

Iolanthe BWT Review

There seems to have been a general feeling recently, not without justification, that Gilbert and Sullivan, in its original form, would not appeal to today's audiences. Thus we have had WOW's Hot Mikado in 2010 and in 2016 Witham Amateur Operatic Society's 'Australian version' of Pirates of Penzance. Now we have WAOS's Iolanthe in modern dress with references to texting, facetime, The Only Way Is Essex and Brexit, imaginatively directed by Thomas Duchan.

It won't have pleased the purists but it won favour with the likes of Stewart Adkins and Tim Sheppard, who have graced many G&S productions in the past. Adkins was in his fourth version of Iolanthe while Sheppard, now in his 63rd year with the society, appeared in WAOS's 1973 production.

There was of course much that they would recognise. The men's chorus still goes around singing 'tantantara' while the Lord Chancellor (Adkins) still has to get his tongue round the machine-gun delivery of Love Unrequited, a task he rises too with aplomb.

There is also room for the beautiful singing voices of Amy Buchanan (Phyllis) and Aimee Hart (Iolanthe) and it was good to see Rhianna Howard back on stage in a meaty part, giving her all as Queen of the Fairies (Essex version). Michael Watling is convincing as the love-torn Strephon with solid support from WAOS veterans Richard Herring and Ron Howe.

Ron Fosker