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'Sing' a song of triumph

KEITH JUROSKO heads a large and uniformly excellent cast.

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REVIEW

GEORGE AND IRA Gershwin's delicious sendup of U.S. politics, "Of Thee I Sing," is being given a new, fully staged production by the New York Gilbert & Sullivan Players in Symphony Space, where it will play through April 15.

This is the first non-G&S show in NYGASP's history, and also the first authentic production of "Of Thee I Sing" since its 1931 Broadway premiere. True, there were revivals here in 1952 and 1969, but script and music were updated and rearranged.

Heard as the Gershwins wrote it, "Of Thee I Sing" is still hilariously trenchant musical comedy. Politics haven't changed all that much since the Depression — the vacuous President John P. Wintergreen and his gormless veep Alexander Throttlebottom seem still with us today. The music likewise remains timeless, and will become a revelation to many audiences. It's also fitting that NYGASP is performing this show, since much of the score, especially the two finales, strikingly recalls Gilbert & Sullivan themselves.

The wonderful tunes are all there, including "Who Cares," "Love is Sweeping the Country" and the title song, while it's a pleasure to hear Robert Russell Bennett's original orchestrations so well played and conducted with such flair by Albert Bergeret. The designs by Jack Garver and Jan Holland are delightfully in period, Kristen Garver's direction is near-flawlessly timed, while the choreography of Bill Fabris is snappy in the extreme and wonderfully executed. The tap dance that opens Act II was a real showstopper.

There's not a weak link in the huge cast. Keith Jurosko (a look-alike for Jack Haley) is an ideal Wintergreen, Alan Hill an endearingly incompetent Throttlebottom. Kate Egan shines as Mary Turner and Jayne Ackley Lynch as Diana Devereaux. Special kudos to the gentlemen of the Supreme Court, who got roars of laughter every time they came on. NYGASP's chorus sounded and looked better than ever. "Of Thee I Sing" wins in a walk.