

# 'Pirates of Penzance'

## Silly & Entertaining

It is, I think, fair to say that there are certain dramatic pieces which are best performed by the nationals of their countries of origin.

When reviewing the Eastern Illinois University Theater Department's successful production of Shaw's *Candida* last autumn, I expressed doubts about the ability of Americans in general to play Shaw. It was with similar doubts that I attended the opening night of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance* at Eastern last Friday evening.

Not only are the Savoy Operas peculiarly British, but a British company — the D'Oyly-Carte — is devoted to the works of Gilbert and Sullivan and gives the definitive presentations of those works. As with *Candida*, I was impressed with the ability of the company to cope with a difficult task, and acquit themselves with a certain amount of credit.

The story-line of *The Pirates of Penzance* is, to say the least, trivial. It can be reduced to boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy finds girl again. In fact, I was compellingly reminded of a Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movie, where a trite story was simply a vehicle for the music and dancing.

In Gilbert and Sullivan, the story, however silly, is a vehicle for music and clever lyrics. There is no message here, no pseudo-intellectualism, just pure entertainment and a lot of fun.

Fun, I think, is one of the key-notes of this production. It was so obvious that the members of the cast were enjoying themselves that the enjoyment was contagious. This contagion would not have been enough to make a successful production without the strong leads of Sal Viviano, who played Frederic, and Lisa Mammoser, who played Mabel Stanely.

Both were strong, although they took different approaches to their characters: Viviano took Frederic

A Review  
By  
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Mammoser, Viviano

seriously, which was appropriate since it gave more credibility to his exaggerated sense of duty; Mammoser poked gentle fun at her character which was also appropriate since Mabel would be quite unbearable if played with complete seriousness. The strength of these leads was given depth by a fine supporting cast.

Of the supporting cast, I should particularly like to compliment Dan Sullivan, who played the Pirate King. It was Sullivan's first production at Eastern, and, although

he did not immediately establish his character, as he gained in assurance, his performance gained in strength. I hope that we shall see more of Sullivan in future productions.

Although this was a most enjoyable production, it was not perfect. I felt the blocking of the show was worse than ordinary, worst than mundane, and consisted of little more than lining everyone up across the front of the stage. Whilst it is very difficult to stage a show like this without being distracting, and

detracting from the lyrics of the songs, I feel sure a little more imagination could have been used. Secondly, the policemen's dance toward the end of ACT II was ragged, and I felt that the soft-shoe shuffle was entirely inappropriate to the genre.

Thirdly, the fight scene between the policemen and the pirates at the end of Act II was confusing. It seemed at one point that the pirates had stabbed all the policemen, yet the policemen went on singing and then went on to arrest the pirates in the name of Queen Victoria. I realize that the "stabbing" was just a method of getting the policemen into a very effective position in order to sing from the floor, but stabbed men tell no tales — let alone sing songs and capture pirates.

Finally, discipline in some parts of the chorus was lacking, which led to some distracting hamming and camping.

I should like to congratulate Clarence Blanchette on a first-rate set, and I feel that the style could not have been better chosen or executed. I should also like to commend the effective scene change. Mr. Blanchette and his assistants did a fine job.

The costumes, too, were excellent. It would seem that most of the costumes were built from scratch, and I have to express sincere admiration for Nancy Paule's work. Only two complaints: the major-general's was a little shabby, especially next to the other costumes; and one of the pirates was very unfortunately costumed.

It would be unfair to compare this production with a D'Oyly-Carte production. There is no point of comparison. This is in no way to denigrate the production here at Eastern. I can fully recommend this show, which will be performed on March 13 and 14 at 8 p.m. and March 15 at 2 p.m. It is a fun show which deserves a large audience.