



Society : Maidenhead Operatic Society  
Production : **IOLANTHE**  
Date : Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> May 2012  
Venue : Desborough Suite, Maidehead  
Report by : Gordon Bird, NODA Representative, Area 14

---

## Report

It has been quite a while since I have seen a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta so I was delighted to be invited to see Maidenhead Operatic Society's production of *Iolanthe* on their second night.

The show was the seventh in the collaboration between G S Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan. It opened on the 25<sup>th</sup> November 1882, unusually in London and New York on the same day. The London showing ran for over 300 nights and the opening night was the first at the New Savoy Theatre in the Strand, where audiences were introduced to the first show to be run by electricity.

Although I did not witness any world firsts of theatre history, I did see a marvellous production that did not disappoint in any way; wonderful singing supplemented by some delightful light comic touches, sumptuous costumes and effective characterisation.

### **DEBBIE HORE (Celia)**

### **JACQI O'BRIEN (Leila)**

### **JULIA HIGGS (Fleta)**

Each of these three fairies had their own unique character, making their performances memorable. I enjoyed the characterisation of Fleta as JULIA introduced some lovely comic touches. This was like a fairy version of Peggy, a character so successfully performed by Su Pollard in the BBC comedy programme, "*Hi-di-hi*". Their singing, both as individuals and as a collective, was superb. I did feel that some of the lines that were delivered out front would have worked better if they were delivered to the characters on stage. On the whole these three characters performed very well indeed.

### **LOU TAIT (Queen of the Fairies)**

Lou looked every inch the queen. Her dominating stature clearly helped giving her marvellous stage presence but it was also supported by a strong character portrayal. Again, Lou's singing was first-rate and sung her pieces very well.

### **SIAN OXLEY (Iolanthe)**

There were some wonderful facial expressions from this fine actress. Not only did she sing superbly, but her movement and characterisation could not be faulted. This was an extremely effective performance of the "seventeen" year old banished fairy. Her opening moments on stage, when she mimed her relationship with her husband was exceptionally well performed.

### **SIMON CLASSEY (Strephon)**

Simon sang superbly throughout the production. From his opening number he sung with confidence. His duets were very well balanced, showing consideration to those he was singing and acting alongside. His costumes help his character – the 'country bumpkin' to begin with and then the outfit for his lordship.

**EVE MACDONALD (Phyllis)**

A lovely character part and acted very well during the scene when she discovers her fiancé is talking to young woman. She presented this very well indeed and “fainted” perfectly. In addition to acting competently throughout, Eve sang superbly too. This was a wonderful part that was brought to life by an accomplished performer.

**GARETH WATKINS (Earl of Mountaratat)  
SEANN WILKINSON (Earl Tolloller)**

I have put these two together because a lot of my comments are the same for both. Gareth and Seann were superb in their characters. There was a lovely chemistry and understanding between these two actors that lifted their scenes. SEANN made use of some wonderful facial expressions to excellent effect. Their singing was of a very high quality indeed. Congratulations to GARETH who despite having an issue with his head microphone continued effortlessly. If it was not for the unfortunate sound effect of the errant mic, no-one would have known. I was impressed not only that you continued without breaking stride, you also compensated your voice to lack of the technical support. Well done indeed!

**REESE YORK (The Lord Chancellor)**

Reese delivered a magnificent performance as the Lord Chancellor. We were treated to some lovely touches of comedy and he delivered the verbal dexterity required for his songs with ease. Reese has a talent of using effective mannerisms that clearly assisted in delivery a memorable performance. Excellent!

**RAY HIGGS (Private Willis)**

Ray produced a lovely characterisation as the straight laced beefeater guard. His singing was of a high quality and did superbly well to hang onto that long note! Well done!

**CHORUS**

The male chorus produced a lovely rich sound for their songs. The characters were well thought through and there were many highlights! The Lords’ can-can in act one, for example; and the entrance from the wings for the act one finale. Their movement was very well rehearsed and apart from one occasion, were very much together. An excellent chorus performance!

The female chorus of fairies were equally superb. I loved the idea of each fairy having a unique character and this worked very well indeed. The singing was first class and the harmonisation was sensational. The movement around stage seemed very well rehearsed with everyone having a clear purpose of movement and the dances looked very effective. I particularly enjoyed the comical shrug of the shoulders to the audience following the comment of “never grown old”.

**Director (LUCY SEYMOUR)**

Lucy commented in the programme that she had concentrated on producing the humour of the show. And she succeeded superbly. There were so many good moments! The miming of **Iolanthe** and her husband and the banishment from the **Queen** during the Act one introduction was extremely effective. The can-can by the lords deservedly produced a round of applause from the audience. And the introduction of wings on Private Willis at the end was very well contrived.

The production was exceptionally well cast and one could tell that everyone had a clear understanding of their characters and a purpose when on stage. An excellent show!

**Musical Director (DAVID HAZELDINE)**

Everyone on stage sang superbly – be it soloist or chorus. The collective sound by the cast was superb and worth the entrance fee alone. There was wonderful balance between the singers which clearly came from the musical direction. The orchestra was very well conducted and balanced the singing very well indeed.

**Set**

The set was practically basic – two painted backdrops – one showing a painted woodland for the first Act (I loved the glitter!); the other revealing the outside the house of commons for Act two. There was a raised platform at the rear that was occasionally used by the cast. In act one it showed some painted flowers, and in act two it was plain, matching the brick work of the surrounding buildings. I noticed the stairs leading down from the stage to the auditorium were draped in camouflage netting that cleverly matched the scenes environment.

**Sound (BRIAN COX)**

The sound of the orchestra and the mic'd performers was superbly balanced. Not once did I struggle to hear the performers over the orchestra, yet I always heard the individual instruments supporting the songs.

**Lighting Design (ANDY NICHOLSON)**

There were some interesting lighting effects that were used to enhance the production. Colour washes changed during the songs to good effect and there were solo spots to enhance other songs.

**Lighting Technicians (ANNE HEWITT, ADAM CALLOWAY, DAVE GREENAWAY, JAMES GREENAWAY, MEGAN GREENAWAY)**

The lighting was very well executed on the night I saw the show – all the cues were seamlessly produced.

**Make-up (ROS HAZELDINE)**

All of the makeup worked superbly under the lights, adding to the characters – especially the fairies.

**Costumes (JENNY HARRIS & CAROUSEL COSTUMES)**

I loved the fairy costumes! They added to the individuality of the characters. The lords cloaks looked suitably authentic.

**Programme**

This was a 20 page A5 programme with a colour cover and black and white interior. There were some intriguing forethoughts by both the director and musical director and I enjoyed reading the cast biographies. The cast photographs were of a good quality, as were the interesting photographs of the rehearsals. The font was clear and unfussy making it easy to read. Although there were adverts, they did not tend to dominate.

(4)

**Front of House**

I was made to feel very welcome by Alf Bramley and his front of house team.

I thoroughly enjoyed my first G&S production for quite a while and thank all those involved in making this a very enjoyable evening.

**Gordon Bird**  
***NODA Representative***  
***London Region, District 14***