

THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE

Performed by Girton Musical Theatre
at Girton Glebe School
Directed by Clare Richards
Musical Director Patricia Davies

Pirates, policemen, Modern Major Generals, a bevy of beautiful maidens, paradoxes and a misunderstanding of words... It can only be Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance*. No doubt Girton Musical Theatre cleverly chose to present *The Pirates of Penzance* for their annual production because 2020 is a Leap year.

The story concerns Frederic, who, having completed his 21st year, is released from his apprenticeship to a band of tender-hearted pirates. He meets Mabel, the daughter of Major-General Stanley, and the two young people fall instantly in love. Frederic soon learns, however, that he was born on the 29th of February, and so, technically, he has a birthday only once every four years. His indenture that he remain apprenticed to the pirates until his "twenty-first birthday", meaning that he must serve for another 63 years. Bound by his own sense of duty, Frederic's only solace is that Mabel agrees to wait for him faithfully.

Contribution from Stage Manager David Hincks and his stage crew was excellent. The stunning scenery constructed and painted by the cast and production team always impresses and the opening scene of a rocky sea shore brought spontaneous applause. The Act 2 set of a ruined chapel also deserved applause but I think everyone was so busy reading and chuckling at the very clever names on the tombstones the moment was lost. You can always rely on Girton to come up with little quirky touches, one of which is the extremely clever safety announcements which are sung as a patter song which, I am sure, is eagerly anticipated by their loyal fan base. Costumes were beautiful, particularly the ladies' elegant evening dresses, although I didn't quite work out why one of the Pirates was wearing a kilt. Props are always well thought out and it is great fun spotting the jokey items.

In the Director's chair this year was Clare Richards who is no stranger to Girton casts. Some of the casting strained our credulity a bit but it all added amusement. Principals were vocally good. Vic Olphin gave a first class performance as Mabel and in a fine performance Simon Fitch led from the front as The Pirate King supported by Glynis Ellis as Samuel. Øistein Anderson made a very good Major General indeed with Steven Aronson seeking romance as Frederic all the time trying to escape the attentions of Ruth (Jane Williams).

Led by Diane Hincks, Helen Wilson and Nirupa Desai as Isabel, Kate and Edith, the ladies' chorus was very good, nice volume too which is important. The band of Pirates obviously enjoyed their chance to do a bit of swashbuckling. They were required to double as policemen which, when they had to go off to do a bit more pirating, left Sergeant Jerry Harrison and Officer George Thorpe to give us a great rendition of the famous "When a Felon's Not Engaged in his Employment". Good support from the ensemble of Daughters, Pirates and Policemen complemented the principals. The finale of Act I was particularly good.

The orchestra, under the direction of Patricia Davies, played well. The sound balance was just right so that every word said and sung on the stage could be heard. Overall the first night performance though enjoyable was slightly shaky at times mostly because of hesitancy with dialogue which did not, thankfully, transfer to the songs. It was nice to see the young boy sat in front of me laughing at the jokes and obviously involved in the story. If I had to choose a favourite G&S show I think it would be POP. It is great fun.

Julie Petrucci
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