



Society : HLO Musical Company
Production : Iolanthe
Date : October 15th, 2022
Venue : Hampton Hill Theatre
Report by : Des Wilby – Regional Representative (District 3)

Show Report

It was a pleasure to have once again been able to visit with HLO Musical Company for this, their autumn production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe* or *The Peer and the Perri*. This is one of Gilbert and Sullivan's many comic operas and a personal favourite of mine.

After twenty five years of banishment for the ultimate crime of marrying a mortal, Iolanthe's half-human, half-fairy son is on the verge of marrying a mortal himself. This too is a fairy crime but one punishable by death which leaves Iolanthe, and her fairy friends, no choice but to challenge the law...

Congratulations must first be given to Steve Taylor not only as the Director, but also as Conductor for this production. With some highly talented cast members to work with it must have been pleasing to see all your hard work, and effort, come together so well. The simple set and uncluttered stage provided plenty of space for all cast members and movement. A high standard of attention to detail ensured everything ran smoothly with no delays or distractions.

Lee Dewsnap (Musical Director) provided full musical accompaniment, via his keyboard, whilst being situated in front of stage. As usual, all music was both perfectly timed with the vocals and sympathetic. Lee worked to ensure that the music never overshadowed cast vocals which is vital for the audience's understanding in a Gilbert & Sullivan production.

Suzi Pink once again brought plenty of movement to the stage as Choreographer. In short, this was far from a 'static' performance and instead created visual interest for those in the audience to enjoy. The heavily booted, and not so dainty fairies, were very funny in their rendition of 'Tripping hither, tripping thither'. Likewise, 'If you go in you're sure to win' (Tolloller, Mountarat and Lord Chancellor) was a terrific number indeed.

Elizabeth Malone must have also be congratulated as Production Manager and for all the time and effort invested to ensure the overall success of this production.

Johanna Chambers demonstrated just what a wonderful leading lady she continues to be, this time beautifully filling the role of Phyllis. Johanna has a superb voice, was gentle in manner, strong in character and brought plenty of energy to the stage. As always, a well-rounded and confident performance.

Alexander Roberts brought his extensive talent to the role of Strephon and handled the part with consummate ease. Alexander's stage presence and vocal skills were outstanding. The romantic interest between Phyllis and Strephon was both genuine and believable. 'Good- morrow, good lover' and 'none shall part us from each other' were beautifully sung and moving duets.

Clare Henderson Roe certainly impresses as the Fairy Queen and extracted plenty of humour from her lines. The purple costumes, wings and top hat were not what I'd expected but worked well with her group of somewhat non-conforming fairies. 'Fare the well, attractive stranger', was one of several enjoyable numbers sung by Clare.

Jacob Taylor (Lord Tolloller), Paul Huggins (Lord Mountararat) and Tony Cotterill (Lord Chancellor) added plenty of humour together with some strong vocal skills. 'If you go in you're sure to win' was a definite highlight

Felicity Morgan (Celia – Gossip Fairy), Heather Monro (Leila – Bossy Fairy) and Andrea Wilkins (Fleta – Nice-but-dim-Fairy) each played their part well and brought a different element to the production.

Karen Heyworth gave a strong performance as Iolanthe. Slowly appearing from underneath the stage, and out of a pond, 'Iolanthe! From thy dark exile thou art summoned' made a dramatic impression.

Andrew Lumsden gave a terrific performance in the cameo role of Private Willis and put his rich, bass vocal skills to effect with 'When all night long a chap remains.'

Whilst the principals enjoy 'the limelight', it is important to recognise the energy, commitment and quality demonstrated by the ensemble. Congratulations to Laurie Cooper, Lis Guest, Stephen Hopkins, June Hume, Elizabeth Malone, Veronica Martin, Genna Martinez, Harriet Muir, Philippa Mukherjee, Rachael Nolan, Anne Pringle, Helen Smith and Peter Stanford who, as Fairies, Peers and Women Peers provided excellent support and greatly added to the overall success of this production. Your efforts were certainly noticed and appreciated.

Ian Nethersell is to be congratulated as Stage Manager with everything appearing to be highly organised. The performance ran smoothly, and with no interruptions, which allowed the audience to remain firmly focused on the show itself.

Veronica Martin, Elizabeth Malone and Harriet Muir deserve credit for co-ordinating the extensive collection of quality outfits. Both the variety, and quantity, of costumes added to the overall appeal of this production. Jane Bean managed a range of Props and these were of a good standard being appropriate for the time period and setting.

Patrick Troughton was responsible for handling both Lighting and Sound. I did feel that the vocals were occasionally a little quiet this was due to the lack of individual microphones and not a technical fault. Simply put, it is vital for all cast members to project clearly! The lighting I found to be very effective and subtle in places. Overall, there were minimal technical issues to mention and nothing to distract from the performance.

Anne Pringle and Felicity Morgan are to be congratulated for delivering an excellent programme that was full of information for the audience to enjoy reading. There were some terrific photographs of rehearsals together with great cast biographies. It was also pleasing to see the prominent NODA reference.

Congratulations once again to everyone at HLO Musical Company and to those specifically involved with 'Iolanthe'.

Des Wilby
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