



Society : Crowthorne Musical Players
Production : The Pirates of Penzance
Date : 23rd May 2009
Venue : Wilde Theatre, Bracknell
Report by : Steve Bold, NODA Representative, Area 14

Report

Gilbert and Sullivan operas – the pop music of mid-Victorian Britain – are often dismissed as staid and old-fashioned. However, Crowthorne Musical Players' swashbuckling production of *The Pirates of Penzance*, which opened last night to sustained approval, proves that after some 130 years Gilbert and Sullivan can still wow. I was warmly greeted by the Front of House staff as always and directed towards my seat and the bar. There was a prominent display in the foyer showing pictures of all the cast principals and the programme had a colourful and appropriate cover with a good half page dedicated to NODA.

The production is updated to reflect the style of a musical rather than an opera. But purists will find the challenging *Poor Wandering One*, exquisitely sung by Emily Austin, as Mabel, to be entirely to their traditional taste. Mabel's Act 2 duet with the pirate apprentice Alex Harvey-Brown as Frederic is another highlight.

Frederic – Alex Harvey-Brown

Accomplished, confident and lively, Alex gave a very watchable performance as Frederic. He sang with gusto and emotion, his change of attitude to Ruth when he discovers she has lied to him was well played. His sense of duty forcing him to change sides and the conflict against his wishes was very evident, one minor point would be to work on his sword play.

Mabel – Emily Austin

A superb voice, outstanding singing throughout. Emily has a magnificent powerful voice that carries throughout the theatre, piercing but melodic notes and emotion. Emily had such a good voice that it almost seemed out of place in a more musical than opera version of *Pirates*, but this should not detract from the excellence of her performance.

The Pirate King – David Bennett

David is great character performer, he throws himself into all his parts. It is always easy to see him as the role, his garishness and confidence in all situations flowed through his performance. A powerful and stimulating voice.

Major General Stanley – Julian Hirst

This was by far the stand out performance, timing, presence and comedy with emotion and sadness all rolled into one great evening. The look, the performance, the singing was all very reminiscent of classic Ronnie Barker. A great all round effort.

Ruth – Kim Halliday

The character of Ruth is a very interesting role, Frederic has never seen another woman so has placed Ruth on a pedestal. Kim handles the two sides of the part very well, before and after Frederic realises he has been lied to. Her disappointment that he no longer looks at her in the same way followed by the joining up with the pirates, the differing emotions all came through.

Police Sergeant – John Caley

Faux bravery from the Police Sergeant alongside his men, good timing and comedy. They showed an excellent turn of foot with their comic antics and earn well-deserved applause for lusty singing.

Samuel – Peter Winn

Back up to the Pirate King, Peter played the First Mate with aplomb, a clear voice and good movement around the stage.

Edith – Danusia Maleczek, Kate – Rebecca Wire and other daughters

The female chorus who were the Major Generals daughters all had good voices and played their roles with lots of vitality. Danusia Maleczek as Edith, the eldest daughter had a powerful voice, the other daughters all filled their roles with bustling emotion and exuberance.

Nick Austin - Musical Director

An accomplished performance from all of the orchestra. It is the sign of a good orchestra that it is the singers and performers that attract your eyes and ears. They were never overshadowed, but were complimented throughout the performance, particularly the soloists.

Stage Management including Lighting, Stage Crew, Sound

Whilst scene changes, lighting changes and sound are all clearly visible to the audience, it is when they do not interfere or distract from the action on stage. There were some occasions where feedback could be heard but these were rare, along with the odd late light as the actors entered the stage in brightening darkness. These are minor observations in the long run, but it is worthwhile pointing them out as we all can improve our delivery.

Debbie Mann – Choreographer

Although not awash with full scale dances, the movement of the cast was smooth and in tune with one another. The choreography was suitably aligned to the music, the cast knew their moves and entrances, although there were occasions when members of the cast could be seen before they made their entrance from the wings

Mark Conolly – Director

The hilarity was constant throughout the performance with amusing banter between the actors and the orchestra. The scenery was simple but effective, the costumes were colourful all helping to make this an excellent production. William S. Gilbert's lyrics are ingeniously crafted, full of magnificent, inventive rhymes and sparkling wit, as in the exchange previously quoted. The problem, however, is that when the tempo gets fast, the cast sometimes trip over the lyrics, hurrying toward the clever rhymes and not enunciating the words in between.