



Society : Maidenhead Operatic Society  
Production : **YEOMAN OF THE GUARD**  
Date : Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2013  
Venue : Desborough Suite, Maidenhead  
Report by : Gordon Bird, NODA Representative, Area 14

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## Report

I first watched Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Yeoman of Guard* (or *The Merryman and His Maid*) many years ago, the days when there was a woman prime minister and I had no grey hair. It features one of my all time favourite G&S songs – *I have a song to sing, O!*

Therefore I was delighted to be invited to Maidenhead Operatic Society's production on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> November.

This was the eleventh partnership between W S Gilbert's witty libretto and Arthur Sullivan's fine music, first performed at the Savoy Theatre on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1888 and is considered to be a lot darker than their previous works. The main character ends heartbroken and two of the pairs end up reluctantly engaged.

MOS's production was superbly sung with some moments of fine individual performances but unfortunately a number of the men were subjected to the seasonal head cold. Despite this obvious disadvantage, they rose to their challenge with enthusiasm and dedication to their art and should be applauded for their efforts.

### **CHRIS DENTON (Sir Richard Cholmondeley, Lieutenant of the Tower)**

As the Lieutenant of the tower who has the task of trying to arrange the wedding of Colonel Fairfax. Chris portrayed this character very well and his singing was skilfully mastered and I particularly enjoyed "*How say you, maiden, will you wed?*"

### **SEANN WILKINSON (Colonel Fairfax)**

I have seen Seann a couple of times now and have always been impressed with his singing and was not disappointed with this performance. As the prisoner waiting his fate and then later wooing his wife, he performed the scenes with good appreciation to the role's character. He has a strong singing voice and commands the stage, as evident in "*Is life a boon?*" Congratulations on another fine performance.

### **PETER KIDSON (Sergeant Meryll of the Yeoman of the Guard)**

Sergeant Meryll hatches the plot to release the Colonel from the jail with his daughter. Peter's characterisation was believable and I enjoyed his reaction to his proposal to the Dame. Well done.

### **SIMON CLASSEY (Leonard Meryll)**

As the newly appointed guard of the yeoman and Phoebe's brother, Leonard Meryll does not have a huge role to play, although his name is used by Fairfax. Simon played his part well with good, clear singing voice.

**PAUL SEDDON (Jack Point)**

What a huge shame that on the evening I watched the show Paul was suffering from a cold. Obviously this affected his usual wonderful vocal range however, he skilfully delivered an admirable performance, carefully avoiding stretching beyond the range he could reach on the night. I was impressed how well Paul managed, given the circumstances. He played "the strolling jester" with fabulous understanding. His performance on the last scene was exceptional – full of emotion and conveyed with immense, heartfelt torment. Well done.

**RAY HIGGS (Wilfred Shadbolt, Head Jailer)**

This is a lovely character part that was in good hands with a fine actor. Ray had excellent characterisation, understanding the role perfectly. The makeup for his role was very well defined his "grubby" appearance adding to his character. His relationship with Phoebe was very well contrived and I certainly felt his sincerity. Well done.

**CAT THOMPSON (Elsie Maynard)**

Cat was wonderful performance as the unwilling bride. I liked the transformation when she starts to fall in love with Fairfax. The quartet was outstanding, especially the unaccompanied sections. Congratulations on a very good all round performance.

**SIAN OXLEY (Phoebe Meryll)**

Once again Sian produced a wonderful vocal performance and a good understanding of the young Phoebe. Sian has very expressive eyes and uses them skilfully to demonstrate her range of emotions.

**CATHY SPOONER (Dame Carruthers)**

A lovely character to play, and CATHY performed very well indeed. With her walking stick and dressed in black, she reminded me of a Tudor version of Downton Abbey's Dowager Countess of Grantham (Maggie Smith's character). Sometimes having a walking stick actors slows down the pace but CATHY ensured that she timed her entrances and exits and her movement around stage with precision without disrupting the pace.

**KIRSTY KINGE (Kate)**

Dame Carruthers niece, Kate, has a small part to play within the production, often being dominated by her aunt. Kirsty performed her role well and sung well during "*Strange Adventure*".

**IAN CAMERON (The Headsman)**

**JOHN CROSBY (First Yeoman/Second Citizen)**

**STUART SEBER (Second Yeoman)**

**MIKE ROBINSON (First Citizen)**

All of these characters had a line or two within the production and adequately produced a fine performance. Characters were established and maintained.

**CHORUS**

A good vocal chorus ensured that everyone enjoyed the show. Characters were set right from the opening with various tradesmen selling their wares and London folk going about their daily chores.

**Director (DIANE HAYLOR)**

Overall the direction was good but I did feel that some of the scenes are a little static and could have helped with some movement. Some of the chorus exits were a little slow, taking time for everyone to leave the stage and it may have helped if they used more than one exit. But these are small points because the pace of the show was very good, and even the slow exits did not affect the pace of the production which was very well maintained. The darker side of the show was brought out very well, I thought, helped by the subdued lighting (particularly in Act two). The show was very well cast with everyone knowing what to do. I liked the idea of introducing some action for the opening of Act one but felt that some of performances were unclear. The ending, however, with the flower being held aloft in a freeze frame was very effective.

**Musical Director (WILLIAM BRANSTON)**

All the characters sung superbly, as did the chorus, providing an enjoyable and pleasant sound that complimented the orchestration perfectly. Clearly everyone was very well rehearsed and knew the score.

**Set (BORDERS STUDIO, JOHN CROSBY and ALICIA WALKER)**

There were some excellent painted backcloths with good perspectives. Only one location was used throughout the show, a painted backcloth of the tower. The backcloth was enhanced with two brick entrances, one stage left, the other right that helped give depth and interest to the staging.

**Stage Manager (ALICIA WALKER)**

The stage was very well managed the evening I watched with good scene changes and effect being on cue.

### **Sound (MATT SMITH)**

The balance of the live orchestra with the singers on stage was successfully sustained throughout the show and achieved a wonderful balance of sound. I heard every word spoken and sung. The gunshot was delivered on cue and produced the required effect.

### **Lighting Design (ANDY NICHOLSON)**

Overall the lighting was good but there did appear to be issues with some of the singers being left out of the spotlight. Although the lanterns were extremely effective at the beginning of act two, I felt some light should have been offered on stage as I could not see any of the singers. This is a small point but important point as I felt the atmosphere and effect could have been achieved with a little stage lighting.

### **Lighting Technicians (ANNE HEWITT, JOE CALLERAN)**

All of the lighting cues appeared on time and looked appropriate to the action.

### **Makeup**

The makeup looked perfect for the characters and I managed to see all the faces under the lighting. Character makeup had been thought through, with Wilfred being perfect for his role. The facial hair for Fairfax was appropriately applied and looked realistic from my seat.

### **Costumes (JENNY HARRIS & DRESS CIRCLE)**

There were lots of costumes to be made or hired for JENNY and overall I felt they were effective. The ladies dresses added colour and the men looked appropriately smart in their befeater costumes. However, I did note that not all the costumes fitted, as some of the sleeves were too long for their intended owner. This I know is very difficult, particularly with hired costumes, but it did look a little odd. Costuming for a large cast within budget and tight timescales are never easy and JENNY should be congratulated on her efforts.

### **Programme**

This was a fine twenty page programme that had all the relevant articles. I liked the eye catching front cover, showing a raven in front of a full moon with bright red lettering with the name of the show. The rehearsal and headshot photographs were of good quality. I did like the idea that all the cast had a photograph. The biographies were interesting but I did wish there was a synopsis of the show.

### **Front of House**

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

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Thank you for a lovely evening and I look forward to their next production, *The Merry Widow*, in June of next year.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Bird', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

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