

CAODS The Pirates of Penzance (the Broadway version), February 26, 2009

Director – Ray Jeffery

Musical Director – John Trent Wallace

I thought I had moved on from G&S after a period, twenty-three years ago, when my final annual booster was meant to provide me with lifelong immunity. But it has clearly worn off as I find myself enjoying G&S once again and CAODS' "Pirates" especially. While this was clearly a, vigorous, colourful, tongue in cheek production that sought to extract maximum laughter, at whatever price, from the "digitally re-mastered" original I did find myself wondering what you get for the substantial royalties paid. Apart from a severely truncated overture, two additional songs (borrowed from out of copyright Ruddigore and HMS Pinafore) and some gratuitous tinkering the essence of G&S remains. The beautiful costumes, lovely set (including the cute boat on the horizon and the flying Tardis) as well as the director's modern style could all be had for no extra cost. This leaves the music, including orchestration, as being the main difference between the Savoy and Broadway versions. This is where I question the value for money, since the substitution of keyboards for strings definitely left the sound feeling thin. There was a strong bass line and good brass accompaniment but where I felt the need for an attacking string section we heard instead the synthetic alternative which cheapened the experience in my view. I am by no means a purist in these matters but wonder whether "the Broadway version" is a marketing con trick that gives credibility to the membership secretary's promise of a good time for the younger members. If so, then perhaps it's worth it but a society with CAODS depth and strength of talent should have a go at adapting their own G&S without paying the royalties.

As far as this Pirates was concerned it was blessed with a great ensemble and principal line up which mixed youth and experience. I love to see a cast looking the right age for their roles and this was it. Jonathan Davies was an energetic and swashbuckling Pirate King who had more swordplay than Zorro during a technical rehearsal. His dashing looks, fine voice and mastery of dialogue set just the right tone for the whole show. Young Frederick, played by Thomas Harper, was equally dashing and his voice, reminiscent of Will Young, offered a great alternative to the traditional tenor. I particularly liked his Elvis impression and that whole scene, which gave the girls much more interesting work to do. The interplay with Ruth (Jenny Hockley), robust of voice combined with subtle acting skills, was always good. Mabel (Christie Hooper) had a lovely, albeit not operatic, voice and shone during the Act 2 solo, Sorry Her Lot. She was ably supported by her sisters Kate, Edith and Isobel, who made the most of their innocent yet knowing roles. Patrick Tucker's Major General was splendid and his mastery of the patter song during the encore quite impressive. Diction generally was strong throughout for all concerned. Patrick Gallagher's Sergeant of Police had a lovely bass voice but I prefer the more traditional marching entrance of the Policemen to the beginning of "When the foeman". The Keystone Cops approach is fine in the end but without some semblance of order at the beginning the audience has nothing against which to judge the increasingly anarchic behaviour thereafter. This is why the second entrance, with the women PCs, worked better in my view and got more laughs. A Policeman's Lot was also dragged out somewhat in between verses and lost its usual appeal. I understand the temptation to extend it because it is so short but the subsequent disintegration of the Policemen into quivering wrecks when they hear the Pirates is usually more amusing if they start out looking orderly.

The use of the ladies as Piratesses (as they are called in the programme) added an extra dimension to the opening numbers and their return as WPCs was also inspired. Not only did it give more people more to do but it made up the numbers when the men split into Police and Pirates in Act 2. I was desperately trying to find in the programme the WPC with the long legs and stockings but perhaps didn't register her face too well. Chorus vocals were strong and although some numbers went at quite a lick the words were still discernible. Hail Poetry was sung particularly well and I was pleased to note there was no obvious gratuitous tinkering here.

Overall, this was a hugely enjoyable show with a talented and energetic cast. This show demonstrates that G&S still has appeal to cast and audience alike. But why pay the royalties.....?

Reviewer - Stewart Adkins

Posted 8th March 2009 by [Stewart Adkins](#)