



Society : Maidenhead Operatic Society
Production: *The Pirates of Penzance*
Date : 19th May, 2007
Venue : The Desbrough Suite, Maidenhead
Report by : Barrie Theobald, Asst. Regional
Representative, Area 13

Report

Thank you for inviting me to your production of this well-loved operetta. You will doubtless recall from my days as your area representative how fond I am of the Savoy Operas, so I needed little persuasion to accept the invitation!

Whilst being a keen traditionalist, I did not feel Messrs Gilbert and Sullivan would have turned in their graves at the ‘topping and tailing’ Kay Lord added to the piece. Indeed, setting the opening/closure in 1940 was an inspired ruse (although Mr. Sullivan would doubtless have been upset to find his overture so severely truncated!!). I did marvel, though, how well some of the nautical artifacts had survived the ravages of the seaside weather on that Cornish beach and how the daughters could possibly be so dim as to think that they could have been the first humans to set foot in the place when we saw what the pirates left behind! (And, as an aged Westcountryman, I recall that in 1940 all the West Country beaches were heavily fortified in case of a Nazi invasion!! My wife tells me that’s nit picking!!!)

GREIG EMMETT (Samuel) competently characterised this role. Vocally, the role can be quite demanding (I seem to recall bottom B flat to top E flat) and you coped with that range with ease.

NATHANAEL PAGE (Frederick) – from randy Bishop to naïve apprentice is quite a change! The role was competently sung but Frederick falls in love with Mabel at first sight and I missed some of that passion in the performance, especially in ‘*Ah Leave Me Not....*’ – I always feel cheated when this duet fails to raise the hairs on my nape.

RAY HIGGS (Pirate King) – a role eminently suitable for Ray, who grasped it and certainly made it his own! Confidently portrayed and sung throughout.

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MURIEL CARPENTER (Ruth) gave a delightful interpretation of the 'piratical maid of all work' and also leant an air of intrigue to the prologue/finale. I do hope you enjoyed the transfer from pit to stage.

CHARLOTTE ROBERTS (Edith) I have grouped these three roles together.
JULIA HIGGS (Kate) Traditionally, they remain part of Major
SARAH SEDDON (Isabel) General Stanley's large family, stepping to the fore as and when necessary (indeed, Isabel only sings with her sisters in the chorus). However, you all appeared to be enjoying the chance of being carted off by the pirates and slipped nicely in and out being the demure young ladies your Father would have wished!

ELLY LOWNEY (Mabel) gave a delightful interpretation of the role and had no problems soaring up to the top notes of her first number. All her other work was equally of the highest quality. The passion between you and Frederick was not always there which meant that '*Ah Leave Me Not...*' failed to move me as it should have.

PAUL SEDDON (Major-General Stanley) excelled in this role and, on the night I attended, recovered well from the little problem in his song. (Was this due to changing Gilbert's original words?) I loved the way his medals moved from costume to costume!

PETER KIDSON (Sergeant of Police) – This was another solid performance that extracted all the humour from the role. The bicycle was a fantastic idea and was never allowed to obstruct the action.

CHORUS This is a great show for the chorus, with plenty of opportunity to sing, act and enjoy yourselves. The vocal quality was excellent throughout, whether men and ladies on their own or in the concerted items, in fact, this was the best I have heard the MOS chorus sing for many shows. Congratulations. The interplay between the pirates and the ladies at the end of Act 1 was good and everyone appeared to have devised an individual character which was maintained throughout.

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PRODUCTION Scenic suppliers usually get Act 1 of Pirates wrong (the seascape on the backcloth meaning that to paddle, the ladies would have to turn their backs on the audience!) and I personally felt that the star cloth behind the Act 2 set was a bit out of place for the era. However, that's just me!! The show ran very smoothly and the fun being enjoyed on stage reached across the 'footlights' ensuring that we enjoyed what was happening too, thanks to Alicia Wright's competent stage management.

The sound and lighting plots worked very effectively and props all suited the action (even though, as I mentioned earlier, some of them had lasted on the seashore for a long time!)

The ladies costumes all looked lovely but one or two of the pirates' costumes looked strange from the front – especially the ones made of a black shiny material. I felt it was a shame that Frederick had not been supplied with a separate costume for Act 2 to denote his changed circumstance. The excellent programme, containing a good blend of text, photos and adverts, was further enhanced by the inclusion of original illustrations drawn by Gilbert himself together with other art work emanating from the late 19th century.

DAVID HAZELDINE (Musical Director) achieved excellent results from both principals and chorus. The reduced orchestral arrangements used in this performance proved entirely adequate and his delicate control of the orchestra ensured that none of the vocals were overpowered.

KAY LORD (Director) brought her own distinctive influence to bear on the show, adding an innovative prelude/postscript to the show. Her choreographic skills were in evidence in the grouping achieved in the many ensemble items throughout the show. I suspect she was also the prime mover for changing some of the libretto and dialogue – and I was probably the only person there to notice these little tweaks!! All in all, this was a most enjoyable production.

Jean and I thank you again for your kind invitation and to Iain for his greeting and hospitality.

Barrie Theobald
Assistant NODA Representative
Area 13