

The Pirates of Penzance

MARCH 2006 AT THE HEXAGON

On Saturday 11th March 2006, I was pleased to be invited to review Reading Operatic Society's presentation of Pirates of Penzance. This was a traditional presentation which included some new comedy which brought the whole show up fresh and new. It had generally, been well cast and characterised with good movement about the stage area by both principals and chorus. Positioning had been well devised which presented some eye-catching pictures. Diction and projection by all performers could not be faulted with every word being heard, both spoken and sung.

Kevin Goodfellow - (SAMUAL - The Pirate King's Lieutenant) - This minor role was well presented by Kevin. He was suitably piratical and entered fully into the spirit of the part. His movements were well controlled with some excellent facial expressions. His singing voice fitted the part well.

Keith Lawrence - (THE PIRATE KING) - Keith brought his own inimitable style to this performance. His movement and posture was very stylised, all coupled with an excellent singing voice which brought the character to life. As stated later in this report, the costume was not befitting the 'Pirate King' being more appropriate to a French fencing instructor and which slightly marred this performance as it failed to make him stand out from his piratical crew.

Jeff Trim - (FREDERICK - The Pirate Apprentice) - Jeff brought his wealth of experience to this part. His singing was of a high quality with good diction and controlled movement about the stage area. His rapport with the pirates and Major-General Stanley's daughters, and in particular Mabel, was well contrived. I particularly liked the way 'theatrical licence' allowed you to be 21 again!!!

Maggie Preston - (RUTH - A Piratical Maid of all Work) - Maggie made an impressive 'Ruth', truly Gilbertian in its presentation. Here was a performer who had immersed herself completely into the character presenting as good a 'Ruth' as you are likely to see, all coupled with an excellent contralto voice.

Tanya Beaney - (EDITH - A Daughter of Major-General Stanley)

Janet Lake - (KATE - A Daughter of Major-General Stanley)

Tor Hartley - (ISABEL - A Daughter of Major-General Stanley)

These three ladies in the minor roles presented their individual characters very well and there was nothing to choose between them, and gave much to the overall excellence of the performance.

Naomi Hinton - (MABEL - A Daughter of Major-General Stanley) - This was a lovely performance by Naomi who exhibited her feelings towards Frederic very well. Her movements and diction was excellent and she exhibited a superb soprano voice which impacted on the audience at her first entry with 'Yes, One' followed by the long cadenza and which led into what I consider to be Mabel's star number "Poor Wandering One". This, I consider to be a difficult number to sing to ensure the coloratura passages sound acceptable, but Naomi had no problems - Congratulations on a fine performance.

Iain Whittaker - (MAJOR-GENERAL STANLEY) - I enjoyed this presentation. of the Major-General by Iain who seems to excel in these parts. He brought out all the inherent humour with good comedy timing. His movements as the sprightly, elderly gentleman had been well contrived. I particularly liked his singing of his patter song as the diction was immaculate so that every word could be heard, which isn't always the case - Well done.

Tony Slevin - (SERGEANT of POLICE) - Tony brought his own brand of humour to this part presenting a gentle, lugubrious character who has little heart for his job, but his duty has to be done as he exhorts his

timid bunch of constables to do their's. Vocally, Tony sang the part well but it really requires a bass/baritone voice to be able to hit the bottom notes in his solo.

Chorus of Major-General Stanley's Daughters and Governesses - These ladies gave a good account of themselves with a good contrast between the daughters and the governesses. The singing was of a high standard with a good balance of voices and spot-on entries. Movement about the stage was well contrived and controlled filling the stage with a feast of colour and movement.

Chorus of Pirates and Police - A good mens chorus who sang well with good tonal quality and precision, both as Pirates and Police. Movement about the stage area was well controlled and it was good to see that each and every one had developed their own character, entering fully into the performance.

Jill Morgan - (PRODUCER and CHOREOGRAPHER) - This was a good traditional presentation by Jill, who, by emphasising the inherent humour, which is so often overlooked, made sure the performance appeared fresh and new. It had been well cast and characterised with good positioning of both chorus and principals. Choreographic movements had been well devised and executed by the cast - Well done.

John Lawes - (MUSICAL DIRECTOR) - John had gathered round him the usual group of excellent musicians who played the MUSIG as Sullivan intended and at the same time was sympathetic to the performers on stage. Both chorus and principals had been well rehearsed in the music with good entries and vocal control.

Stage Manager & Crew - A well managed stage throughout. Although only two sets to worry about, they were well positioned and braced.

Lighting Design - This was a good lighting design by Kim Holiamby, generating the right atmosphere on stage, particularly in Act 2

Lighting Operation and Sound - At long last I can say congratulations to the Hexagon staff for the lighting operation, and in particular, the sound. It was of a good balance with no distortion and every word could be heard Congratulations - Keep it up!!

Costumes - The costumes by Haslemere Wardrobe were excellent, The ladies costumes looked fresh and new with the pirates looking authentic as did the policemen and together presented excellent colours on stage. The one costume I was not very impressed with was the 'Pirate King's'. This characters costume needs to be flamboyant in keeping with his character but the costume was more suited to a French fencing instructor as opposed to a Pirate King. In fact the pirates themselves were more flamboyant.

Scenery - I was not particularly impressed with the first act scenery. It did not appear to have been painted very well and did not stand up under the stage lighting. The backcloth for this act was acceptable apart from the poor painting of the sailing ship at sea. The second act scenery was excellent, depicting the ruined chapel very well indeed.

Properties - A good line up of properties, looking authentic and in keeping with the plot.

Make-up - The make-up had been well devised and stood up well under the stage lighting. Character make-up was also effective.

Programme - An excellent programme, containing a wealth of information, all printed on good quality paper. It had an eye catching cover with well reproduced photographs together with some amusing graphic inserts.

Front of House - As always, Front of House staff were well in attendance, easily identifiable, smart and welcoming to their audience, an aspect which is so important, but rarely seen in this day and age.

Thank you for inviting me to review your latest presentation and your excellent hospitality. May I wish you all success with you next production 'The Boy Friend'.

Henry Hawes - N06A Representative - Region 13.