



**Society** : St. Albans Operatic Society  
**Production** : La Belle Helene  
**Date** : April 1996 1999  
**Venue** : Alban Arena  
**Report by** : Lennie Self

## Report

There were some very nice touches in Val Fardell's production, especially the beautiful poses set behind the gauzes and there were some notable performances.

Margaret Johnstones made an excellent Helene. It was a joy to listen to her beautiful voice especially singing "The Moment Now is Drawing Near" which was absolutely magical to hear, and she acted and moved so well. Her training and experience stood out.

She interacted well with Paris, played by Mike Fooks, who sung well, I particularly liked his rendition of "The Judgement of Paris", every word could be heard (but his White costume did nothing to enhance his Princely qualities).

In the programme Barry Sawyer writes that he has returned from his backstage duties as "singing and acting gives him so much pleasure and fun" and this certainly came over in his positive portrayal of the cockney comedy character Calchas.

The part of Orestes gave Robert Milner the chance to display his fine voice to the best advantage.

Sue Heath created a superb character with her interpretation of Nesta, Helen's confidant. With her northern accent, neat movements and bemused expressions she was the perfect attendant.

Judging by the reaction of the audience on Thursday night they certainly enjoyed the comedy duo Ajax and Achilles (James Shipp and Jim Burgess) and "Two Mighty Men-at-Arms" received rapturous applause. Achilles was the stronger character.

David Berridge is another performer who always delights the audience and he was well cast as Menalalaus King of Sparta and Alan Nicholson made an imposing Agaamemnon, King of Argos.

The three goddesses, Venus (Andrea Adlam), Juno Caroline Arthur) and Minerva Angela Griffiths opened the show well. They looked delightful, moved gracefully and their voices blended well together. They all sang clearly but on Thursday night there was a tendency for some top notes to be slightly off key.

Leona (Sarah Holt) and Cressida (Andrea Baron) were two enchanting ladies of Sparta who reacted well to each situation. Andrea moves so gracefully but although ~~Cressida~~ Leona sang pleasantly she had an awkward stance and a tendency to slouch and wave her arms about).

Most of the chorus looked good and generally moved well and there was some fine chorus singing.

Overall the orchestra, under the direction of Neil Stirling Buick, was very good, but at times it was too loud and drowned the singers, particularly in "The Rising Generation" and on Thursday (and I have heard, other nights as

well) there were some interesting notes from the trumpets when exposed in "Two Mighty Men".

There were some nice groupings, but although the chorus moved well and were generally all in time (apart from their opening number) the choreography was very repetitive and not in character with the storyline or period.

As already mentioned, the sets were excellent as were most of the costumes (although one of Helen's could have been more flattering) and the lighting was very effective.

However, despite the combination of melodious familiar tunes, an excellent set and attractive costumes although visually a delight this was not one of the Company's best productions..