

*National Operatic & Dramatic
Association*

South West Amateur Theatre Magazine

"A First-rate Opportunity"

AUTUMN 2009

PETER WHEELDON reports on District 11 (W.Dorest)

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THE BROADWAY PIRATES, WOW Musical Theatre, Pavilion Theatre, Weymouth, 12th November 2008

Director: Martyn Knight Musical Director: Heather Reed

For latter-day teenagers to reproduce the long-outdated characteristics and nuances of Victorian times can be somewhat of a challenge. But the highly talented young people of WOW are no strangers to challenge – indeed they relish it! As well as mastering the sophistications of traditional G&S, they also injected those touches of contemporary humour essential to this Broadway version, in course of delivering the best production I have seen from the WOW stable – and to near-professional standards. Performances from the entire cast were consistently excellent and without visible sign of weakness – a credit to themselves, their mentors and director. The principals were outstanding, in both song and speech, each deserving of individual mention here were space to allow. Solid support came from Heather Reed and orchestra in providing her customary high standard of accompaniment. The scenery was effective, if not spectacular, with the virtue of leaving adequate clear space for crowd scenes and on-stage action. Well balanced sound aided the clarity of both sung and spoken word. The First Night house reflected the undeserved struggle to sell tickets in advance. But those good burghers of Weymouth who chose to stay away missed a real treat.

How this report came to disappear from the last magazine remains a mystery. Apologies to WOW members for omitting a report on such an enjoyable production. Editor.

WHEN WE ARE MARRIED, Amateur Players of Sherborne, Digby Hall, Sherborne, 13th March

Director: Jennie Ward

This was an excellent production, finely crafted by director Jennie Ward and well up to the high standards already established by the Players. Set, as the play is, in the North Country, the portrayal of brusque Yorkshire manners and accents can present major challenges to those from elsewhere, but these were met in great style and to hilarious effect. Further aided by a highly detailed, atmospheric set, some splendid costumes and effective lighting, we were convincingly transported to the Ridings of 1900. At the heart of the play, local dignitaries played by Roger Chadbourne, Charles Napier and John Bowles, together with their wives Christine Yardley, Janet Vincent and Ruth Rice, were most entertaining in their

representation of the pomposities and prejudices of the period, this being underscored by the antics of the 'below stairs' staff played by Ria Rylatt-Chandaman and Gilly Savage. There was solid support from all other members of the 14-strong cast. With due respect to Priestley, the play is a tad too long for me, and a little blue pencil applied judiciously to some plot irrelevances could improve its audience-friendliness. The unscripted opening by a period music hall song was a nice directorial touch.

CAROUSEL, Swanage Musical Theatre Company, Mowlem Theatre, Swanage, 31st March
Director: Brenda Ridout

A clash of dates caused me to attend the dress rehearsal of this show and, despite a lack of live audience and its attendant reactions, the company gave a creditable performance, thus boding well for the run to follow. Most of the work in 'Carousel' falls to the six principal voices all of whom gave strong performances and acquitted themselves with honour. Victoria Jones and Karen Woolley portrayed clearly contrasting characters Carrie and Julie, as did Adrian Lane and Malcolm Green playing Billy and Enoch. Pearl Nash as Nettie got to sing the 'big number', and Stuart Jones was arrestingly animated as Jigger. The crowd scenes and chorus items revealed some promising young newcomers and were both nicely structured and pleasingly delivered. The orchestra coped well with the intricacies of the Richard Rodgers score. A lovely suite of costumes tended to be a little washed out by the predominantly white set used throughout the show, and the sound balance, as radio mikes were switched in and out, could have been better. But all in all, this was another good production from Brenda Ridout, thereby maintaining the new set of high standards coincident with the company's change of name.

THAT'S WHAT I CALL MUSIC 2, WOW Youth Musical Theatre, The Pavilion Theatre, Weymouth, 17th April
Director: Scott St. Martyn

Staged by the highly-talented WOW company, this was a superbly entertaining production celebrating the exuberance and enthusiasm of young people in a series of song-and-dance routines that held audiences on the edge of their seats from beginning to end. The fast-moving action, expertly compiled and executed by director Scott St, Martyn and WOW President, Janet Stockley, comprised a continuous sequence of dynamic and disciplined ensemble numbers from the 50-strong cast interspersed with songs from soloist after soloist, all of whom would have excelled in any reputable talent contest. The widely contrasting styles of music built into the show, ranging from Broadway to Verdi and Lehar to Abba, were all performed equally well, amply demonstrating the depth of talent and versatility that exists within the group. Sadly, several of the lead parts will now be moving on – that is an occupational hazard of youth theatre – but, on this showing, there are plenty more coming on behind who will soon be ready to step into their shoes. As ever, excellent musical direction and accompaniment by Heather Reed contributed greatly to the success of the show.

The final verdict? I know it's a little corny but – WOW!

FOUR PART HARMONIES III, Weymouth Operatic Society Hope Church, Weymouth, 22nd April

Geoff King marked his tenth year as WOS Chairman by staging his third variation on the "Four Part Harmonies" theme. This was a delightfully enjoyable evening in the relaxed atmosphere of the URC auditorium during which the company showed off its considerable musical and theatrical prowess with a programme to suit all tastes. Lynne Mullins' "Swing" compilation got proceedings off to a foot-tapping start, making rhythmic demands on the performers to which they rose admirably. The mood changed to

“Melodic Miscellany” with emphasis on choral harmony resulting in a most agreeable blend of voices. Paul Brewster delivered a spirited, raunchy number while the group changed for his “Current Musicals” compilation ranging from the high drama of ‘Les Misérables’ to the near-lunacy of ‘Spamalot’ together with some sharp movement from the cast in Julie Storey’s interpretation of ‘Hairspray’. Finally, Geoff returned to his much-loved G&S, with a quirky, compacted version of “Pirates” in which, with clever play on the word ‘king’, the pirate leader was manifest as Elvis – not as incongruous as at first it might seem. Some lovely singing here from Anna-Maria Geare strongly supported by all the other principal parts. A fun evening for everybody.

A LAUGHING MATTER, Encore Theatre Club, The Arts Centre, Bridport, 1st May
Director: Miles Bell

I never cease to be impressed by the strength and depth of acting ability at the disposal of Encore directors. There were twenty-two different players in the latest two productions, and every one a credit to the Club. This historical play fields a cast of seventeen, and it demands close attention from its audience. It runs for 2½ hours, it’s quite wordy yet fast-moving with some physical comedy, and it’s convoluted by the kind of temporal flashback so beloved of latter-day television scriptwriters. But it is full of fun and well worth the concentration. The action is led by actor-turned-impresario David Garrick played by Jean-Paul Draper with great panache, and he is more than ably supported by fine ensemble performances all round. Stand-outs for me were John Surry’s Samuel Johnson, Emma Batchelor’s Hannah, Ellen Denning as Lady Kingston and John Duff’s Rev. Cumberland. But, that said, everyone else deserved mention too. The set design from Tony Anthony was ingeniously versatile, including the concealment of a vast four-poster bed, and the costumes were authentically detailed to the period. An excellent play indeed, and another deep notch in the much-carved directorial belt of Miles Bell.

**THE CEMETERY CLUB, Sturminster Newton Amateur Dramatic Society The Exchange,
Sturminster Newton, 23rd May**
Director: Dick Allwood

It was my first visit to this new member society, and I was much impressed on all counts – impressed firstly by the play under the experienced direction of Dick Allwood who, in addition to masterminding the production, played exquisite keyboard medleys of Beatles’ music during scene-change intermissions. A wry comedy, ‘*The Cemetery Club*’ concerns the lives of three Jewish widows in New York and their divergent approaches to bereavement a few years on. The performances by Helen Dodd, Jane Coe and Alison Mash, as widows Ida, Lucille and Doris, were excellent, fully engaging the audience’s attention as they clearly established the personalities and emotions of their distinctive characters whilst moving the action along with admirable pace and smoothness of continuity. With solid backing from the supporting cast and a comprehensive, well-lit set designed and constructed in-house, this was a highly competent and entertaining production deserving of far better attendance from the locality than it got. The quality of the performance matched the excellence of the venue which SNADS is fortunate to enjoy. The new Exchange Community Centre boasts impressive features and facilities that would be the envy of many a theatrical group. A toast to the ladies!

MOZART, MELODY AND MOTION, Ranger Productions, Mowlem Theatre, Swanage, 24th July

Staged by mother-and-daughter team June and Caroline, this was my third Ranger compilation show and was surely the best yet. I particularly enjoyed the first and third acts. Act 1, ‘Mozart’, featuring classical dance agreeably interspersed with minuet and character dances, was full of poise, grace and fluid

choreography. An ever-unfolding exposition of traditional disciplines, it was a joy to behold. In complete contrast, Act 3 'Motion' was a stunningly dynamic display of modern dance showing remarkable precision and athleticism, including a cleverly constructed sequence wherein Hollywood film classics were graphically portrayed in dance. Act 2 'Melody' was a vocal section comprising a cavalcade of popular music from the latter half of last century and presenting some familiar faces from other Mowlem shows. Some good performances here in an entertaining medley, diminished perhaps by use of young voices not quite up to the task. The visual impact of the show was much enhanced by very effective lighting and filmed imagery, and the sound backing was of high quality. It was good to see so many boys in the line-up and, finally, special mention for Hannah Barrow who both led the dance so well and was much involved in its creation.

ANYTHING GOES, Bridport Musical Theatre Company, Bridport Arts Centre, 2nd September

Director: David Swaffield Choreographer: Becky Mather Musical Director: Murray Davis

'Anything Goes' and it certainly did! Director, Dave Swaffield used this ideal vehicle to utilise the talents of his enthusiastic young company ranging from teens to 70's! Musical Director, Murray Davis, set the tone for the whole performance marching onto the stage dressed in navel regalia saluting the audience before taking command of his crew (the orchestra). All aboard the SS American for the time of your life! Casting of this show was spot on; all principals gave unique and believable interpretations of their characters. Sian Dearnley playing Reno Sweeney lit up the stage as she delivered a colourful performance full of pizzazz !Ally Hughes (Lord Evelyn Oakleigh) whose comic timing and amazing dancing had everyone in stitches. Ensemble singing was strong, giving a solid backing to principals and enhancing their performance. Choreography was kept simple and was well executed making good use of the stage. Costumes for this show were superb using authentic materials and styles for the period. Scene changing was seamless allowing the show to flow. Congratulations to all concerned.

Youth Academy 2010, 6th - 9th April

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Invoices will be sent in December.

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