

Review**Ohio Light Opera: *H.M.S. Pinafore*,
opening performance (June 27)**

by J.D. Goddard

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OPERA**

“Beginning in the 1870s, two Englishmen — playwright William S. Gilbert and composer Arthur Sullivan — revolutionized the musical theatre, creating a series of witty, melodic operettas that set a new standard for stage professionalism. Sullivan's music sparkled with fresh melody, and Gilbert's librettos blended silliness and satire in settings that ranged from pure fantasy to the utterly realistic. Innovative producer Richard D'Oyly Carte publicized these shows as "light operas", but by any name, they were musicals — some of the finest the world would ever see in any language.” —John Kenrick

On Thursday afternoon, June 27, I traveled to Wooster to be delightfully entertained once again by a musical production of the Ohio Light Opera, the resident professional company of The College of Wooster. This was the opening performance of Gilbert and Sullivan's 1878 operetta *H.M.S. Pinafore* (*The Lass that Loved a Sailor*). This season marks the fifteenth time the OLO has counted *Pinafore* among its 120 productions over the past 35 years.

As in the past, prior to the performance the audience was invited to stand and sing England's National Anthem, “God Save the Queen,” a tradition that everyone seemed to enjoy.

The highlight of this production was Ted Christopher's patter-filled representation of Admiral Joseph Porter. He totally dominated the stage with his maturity, comedic timing, sense of pace and profound knowledge of the G & S style. His asides were farcical and he never broke character, leaving the audience at times in complete hysterics. His vocal quality was brilliant, clear and resonant, his enunciation impeccable.

Combining the strength of an able seaman with the voice of a lovesick youth, Stephen Faulk made for a Ralph Rackstraw whose character bordered on wholesome melancholy. A smooth and gentle lyric tenor, his voice wafted out over the audience with simplicity and ease. His interpretation of “A Maiden Fair to See” with the men's chorus was exceptional.

As Captain Corcoran, Stephen Gordon was stately, tried and true, reflecting his rank and station in life. His lyric baritone voice was controlled, focused and never pushed, as he aptly demonstrated in “Fair Moon to Thee I Sing.”

Alexa Devlin's strong interpretation of Little Buttercup was coyly captivating. Her vocal prowess was evident from top to bottom as she deftly traversed the taxing range of the role. Her sensitive "I'm Called Little Buttercup" had just the right amount of tongue-in-cheek irony.

Edward Hanlon's raucous characterization of Dick Deadeye was strong and bold, seasoned with brief moments of humor and sarcasm. He was most impressive when he sang with a full open sound, exhibiting a voice that was well placed, resonant and nasally edgy. Hanlon's duet with Corcoran, "Kind Captain I Have Important Information," was a dramatic highlight of the show.

Natalie Ballenger's characterization of Josephine was well thought-out and her stage presence was excellent. She delivered "Sorry Her Lot Who Love Too Well" impressively.

Filling out the cast of characters were Ezra Bershatsky as Bill Bobstay (whose English accent was quite nicely done) Nathan Brian as Bob Becket, Sara Giray as Tom Tucker and Olivia Maughan, who made an excellent foil for Christopher's G & S shenanigans and brought some very fine singing and acting to her role as Admiral Porter's first cousin Hebe.

Conductor J. Lynn Thompson energized the orchestra with crisp tempos and a clear beat while Julie Wright Costa's stage direction was well conceived. Carol Hageman's choreography was wonderfully simple, effective and sharp but needs a few more performances to become really precise. Adrienne Jones' costumes were visually pleasing and appropriately period while Kimberly Powers' sets were attractive and wonderfully utilized given the space and room provided. Michael Banks's lighting was effective, but follow-spots were occasionally a bit out of sync while tracking.

The chorus of sailors and ladies was, as always in OLO productions, vocally superb. This is a group of fine singers all of whom possess the vocal strength to be showcased in leading roles, as they or will be are in the company's other six productions.

If you want to have a pleasant afternoon or evening outing and enjoy superb light opera performances, catch one of Ohio Light Opera's productions at The College of Wooster this summer. The short trip is well worth it for the professional performances you will see and hear.

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