

**Ohio Light Opera:
Pirates of Penzance enchants (July 3)**

by Kelly Ferjutz
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Quick — name the only Gilbert & Sullivan operetta to have been written in the United States. Why, it's *The Pirates of Penzance*, a delightful tribute to the absent-minded composer Arthur Sullivan. In the late 1870s, Sullivan and Gilbert and other artists, presumably, came to America to premiere their new musical here, after one performance in England, to protect their copyright. Except that, in rushing around to get on the boat, Sullivan forgot to bring the music. So he simply wrote it all over again. Once that little hangup was out of the way, the show was a triumph all around, and the copyrights (U.K. and U.S.) were indeed protected.

The zany result, which opened on July 3 at Ohio Light Opera in Wooster, is among the most-loved musical theater confections of all time. Briefly, Frederic has been given over to the care of a nursemaid, Ruth, who was slightly hard of hearing, which would have major repercussions for her charge. First, she apprenticed the boy to 'Pi-RATES' instead of 'Pi-LOTS' as she'd been instructed. But these Pirates, who should be terrorizing ships

off the coast of Cornwall during the reign of Queen Victoria, are a soft-hearted bunch with a major weakness for orphans, leaving them all skirting poverty.



Secondly, since it's usual for apprenticeships to expire when one turns 21, thinking he's about to be free, Frederic eagerly anticipates his new life. Having to this point only known Ruth, he's especially eager to at least see another female person. Alas, he was born on February 29, meaning that he's had only five actual birthdays, and won't be free for another 63 years. Enter the Major General and his eight beautiful, unwed daughters, a police force that doesn't wish to tangle with the pirates, and you have mad, musical mayhem.



Fortunately for the OLO audience, the experienced but insouciant Ted Christopher was available to direct the production (he also plays the Sergeant of Police). Conductor J. Lynn Thompson is another gentleman with vast G & S experience, and between them, they created magic. The costumes by Jennifer Ammons were charming and appropriate, as was the large and spacious set, designed by Charles Murdock and wonderfully lit by Daniel Houston, with sound by Tyler Quinn. Choreographer Spencer Reese challenged his company-mates with nimble-footed, clever steps, especially the Major General and the Sergeant of Police.



Veterans Hannah Holmes (Ruth) Brad Baron (who was obviously a Pirate King in a former life) and Boyd Mackus (Major General), added stability and comic prowess to their warm vocal qualities. As always, Mackus was the very model of a modern Major General, in addition to being a caring Papa to his brood of daughters.

Chelsea Miller (Mabel) and Alan Smith (Frederic) were well-matched both vocally and visually. (These two characters plus the Pirate King are double-cast, and those mentioned here were the artists who performed at the opening performance on July 3.)

As an ensemble, the daughters and the pirates both looked and sounded terrific. The OLO orchestra was its usual marvelous self, performing with gusto and accuracy. All in all, a superb example of musical theater at its best.



The Pirates of Penzance runs in repertoire through August 9 in Freedlander Theatre on the campus of Wooster College. Tickets can be ordered [online](#) or by calling 330.263.2345.

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