



ScenOne Review

TRIAL BY JURY / HMS PINAFORE

Steve O'Neill

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I confess; I abhor Gilbert & Sullivan, their twee songs and improbable lib. played by, in my (limited) experience, scratchy, out of tune orchestras with singers of equal ability. So when the call for a reviewer came I was not forthcoming. Then my wife chided my closed mindedness, reminding me of my admonishment of the kids that, "tastes change, that you've disliked something before, does not mean you'll still dislike it if you give it another go later on".

So it is, that with some reluctance and feeling thoroughly drained after a long day in the office that I find myself sat in row F in the Lighthouse when I'd really rather be sat snoring on the sofa at home. I told my wife beforehand to give me a nudge if I dropped off.

I needn't have worried. I am a renewed man and all the richer for going to see production.

It was absolutely brilliant from the first opening note to the last strident chord!

Set in front of curtains, the evening began with the rousing chorus of Trial by Jury, quickly followed by James Rosser's first number as the court usher. What a lovely deep baritone voice James has; and so much energy he literally fills the stage all on his own. Not that there was any need, the stage was packed by a very sizeable chorus of very, very fine monochrome singers. The overall effect was highly stylised both in the acting and of a black and white film with splashes of colour coming from the defendant's new girlfriend, jilted fiancée and the Judge. I love minimalism in theatre so the use of two simple frames that became doors, dock and juror's bench really impressed.

After 35 minutes that felt more like 10, the utter nonsense and hilarity of Trial by Jury came to an end and I was thoroughly awake, energised and eagerly awaiting HMS Pinafore.

The audience was transported the moment the excellent orchestra, under the leadership of musical director Helen Brind, opened up the overture. The curtains lifted on a beautifully lit set and another rousing number from the sailor's chorus. There was just a hint that this is an amateur show – the boy's dancing was not quite together or on time. Other little signs crept in throughout; some of the a cappella sections would drift through several keys; some of the chorus numbers would get out of sync with the orchestra; Otherwise, this had the look and sound of a professional show.

After the opening number Amanda King, dressed all in bright gypsy costume, lit up the stage with her gorgeous voice as a very lovely, if a bit naughty, Little Buttercup.

Richard Moore played a very dashing and incongruently eloquent Ralph Rackshaw. I think there were some first night nerves for Richard as his first song was just a little bit pitchy in places but it would seem he overcame them as he warmed into the role with some lovely numbers later on.

Bruce Vyner brought a very affable and quietly funny Captain Corcoran to life with his velvety rich baritone and Amy McIntosh as his daughter Josephine was simply stunning (where does that voice come from?) and, I was surprised to see, pretty nimble with the Diablo. The pair of them were lots of fun and very convincing.

The director, Claire Camble-Hutchins, brought some brilliant touches to the whole production which was deftly performed and hugely funny. She even brought bits of it (more) up to date – I loved the '20s flapper girls, Sir Joseph Porter's entourage, and she even sneaked in a few very modern references to hilarious effect. Of the flappers, Tanya Lerche-Lerchenborg as the tap-dancing Cousin Hebe, was sensational. She seemed to fill the stage with her brilliance.

The cast were all fantastic, obviously having the time of their lives and the sizeable audience couldn't help but have a great time too.

James Rosser certainly lit up the stage in Trial by Jury but he was no less stellar as Dick Deadeye. He brought such energy, passion and cheeky rogueishness, to the stage. With that twinkle in his one good eye, he made the whole thing seem even brighter (if that were possible).

The shows run until Saturday, so even if you're a G&S philistine like me, do yourself a favour and get down to the Lighthouse for a brilliant night out!