

*National Operatic & Dramatic
Association*

South West Amateur Theatre Magazine

"A First-rate Opportunity"

AUTUMN 2009

SHARON WOOD reports on District 13 (Bristol)

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**SLEEPING BEAUTY, Bradfordians Dramatic Society, St. Laurence School,
Bradford on Avon, February**

Director: Graham Billing Choreographer: Fliss Courage

This was an original adaptation of the famous Grimm Brothers tale of the Sleeping Beauty, (though when it was written by the brothers, it was entitled Little Briar Rose). Written and directed by Graham Billing and set in 1904, 1920 and 2004, this was a production which never really fulfilled its promise. The production lacked pace and energy, with long duologues and pauses that were so lengthy, it seemed as if lines had been forgotten! Fundamental mistakes e.g. talking to the back of the stage and masking, lost a lot of the dialogue and the recorded music used was of very poor quality, which really didn't help the dance routines, some of which were better than others. There were some promising performances, particularly from the two Chamberlains (Philip Courage and Simon Green), Captain Cornelius (Ian Harding) Countess von Linck (Charlotte Howard) and Fairy Spinosa (Martha Dudbridge, but they just didn't seem to have enough material to build on. There were some nice lighting effects and a wonderful fish in a barrel, (part of the complicated story!). However, before the plot eventually unfolded, some members of the audience around me had obviously lost interest, which was a shame as I'm sure that a lot of time and effort had gone into this production. An ambitious project that wasn't quite up to the Bradfordians usual excellent standards.

THE MIKADO, Bristol Gilbert & Sullivan Society, Redgrave Theatre, Bristol, April

Director: John Telfer Choreographer: Joan Walke Musical Director: Eric Wetherell

The Bristol G&S Society gave us a traditional and polished performance of this much loved operetta, with wonderful characterisations, exceptional vocals, both solo and choral, beautiful costumes and some topical input that was much appreciated by the audience. Adrian Cooper (Ko-Ko) gave a superb performance as the hapless Lord High Executioner and Tony Turner (Pooh Bah) had the audience in the palm of his hand, with his wonderful interpretation of the Lord High Everything Else, which was hysterical! Liz Wetherell (Katisha) was on top form and a delight to watch as she made everybody squirm. Michael Ladomery (Nanki-Poo) and Elisabeth Armstrong (Yum-Yum) gave very creditable performances as the doomed (or so it seemed) young lovers and Ben Hambridge (The Mikado) was suitably grand and regal. The scene was set with full size Japanese 'screens', for both acts which were a

little bland, but the colourful costumes and characters of the entire cast, covered the stage well and the quality and professionalism of this excellent production shone through.

LOOK NO HANS, CHAPS, Wick Village Hall, Bristol, April

Director: Madeleine Bills

Set in a West Berlin apartment which is also the office of Peter Fisher (a superb performance by Grant Daly) a car company manager and undercover agent for British Security – a role for which he is singularly ill-equipped. Today – his birthday is beset by problems from start to finish, as his wife (Katie Hayes), his mistress (Vikie Henry), a singing telegram (Jill Lawrence) and Cadwaller, another agent (an impressive portrayal by Tim Mayo), all converge upon him and his day descends into disorganised chaos! A substantial set depicting home and office with lots of doors to aid the confusion, was well dressed, (more than the mistress was!) and circumnavigated by all concerned with great skill. The furious pace was never allowed to drop and the hapless Peter was run ragged trying to keep people apart and invent unbelievable scenarios to explain things away, whilst having to contend with a filing cabinet that had a life of its own, a tannoy system that kept interrupting at inopportune moments and last, but certainly not least, the appearance of a rather butch rep from Midland Motors – Tregunter-Jones (Edwina Dagger). Well directed with excellent characters and ‘business’, (the pouring of drinks was hysterical), wonderful comic timing from the whole cast and the finale piece of ‘Hans’ putting in an appearance, dangling from a helicopter outside the window, this was an excellent piece of theatre that left the audience breathless, never mind the cast!

CHESS, St. Mary's Players, Redgrave Theatre, Bristol, April

Director: Steve Woolley Choreographer: Jane Priddes Musical Director: Paul Woolley

To mark St Mary’s Players 50th Anniversary, this talented and ambitious group tackled ‘Chess’, with music by Benny Andersson and Bjorn Ulvaeus, and lyrics by Tim Rice. The audience were greeted by a wonderful set, based on a chess board, with sectioned pieces leading up to a beautiful panorama of flats, a table that rose and fell from the floor, and piano hinged sections that opened to reveal past chess masters. Superb lighting throughout, with side stage projections helping to unravel the difficult and dramatic storyline, that has very little dialogue, so you had to listen quickly! There were some outstanding performances – John Webber (Anatoly), Ruth Tavener (Florence), Peter Woolley (Alexander) and Matt Wells (Frederick) to name but a few. The whole company really *lived* the powerful story and the singing, both solo and ensemble was a triumph, which, along with accomplished and compelling action, gave us a very significant and convincing production. Pace was slick, with the human chess game proving to be a memorable highlight, and though there is little light relief in this musical, the atmosphere, drama and despair of the piece was beautifully controlled and portrayed by the entire cast. This commendable production that celebrated the half centenary of St Mary’s Players, was captivating, stylish and sincere. A superb piece of theatre.

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF, Western Opera Players, Redgrave Theatre, Bristol, April

Director: Keith Glasspole Choreographers: Catherine Price & Lizzie Hudson Musical Director: Bob Lavis

This can be dark and depressing musical given the content, but this superb production by WOPS, brought out all the aspects of the story, (not least, the great humour of the show, which has been completely lost to me in other productions), making the audience laugh and cry in equal measure! A consummate portrayal by Neil Baker (Tevye), with superb vocals and characterisation, showed complete understanding of the role of a poor milkman, struggling, along with his long suffering wife Golde, (an

outstanding performance by Sue Davis), with his Jewish faith and customs, as his three eldest daughters decide to choose their husbands themselves, rather than leave it to the Matchmaker Yente (a lovely portrayal by Beryl Morris). All the principal roles were played effectively, with impressive interpretation, the chorus interaction and singing were exemplary and the beautiful, well known melodies were a delight. Scenery, lighting and properties were imaginative, greatly enhancing the action, costumes were authentic and choreography was excellent – a great favourite with the audience being The Bottle Dance, which was amazing! The Yiddish accents were perfectly sustained throughout and the poignant end as the villagers were ordered to move on with families dispersed all over the world, was sensitively portrayed, providing a particularly moving and thought provoking conclusion to this captivating and compelling production.

THE GONDOLIERS, Winterbourne Musical Theatre, Community Centre, Winterbourne, April

Director/Choreographer: Maggie Williams

Musical Director: Heather Wren

Winterbourne Musical Theatre bring new life and energy to their Gilbert & Sullivan productions, that is refreshing and hugely enjoyable. Greeted at the door by all things Italian, (including Ameretti biscuits), the Front of House and the auditorium were bedecked in Italian bunting and flags, with the Gondola station and quayside in full view. The overture started with taped music, then was quickly and expertly taken over by the very talented pianist (Katie Robson), who played beautifully for the rest of the evening. The complicated story unfolded in the capable hands of this company, with some captivating performances – Alan Dove & Pauline March (The Duke and Duchess), Vicky Worgan (Casilda), Tom Harrison (Luiz), Mike Couzins (Don Alhambra) and the wonderful pairing of Mark Beardmore and Tony Worgan who played Marco and Guiseppe with excellent comic timing, strong vocals, superb business and a real understanding of the characters. The addition of Albert & Ethel Higgsthwaite as British tourists, colourful and imaginative costumes, excellent choreography (especially on such a small stage) incorporating some hilarious dummies, plenty of topical input and some lovely touches, such as the Thomas the Tank Engine train set being played with by the lords at the opening of Act 2, along with the impressive support and enthusiasm from the entire cast, made for a splendid production, that no-one wanted to end

EUGENE ONEGIN, Bristol Opera, Olympus Theatre, Bristol, May

Director: Charlotte Monk

Conductor: Arne Kovac

A superb production of Tchaikovsky's masterpiece, based on the novel in verse by Alexander Pushkin. Wonderful orchestrations led by the very talented Arne Kovac, complemented the artistic and powerful direction of this opera, with outstanding performances from the principals and chorus alike. Louise Merrifield (Tatyana) gave a wonderful portrayal of the heroine, both vocally and dramatically, while John Fletcher (Eugene) drew a strong and complicated character. All the principal characters were well cast but accolades must go to Meike Booken (Madame Larina), Susan Weaver (Filipyevna), Alain Lioure (Lensky), Edward Harper (Gremin) and Guy Withers (Triquet), the latter bringing a welcome interlude of comedy with his impeccable French. A charming and accomplished chorus gave strong support throughout and sets, though minimalist, had been extremely well thought out and were very effective, with a commendable lighting plot enhancing every scene. Costumes were historically correct with a great deal of research having gone into them and dance routines were original, always keeping within the capabilities of the dancers. The beautiful music of this opera was interpreted, played and sung to perfection, while the dramatic elements within the poignant and compelling storyline, were totally convincing. A powerful and highly impressive production.

THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE, Bristol Catholic Players, Newman Hall, Bristol, May

Director/Choreographer: Louisa White Musical Director: Geoffrey Wickham

With plenty of energy, excellent characterisations, topical references and a huge sense of fun, Bristol Catholic Players gave us one of their best offerings of recent times. Always a favourite with the audiences, 'Pirates' is full of lovely characters which were well cast and superbly played. A wonderful Pirate King (Chris March), made a good foil for Frederic (a sensitive performance from Jon Edwardes) and the Major General (Peter Marsh). The charming Mabel (Laura Davies) and Ruth (well played by Kay Lacey), not to mention the hilarious (and balletic!) Sergeant (John Laycock), all gave superb performances, and along with the rest of the enthusiastic cast and chorus, drew the audience quickly into the story. The large orchestra was expertly led by their talented MD, the superb scenery by the Shippies was greatly enhanced with the imaginative lighting, (some great effects here) and costumes were beautiful. Gilbert & Sullivan themselves would have enjoyed this production – I certainly did!

RENT, Backstage Productions, Olympus Theatre, Bristol, July

Director/Choreographer: Vicki Klein Musical Director: Julian Edgell

It was great to welcome Backstage Productions back to the Bristol circuit and indeed back to NODA. This multi-talented group has been 'resting' while they looked for a suitable production to tackle and they certainly succeeded when they acquired the rights to perform 'Rent', a revolutionary musical based on Giacomo Puccini's "La Bohème", written and composed by Jonathan Larson who unfortunately died on the eve of its Broadway opening. Dealing with the extremely complex lives and relationships of a group of people in Manhattan, this is a tremendously complicated and intense production, which needs complete dedication from the cast. This had obviously been duly given and the result was a moving and significant piece of theatre. The show revolves around roommates Mark and Roger, (superb performances from Mike Griffiths and Ian Brooks) and the relationships of people involved with them. Dealing with very sensitive issues, every character was beautifully drawn, in particular Mimi (Natasha Green), Angel (Tim Reid), and Collins (Christopher Burt). This musical has no happy ending – quite the contrary – and the death of Angel was particularly emotional, but the sheer energy and enthusiasm of the entire cast was mesmerising and highly commendable. A superb production to herald your return Backstage!

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July 2010

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venue & date to be announced shortly

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*Contact our membership secretary: nicklawrence@hotmail.com
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YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2010 WILL BE DUE ON JANUARY 1st

Invoices will be sent in December.

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