

BWT Review

Pirates of Penzance
Witham Amateur Operatic Society
Witham Public Hall
April 25-30

Brash Gilbert and Sullivan for 21st Century

This was Gilbert and Sullivan for the 21st century – a brash irreverent version with topical references, suggestive asides and a doowop chorus.

It is billed as ‘the Australian version’ to make it clear that this is not D’Oyly Carte or Covent Garden.

Instead we get an updated take that gives some of the songs more of a pop feel, notably by the introduction of a female chorus line straight out of 1950s’ New York, a text tweaked at the edges and a Tiller Girls chorus line to finish off with.

All the well-known songs are here (and so, unfortunately, is the somewhat nonsensical plot) as are all the main characters, led by the outstanding youthful pairing of Thomas Pleasant and Jess Edom-Carey, whose strong vocals command the stage.

David Slater is at his swashbuckling best as the Pirate King alongside Michael Mundell-Poole as the able No.2 and Anne Wilson as the demure Ruth.

The production’s two best known numbers are in assured hands. Tom Whelan’s excellent delivery ensures we miss none of the Modern Major General’s fiendishly clever rhymes while Stewart Adkins, in what he describes as his favourite G&S role, is all elasticity and convoluted facial expression as he tells us A Policemen’s Lot Is Not A Happy One.

The maidens’ beehives and references to David Cameron and Jeremy Corbyn sit rather awkwardly with the paean to Queen Victoria and the reference to 1940 being some way off in the future but these are small prices to pay for the jaunty and breezy antics and colourful stage presentation that give us the very model of the modern G&S.

Ron Fosker