, 11D, 12D, 16D, 17D, 23D

Mrs. Partlet: 2aD, 3aD, 17D

Constance: 2aD, 3aD

Mr. Wells's Page: 11D

