

"THE GONDOLIERS" AT WINCHESTER

Winchester Operatic Society's 1957 Production

The opening bars of the overture to Gilbert and Sullivan's well-loved opera, "The Gondoliers," will this evening mark the beginning of yet another of the traditional May "seasons" of light opera in Winchester, and the many hundreds who look forward to this regular feature of the city's year can rest assured that, at the very least, this latest production is up to the standard of its predecessors. "The Gondoliers" has, in fact, been presented in the Guildhall since the war, and those who remember the Winchester Amateur Operatic Society's performances in 1949 will no doubt compare the two. Some will be able to cast their minds back to 1930 and even 1922, but for others this year will be their first contact with the Society, and they are certain to be impressed.

One can speak so assuredly, not only because of the Society's past record but also because of the evidence offered at the final dress rehearsal on Wednesday evening. This was a public performance in so far as a number of Winchester old folk were present as guests, but those who see the later "official" shows will have very little advantage over them. True the rehearsal had its off-key moments and the principals were not fully into their stride, but this was only to be expected, and the Producer and Stage Director, Gladwys Starling, and the Musical Director, John Sealey, collaborating for the second time, must have felt extremely pleased with the way things went.

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After all the seemingly inevitable delays and worries, the costumes and scenery had arrived, and it seemed impossible that against such magnificent backcloths and scenery, and in such beautiful dresses, the cast would fail to find the touch of inspiration needed to round off their hours of hard work at rehearsals. And indeed so it was. Principals and chorus alike gave of their best, and with the orchestra improving minute by minute, "The Gondoliers," which had begun well, was by the final curtain a resounding success.

Few, one imagines, would call "The Gondoliers" their favourite Gilbert and Sullivan opera, but it has such delightful songs and scenes that it holds a special place in the minds of many. "I stole the Prince," "When a merry maiden marries," "In a contemplative fashion" and "Take a pair of sparkling eyes" are amongst Sullivan's most attractive songs, and with the other musical numbers, give both principals and chorus the chance to really show their paces. This coming week's audiences are going to find that the Winchester performers are taking these opportunities with open hands (or should it be with open mouths?) and that Horace Taylor, Bertram Dobson, Dorothy Crosby, to mention only some of the well-established favourites, are in as fine a voice as ever.

Mr. Taylor fills—the only word adequate to describe his playing—the role of the "Grand Inquisitor," and a grander Inquisitor it would be hard to imagine. Whatever problems B. J. Simmons and Co. Ltd. had in fitting him for his costume, they certainly overcame them magnificently, and all that Horace Taylor does matches his suiting. Bertram Dobson as "Marco" is completely himself, and with his co-Monarch and fellow Gondolier, "Giuseppe" (Edward

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Dorothy Crosby, representing the older school of ladies, is excellently cast as the “Duchess of Plaza-Toro” and makes “On the day when I was wedded” a memorable song. Her foil, who asks, or is it desires, or should it not be *demands*, so little from life, is of course the “Duke,” and here Paul Brown, spindle-legged and frolicsome, creates a fine part. On Wednesday he reduced one of the excellent ladies of St. John Ambulance Brigade to a state of hysterics, and he will undoubtedly produce similar results with many folk during the next few days.

Mary Spalding has a lovely voice, and as “Casilda” she does extremely well, while Byron Cavil (“Luiz”), straying from the world of Oscar Wilde, is all the handsome hero should be. He even managed the gondola pretty well, and it can be truly said that all the other principals, Raymond Allen, Wyndham Radcliffe, Leonard Knowles, John Wright, Ruby Knight, Margaret Morgan, Muriel Fisher, and at the very end, Rita Owen, manage their parts pretty well, too.

Barry Dobson, reduced in rank from “midshipmite” to “drummer boy,” makes a brief but telling appearance, Margaret Faddy and Beatrice Fletcher are the “pages,” and the members of the chorus of Contadine are:—

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Heather Baker, Margaret Bone, Cynthia Burton, Irene Clarke-Jones, Jane Edmonds, Margaret Elton, Madeline Furmidge, Irene Hayne, Christine Hemming, Constance Hooker, Eileen Jarrett, Elizabeth Jarvis, Anna Layton, Iris O'Grady, Barbara Payne, Clarice Portsmouth, Ann Shawyer, Marjorie Williams and Rita Owton.

In the chorus of Gondoliers, Men-at-Arms and Heralds are:—Ronald Baverstock, Roland Belcher, John Bentley, John Blake, Conrad Davies, Gerald Harding, Colin Harris, Paul Hewes, Austen Hooker, Brian Hurst, Raymond Hutchins, Alfred