Pirates Of Penzance – Critique Essay, Research Paper

Pirates of Penzance – Critique

The Pirates of Penzance was an opera performed by the Southwest Texas Opera Workshop. The Pirates of Penzance, composed by Gilbert & Sullivan, is a light-hearted parody of the traditional opera. This opera takes place somewhere in the British Virgin Islands. It is about a boy, Federic, who is to be apprenticed by his nurse, Ruth, to become a pilot. Ruth mistakes the word pilot for pirate and apprentices him to a band of pirates. She, too, remains with them as a maid-of-all-work.

Act I opens with the celebration of Frederic s coming of age. He is planning to leave the pirates and devote his life to the eradication of piracy. Now that Frederic has come of age, Ruth wishes to become his spouse and he reluctantly agrees, believing that she is as beautiful as she says. Soon after he agrees to marry Ruth, Major-General Stanley s many daughters stumble upon the island. After Frederic sees their beauty, especially that of Mabel s, he renounces Ruth and pursues Mabel. The other girls are seized by the pirates and threatened with marriage. When the Major-General shows up he too is captured by the pirates. The Major-General eludes the pirates by telling them a lie about being an orphan. Having been orphans themselves and having a place in their hearts for them, the pirates let the Major-General and his daughters go. Over the next few days, the Major-General s conscience gets the best of him and he confides to Frederic the lie that he told the pirates. Frederic consoles him and tells of his plan to lead a band of police against the pirates. While this goes on, the Pirate King and Ruth discover Frederic was born on February 29, leap year. This discovery leads them to realize that Frederic has only had 5 birthdays, making him well short of the 21 years he must serve the pirates. Upon learning this, Frederic rejoins the pirates and tells them of the Major-General s deception he practiced upon them. The Major-General is once again seized by the pirates, only to be rescued by the police. Ruth, however, explains to the police and Major-General Stanley that the pirates are truly noblemen gone wrong and gets them pardoned. They are in turn permitted to marry the Major-General s many daughters.

The Friday, January 29 performance that I attended contained many extraordinary performances, especially that of Frederic, Mabel, the Major-General Stanley and the Pirate King. Although the entire cast was good, these performances stood out the most.

Matthew Kendrick did a wonderful job as Frederic. His voice was smooth and clear, though a bit soft. His quieter voice made it difficult to understand most of the words he was singing, especially when his back was to the audience. He seemed a little uneasy on stage by himself, but his chemistry when on stage with Pam Brumley, who played the part of Mabel, was outstanding. What Kendrick lacked in sound she made up for with her strong, crisp voice. Their voices blended together nicely during their duets adding to their convincing portrayal of two lovers courting one another. It was a pleasure to hear such beautiful voices and to see how well those two actors portrayed the loving couple on stage.

The Major-General Stanley, played by Scott Shipman, was another great performance. His acting was less convincing than the others, but it was his singing that carried his performance. His rare solos overpowered the orchestra and got strong reactions from the audience, proving that what his acting lacked his vocal ability overshadowed.

Although he was not the main character, the Pirate King, played by Joshua Ryan Phillips, stole the show. Even though his voice was not as strong as Brumley s or Shipman s, his appeal to the audience was. His performance, by far, was the most convincing. His audience appeal came from his comfortable disposition on stage and his multiple side-stage facial remarks that only the audience could see. It was apparent that when his character was on stage, the entire audience s eyes were focused upon him.

The musical numbers performed by the orchestra were soothing. Most all of the pieces had slow tempos, steady rhythms and were moderate in texture. Many of the numbers were of this slow, romantic style since a lot of them were duets between Frederic and Mabel, therefore, intensifying their feelings of love for one another. The orchestra consisted of two violins, a viola, a cello, a string bass, two flutes, percussion and a piano. Though it was small, the orchestra produced the perfect sound, loud enough to be heard by all without taking anything away from the actors.

The opera, although based around a love story, had an appeal to even those who do not care so much for mushy love stories. There were many humorous remarks, looks, and dances from the entire cast, mainly coming from the Pirate King. The police took on Keystone Cop-like demeanors through their follies and slap-stick comedy. Another amusing aspect of this opera was the cameo performance and complete cast dance to the Southwest Texas Panorama Steel Drum Band piece. This stoppage of the opera and dance number at the beginning of Act I set the tone for the entire opera. The light-hearted humor along with outstanding personal performances by every cast member made this a truly enjoyable opera.