

*National Operatic & Dramatic
Association*

South West Amateur Theatre Magazine

"A First-rate Opportunity"

AUTUMN 2009

MICHAEL SIMPSON reports on District 3 (Plymouth)

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OLD TYME MUSICAL HALL, City of Plymouth Theatre Company, Devonport Playhouse,
March 2009
Director: Angela Collins

Under the Chairmanship of Douglas Mounce, who conducted the evening with great professionalism, we were highly entertained with the old favourites of yesteryear. The performances of the individuals were very polished and the singing of good quality. There was a very nice tribute to Max Miller and if my memory serves me well, a very good impression of male impersonator Vesta Tilley. The choreography was excellent and very precise. The musical duo i.e. Piano and Percussion accompanied the vocalists and the dancing superbly which added to the overall enjoyment of the evening. A very cleverly designed set and lovely costumes presented a picture which, undoubtedly for the older members of the audience took them back to the great days of the Variety Theatres, of which Plymouth had several. I do like some of the modern songs but as I sat there I couldn't help thinking how much I enjoyed every tune that was presented. If this makes me sound-like an old curmudgeon then so be it. I had a lovely night out.

ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN, Younstagers, Community College, Saltash, March 2009
Director : Marilyn Grose Choreographers: Bethany Westcott, Verity Westcott Musical Director: Neil Bailey

I am always amazed at the vitality these young people have and how obvious to the audience the enjoyment they are having. The Director had given them a very full programme in this compilation but each musical number was attacked with verve. The singing had a good deal of quality and the Musical Director had been very successful in bringing out the talents across the spectrum. He also played Keyboard in the musical trio who accompanied the cast, with a very nicely controlled level of volume. Alongside the more serious music we had some comedic numbers which went down very well, also some Poetry. The practical costumes fitted in perfectly with the overall programme and provided a good deal of colour. The staging too was colourful and well dressed and was complimented with fine lighting. I know from talking to the Director that the production had not been without some problems but being who they are they rose to the challenges. From the opening number "Team Work" to the finale "You Can't Stop the Beat" this evening bounced.

BRIGADOON, Sounds Musical Theatre Company, Athenaeum Theatre, Plymouth, 13th March 09
Director:Karen Marks Choreographers:Denise Avent & Jane Hooper Musical Director: Jenny George

Carol Lee reports:-

From the moment the curtain rose, right through to the emotional finale, the action and singing in this well-loved production never faltered. The quiet opening, prefacing the full stage chorus presentation of McConnachie Square (a lovely scene this) was most telling. All of the singing both chorus-wise and solos could not be faulted; the lovely Frederick Loewe melodies being heard at their best. The staging had been carefully thought out, this being most evident in the full chorus numbers. A word of praise here for the very authentic Scottish accents, not the easiest to do, but all principals had developed very believable ones. This production had a very strong set of principals, all of whom produced very convincing characterisations. A word of congratulation for chorus members whom all seemed to have adopted a believable personality. This is a most romantic story-line, and those not familiar with the plot are hoping for a happy ending which does not seem to be possible, but in this case it was with a climax guaranteed to satisfy everyone in the audience. The comedy mostly in the hands of Meg and Jeff was expertly handled. The scenery was very authentic as too were the props. The six-piece orchestra provided the admirable backing to this story with its touch of tragedy (beautifully handled). Altogether an expertly directed show.

THE FARNDALE AVENUE HOUSING ESTATE TOWN WOMEN'S GUILD DRAMATIC SOCIETY – MURDER MYSTERY, Torpoint Players, Council Chambers, Torpoint, May 2009

Director : Tony Bowditch

This extremely funny play requires a number of elements to make it successful. Fortunately this company had all of them. Four very talented ladies and one gentleman, plus a Director who knew what was needed to make the play work. A clever set that proceeded to fall apart right on cue and some excellent lighting. The cast got off to a flying start and the laughter came thick and fast. Fifteen characters played by four women playing both male and female parts is no mean feat with all the attendant costume changes but they took it all on and never dropped a line. The one male actor also was very convincing and played the part of the Police Inspector quite deadpan which added to the humour. The many costumes lent authenticity to the production as did the props. The audience was small but very appreciative and I sincerely hope that they improved during the run.

THE MERRY WIDOW, Plymouth Gilbert & Sullivan Fellowship, Athenaeum Theatre, June 2009

Director : Alan Spencer Musical Director : Paul Foster

With a departure from their usual G & S productions the Fellowship brought this wonderful Lehar show to the city. A strong cast of principals and excellent chorus brought the beautiful melodies to a very appreciative audience. The thirteen piece orchestra was expertly controlled and was a joy to listen to. The set design and construction by (Andy Martin) worked very well and his lighting set it off to perfection. Smooth scene changes were quick and silent so there were no breaks in the continuity. The overall Direction and Choreography could not be faulted. It appeared that no expense had been spared with regard to costumes (Costume Workshop, Isle of Wight) they were just simply superb. It was a brave move for the Fellowship to perform this kind of operetta after eighty-five years of Gilbert & Sullivan but one that truly worked. This is a lovely show that was so well presented, and revived many happy memories for me.

LAST TRAIN TO BROADWAY, The Carmenians Musical Theatre Company, Edgcumbe Theatre, Devonport High School, June 2009

Director : Mark Sidey Choreographer : Anna-Rees Howe Musical Director : Rosemary Fox

It is always a delight to see something different and, whilst this was a Revue, it offered a selection of

songs from not very familiar shows as well as some of the more standard fare. With a cast of seventeen this was a fast paced journey through the many musicals to grace the Broadway stage. Some I admit were not familiar to me, but as a great fan of Tom Lerher I enjoyed "Poisoning Pigeons in the Park" from "Tom Foolery" among the many others. All members of the cast were given an opportunity to perform individually or in groups and all were equally talented. The dance routines were nicely choreographed and executed with skill. Minimal staging and some clever personalised props were sufficient to relate to the songs. The musical accompaniment consisting of four musicians was just enough in this new venue which the company has, like all companies in Plymouth, been forced into finding due to the closing of the Athenaeum. The evening ended as it began with the reprise of "Run Freedom Run" from "Urinetown". I am pleased to say, this was a splendid evening's entertainment.

**DISNEY'S THE ARISTOCATS, Wranglers Children's Theatre Group, Athenaeum Theatre,
Plymouth, July 2009**

Director : Wendy Holmes Choreographer : Diane Sullivan

This show, based on the ever popular Disney cartoon, proved to be a delightful choice for these young people to perform. A riot of colourful costumes lit up the stage, but were overtaken by the happy smiling faces of the company. Splendidly cast: every principal excelled themselves. Headed by the marvellous feline character Thomas O'Malley all the cat characters were able to emulate the same cat-like movement. The dog Napoleon and his troupe were very good and so was Roquefort the mouse, lovely performances. An outstanding performance by Scat Cat had a great deal of professionalism about it. I did enjoy the Geese characters with their exaggerated walks, very well maintained. The music was recorded but soloists and the ensemble sang well although occasionally overpowered by the volume. The two human characters Madame and butler Edgar proved to be very good amongst all these four-legged creatures. A minimalist set was augmented by some rather good lighting which brought out all the lovely colours of the costumes. Although this is only a show of short duration I, like everyone else coming out of the theatre felt thoroughly entertained.

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