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Clevedon Gilbert & Sullivan Society 'Ruddigore'

Producer Cliff White MD Carol Kenway

Princes Hall Clevedon 19th February 2010

Having not seen Gilbert & Sullivan's 'Ruddigore' before I was very grateful for the comprehensive synopsis in your programme. I found myself thinking that G & S is quite formulaic, when you have seen a few productions you can predict the technique and the style of the songs to come. This is actually very comfortable for although the wonderful music in each is different, you immediately feel at home; it's like being with an old friend.

The attractive setting for Act 1 immediately caught the attention and the entrance of the very 'age assorted' bridesmaids in their pretty dresses predicted the fun to come. The story unfolded and we recognised the mismatched and assorted Gilbertian characters that populate these operettas.

The story was foolish but fun, the music was wonderful and we waited for the entrance of each soloist with anticipation and were not disappointed. Each displayed the 'quirkiness' of their role with obvious enjoyment and accomplishment.

I was disappointed with the setting for Act 2, rather drab, certainly not very grand and where were all the pictures? But the story continued with humour and interest until we reached, what I considered to be, a rather sudden and abrupt conclusion to the tale.

The orchestra in the capable hands of MD Carol Kenway was a delight, under control at all times, with the richness of the tunes enhanced by the right mix of instruments. The orchestra did not overpower the singing, but there were times when I couldn't clearly hear the words of the songs, this could have been lack of diction, as some of the phrasing is very fast, or lack of sound reinforcement, I wasn't sure.

The singing was good particularly from the principals and all the harmonies were present from the chorus, but I missed some of the soaring top soprano notes, which would have rounded out the big endings in some of the choruses.

The unaccompanied ending to Act 1 was delightful, a joy to hear and must have been great to sing.

The small amount of choreography was effective, in keeping with the music and the story but I was unconvinced about the use of the children, particularly the solo dance in the duet between Robin and Rose Maybud.

The costumes were very good, the bridesmaids looked charming and the whole company was dressed suitably. A small point... from my view in the third row, when Sir Ruthven was on stage, all I could see were his crepe soled, suede shoes, not in character at all particularly when in morning dress.

All the principal players were accomplished and played their parts convincingly.

To single out a few: - Glynis Barcham as Rose Maybud was delightful, her clear soprano voice and wicked sense of fun made her a very attractive character and I really enjoyed watching her performance.

Camilla Cook, Dame Hannah, demonstrated a fine contralto voice in all her songs and Christine Richards displayed a rich soprano as Zorah.

Outstanding was Marianne McAleer as Mad Margaret, not only did she show us a delicious uninhibited performance as a crazy woman but she had a fine mezzo voice as well.

Philip Pover as Sir Ruthven was an attractive baronet, quite believable and very funny and was paired well with his foster brother Dave Kelly as Dick Dauntless, again displaying a talent for comedy. Dave Robinson's performance as Sir Despard Murgatroyd was excellent, his fine voice, accomplished acting made his character so enjoyable to watch and when coupled with Mad Margaret and Sir Ruthven in 'Mine eyes are fully opened' we saw *G & S* at its best.

The remainder of the principals were all very good and completed a worthy line up of talent.

The chorus looked good and sang well, but were a little static on stage; although I do wonder what else the director could have done, they move on and off throughout the performance.

The producer Cliff White did an excellent job in bringing this lesser known operetta to a most appreciative audience. I had no idea the story was so comical and everyone did well to convey the fun and humour.

Thank you for a very entertaining evening, I look forward with anticipation to the next production and improving my knowledge of *G & S*.

Sue Pomeroy NODA Representative District 9