Positively Piratical

Broadway Baby Rating: Four Stars

Pirates of Penzance at the King's Head Theatre presented by Charles Court Opera is a fantastic and funny production of the classic light opera. The spot on humour and sharp cutting wit is brilliantly seen throughout creating a humorous and engaging experience. The setting within a child’s bedroom evoked both the adventurous side of the plot and the fantastical element. It also lightly hinted at the absurdities within the stories itself. While the setting was an effective choice the introduction was somewhat confusing. Frederic (Kevin Kyle) and Mabel (Alexandra Hutton) entered dressed in suits and proceeded to take dust covers off of the children’s furniture in the room. After Frederic then opened a book and was forcefully whisked into the piratical tale. Though this may have been a hint at the whirlwind fantasy side of the show it was not made clear and did not add to the performance but instead confused the setting.

The characterisation was superb throughout, with particular highlights from both the aging nurse Ruth (Amy J Payne) and the trio of eligible sisters. Payne brilliantly captured every possible nuance of humour in her attempts to seduce a much younger man. The physicality and subtle comedic timing from the sisters was a fantastic accompaniment to brisk tempo maintained throughout their numbers. Mabel’s defection from the ranks of outraged maidens towards her love of the beautiful Frederic was fantastic.

However the strength shown in the majority of the show meant weaker moments stood out all the more. The much anticipated I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major General struggled to define itself and capture the laughs the way the show had previously done. Though the awkward pacing may have been deliberate it failed to make itself clear as such, instead it seemed to clash with spot on and razor sharp wit presented on the rest of the stage.

The staging throughout was dynamic and filled the intimate space beautifully without crowding it. The comedic staged fight scenes were chaotic and ridiculous but managed to convey both grandiose and subtle moments of humour amidst the action. Each cast member was able to make their actions distinct whilst maintaining the integrity and effect of the ensemble.

This is an enjoyable and funny production by a very talented cast. It embraces the spirit of Gilbert and Sullivan without allowing tradition and expectation dictate every aspect of the performance.