



Society : Maidenhead Operatic Society
Production : The Scarlet Pimpernel
Date : 16th May 2009
Venue : Norden Farm, Maidenhead
Report by : Steve Bold, NODA Representative, Area 14

Report

They seek him here! They seek him there! but search no further I have found him at Norden Farm, Maidenhead. The Scarlet Pimpernel offers a great curtain-raiser: A full-scale guillotine dominates the stage in sinister half-light. The audience very much appreciated this 'new' musical, a performance and show like something I had not seen before. It is truly a rousing evening of entertainment complimented by an accomplished and unseen orchestra under the excellent direction of Andy Milburn. This musical possesses the charm and humor that many musicals lack and this production excels in every department.

Sir Percy Blakeney – Ryan Stevens

The Pimpernel aka Sir Percy Blakeney, an aristocrat, is played with tremendous energy and flair by Ryan, who along with fellow adventurers leads daring raids into France to rescue other doomed aristocrats from the guillotine. Back home Percy is the epitome of an upper-crust fop, the disguise used to hide his true character and activities. With his finely tuned comic delivery and face fixed in a look of pained surprise you cannot take your eyes off him when he is on stage. Add to that a voice of the highest quality and truly an excellent portrayal all round.

Marguerite St Just – Andrea Tushingam

Andrea excels as his French wife Marguerite, whose enigmatic loyalties place her constantly under suspicion. She looks beautiful, sings beautifully, and manages to make her character, trapped between two worlds, credible and moving. Her anxiety and despair at the fact she has betrayed her friends is clear and moulds her character, the way she is gradually estranged from her husband and drawn to the Pimpernel is a superb growth of her role.

Chauvelin – Ray Siberini

Ray plays the villain Chauvelin with great conviction and contributes a strong presence, in singing as well as acting. His demeanour emanates cruelty and deviousness, the looks towards Marguerite belie his clear intentions, to have his way and her. His overconfidence in his ability to outwit the Pimpernel make for a marvelous coming together at the end and with Ray showing the Chauvelin's fallibility.

Armand St Just – Jamie Boshier

Emotional and downplayed performance from Jamie. He took the role on well, the younger brother to Marguerite, desperate to be involved and play his part in the rescue of his countrymen with the Pimpernel. He played the dual aspect of the role very well, hiding the truth from Marguerite as he conspired with Percy.

Ben – Gary Owens, Dewhurst – Laurence Cox, Eltron – Matthew Filmore, Farleigh – Bob Spooner, Hal – Mike Robinson, Ozzy – Mike Smith

Sir Percy's six "bounders" added a rich costume and comic thread to the action, particularly in the first act building up to a more powerful, emotionally-charged second act. Bringing comedy, dissention,

uncertainty and adventure as Percy creates and builds his plan and then their superb involvement in the enactment. Excellent physical and movement comedy as they disguised themselves as a variety of soldiers, peasants and even women. Great performances from one and all.

Marie – Cat Ellis

A great role well played by Cat. Although there wasn't a great deal for her to use, Cat gave the character everything, plenty of looks and movement brought the character to life. The final joke, her marriage to Tussaud was an excellent denouement.

Jessup – Kit Hobson

Almost a mime part in that there weren't that many lines, but the deadpan expressions and complete discretion to his master's plans and deceit were well executed.

Robespierre – Ray Higgs

A sense of authority over even Chauvelin, sometimes even appearing to make him feel small, diminishing not his sense of purpose but his belief in his own ability to achieve his ends. A good display of power over the villain of the piece demonstrating that even the most evil have a superior.

Coupeau – Bob Nicholson, Mercier – Greig Emmett

Supporting roles to Chauvelin, performing his dirty work, acting on his orders. They provided strength to his words, venom to his action.

Prince of Wales – Richard Whaley

Played the Prince as your typically unaware Royal, almost pompous but not overly or rudely so. Moved about the stage with a sense of occasion, unaware of Percy's machinations and plots.

Tussaud - Gareth Watkins

Although a small role, it was well played, with conviction and a little comedy. I didn't see the final joke coming, an excellent line to finish with.

Director – Simon Woodbridge

There are many other creditable performances which add further dimension to this musical, together with a strong chorus of excellent singers. With an array of dazzling costumes and wigs and super lighting and scenery this show has everything. Director Simon Woodbridge has put together a marvellous all around show, making shrewd use of the playing space with the focus very much on the actors. I would just make one small observation, that some of the chorus prepared themselves for their entrances a little too early, standing offstage but in full view of the audience. It is a very minor thing but highly visible and easily rectifiable. It is always advisable to have clear sightlines set far enough back so that the cast clearly know the limitations of the stage, but this mustn't detract from the high standard of the show. This swashbuckling, scintillating, effervescent, crammed-with-adventure sweep into the French Revolution moves at a furious pace and is a definite recommendation as an alternative to sitting in watching TV.