

DRAFT REPORT FOR THE SEPTEMBER 2001 EASTERN NEWS
PERFORMANCE OF 27TH April 2001

WITHAM A.O.S. - THE GONDOLIERS

This evening started with a really pleasant and welcome surprise, with the audience listening in complete silence and attention to the whole of the overture, very well played under the baton of Musical Director David Cawdell. Musically this production was at the top end of Witham's usual high standard with some pleasing choral work, and a good set of principals. Nick Clough, directing his first major production, kept chorus movement to a minimum, but nevertheless kept the chorus involved in the action and the stage pictures interesting on two excellent sets. Wardrobe was colourful and effective and the lighting complemented the whole. Sound amplification was well handled and unobtrusive and apart from a very few instances the orchestra stage balance was excellent. It has to be said, however, that the first Act was sluggish in places, with an audience which from the start seemed unreasonably reluctant to applaud. Which, I wonder, was cause and which was effect? I guess there must have been a 'words of one syllable, manager style', pep talk at half time because Act II really did come to life and demonstrate the real calibre of the company. Marco and Guiseppe were very well played by Jonathon Baron and Tim Clark and were nicely matched with their partners Gianetta and Tessa played respectively by Helen Fox and Carolyn Wash. Patrick O'Brian, both in dress and manner, made a splendidly exaggerated Duke, with Jan Wash in fine form as his Duchess. Helene Jones was a stately and composed Casilda, with Luiz, the dark horse of the plot, being well played by Paul Chittleborough. Steve Draper exuded a great air of pompous authority as the Inquisitor. The other principals gave good support. I enjoyed this evening with the Gondoliers greatly, which included a beautifully crafted replacement lyric for the Duke and Duchess recitative based on current political machinations and comment.

Other Comments (for the Society only)

1. Thinking further on my comments above, about the quiet audience for the overture and ongoing reluctance to applaud, leads me to wonder whether the absence of an opportunity to applaud after the overture might have been a factor. There was, in the audience, a move toward applauding but the immediate rise of the curtain straight into 'Lis't and Learn' seemed to stifle it.
2. A couple of other points near the beginning also had their influence I'm sure. In 'The Merriest Fellows are we...', it was noticeable that 'quipping and loving and laughing' produced not even a smile from either soloist or most of the chorus. Also, the choosing of the brides would have benefited from a bit more zest.
3. All of the foregoing amounts to the possibility that the first act sluggishness was not necessarily wholly the company's fault or that of the audience but simply developed from one or two instances at or near the beginning.
4. The idea of lighting only the couples near the of Act I as they exchanged their private thoughts was good, although the sudden change from an overall soft light to hard white rather spoiled the effect. If it had been possible, a slow cross fade would have retained and deepened the mood. Also the spots spilled rather brightly on to the chorus.
5. Despite the above few points this was a good production with a well controlled orchestra and Nick is to be congratulated on his 'first'.

John Warburton
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