

Ohio Light Opera:
Patience, or Bunthorne's Bride (July 2)

by Daniel Hathaway



Of all the sacred Victorian oxen William Shenk Gilbert and Arthur Seymour Sullivan set out to gore in their fourteen Savoy Operas, their satire of the Aesthetic Movement and its medieval values is one of their cleverest.

Patience (1890) lampoons the literary excesses of the aesthetes and their followers with similar affectations of its own, and the G&S veterans of Ohio Light Opera miss few opportunities to demonstrate their individual virtuosity.

I saw the opening performance, a matinee, at Freedlander Theater at The College of Wooster on July 2. The production was expertly directed by veteran company member Julie Wright Costa, with Wilson Southerland conducting the fine-sounding OLO Orchestra.



After the orchestra tattled some of the show's tunes in an overture, the lights came up on Castle Bunthorne, where "rapturous maidens" were brandishing sunflowers — a

parody of the habits of aesthetes like Oscar Wilde, who created art and poetry while sniffing lilies.



Those maidens had all been betrothed the year before to members of the local dragoon guards, but as the Lady Angela (Amia Korman) helpfully explained, “our tastes have been etherealized” and their new ideal is the “fleshly poet” Reginald Bunthorne (played with broad theatricality by the strong voiced tenor Thomas Valenti), who is in love with the village milkmaid Patience.



Alone onstage, Bunthorne confesses in a dramatic monologue that he’s only pretending to be an aesthete in order to attract female admirers.

*In short, my
mediævalism’s
affectation,
Born of a morbid love of
admiration!*

and he proves it with a cringeworthy bit of doggerel when the maidens ask for a poem.



Patience (played by the sweet-voiced soprano Jordan Knapick) has no use for aesthetes, including Bunthorne, and as she explains in “I cannot tell what this love may be,” is perplexed about love in general, having only experienced that emotion in the direction of a great aunt. The situation gets more complicated when her childhood sweetheart, the “Fleshly

poet” Archibald Grosvenor (played and sung reverently by the ubiquitous Spencer Reese) shows up and now she has two rivals for her affections.



The fickle maidens soon transfer their attention to Grosvenor, leaving Lady Jane on the sidelines to lament her declining charms in a soulful performance of “Silvered is the raven hair.” Here, Maggie Langhorne stole the show, accompanying herself convincingly on the cello, then scooting herself offstage as if she were on wheels.

Niko Theriault, Jacob Allen, and Adam Griffiths brought comic relief to the second act as Officers of the Dragoon Guards — Colonel Calverley, Major Murgatroyd, and Lieut. The Duke of Dunstable. Donning aesthetic clothing in an attempt to woo the ladies back, the trio made a brilliant moment of “It’s Clear That Medieval Art Alone Retains Its Zest,” an athletic number choreographed by Spencer Reese.



The complicated plot begins to resolve itself when Grosvenor renounces his poetical pretensions in order to become “an ordinary man” and thus makes himself available to marry Patience. Bunthorne and Grosvenor bring the drama to a head in their virtuosic, warp speed patter song “When I Go Out of Door,” then reprise the song at even a faster clip.

Ironically, when all gets worked out at the end of this delightfully witty show and people are paired as they should be,

Bunthorne himself is left alone — without a bride.

It’s good for Ohio Light Opera to continue to produce at least one G&S title each season as its repertoire expands in the direction of musical theater. That reminds the company and its audience of its origins — and preserves one more corner of a foreign field that is forever England (sorry, Rupert!)

Surely I’m not the only one who thought about that on Thursday when the Orchestra rose from the pit to accompany the audience in the traditional singing of

God Save the Queen (yes, Queen! Sorry, Charles, but Victoria is still on the throne in Wooster!)

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