

## A GENTLEMAN'S GUIDE TO LOVE AND MURDER

Reviewed by Tony Annicone (Tony's Corner)

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Greater Worcester Opera's spring production this year is the 2014 Tony Award winning "A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder." The musical has been recorded live on stage, adhering to strict protocols, and will be available to be livestreamed viewing for six performances on May 7, 8, 14 and 15 at 7:30 P.M. and May 9 and 16 at 2 P.M. It features everything a live performance would expect for an in-person audience.

The musical centers on Monty Navarro who is in a jail cell writing in his diary as the show opens. We then follow him from right after his mother's funeral when he finds out a secret about her past from Miss Shingle. His mother is related to the enormously wealthy D'Ysquith family and Monty is the ninth in line of succession to become an Earl. He also has his eye on the beautiful Sibilla who is only interested in a man with lots of money. Later on after meeting several snobby relatives, Monty develops a crush on his cousin, Phoebe. Monty's many relatives meet "accidents" along the way in comic ways while he pursues love. Hence the title of the show becomes apparent as he follows his guide to love and murder.

Director and music director Aldo Fabrizi picks talented performers not only for the leading roles but for the ensemble, too. This streaming show is sound engineered and edited by Charles Crane and filmed and edited by Ryan Malyar. It rivets you to your seat from start to finish as the story winds and twists one way to the other with marvelous singing and acting by one and all. To order your ticket for this spectacular musical go to [www.greaterworcesteropera.org](http://www.greaterworcesteropera.org) This musical is a tongue in cheek show almost like a comic Sweeney Todd set in a Downton Abbey setting. Center stage has a curtain that opens and closes on the various locations in the show. While in prison Monty is on stage right while the D'Ysquith family office is on stage left. Aldo gives his cast a lot of shtick to perform that will keep you in stitches.

Playing the leading role of Monty is Taylor Lawton who is hardly offstage for the entire two hour and 38 minute show. He has an incredible tenor voice which soars in all his numbers whether it be a solo, duet or trio. Taylor's solos include "Foolish to Think" as he wonders if he can really become a member of this wealthy clan, "Sibella" where he ponders whether to continue to love her even though she's married and "Poison in his Pocket" where he contemplates bumping off his relatives. His acting entrances you while committing some evil deeds you still root for him to take his rightful position as the Earl and for him to find true love at last. The most comic number is the trio song "I've Decided to Marry You" where he blocks each woman from observing the other with a door between them as he continually runs back and forth.

All the D'Ysquith family members are brilliantly played by Benjamin Morse who has some of the fastest costume changes in the history of the theatre. His characterization of each one is different from the other. They include the tipsy cleric, Ezekial who takes him to the turrets of a monastery, (Foolish to Think), the obnoxious playboy, Asquith Jr. who takes his gal to ice skate, (Poison in My Pocket trio), the tres gay, Henry, the beekeeper (Better with a Man duet with Monty), Lady Hyacinth who Monty sends to Egypt, India and Africa for her philanthropic work, Major Bartholomew who lifts heavy weights, Lady Salome, a dreadful actress in "Hedda Gabler" and the kindly Asquith Sr. who hires Monty for his stockbroking firm (Last One You'd Expect). The worst relative of them all is Adalbert who sings the condescending number "I Don't Understand the

Poor" and at the dinner scene in Act 2 sings "Looking Down the Barrel of a Gun" about the Boer War while he waves a rifle at all the guests. Benjamin shines in all these roles and his exchanges with Taylor in each scene are topnotch. Also his argument scene with his wife, Eugenia played by Jeanine Went are hilarious as they bicker back and forth.

The social climbing, vain beautiful Sibilla is excellently played by Paige Fowler. She forces Monty to wait on her hand and foot in "I Don't Know What I'd Do" without him even though he's poor, she laments leaving him for her husband in "Poor Monty" on her wedding day and in "That Horrible Woman" Sibella and Phoebe sing about the faults of each other. Paige's mezzo soprano voice is beautiful. Phoebe, the sweet innocent and true love of Monty is played marvelously by Elaine Crane who has a stunning soprano voice. Her numbers are "Inside Out" where she wants the world to see the goodness in each person, the trio number "I've Decided to Marry You" and the duet with Sibella "That Horrible Woman." All the performers do a splendid job both singing and acting their roles. The mysterious, Miss Shingle who figures greatly in this story is wonderfully played by Martha Warren. She spills the beans about Monty's true heritage in "You're a D'Ysquith" duet with Taylor. The chorus members do an exceptional job while playing multiple roles. Kevin Dibble displayed his bass voice while Travis Benoit displayed his tenor voice in the ensemble numbers.

Kudos to one and all who make this a production to be very proud of. I encourage audience members to definitely contact Greater Worcester Opera to obtain tickets for this outstanding performance. Tell them Tony sent you.

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Greater Worcester Opera