

REVIEW OF IOLANTHE BY ALEX WOOD FOR N.O.D.A.

Another parliamentary mess...this time in the 19th century and, mercifully, not about our future in Europe. The Lord Chancellor's pretty ward is refused marriage with a shepherd who is half-man half-fairy, the assembled lustful peers are being sorely distracted by said young lady, and the fairies have installed her swain in the Commons with a guaranteed majority which is about to be used to create a law to ensure that all members of the House of Lords are to be appointed according to merit. Underlying this are Gilbert and Sullivan's brilliant - and still surprisingly relevant - satire of the class system, politics and the law.

Wolverton Gilbert and Sullivan Society presented us with a delightful treat of a production.

There were some outstanding performances. Leading by example, Director Graham Breeze took on the role of shepherd Strephon with a great deal of skill and gusto. His stage partner, Phyllis, was played by Catherine Lee, who has a voice as clear as crystal and a very well-judged stage presence; the role involves a lot of eavesdropping and Catherine judged her reactions to what she was overhearing to perfection. Roger Whatmore was just right as the Lord Chancellor, confidently and very competently demonstrating his self-importance ('When I went to the Bar') but also his human frailties ('Love Unrequited Robs Me'). And many of the most comic moments of the evening were provided by Paula Fraser, looking every inch the Queen of the Fairies and whose lovely comic timing enabled her to judge perfectly the balance between her regal status and more 'mortal' feelings, especially when presented with Constable Willis - played with a knowing wit by John Douglas.

Liz Carter gave us a suitably maternal Iolanthe and Alan Bennett (as the Earl of Mountararat) and Graham Mitchell (as Earl Tolloller) made a perfect comic duo - I loved their duet 'Tho' P'raps I May incur'.

Both choruses - fairies and Peers - worked well with some good singing and acting, though I am not sure that their diction was as clear as it could have been.

A superb 16-piece orchestra was lead by MD Mike Crofts, assisted by leader Lorna Morton.

Costumes (some hired) were magnificent - well done the wardrobe team - and lighting, scenery and make-up (the fairies sparkled) were excellent.

Many thanks to Wolverton G & S Society for inviting me and your hospitality at the show.

ALEX WOOD