

Ohio Light Opera: Gilbert & Sullivan's *Ruddigore (The Witch's Curse)*, July 10

by J.D. Goddard



On Friday, July 10, after the customary singing of *God Save the Queen*, the curtain went up on the second performance of Ohio Light Opera's *Ruddigore* in Freedlander Theater at the College of Wooster, and the audience was immediately swept into the action in the Cornish town of Rederring. Gilbert and Sullivan's 1887 operetta has a rather baffling story line and a whimsical musical style.

Despite the familiar “girl meets boy, loses boy, is reunited with boy” storyline at the heart of *Ruddigore*, there are several complicated sub-plots that seem, to a modern audience at least, completely bizarre, silly, and, at times, ridiculous.

The Baronets of Ruddigore have been cursed by a witch. Each Baronet, in turn, must commit a crime a day, or die in torture. To escape his dreadful fate, the most recent Baronet, Sir Ruthven Murgatroyd, disguises himself as Robin Oakapple, a farmer. Only two people know his true identity — his faithful servant, Old Adam Goodheart, and his adopted brother, Richard Dauntless, a seaman. Robin Oakapple is in love with the beautiful Rose Maybud and wants to marry her, but his future plans appear doomed when his true identity is revealed. All turns out well in the end, but what happens in between is not to be believed.

Baritone Ted Christopher (Sir Despard Murgatroyd) was his usual mature and brilliant self, demonstrating superb vocal and acting technique. Nathan Brian (Sir Ruthven Murgatroyd, disguised as young farmer Robin Oakapple) and Andrew Gilstrap (Old

Adam Goodheart, Robin's faithful servant) were stand-outs with their strong, resonant voices.

A highlight was tenor Steven Faulk (Richard Dauntless, Sir Ruthven Murgatroyd's foster brother) who sang with clear projection and danced with stylish flair. His ensemble work with the other actors was outstanding.

Soprano Katherine Polit (Rose Maybud, a village maiden) sang with a keen awareness of the G&S style and a bright, resonant upper range.

Mezzo-Soprano Sarah Best (Mad Margaret) artfully brought out the "madness" in her character with clever exaggeration and moments of just plain fun. Her vocal prowess, especially in her lower range, was impressive. Mezzo-Soprano Julie Wright Costa (Dame Hannah, Rose's aunt) was a pleasure to hear and watch.

Other fine performances were given by Sarah Diller and Katherine Corle (Zora and Ruth, professional bridesmaids), Brad Baron (Sir Robert Murgatroyd, the 21st Baronet), and Mark Snyder, Paul Holmes, C.J. David, and Samus Haddad as the four ghosts.

The chorus of Bridesmaids turned in some exceptional singing and acting and contributed humorously to the plot: the stage would light up with excitement each time they entered.

Steven Byess and the OLO Orchestra gave fine leadership and support. With director Steven Daigle's superb stage direction and acute attention to the absurdity of the plot, Ohio Light Opera handled this archaic comic-melodrama in a stylish fashion.

Spencer Reese's creative choreography was a highlight of the show and Michael Benson's set design added pictorial clarity — along with Eric Keil's lighting design and Adrienne Jones' wonderfully pastel-hued period costuming.

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