

## Coach House Players stage ‘The Enchanted Cottage’ in Kingston April 5 to 9



Scott Wooley and Grace Jarrold play Oliver Bashforth and Laura Penington in a rehearsal of a scene from Coach House Theater’s production of “The Enchanted Cottage.” The play tells the story of how Oliver, an emotionally and physically wounded WWI veteran falls in love with Laura, a plain Jane housekeeper at a cottage where he goes to escape it all. The play opens at the theater housed in the historic Coykendall Coach House at 12 Augusta St.in Kingston on Wednesday, April 5 at 7:30 p.m. with additional 7:30 p.m. shows on April 6, 7 and 8 and a matinee at 2 p.m. April 9. Photo provided

By Brian Hubert , [bhubert@freemanonline.com](mailto:bhubert@freemanonline.com)

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Cast members of Coach House Theater's "The Enchanted Cottage" chat during a recent rehearsal at the company's theater housed in the historic Coykendall Coach House at 12 Augusta St. in Kingston. Photo provided

KINGSTON, N.Y. >> Scott Wooley, a software developer at IBM Poughkeepsie by day and a community theater actor by night, likes a challenge.

That's why he took on the role of Oliver Bashforth in "The Enchanted Cottage" in Coach House Players' revival of the 1920s British play, which opens Wednesday.

The play chronicles the life of Bashforth, a disfigured and emotionally injured World War I veteran who falls in love with Laura Pennington, a housekeeper who works at the cottage where he goes to escape.

Waiting for a rehearsal to start on a recent evening, Wooley admitted he had misgivings about even taking up the role at first.

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"I had my reservations," Wooley said, adding that he typically prefers playing more upbeat roles in musicals over the downcast Bashforth.

"I usually don't go out for dramas," Wooley said. "I did enjoy the script."

But he just couldn't bring himself to say no to a role his mother-in-law pushed him to rehearse for.

"I like a challenge," Wooley said. "Each show is its own creative process, and I like the challenge of bringing it all together."

He admitted that he found the script to be a bit "musty."

"How do we interpret that," Wooley said. "There's not a lot of backstory from author to tell us how the lines are to be delivered."

Wooley, who formerly lived in Kingston but now lives in Poughkeepsie, said he's acted at Coach House in the past, but he hasn't done a show there in quite a bit.

Wooley said he doesn't even mind driving 35-40 minutes each way for rehearsals.

As he's rehearsed and rehearsed Wooley said he's worked himself into Bashforth's character, but he added he continues to have mixed feelings about the character.

"I'm not a grumpy person," Wooley said. "I'm playing a grumpy character that is supposed to be liked."

But as the show progresses, Oliver shows he has capacity to show emotion, Wooley said.

Wooley said he's grown to like the show's message about what beauty really is.

"What is beauty is not what's on the outside," Wooley said.

Like Wooley, Grace Jarrold, who plays Laura Pennington, said her role represents a departure from her usual roles as an actor and singer in upbeat comedies and musicals.

Laura is different from me, Jarrold said.

"It's really hard being still," Jarrold said. "It's just really hard being quieter."

"She's more mild mannered, much more than I am," Jarrold said.

Despite Laura's meekness, Jarrold said she's grown to like how she deals with Oliver's grumpiness.

"She has to be nice and appease him, but she holds her own ability to bite back a bit," Jarrold said.

Jarrold, who holds a bachelor's in theater from SUNY New Paltz, said she wasn't even that familiar with the story when she heard about the production from director Susan Regan.

“Sue talked about it, and I quickly learned about it,” Jarrold said,

Jarrold decided to audition for the part, and she said she’s grown to love how this play allows the audience to interpret how they feel about what can seem as pretty straightforward plot.

“They can take it the way they want to,” Jarrold added. “We don’t have to spoon-feed it to them.”

Regan, a longtime Coach House member, who is making her debut as director, said she was attracted to “The Enchanted Cottage” after seeing the 1945 RKO Pictures film of the same named that starred Dorothy McGuire, Robert Young, Herbert Marshall and which differed from the play by moving the setting to post-World War II.

“I saw the movie, and loved the story and I knew of the play,” Regan said.

She added that she regretted not picking up a copy of the script years ago in New York City.

“I searched the internet high and low,” Regan said.

Eventually, Regan, who’d previously only seen the movie, said she happened on a script for the play, which is now in the public domain.

Regan said she decided to return the production to its original setting in the 1920s, but like the film, she made some edits to the script to move things along better.

“I cut the nightmare scene to push it along,” Regan said. “Hollywood had this long prologue that dumbed it down.

“I guess they thought the audience couldn’t figure it out.”

But as opening night neared, the actor who was cast to play Major Hillgrove fell ill.

“His doctor told him he had to drop out,” Regan said.

While the role was recast in two days, Regan said it forced her to push the play’s opening back nearly two weeks from its original March 24 opening night.

She added that her cast was up to task.

“It didn’t take long to take him into the fold,” Regan said.

Regan said she believes despite its age the story will connect with 21st century audiences.

“They got me crying,” Regan said.

Regan said several of the cast members saw the film to get a visual reading of the characters.

But she cautioned that film acting is quite different from acting on stage.

The actor or actress has to be heard and be seen by everyone in the audience, and this requires considering many things like knowing where people in the middle of the aisle are.

“On stage you are acting for the person in the back row,” Regan said. “With film, you are acting for the one person on camera.

“There are different ways of showing movement and emotion.”

Sitting on the stage in the theater, housed in the historic Coykendall coach house on Augusta Street, Regan elaborated on why Oliver decides to go to the cottage in the first place.

“He wants to jump into a hole, and get away from the world,” Regan said.

But he meets Laura, and finds she’s in the same emotional boat, Regan said.

“Things start to change slowly, but surely,” Regan said.

What: Coach House Players presents “The Enchanted Cottage”

When: April 5 to 8 at 7:30 p.m., April 9 at 2:30 p.m.

Where: Coach House Theater, 12 Augusta St., Kingston.

How much: \$20 adults; \$18 seniors 62 and over and children age 12 and under.

Contact: <http://coachhouseplayers.org/>