

"THE GONDOLIERS" PLAYED AT CHELMSFORD.

OPERATIO SOCIETY'S FINE PERFORMANCE.

The Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society opened their second season at the Empire Theatre, Chelmsford, on Tuesday, when they presented Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera, "The Gondoliers" (or "The King of Barataria"). Five evening performances are being given this week, the first of which was on Tuesday; and there is to be a matinee to-morrow (Saturday).

In venturing upon "The Gondoliers," the Society had a much bigger task before them than they essayed for their debut last year, when they produced "H.M.S. Pinafore." Still, it is an excellent sign when a young organisation determines to aim at big things; and the members deserve credit in that they have caught the spirit which should animate Gilbert and Sullivan opera. From the first the Society has set before itself a high standard, and if this week's performances are any criterion they have gone a long way towards establishing themselves in an assured position among successful amateur players.

THE PERFORMERS.

In selecting the cast the Executive Committee had a good deal of tried talent to draw upon, and this they utilised in judicious fashion. In a few notable instances, however, leading parts were allotted to newcomers to the Society's ranks, with the happiest results. The full cast was as follows:—

The Duke of Plaza Toro (a Grandee of Spain),
Mr. Tom Bellamy
Luis (his Attendant) _____ Mr. Tom Parfitt
Don Alhambra (the Grand Inquisitor),
Mr. Jeff Snoodbridge
Marco, Giuseppe, Antonio, Francesco,
Giorgio, and Annibale, Venetian Gondoliers,
Messrs. Leonard Hayward, Cecil Booking,
Cyril A. Last, Reg. Jackson, Victor Spurgeon,
and R. G. Berr

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Louis (his Attendant) ——— Mr. Tom Partitt
Don Alhambra (the Grand Inquisitor),
Mr. Jeff Shoobridge

Marco, Giuseppe, Antonio, Francesco,
Giorgio, and Annibale, Venetian Gondoliers,
Messrs. Leonard Hayward, Cecil Booking,
Cyril O. Last, Reg. Jackson, Victor Spurgeon,
and R. G. Beer.

The Duchess of Plaza Toro, Miss Peggy Green
Casilda (her daughter),

Miss Dorothy Fincham
Gianetta, Tessa, Fiametta, Vittoria, and
Giulia, Contadine, Mrs. A. J. Hobart, Mrs.
Doris Jackson, Mrs. Alice Bellamy, Mrs.
Clara Marks, and Mrs. Ralph Catt
Inez (the King's foster-mother),

Mrs. R. G. Beer
Chorus of Contadine, Gondoliers, Courtiers,
etc.:—Messdames A. B. Barnes, R. G. Beer, E.
Cullis, O. Ling, O. E. Perks, M. D. Smith, W.
Woodward; Misses A. E. Chisnell, D. E.
Creasy, Q. Fewell, Ivy Fisher, E. F. Jaggs, K.
Last, E. S. Myall, E. Meager, E. M. Sayera,
L. Smyth-Tyrrell, M. Spalding, D. Ward;
Messrs. E. W. Alston, O. Beasley, Ralph Catt,
O. Copsey, E. G. Coulter, G. Debiann, A. J.
Hobart, H. Jackson, G. N. Knight, B. J. Myall,
A. J. Nokes, H. N. Pullen, F. T.
Smyth-Tyrrell, W. H. Tutt. Drummer Boy:
Miss D. Marks. Trainbearers: Miss O.
Cannon, Miss M. V. Chisnell.

The Scenes:—Act I: The Piazzetta,
Venice. Act II: Pavilion in the Royal
Palace, Barataria. (Three months is sup-
posed to elapse between the two acts).

The orchestra was composed as follows:—
First violins, Messrs. W. H. Bateman, R. G.
Hodges, L. Bragg, A. E. Bragg; second violins,
Miss Ethel K. Waumale, Mr. V. F. Waldau;
viola, Mrs. Price-Smith; violoncello, Mr.
A. G. Fulcher; double bass, Mr. J. H.
LeFevre; flute, Rev. L. C. Blower; oboe,
Mr. A. V. W. Beeton; clarionets, Messrs.
F. Ratty and E. J. Wright; bassoon, Mr. E.
Newcombe; cornet, Mr. George Lee; trom-
bones, Messrs. W. Reed, F. Appleton, J. T.
Hazelton; drums, Mr. A. McCormack; piano,
Mr. Lawrence Hey.

ABOUT THE PLAY.

The story of the play is too well known to
need description. Moreover, an excellent
descriptive summary, from the pen of the
hon. secretary of the Society, Mr. R. J.
Shoobridge, was printed in the programme.

Miss Peggy Green, as the Duchess of Plaza
Toro, enhanced the already high reputation
she has acquired as an amateur actress.
Nothing could have excelled the grace and
dignity with which she portrayed the part,
while her song, "On the day that I was
wedded," evoked manifest appreciation. Miss

Dorothy Fincham, as Casilda, had a very encouraging reception at her first appearance in comic opera. It is not an easy role to fill, and there is a great deal of work in it; but the character was presented with marked success, the love passages with Luiz being quite a feature of the production, exhibiting a combination of dainty acting and tuneful singing which do not always go together.

Very happy, indeed, was the selection of Messrs. Hayward and Bocking as Marco and Guiseppe, the pair of gondoliers who are the adored of the Venetian maidens; and their brides Gianetta and Tessa, played, respectively, by Mrs. Hobart and Mrs. Jackson, were charming and vivacious. On these players the success of the piece very largely depends, especially perhaps on the musical side. Whether as the "pink and flower of all the gondoliers," or the joint occupants of the throne of Barataria—exquisitely Gilbertian this—the men displayed accurate perception of the possibilities of the situations, and made the most of them. Mrs. Jackson's acting was very graceful and finished in style, and she was deservedly applauded for the solo, "When a merry maiden marries" (in the chorus "Bridegroom and bride"); while Mrs. Hobart's song, "Kind Sir, you cannot have the heart," was characterised by excellent expression, the high notes being especially good and clear. Mr. Hayward scored a success in "Take a pair of sparkling eyes," perhaps the best-known, and certainly one of the finest, tenor numbers in the whole of Gilbert and Sullivan's operas.

Mr. Tom Bellamy, who has been one of the foremost members of the Society since its formation, appeared as the impecunious Duke of Plaza Toro, who solved his financial difficulties by being floated as a Limited Company! If anything, he out-Gilberted Gilbert in his interpretation of the burlesque character of a Spanish grandee, and he handled a part in which dignity and comicality are so delightfully blended with considerable skill. In the recitative and duet with the Duchess, "Small titles and orders," he was particularly good. The role of the Grand Inquisitor gave Mr. Jeff. Shoobridge—who is a pillar of the Society—a capital opportunity of displaying his abilities. In the sombre garb and general Kill Joy atmosphere of the part he was entirely successful, and he seemed to revel in it, his portrayal being distinctly one of the hits of the performance. Mr. Tom Parfitt, as Luiz, had not a great deal to do, but did it well; and Mrs. R. G. Beer, also cast for a small part, made the most of her opportunities.

GOOD CHORUS WORK.

The chorus work was admirably done, the tuneful singing and graceful dancing being particularly appreciated by the audience. The chorus and dance, "Dance a Cachuca," in the second act, was especially good, the gaily ribboned tambourines of the ladies adding to the effect. The chorus of Contadine, with which the first act opens, and the finales of both acts, also deserve favourable mention.

The opera was prettily dressed throughout, and the scenery and stage appointments left nothing to be desired. Much of the success of the production is due to the fine orchestra, who gave of their best, under their talented and enthusiastic conductor, Mr. G. E. Bower, L.R.A.M., A.R.C.M., who, in the post of honorary musical director, is one of the mainstays of the Society. The play was produced under the personal direction of Mr. H. Ashley Cooper, late of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company; and Mr. E. G. Brown was scenery manager.

Assistance was rendered by the following in the capacity of programme sellers, ushers, scene shifters, prompters, etc.:—Mesdames P. Butchard, A. Claydon; Misses E. and L. Bradridge, E. Brasher, C. Gunner, F. Matthams; Messrs A. B. Barnes, R. C. Barnwell, A. T. Bradridge, P. Butchard, H. W. Hagger, F. Jeffreys, A. J. Jones, C. Ling, S. Martin, R. Stark, H. E. Ward, and H. Wright.

To produce a play like "The Gondoliers" involves considerable preliminary organisation and hard work; and fortunately the Society has a capable Executive Committee, consisting of Mrs. D. Jackson, Miss Peggy Green, Messrs T. Bellamy, L. S. Bragg, E. G. Brown, and Ralph Catt; with Mr. R. J. Shoobridge as hon. secretary; Mr. Percy G. Cheverton, hon. treasurer; and Mr. A. J. Jones, hon. auditor.



Olive Catt in The Gondoliers.