



Society : St. Albans Operatic Society
Production : Me and My Girl
Date : April 1997
Venue : Alban Arena
Report by : Lennie Self

Report

I eagerly awaited seeing my first amateur production of "Me and My Girl" having seen the professional production several times _ I was not disappointed, in fact, I thought Chris Cavanagh's splendid production was one of the best shows I have seen St. Alban's perform (and they have done some very good shows in recent years).

The orchestra, under the direction of Peter Holt, was superb, it was a joy to listen to (why was there no spot light on him as he entered ?). Under his direction there is always a high vocal standard from principals and chorus alike.

"Me and My Girl" is a show that needs dynamic hard working principals and chorus with excellent timing and these ingredients were present on Thursday night. The audience was captivated from start when the effective jogging movement suggested the car was in motion. The car dissembled well to become luggage, the wheels being umbrellas.

There were some excellent performances.

The star of the show was definitely John Dell. He was exceptional as Bill Snibson. From the moment he walked on stage the audience was enraptured. He sang and moved well with great confidence and his timing was superb yet he appeared relaxed. All his "tricks" worked well, obviously the result of hours of practise. His performance was of such a consistently high standard it is difficult to single out any special moment, but his antics with the cloak and tiger in Act two were particularly praiseworthy.

The society was fortunate that Natasha Jordan was available to take the part of Sally Smith at such short notice. She made a stunning entrance, with good projection and no amateur hesitation in delivering her lines. She had a very realistic accent, yet was a lovely gentle character and sang, moved and danced well. Sally and Bill complemented each other well "Me and My Girl" sung by Sally and Bill set the high standard for the rest of the evening. "Once You Lose Your Heart was beautiful, and the moment she left Bill poignant, yet she displayed a dynamism, especially in "The Lambeth Walk".

The other excellent performer on Thursday night was Martyn Knight, again adding to the professionalism of the show playing The Hon Gerald Bolingbroke. He was a magnificent character, (very like Bertie Wooster) just right for the part, with a super upper crust accent. Martyn sings and dances so well and gave a superb portrayal.

There were some very good supporting roles. Peter Jones displayed his versatility as Herbert Parchester, and the song "The Family Solicitor" was a delight. He not only displayed a fine voice but a lightness of foot and again excellent timing for all the "tricks" from the moment he caught the decanter.

Don Scott is also a very good performer who can be relied upon to give a convincing performance. He was well cast as Sir John Tremayne. He also has very good timing and moves well and had obviously rehearsed his tricks well. He was a lovable convincing character but he really excelled with Parchester and Bill in the reprise of "The Family Solicitor".

No St. Albans show would be complete without a cameo from Arthur Harris, elevated to the aristocracy in this production to play deaf Sir Jasper Tring. There was some nice interaction between him and Bill in the opening and some nice business with Charles the Butler, (very well played by David Berridge, another very good character).

Jeanne Cavil was imposing as Maria, Duchess of Dene and I especially liked her in scene three when she tried so hard to turn Bill into a gentleman. She interacted well with Sir Jasper.

Carla Dell had a very O.T.T. upper crust accent. Initially she did not appear so relaxed on Thursday night but was good in scene three with Bill "You Would if you Could" (surely she would have worn stockings, not tights)

Another very good cameo was Jane Byrne's portrayal of Mrs. Brown, but there were no weak links in the very good cast, everyone gave a positive performance, and the society are fortunate to have so many talented members.

Peter and David Barker always give enthusiastic performances and Ross Macinnes displayed a very fine singing voice.

The transition from Hareford Hall to the kitchen was smooth and the ensuing scene very enjoyable. Using the kitchen implements to give rhythm was effective and "An English Gentleman" was a fine example of the high standard of singing and movement displayed by the chorus throughout the evening. Whenever they were on stage the chorus performed with enthusiasm and verve, and whether playing a servant, a member of the aristocracy or a cockney there was a dynamism and overall commitment from the chorus, and high musical standard (the only exception being the opening chorus when words could not be heard so clearly). The men were extremely good in "Song of Hareford" (a pity one of the book shelves did not drop) and the big blockbuster numbers "The Lambeth Walk" and "The Sun Has Got His Hat On " exciting, you don't often see the audience dancing in the aisles at St.Albans. Bringing the cast through the audience in "The Lambeth Walk" added to the fun.

Throughout the evening there was clear evidence of clever direction. The pace was excellent and the stage used to utmost advantage. All the tricks had obviously been carefully planned and intensively rehearsed Using footmen and maids to change sets added to the realism, and changing sets while the action was in progress all added to the general flow of the evening. The gag with the coat on the Butler focused attention while the scene was change to the Hareford Arms (a very effective cloth) The clever choreography was very effective all evening, not only for the big block buster numbers but also the smaller ensembles, (especially the tennis dance and "Leaning on a Lamppost") There were so many exciting moments in the evening.

Overall the costumes were very good and in period , but were one to nit-pick Jane Porsters opening outfit looked wrong and Jeanne Cavill's black lace dress was too short. Hair styles and footwear were all appropriate.

Generally scenery was moved efficiently (although there were some noisy set changes and on one occasion the backstage crew could be seen through the gauze).

There appeared to be problems with microphones at times, notably Gerald's at the start of "Weekend in Hareford", Parchesters in "The Family Solicitor and Sir Jaspers at the Hunt Ball but this did not detract from an excellent evening's entertainment.

Thank you and congratulations St. Albans. This really was amateur theatre at it's best.