

IOLANTHE NODA Review

WITHAM AMATEUR OPERATIC SOCIETY

Iolanthe, by Gilbert and Sullivan

Director and Musical Director Thomas Duchan

Choreographer and Assistant Director Heather Howard

Performed at Witham Public Hall on Friday 26th April 2019

I was met by Debbie Rolph, Front of House Manager and afterwards I had the opportunity to talk with Thomas Duchan, the Director and Musical Director.

This production of the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta was an updated and very modern script which really brought the disparate characters to life. Director Thomas Duchan has introduced some minor changes to the script and lyrics which have rooted the story firmly in the modern day with a local element eg Brentwood.

The production opened in the Fairy House introducing the Fairy Chorus and Soloists and the Queen of the Fairies,(Rhianna Howard) The fairies were certainly not fairies in the accepted traditional sense and were all very vocal and intent on being heard. Rhianna played a rather forthright and assertive character, trying hard to exert some control over the Fairies. Aimee Hart, in the title role of Iolanthe, had been banished from the Fairies as she had married a mere mortal and had a son, Strephon played by Michael Watling.

Stewart Adkins was quite majestic in the role of Lord Chancellor with a strong vocal performance in "The Law is the True Embodiment" and "When I went to the Bar ". Amy Buchanan, as Phyllis, played a strong character quite capable of fielding off the amorous advances of the group of Peers and is in love with Strephon. Amy and Michael performed two delightful duets, "None Shall Part Us from Each Other" and "If We're Weak Enough to Tarry" and their voices complemented each other with excellent expression.

And what a great group of Peers with some really excellent voices throughout the production - Gary Rolph, Simon Rothman, Tim Sheppard and Matt Waldie, ably assisted by Richard Herring, as Lord Mountararat and Alex Moore, as Lord Tolloller. Very strong vocal performances! Ron Howe, as Bouncer Willis at the Arcadia Club did well with the opening number of Act 2 ie "When All Night Long a Chap Remains" and was well cast in this role.

Assistant Director and Choreographer, Heather Howard ensured that good use was made of the stage. There were some interesting dance routines although I suspect that the Peers were not really keen dancers! Nevertheless, they did well.

I must mention the large band of fourteen musicians ably conducted by Thomas Duchan. There were many different instruments all played with great skill and enthusiasm. The volume was perfect with no actor overshadowed, well done especially considering the limited rehearsal time they had together before the first live show. The set was fairly basic

but effective, consisting mainly of black backdrops, shimmery backdrop for the Fairy House and signage and a bar for the Arcadia Club .A number of props were moved on and off stage seamlessly, adding much to the backdrops .Production Manager (Paul Goddard) and Stage Manager (Ben Sawyer) were clearly in control here and some excellent lighting and sound added to the overall effect. Costumes, from the group's wardrobe, were all very relevant to the characters and the period, as was the make-up.

This was a well-directed and innovative production, which moved along at a good pace and with great enthusiasm. I enjoyed the evening immensely and congratulate everyone involved in this first class production, both on and off stage

Well done

Hazel Hole MBE

Regional Representative

NODA East