

NODA review of HMS Pinafore
Performed by Stewartby Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society on
Thursday 19th November 2015 – by Richard Fitt

I had forgotten what fun these Gilbert and Sullivan shows can be, as to be honest I haven't seen one for a long time, but having been brought up with a father who shaved almost every morning whilst singing (sadly rarely in tune) some aria or another from a G and S operetta I have rather fond childhood memories. This was later bolstered by a close association to a sister G and S society by my acting group during my own early acting career in Kent back in the 80's.

G and S is very much a 'Marmite' thing, you either love it or you hate it. They are a very specific form of entertainment and should not be compared with any other type of musical. They are first and foremost, to the exclusion of all the other parts of the show an exercise in singing. I have rarely seen an amateur one with great acting, or with all the characters correctly cast as to their age brackets. It is, unashamedly and quite correctly in my opinion, all about the singing. And boy, do Stewartby Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society do that rather well. And what a thoroughly entertaining evening I have just enjoyed at Stewartby village hall.

Musical Director Alana Thackray has a very competent orchestra to work with and as a result the music was beautifully played, despite, I was informed lacking a percussionist and a double bassist, which I must admit I hadn't noticed, so made very little difference to the quality of the music or anybody's enjoyment. It was the backbone and the very assured rock upon which this show was performed. The sound balance was very impressive without the use of any microphones with a perfect balance between orchestra and singers, as in the wonderful old fashioned, pre electronic era where people actually have to project! A rarity these days. How nice to see it alive and well and living in Stewartby.

The casting was as I stated above entirely according to singing ability and resulted in a ship's crew whose creaking bones might struggle to man the yardarms and some various cast pairings whose age difference would suggest more brother and sister rather than father and daughter relationships, or a suitor who would in reality probably have found a wife a decade or two earlier. That said, who cares as long as they can all sing.

The wonderful set, a brightly and expertly painted box set by Hazel and John Daniels of the quarter-deck of HMS Pinafore was pure Victorian, seaside, picture postcard, which was very well lit by Richard Hull, particularly in his contrast between day and night topped off with a resplendent moon in the second act. My only criticism of the set and I say this with slight tongue in cheek, was the rather pathetic front door bell which was I presume meant to be the ship's bell?

After a splendid opening chorus of 'We Sail The Ocean Blue' which set up the atmosphere for the evening and a collective smile on the face of the audience, Linda Bowen as Mrs Cripps treated us to 'I'm called little buttercup,' and we were into all the frivolity of poking fun at the establishment in general and the class system in particular which this Gilbert and Sullivan show delivers.

Stephen Hoath, an impressive baritone, as Captain Corcoran, Charles Mills as Able Seaman Ralph Rackshaw (Tenor) and Colin Jones as Sir Joseph Porter (baritone), ably (pardon the pun) supported by Peter Davis, John Epton and Mike Cocke were soon showing their class and taking us through the familiar numbers in grand style to the delight of an appreciative full house.

The ladies were no slouches either, Carol Unwin gave us a very strong vocal performance, hitting some of the higher soprano notes with some aplomb and she was superbly supported by Jenny Jackson as Hebe, who added some of the better comic moments to proceedings. Linda Bowden and

Margaret Magee together with a suitably resplendent chorus completed a very competent cast of singers.

Choreography by Carol Wallman was, in the old fashioned sense of the word gay and light and I must mention Gordon Hodges who is obviously a consummate dancer and his performance in that arena stood out, he was a delight to watch. Unfortunately watching him hit every beat on the nail did highlight the slight lag, not to mention posture with regard to the rest of the troupe.

So well done to Pru Gardiner, I loved it and very much look forward to seeing more of this strong and enthusiastic group as they hold up a tradition that dates back to a fabulous by gone musical era.

Many thanks to the front of house staff who showed us their warm hospitality and for the back stage tour after the show. A terrific evening which left a large grin on my face!

Richard Fitt