

Well, what an unexpected delight Iolanthe turned out to be! I'm a big Mikado and Pirates of Penzance fan but was unfamiliar with Iolanthe but this Gilbert and Sullivan operetta is not only darkly comic and amusing but so utterly pertinent, it may have been written today and re-titled "Brexit for Fairies".

Gilbert had taken pot shots at the aristocracy before, but in this "fairy opera", the House of Lords is lampooned as a bastion of the ineffective, privileged and dim-witted. Sound familiar? The political party system and other institutions also come in for a dose of satire. This, G & S, seventh work together is brilliantly presented by Wolverton Gilbert and Sullivan Society.

The fairies, all gothic and sexy open the show led by Iolanthe, Liz Carter, who is excellent but it is Paula Fraser as Queen of the Fairies, who steals the show, borrowing heavily from Queenie from Blackadder, with a touch of Olivia Coleman and Miranda, with her archness and sarcasm. Brilliant!

It's the first time I've seen Jo Bigg, as Leila, have a part in a show and she's really rather good. Catherine Lee, (who appeared on my show a few weeks ago), is a newcomer to the Society and she plays Phyllis, the ingénue, just beautifully, her voice is a delight, and she manages to be both cotequish and manipulative in equal measure. Director Graham Breeze who also plays Strephon, (who is half fairy – his upper half – his legs are mortal) manages to convey so much with just a raised Roger Moore eyebrow and possesses a wonderful singing voice - I had forgotten just how much I enjoy watching him perform.

Roger Whatmore as the Lord Chancellor, delivers the notoriously tricky patter song, which is so complex and wordy, yet so very G & S. He's spritely, lively and his interaction with the Earls' Tolloller, Graham Mitchell and Mountarat, Alan Bennett, is hilarious. John Douglas as Constable Willis is not on stage for very long, but he certainly makes an impact, delivering a perfect deadpan performance.

The audience were all thoroughly engaged, laughed uproariously at all the political jibes, and the pokes at the establishment but I think the overriding message was, this is uncannily like a day in the Houses of Parliament at present. G & S were so ahead of their time.

I cannot believe I have waited this long to see a Wolverton G & S production, but I shall be attending all their shows in the future as not only have they introduced me to a new operetta, they are slick, professional, sing unamplified, no bells and whistles and simply rely on home-grown talent to produce a top-class show. Bravo!

Iolanthe is on at Stantonbury Theatre till 30th March, catch it if you can!

Nancy Stevens

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