Sinfonicron Light Opera presents
The Drowsy Chaperone
January 17-20, 2019
Kimball Theatre

Christopher Wren Association
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NOTE: The views expressed in this lecture are those of the speaker, and do not necessarily reflect the views of Sinfonicron Light Opera, the Christopher Wren Association, Thomas Nelson Community College, or any other person or institution.
Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia + Delta Omicron = Sinfonicron

Founded in 1965, Managed entirely by students
“A Musical within a Comedy”

Time: The present and 1928 (sort of)
Place: A modern day apartment and the Morosco Theater (sort of)

Lyrics and Music by Lisa Lambert and Greg Morrison
Book by Bob Martin and Don McKellar

Tony Award Winner in 2006 for Best Score and Best Book
The Drowsy Chaperone
Topics for discussion

The enduring appeal of the musical comedies of the Twenties

The play within a play in drama, opera, and musical theater
Musical Comedies of the Twenties (and Thirties)

Plotless revues (e.g. Ziegfeld Follies)

European style operettas

Light, frivolous comedies, often with interchangeable songs

And then there’s:

Show Boat (1927)

The exception that proves the rule.
Musicals of the Forties and beyond

Starting with Oklahoma! (1943)

• Naturalistic stories
• Songs integrated into the plot
• Dance numbers that advance the story and/or character development
• Serious plots; willingness to deal with death

• “Musical” makes a transition from adjective to noun
The enduring appeal

As Broadway musicals evolved in new and more dramatic directions, it is as if there was a collective realization that the older, lighter musical comedies had a charm that was worth preserving.

On film and onstage, Twenties musicals have remained with us.
Looking back at 1920s musical comedy: Parodies, tributes, revivals, and rewrites

• The Boy Friend (1954, 1970)
• Little Mary Sunshine (1959 Off Broadway)
• No, No, Nanette (1925, revived 1971)
• Anything Goes (1934, Film 1956, revived 1987, 2011)
• 42nd Street (Film 1933, Broadway 1980, 2001)
Looking back at 1920s musical comedy: Parodies, tributes, revivals, and rewrites

• An American in Paris (Film 1951, Broadway 2015)

• Singin’ in the Rain (Film 1952, Broadway 1985)
Looking back at 1920s musical comedy: Parodies, tributes, revivals, and rewrites

• Funny Girl (Broadway 1964, Film 1968)
• Thoroughly Modern Millie (Film 1967, Broadway 2002)
• Crazy For You (Broadway 1992)
• Sugar Babies (Broadway 1979)
• Will Rogers Follies (Broadway 1991)
• Follies (Broadway 1971, 2001, 2011)

and

• That’s Entertainment I-III (Films 1974, 1976, 1994)
The play within a play in Shakespeare

• The Taming of the Shrew
• Love’s Labours Lost: The Pageant of the Nine Worthies
• A Midsummer Night’s Dream: Pyramus and Thisbe
• Hamlet: The Murder of Gonzago
Divertissement: The dance within an opera

• “Happy peasants on the village green”
• Guests at a party: “Let’s dance.”

• More elaborate divertissements
  Verdi, La Traviata
  Wagner, Tannhauser (Paris version)
  Ponchielli, La Gioconda
Pagliacci by Ruggero Leoncavallo (1892)
Opera’s greatest play within a play

• The opera’s characters are a troupe of actors

• The opera ends with a play within a play reflecting their real life situation

• Spoiler alert: it doesn’t end well
Broadway plays within a play

- The Sound of Music: The Lonely Goatherd
- Singin’ in the Rain: The Dancing Cavalier
- The King and I: The Small House of Uncle Thomas
- Kiss Me, Kate: The Taming of the Shrew
- Man of La Mancha: Don Quixote
- The Producers: Springtime for Hitler
- Curtains: Robbin’ Hood of the Old West
- Something Rotten: Omelette, the Musical
- Follies: Act II
The Drowsy Chaperone

• Overture

• Introductory monologue by Man in Chair

• Opening number, Fancy Dress, which introduces the characters:
Cast List, Part I

• Mrs. Tottendale, the hostess
• Underling, her butler
• Robert Martin, the groom
• George, his best man
Cast List II: The Adventure Continues

• Feldzieg, a Broadway producer
• Kitty, a chorus girl aspiring to stardom
• Two gangsters disguised as pastry chefs
• Aldolpho, a Latin lover
Cast List III: The Final Chapter

• Janet Van De Graaf, the bride
• The Chaperone
• Trix, an aviatrix

• Ensemble: servants, reporters, wedding guests, etc.
The situation

Janet wants to marry Robert and retire from show business. Feldzieg is afraid that losing his star will close his show. The gangsters’ boss has money invested in the show so they, like Feldzieg, want to stop the wedding.

In the song “Show Off,” Janet explains to the reporters that she is serious about retiring.
The plot thickens (but remains pretty thin)

Feldzieg’s attempts to stop the wedding don’t seem to be working. The gangsters threaten him with a “Toledo Surprise,” which is a euphemism for a gangland assassination method, but which the rest of the cast assumes is a dessert recipe.

Because of a misunderstanding involving mistaken identity, Janet calls off the wedding. Feldzieg is overjoyed. Act I ends with the entire cast dancing the Toledo Surprise.
Intermission

Man in Chair leaves for a bathroom break. Before leaving he invites us to listen to the beginning of Act II. However, he puts on the wrong record.

Hilarity ensues.

Caution: the next slide contains a spoiler. If you don’t want to learn what happens in Act II, skip it.
Act II

The misunderstanding from Act I is resolved. Robert and Janet get married and everyone is very happy.

Even the gangsters.
The End
Final thought on The Drowsy Chaperone

Man in Chair is too young to have ever seen The Drowsy Chaperone onstage. What we have seen are not his memories, but his imaginings.

In 1928, were the costumes as colorful, the sets as bright, the dances as energetic as what he has shown us? Neither he nor we will ever know.
... and coming to a theater near you:
The Sorcerer by Gilbert and Sullivan

• Thomas Nelson Community College, Hampton

• July 12-21, 2019

• tncc.edu/performingarts
Sinfonicron Sorcerer, 1976
Act II quintet
The G&S Canon

- Thespis, or The Gods Grown Old 1871 (63)
- Trial by Jury 1875 (131)
- The Sorcerer 1877 (178)
- HMS Pinafore, or The Lass Who Loved a Sailor 1878 (571)
- The Pirates of Penzance, or The Slave of Duty 1879 (363)
- Patience, or Bunthorne’s Bride 1881 (578)
- Iolanthe, or The Peer and the Peri 1882 (398)
- Princess Ida, or Castle Adamant 1884 (246)
The G&S Canon

• The Mikado, or The Town of Titipu 1885 (672)
• Ruddigore, or The Witch’s Curse 1887 (288)
• The Yeomen of the Guard, or The Merryman & His Maid 1888 (423)
• The Gondoliers, or The King of Barataria 1889 (554)
• Utopia, Limited, or The Flowers of Progress 1893 (245)
• The Grand Duke, or The Statutory Duel 1896 (123)
Love potion stories, old and new

• A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Shakespeare (1595)
• L’elisir d’Amore, Donizetti (1832)
• Dulcamara, or the Little Duck and the Great Quack, Gilbert (1866)
• Tristan und Isolde, Wagner (1865)

• The Up-to-Date Sorcerer, Asimov (1958), reprinted in Nightfall and Other Stories (1969)
The Sorcerer

• First extant full length G&S work
• Set the pattern for what was to come
• Effective comic use of the chorus
• The strongest example in the canon of the Lozenge Plot
• The first opera to be revived (1884)
• Beginnings of the standard set of G&S characters
  The young lovers, the elderly contralto, the patter song baritone, etc.
The Rules of the Love Potion

1. Whoever drinks it falls asleep immediately.

2. On waking, the person falls in love with the first person he or she sees of the opposite sex, provided that the other person has also taken the potion. However;

3. The potion has no effect on married people.
Wells’ Patter Song (Abridged)

My name is John Wellington Wells,
I’m a dealer in magic and spells,
in blessings and curses and ever-filled purses,
in prophecies, witches, and knells.

If you want a proud foe to "make tracks"
if you'd melt a rich uncle in wax--
you've but to look in on the resident djinn,
Number 70 Simmery Axe!
Wells’ Patter Song (Abridged)

We've a first-rate assortment of magic;
and for raising a posthumous shade,
with effects that are comic or tragic,
there's no cheaper house in the trade.
love-philtre--we've quantities of it!
and for knowledge if any one burns,
we’re keeping a very small prophet, a prophet
who brings us unbounded returns:
Wells’ Patter Song (Abridged)

For he can prophesy with a wink of his eye,  
peep with security into futurity,  
sum up your history, clear up a mystery,  
humour proclivity for a nativity--for a nativity;

He has answers oracular, bogies spectacular,  
tetrapods tragical, mirrors so magical,  
facts astronomical, solemn or comical,  
and, if you want it, he makes a reduction on taking a quantity!

Oh!
Wells’ Patter Song (Abridged)

My name is John Wellington Wells,
I’m a dealer in magic and spells,
in blessings and curses and ever-filled purses,
in prophecies, witches, and knells.

And if any one anything lacks,
he'll find it all ready in stacks,
if he'll only look in on the resident djinn,
Number 70, Simmery Axe!
In Conclusion


3. Keep musical theater in your life.