

EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

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READER NO. 1

"The Pirates of Penzance" given at the University Theatre is one of the funniest of William S. Gilbert's librettos to have provided inspiration for a set of Arthur Sullivan's inimitable and memorable tunes. First produced in 1879, this has been one of the world's most popular comic operas ever since.

Its plot tells of a bemused nursemaid who has mistaken the word "pilot" for "pirate" when she'd been told to take a little boy in her care to be apprenticed for a useful career. After she has realized her error, she tries to make up for it by remaining with the boy till his indenture is over at the age of 21.

Although she has been forced to become a maid-of-all-work for the pirate crew into which she stumbled, she has not neglected proper instruction and upbringing for the luckless youngster. As the end of his apprenticeship nears, he feels his duty demands that he bring these bland "criminals" with whom he has grown up to Justice.

His plans are complicated by his meeting a fair young lady of his own real background while he's still a member of the pirates -- as well as by the exaggerated kindheartedness of the pirates themselves which has lost them most of their possible revenue. For instance, it has become well-known that they will not hold, harm nor ransom anyone claiming to be an orphan -- and so, of course, all people of any age they capture pretend to have lost their parents, even though they may be old enough to be parents or grandparents themselves.

The young man's girl friend is the very upright daughter of "the very model of a modern Major-General," whose friends are the long-famous policemen "whose lot is not a happy one," as one of the show's most famous songs declares. Inevitably, these reluctant law-enforcers are discovered stealing upon their prey (the pirates) "with catlike tread," despite their protestation that "when the foeman bares his steel, we uncomfortable feel, and we find the wisest thing is to slap our chests and sing: Tarantara!"

The pirates' surface ferocity gains the day for them, despite their gentle hearts, but a few last-minute surprise developments bring about a civilized as well as happy conclusion for everybody concerned.

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