



The Guide to Musical Theatre

THE CHOCOLATE SOLDIER

Music by Oscar Straus. Book & Lyrics by Stanislaus Stange. Adaptation by Agnes Bernelle, Adam Carstairs and Ronald Hanmer. Based on the play *Arms and the Man* by George Bernard Shaw

Lyric Theatre, New York - 13 September, 1909 (296 perfs)

Lyric Theatre, London - 10 September, 1910

SYNOPSIS

When Lieutenant Bummerli, a Swiss mercenary in the Serbian army, takes refuge from his Bulgarian enemies in the house of a Bulgarian general - to be precise, in the daughter's bedroom - he sets hearts a-flutter, almost compromises three ladies and then ruins the daughter's wedding to a Bulgarian soldier-hero by being recognised as the fugitive! This is just as well because he and Nadina, the daughter, were destined for each other anyway. This new English version should help to restore this formerly well-loved operetta to the repertoire.



STORY

Act 1

Serbia and Bulgaria are at war, and the wife and daughter of the Bulgarian Colonel Popoff are missing their menfolk – the Colonel himself, and Major Alexius Spiridoff, who is engaged to the daughter, Nadina. Mascha, a young cousin of Nadina who is staying at the Popoff's residence, also hero worships Alexius. Alone in her bedroom, Nadina clutches her sweetheart's photograph and sings of her admiration and love for her "brave hussar" and longs for his return.

An intruder (Bumerli) climbs in through her bedroom window. He is a very ordinary person, nothing like the ideal hero Nadina has been worshipping. In fact he has escaped the battle taking place nearby by climbing the Popoffs' drainpipe. He is in Serbian uniform, but responds to Nadina's patriotic posturing by revealing that his is actually Swiss, and is serving in the Serbian army as a mercenary. When she threatens to call for help he briefly threatens her with his revolver – but soon puts it down. When she picks it up and threatens him he laughs at her – he uses his ammunition pouch to carry chocolates and has no cartridges to load his weapon.

In spite of herself Nadina is amused and charmed by this "Little Chocolate Soldier". He recounts an incident in battle when a foolish Bulgarian officer lost control of his horse, thus leading an inadvertent cavalry charge against Serb guns that happened to have been supplied with the wrong ammunition and were thus overrun. Nadina is furious to realise that the officer concerned was her Alexius, and orders Bumerli to leave at once – when he starts to leave she calls him back. Just in time, as a squad of bumbling Bulgarian soldiers, led by Captain Massakroff, arrive in pursuit. Fortunately Bumerli has had time to hide behind the bed curtains, and Nadina assures them that she has not seen the intruder. While the Bulgarian soldiers search the rest of the house, Aurelia, Nadina's mother, and young Mascha come to the bedroom. They are sure something is going

on, and when they spot Bumerli's revolver the secret is out.

By the time the soldiers have left the house and Nadina opens her bed curtains Bumerli is asleep, and the lonely women are all very taken with him. They awaken him with their chatter, but he is exhausted and only wants to go back to sleep again. They ransack the house for civilian clothes to enable him to escape – each, unknown to the others, slipping a photograph of herself into the pocket of his jacket – a favourite house coat of the Colonel's.

Act 2

Six months have passed, and the war is over. Outside the Popoff residence the family and servants are welcoming their heroes home. Nadina is delighted to have her Alexius back, but she soon realises that he is far from the hero she imagined, but is boastful and self-centred. When he boasts of the incident of the charge on the guns he is embarrassed to realise that Nadina knows more about the matter than she should. The ladies are embarrassed in their turn when Popoff tells them of a Swiss soldier in the Serbian army that they met after the fighting was over – and who told them a very funny story of escaping from a battle by hiding in a house where he was sheltered by three ladies who all fell in love with him.

The plot thickens as Bumerli himself returns to the scene. He has come to return the clothes he used to escape, and manages to slip them to the ladies without suspicion being aroused. The menfolk are a little puzzled to meet him again, but they invite him to stay for the wedding of Nadina and Alexius. Bumerli manages to get Nadina alone, and confesses that it is his love for her that has drawn him back. He cannot bear to see her married to another, and goes to leave. Heartbroken herself, Nadina asks for her photograph – but Bumerli never looked in the pocket of her father's housecoat – it is still there!

The Colonel is wearing his favourite coat – there is some slapstick as the ladies try to stop him looking in his pocket by finding him matches and a handkerchief. Eventually they all retrieve a photograph from the pocket – each assuming it is their own. When Nadina goes to return her photograph to Bumerli she finds that it is Mascha's, and that there is a compromising message on the back of it. She flies into a jealous fury that removes all possible doubt that it is Bumerli she really loves.

The guests gather for the wedding ceremony – including Captain Massakroff, who recognises Bumerli as the intruder he saw climb the drainpipe in Act I – in the resulting chaos Mascha produces Nadina's photograph, with its compromising message. Popoff and Alexius are not very bright, but even they start to put two and two together. Alexius is furious with Nadina, and she in her turn declares that she no longer loves him. As the act curtain falls the wedding is definitely off.

Act 3

The scene returns to Nadina's bedroom, where she is writing a letter to Bumerli. It is not friendly, as she is still jealous of Mascha. As she finishes the letter, Bumerli himself appears through the window. Nadina gives him his letter, but he does not take it seriously. If she did not love him she would not be so jealous.

Massakroff appears, with a challenge to a duel from Alexius to Bumerli. Bumerli accepts without hesitation, much to Nadina's consternation. Alexius is also terrified – he would never have challenged his rival if he had not been sure he was too much of a coward to accept. It seems Alexius is coming round to the idea he would be happier with Mascha anyway.

Any doubts among the family that Bumerli would not make a good husband for Nadina are dispelled by the revelation that he is the son of a wealthy Swiss businessman, and all ends happily.

CAST

Principals: 3 female, 4 male

Lieutenant Bumerli - a serving officer

Colonel Kasimir Popoff

Nadina Poppoff - his daughter
Mascha - a kinswoman
Major Alexius Spiridoff - a pompous hero

MUSICAL NUMBERS:

Act 1

1. "We Are Marching Through the Night" – Soldiers
2. "We Too, Are Lonely" – Nadina, Aurelia, Mascha
3. "We Are Searching for the Foe" – Soldiers
4. "What Can We Do Without a Man?" – Nadina, Aurelia, Mascha
5. "Say Good Night" – Nadina, Aurelia, Mascha
6. "Melodrama" – Nadina, Aurelia, Mascha
7. "My Hero" – Nadina
8. "Chocolate Soldier" – Bumerli, Nadina
9. "Sympathy" – Bumerli, Nadina
10. "Seek the Spy" – Massakroff, Nadina, Aurelia, Macha, Bumerli, Soldiers
11. Finaletto Act 1 – Nadina, Aurelia, Mascha

Act 2

12. "The Fatherland is Free" – Company
13. "Alexius the Hero" – Nadina, Aurelia, Mascha, Poppoff, Alexius, Bumerli, Ensemble
14. "Never Was There Such a Lover" – Alexius, Nadina
15. "The Tale of the Coat" – Nadina, Aurelia, Mascha, Poppoff, Alexius, Bumerli
16. "That Would Be Lovely" – Bumerli, Nadina
17. Finaletto Act 2 – Nadina, Aurelia, Mascha, Poppoff, Alexius, Bumerli, Ensemble

Act 3

18. Opening Chorus – Ensemble
19. "Falling in Love" – Alexius, Mascha
20. "The Letter Song" – Nadina
21. "Melodrama" – Bumerli
22. "The Letter Song" (reprise) – Bumerli, Nadina
23. Finale – Company

MUSICAL NUMBERS (GERMAN)

Act 1

1. "Wir marschieren durch die Nacht" ("We march through the night")
2. "Mein Held!" ("My Hero!")
3. "Wie schön ist dieses Männerbild" ("How handsome is this man")
4. "Komm', Komm! Held meiner Träume" ("Come, come! Hero of my dreams")
5. "In meinen Leben sah ich nie einen Helden" ("In my life I never saw a hero")
6. "Ach, du kleiner Praliné-Soldat" ("Oh, you little praline-soldier")
7. "Es ist ein Schicksal, schwer zu tragen; Weil's Leben süß und herrlich ist" ("It is a destiny that is hard to bear; because life is sweet and splendid")
8. "Suchet alle Mann, der Serbe nicht entwischen Kann!" ("Every man, search, the Serb cannot escape")
9. "Drei Frauen sassen am Feuerherd; Tiralala! (finale)" ("Three women sat at the fireplace; Tiralala! (finale)")

Act 2

10. "Ein Hoch ein Hoch der Heldenschar!" ("Hail, hail the high band of heroes")
11. "Ich bin gewöhnt stets nur zu siegen; Mein Mädchenherz, das schlägt" ("I am used to always winning; my maiden heart is beating")
12. "Ich habe die Feinde geschlagen auf's Haupt" ("I have hit the enemy at the top")
13. "Ein Jeder hat es schon erfahren; Wenn man so dürfte, wie man wollte" ("Everyone already knows it; if you wish, do as you please")
14. "Ach, es ist doch ein schönes Vergnügen" ("Oh, it is a fine joy")
15. "Es war einmal ein Fräulein" ("There was once a maiden")
16. "Leute, Leute, kommt herbei" ("People, people, come this way")
17. "Ich was der Held deiner Träume" ("I was the hero of your dreams")

Act 3

18. "Mein lieber Herr von Bumerli" ("My dear Lord Bumerli")
19. "Pardon! Ich steig' ja nur auf den Balcon!" ("Pardon! I rise only on the balcony!")
20. "Du magst dein Köpfchen noch so heftig schütteln; Freundchen, Freundchen nur nicht toben" ("You might have shaken your head, friend, rather than rage")
21. "Wenn ein Mann ein Mädchen; Lieber Schwiegerpapa, liebe Schweigermama" ("If a man is a girl; Dear Papa, dear Mama")
22. "Ich geb' Dir morgens einem Kuss" ("I give you a morning kiss")

INSTRUMENTATION:

flute, oboe, 2 clarinets, bassoon, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, percussion, harp, strings