



Society : Maidenhead Operatic Society
 Production : Die Fledermaus
 Date : Thursday 25th November 2004
 Venue : The Desborough Suite, Maidenhead Town Hall
 Report by : Kim Halliday, Regional Rep.
 London Area 14

Report

I would like to start by thanking Maidenhead Operatic Society for inviting me to review this production. Not having seen *Die Fledermaus* before, I took the precaution of ‘mugging up’ on the story (thank you, internet!), but I must admit that I was very pleasantly surprised to be so excellently entertained, and this is, I think, mainly due to the ability of the principle cast members to present their characters so well.

ROBIN HICKERY (Adele). Robin has a beautiful ‘operatic’ singing voice and was able to bring this larger-than-life character alive with her expressions and mannerisms. I particularly liked her comic reactions when reading the note during *And I Must Face Tomorrow Without You*. Slight traces of her American accent came through at times, but it was mostly perfect ‘Queen’s English’. Well done, Robin!

TAMARA MIGRINA (Rosalinda von Eisenstein). Tamara appeared to be perfectly cast as Eisenstein’s long-suffering wife and, like Robin, had a pleasant operatically-trained voice. Her natural acting skills helped her to portray a whole range of emotions and she coped marvellously with some of the more comical scenes. She also paired well with Gary and their *Watch Duet* was beautiful, demonstrating both vocal control and characterisation from both parties. Although, like with Robin, her natural accent sometimes came through, this was a fine portrayal of an extremely wordy part.

TIM ELLIOTT (Alfred). What confidence from such a young performer! Tim really threw himself into the part and although perhaps a little young for the role, he more than compensated for this with his flamboyant acting talents and vocal skills. He also handled some very comic situations with perfect timing and expression, notably when sat at the dining table in Act 1. He also made a very convincing ‘drunk’, during *Drink My Dear a Glass of Wine* (something which isn’t as easy as it seems) and all-in-all gave us a good characterisation of the cheeky Italian would-be seducer.

GARY MASLEN (Gabriel Eisenstein). This was another extremely wordy part and it was essential to have an actor/singer who was an ‘all-rounder’ in order to carry off the role convincingly. Gary more than fitted the bill! He has one of those faces that expresses emotions very clearly – right across the auditorium, in fact – and a voice to match! He did a most excellent and convincing job of gradually getting drunk, and stayed wonderfully in character, even when he wasn’t the centre of the action (loved the comic dancing!). An extremely entertaining performance, despite the flu! (Hope you recovered quickly, Gary).

PETER KIDSON (Dr Blind). Peter portrayed the stuttering lawyer with great confidence and was suitably pompous, whilst remaining in character throughout. His powerful singing voice was put to good use in *When Your Lawyer Can’t Deliver*, holding his harmony well and he also handled the comic scenes with ease.

RICHARD BROOMAN (Dr Falke). Richard is another of MOS’s talented character actors and his experience at handling such roles became evident as he turned in an almost faultless performance as the put-upon Doctor. He remained in character throughout and although *To the Ball Come With Me* was a little out of synch with the orchestra, he recovered well.

PAUL SEDDON (Colonel Frank). Not the strongest singing voice in the cast, but Paul more than made up for this with his superb comedy acting. The gag with the wheeled chair in Act 3 had me in stitches, and large respect for the real whiskers – absolutely perfect! It is attention to detail that really does make the difference. Paul’s partnership – almost a ‘double-act’ – with Gary brought together two intelligent actors, both with excellent timing, and able to draw on each other’s energy, leading to a most entertaining performance. Well done Paul, another success!

EVE MACDONALD (Prince Orlofsky). I was a little bit confused as to why the Prince was being portrayed by a female, as opposed to a man, and can only conclude that there were no suitable men to play the part. Nevertheless, Eve coped well with her cross-dressed role and, although like Tim was perhaps a bit young for the part, she was almost convincing as a 'man', although some of the notes were a bit low and out of her range during his/her solo *I Like My Guests to Feel at Ease*.

CLAIRE IMRIE (Ida). Although this was a slightly smaller role, as the sister of the principal character, Claire characterised well, reacting perfectly to those around her and although she had no solo lines to sing, she harmonised well when part of the chorus.

GRAHAM JOHNSTONE (Frosch). This was another smaller character role, but Graham managed to almost steal the show with his excellent portrayal of the drunken prison guard. Hamming it up like a Bernard Cribbins 'Carry On' film character meant that he got a lot of laughs and his obvious talent for comic timing helped to make the prison scene with Paul and Gary so entertaining. Full marks, Graham – you're a natural!

CHARLOTTE ROBERTS, GREIG EMMETT, BRENDA SOUTHCOMBE, RICHARD MAIDMENT, SARAH SEDDON, MIKE ROBINSON & STUART SEBER (Faustine, Fritz, Brigitte, Johann, Gretchen, Hans, Ivan). These smaller individual roles were handled well by all involved – I particularly liked the Hungarian dance involving Faustine and Gretchen – well done girls (and guys!)

CHORUS. This particular production did appear to have quite an exceptionally large chorus and at times, such as during the finales, the stage appeared very crowded. That said, however, everyone appeared to know what they were doing – even if some didn't know the words! Harmonies were held well and easy to pick out and generally everyone looked at ease. Choruses are intended to compliment the action and tonight's crowd did that perfectly, so well done to everyone involved!

DIRECTION (John Rigg). The problem I imagine with directing *Die Fledermaus* would be to bring something fresh to it, as it must be a popular opera to perform, but I think John managed to achieve this tonight by bringing out the comedy - casting certain individuals who had 'slapstick' talents and a talent for comic timing. It must also be extremely difficult to direct such a large group, but I think John was helped immensely by his obviously talented cast and crew. Thanks, John, for providing us with a very enjoyable evening's entertainment!

MUSICAL DIRECTION (Sandy Johnstone). I have to say a huge 'congratulations' to Sandy for a very successful first time at the helm of the music department! That NODA Summer School really seems to have paid off, and there were no noticeable disasters in tonight's performance. If I was to be extra-critical I would have preferred a smoother flow and transition between dialogue and music; this may be nervousness or just a matter of taste. The orchestra was nicely balanced, especially with Toby & Tim filling in the wind & brass electronically (it can be a nightmare to balance mixing acoustic and electric!). I particularly likes the interaction between cast and orchestra during the Scene 2/Scene 3 musical interlude, although after a while, it became predictable/static (see below). Once again, well done, and I look forward to seeing you in charge again in the future!

CHOREOGRAPHY (Claire Imrie). Although it is always difficult to get such a huge number of people to 'move', on the whole Claire had done a good job and everyone seemed to know what was expected of them. It was a shame, however, that some scenes were quite 'static' and the chorus appeared to go back to their original places for every 'group' scene, which started to look odd half way though! There also could have been a bit more 'movement' during the musical interlude, perhaps placing some of the chorus into the audience, as it started to get a bit 'same-y' as the numbers wore on. This also would have solved the problem of there not being enough room in front of the curtain to house everyone comfortably (some of the chorus weren't seen).

LIGHTING (Andy Nicholson). Lighting for tonight's show was sensitive, subtle, smooth, and effective. There were one or two occasions when the actors were close to the front of the stage that I felt their faces were slightly cast in shadow by being lit too much from above and not enough from in front, but again, that may be a matter of taste/design. All in all, a good job, well-designed lighting, well-executed sympathetically supporting the performance. Well done!

SCENERY AND STAGE MANAGEMENT (Paul Graham & Karen Newton). I was extremely impressed with the sets and props used tonight, on which no expense appeared to have been spared! The blue 'Wedgewood' decoration in Eisenstein's house immediately gave us the impression this was a very elaborate abode, whilst the Villa Orlofsky was equally as high-class, with the gold and navy theme. Equally, the Prison Governor's office was well-designed and very convincing. Generally, scene changes were slick and unnoticeable, bearing in mind the complexity of the sets, so well done to the 'team' behind the scenes!

WARDROBE/COSTUMES (Teresa Stanton & Jenny Harris). As with the sets, I was very impressed with tonight's costumes, which were lavish and suited their characters perfectly. I particularly liked Eisenstein and Faulke's immaculate tailcoat suits – although I'm sure Gary would curse his as he had to get into it during a quick change! Similarly, the principal ladies looked immaculate and in character (although having such a 'fitted' party dress for Adele made the plot-line that she had 'borrowed it from her mistresses wardrobe' slightly far fetched...!). Well done to all involved in wardrobe – a sterling job!

MAKE-UP AND HAIR (Ros Hazeldine & Jackie Pickering). Make-up and wigs appeared to be perfectly in keeping with the period and setting and everyone appeared fresh-faced and natural. If I have a criticism, it would be that Alfred's hair was far too modern for the era and should have been slicked back or parted. It would also have helped to convince us he was older if he had been given a moustache – surely such a suave Italian would have sported one?!

PROGRAMME (Rosemary & Derek Roberts). Tonight's programme looked to be a very professional job, with glossy, thick paper, clear print and good quality black and white photographs of the cast and production team. The cast resumés were amusing and an interesting read as were the Chairman and Director's notes and the synopsis, amongst others. I also liked the 'bat' theme which was repeated throughout the programme. There was quite a bit of advertising, but most of this was promoting other societies' shows, which is an excellent idea and helps to increase cooperation between groups. It was good to see there was mention of MOS's affiliation to NODA, although for future reference, to be entered into NODA's annual programme competition, it is advisable to carry brief information on NODA, which can be downloaded from the new-look NODA website: <http://www.noda.org.uk>

FRONT OF HOUSE (Alf Bramley & Friends). Although I arrived late due to traffic problems, the performance hadn't started as there had been a false fire alarm incident (these seem to be a regular feature of shows at the Desborough Suite!). The public, however, were in good hands and the performance was able to go ahead with minimum disruption, thanks to the skills of the FOH team. Well done also to Sandy for the abbreviated overture, which helped to re-establish the timing for the evening. I was well looked-after during the interval and after the production so well done, Alf & Co!

To sum up, this was overall a well-rehearsed, slick, enjoyable production with some good characterisations and excellent singing and orchestration. MOS are very experienced in staging comic operas and have so many talented singers and actors to call upon, so I am delighted to see a huge improvement over the last production. I look forward to reviewing your next venture.

Kim Halliday