



Society : St. Albans Operatic Society
Production : The Broadway version of "The Pirates of Penzance"
Date : November 1996
Venue : Alban Arena
Report by : Lennie Self

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I eagerly awaited this production of "Broadway Pirates" having seen the Drury Lane original several years ago, and seen the traditional production innumerable times. How could the show fail to be a success, combining a lively new orchestration of one of Sullivan's most popular scores, imaginative direction and choreography and the enthusiasm and talents of St. Albans Operatic Society and I was not to be disappointed.

Overall it was a very enjoyable, lively production, with some clever innovative touches and inspired choreography, mainly well executed by chorus and principals alike, but on Thursday Act two was the better of the two acts. (Unfortunately the performance was marred by problems with the sound system, but I understand these had improved by the end of the week).

The opening was very effective with the use of the small ships, but on stage noise drowned the orchestra and the overture could not be enjoyed to the full.

The pirates moved with vitality and sang well throughout the evening. although sound distortion meant that the men's opening chorus "Pour oh Pour the Pirate sherry" could not be heard at times.

Robert Milner was impressive as the Pirate King. He gave a very assured performance and has a good voice. "Better Far to Live and Die" was well sung and the staging was effective with some interesting groupings and movement.

Jeremy Pelzer was an ideal Frederick, singing and moving well. I liked the Elvis imitation in "Stop Ladies Pray" and the daughter (Andrea Baron) with the banana was an amusing touch.

I felt the other outstanding performer on Thursday night was Don Scott. He was excellent as the Major General. He moved well and sang with great clarity and perfect diction - a super character. The Major General's song was one of the highlights of the evening. with very good chorus sound and movement.

Claire Bassinger moves well and gave a spirited performance as Ruth. but she looked too young and attractive. even the addition of warts did not make her ugly and old. I liked her interaction with Frederick and enjoyed "Oh False One." Ruth excelled in Act two and I particularly enjoyed the Paradox, but following the "Particularly Rapid Unintelligible Patter" by all three singers was not "Generally Heard" due to problems with the sound.

Clare Pettit Playing Mabel looked very pretty and has a pleasant voice. "Poor Wandering One" was enjoyable. but she tended to croon at times, especially in "Sorry Her Lot" although the ending to this was beautiful.

The Daughters looked good and moved and sang well especially Edith, Kate and Isabel, played by Yioda Panayiotoi, Angela Thurnham and Julie Martin. All three had their own distinct personalities, bespectacled Edith, Kate with a beautiful voice and lively Isabel.

There was nice movement for "How Beautifully Bluett, the use of umbrella's was effective - and this contrasted well with the general melee when the pirates arrived (a nice production touch having Jane Forster chase the pirate) .

"Hail Poetry" was another enjoyable moment, beautifully staged and sung and directed' by the Pirate King (another nice touch) who took a bow at the end, this was followed by a lively finale to Act one.

As already stated, Act Two was the better of the two acts, and the set and lighting effects very good. Whether the problems with the sound system had been overcome I do not know, but generally this act was more lively and everyone seemed to have more energy.

The opening was very impressive, with an effective set, good lighting and nice groupings for the Major General's song "Dry the Glistening Tear"

The Policemen were marvellous. They looked funny, moved well, the choreography was inspired and they all performed with such well rehearsed precision. The Sergeant of Police. Matthew Gregory, was superb. What a wonderful deep voice that young man has, and what a lovely deadpan expression he maintained. Both "When The Foeman Bears his Steel" and "A Policemen's Lot", delighted the audience.

The pirates moved well together, obviously the result of hours of hard work. Using the stairs, camouflaged with greenery was a good idea and the chase through the auditorium was reminiscent of pantomime.

Overall it was a very good production with inspired choreography, and a dedicated and committed cast, directed by Martyn Knight.

The orchestra, under the direction of Peter Jones, played extremely well, although problems with microphones distorted the sound at times.

The lighting and costumes were good