

NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD SHOWCASE FESTIVAL 2012-13

Group: Wickham Bishops Drama Club

Production: The Pirates Of Penzance by Gilbert & Sullivan

Adjudication Date: Sat July 13, 2013

Venue: Village Hall

Adjudicator: Liz Mullen accompanied by Jane Rayner

INTRODUCTION:

A brave choice on behalf of a drama group (rather than a strong-voiced operatic or concert society).

At times the show was slightly reminiscent of a pantomime, yet the table seating (with everyone tucking into their wine and nibbles) also gave a relaxed Last Night Of The Proms feeling too!

This show may not have been totally purist in its presentation and there were some weaknesses in the cast. Yet, having said that, we witnessed a couple of very good vocal performances and it's impossible not to applaud the director's bold and exciting move to get children involved in G&S. What an experience for them!

FRONT OF HOUSE:

A cheerful and efficient welcome, before we joined our table. Luckily, this time I'd been warned (thank you, Laura) to bring food and drink. Other adjudicators on our table were not so fortunate.

The overture from the very competent orchestra set the scene for this popular show.

SETTING & PROPS:

I searched my programme to see if the settings were hired and was impressed to find that was not the case.

Well done to Peter Robinson and the painting team. The shore with its gold and blue theme – complete with pirate galleon anchored in the bay – made an eye-catching start to the show.

Props were well chosen

SOUND AND LIGHTING

Again, good work, with the lighting being particularly memorable. The opening waterside scene was brightly lit, while the opening of act two looked lovely with its moonlight and shadows.

COSTUMES:

Perhaps some of the pirates could have dressed down a bit so that the Pirate King stood out more in his grander clothing and tricorn hat.

Samuel looked good in his wig, but couldn't resist touching it. Was the crutch necessary? – a bit restrictive for dancing.

The girls were very prettily-costumed. Their dresses were a nice mix of colours with subtly different styles. Mabel, of course, looked the most ravishing, with a doll-like beauty and a wig and dress to match the image.

The little policemen looked cute and funny, while the other lead characters were all suitably clad for their station in life.

Make-up was generally good, though Frederic's lipstick may have been a bit too pink.

MUSIC:

Thomas Duchan was director as well as musical director, assisted by Matilda Bourne and the choreography of Heather Howard. As a musician, Thomas may have aimed a bit high by giving G & S songs to actors with reasonably good voices (with one or two superb exceptions) but if he was frustrated by occasional shortcomings, he remained unruffled and patient.

The orchestra played well throughout.

The Major-General's false starts were a shame, but the glorious voice of an enormously accomplished Mabel, and the masterly vocals of the Pirate King were a delight.

PERFORMANCES:

Frederic:

A self-assured and enjoyable performance from Jack Williams. Being so "into" the story and putting that over to the audience was a strength that out-weighed the fact that, at times, his pleasant voice couldn't quite reach the trickier notes. We enjoyed his performance of A Paradox with Ruth and the Pirate King.

Mabel:

Very pretty, very professional in personality and voice. Corrina Wilson raised the bar whenever she came on stage. O Wand'ring One was particularly stunning.

Ruth:

A warm and very likeable performance as Frederic's nursery maid-turned-pirate, from Pauline Roast. She was at ease in the part, sang well and engaged our attention throughout. Very expressive and watchable.

Major General:

Len Howard had the character and even a reasonable voice, but his false starts on that crucial song made us lose confidence more than Len did. If memorising this admittedly difficult patter song was proving to be a nightmare, I'd rather have seen him reading the words off a long scroll.

Pirate King:

A robust and assured portrayal by Colin Bellett, who really knew his stuff. His rich and accomplished voice was one of the production's strong points.

Samuel:

Nerves seemed to be Jim Self's problem and he broke the rule that if you "dry" you somehow stay in character rather than muttering an apology. But I'm sure Jim knows that and was just having a jittery moment. Generally he did his fair share of supportive swash-buckling and just needs more faith in himself.

Pirates:

As the other pirates, Jica Bates and Steve Barham certainly worked hard. They had enthusiasm and seemed to genuinely enjoy what they were doing.

Girls:

These characters were great fun, each with her own personality. The marriageable young ladies gushed, simpered and giggled and gave an energy to the proceedings. They were expressive and focussed on the action. So, take a bow, Debbie, Linda, Seren, Katie, Laura and Maddy.

The Police:

Definitely not purist G&S but a fantastic experience for these children to learn and perform operetta. If some of the broad comedy was inevitably lost, the compensation was some cheeky and confident acting and singing, led by Ben Howard and Archie Gunton as the appealing little Sergeants. Well done to all of you.

SUMMARY:

As I said, a brave choice with some failings. But as a night of relaxed entertainment in a somewhat unorthodox cabaret setting, it was a colourful crowd-pleaser, enhanced by a few very good vocal turns!

*Best wishes
Liz Mullen
Adjudicator*