

Wiltshire **TIMES**

Review- HMS Pinafore

Wednesday 20th May 2015

TAOS Musical Theatre, formerly known as Trowbridge Amateur Operatic Society, have performed HMS Pinafore or 'The Lass That Loved a Sailor' twice before under their previous guise.

Their latest version, which played at the Arc Theatre this week, is - a bit like the society's nomenclature - a combination of the old and the new. On the one hand you have the evergreen Sean Andrews in his 34th show for the company, but perhaps rather surprisingly, partaking in Pinafore for the first time. He played Ralph Rackstraw, the humble sailor, with a nice vulnerability. His excellent voice keeps him sounding young, while his good genetics keep him looking young.

Young enough to not look out of place next to fresh faced society newcomer Caroline Murray as Josephine, a role she played suitably delicately. The blend of voices during the harmonies were beautifully true to form - no sign of 'resorting to singing the tune' here.

For the most part the show felt raw and honest with no microphones and no elaborate set changes enhancing the charm of the piece. There is no doubt that Gilbert & Sullivan are the yeast extract based product of the musical theatre world, but director Phil Courage & MD Julian Clementson did all they could to give the show wide ranging appeal by keeping it true to the original score, and not over complicating the staging or vocal work, keeping it flowing and interesting at all times.

Any show at the Arc struggles when large numbers of chorus join the fray, but in this case minimal movement and especially luscious harmonies - the hallmark of TAOS down the years, highlighted that at least one thing about the society never changes.

Good performances followed from Andrew Curtis as the ship's captain, Chris Pollock as Sir Joseph Porter KCB - another society newcomer, and the indefatigable Pete Grant who gives one of his best performances to date as storyline buzzkill Dick Deadeye. The supporting soloists, Allison Moore as Little Buttercup, Paul West as the Boatswain's mate, Janet Cooper as Cousin Hebe and the last of the newbies Iorwerth Mitchell as the Carpenter's mate all tackled their roles expertly and convincingly.

The chorus supported well and contained a few more men than usual which was great to see and meant the sisters, cousins and aunts weren't squabbling too hard among themselves to find the one suitable dance partner!

Fair to say that this voyage was a successful one then, however I think it would be fair to say that G&S is the sort of staple that TAOS Musical Theatre thrives on. So it will be good to see them doing something slightly more unusual as they tackle their next show in November, West End sensation City of Angels.