The Pirates of Penzance

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Although the stage is small and the scenery rather sparse, Charles Court Opera presents a vibrant, action-packed show, with the emphasis placed firmly on the players.

Fortunately each of them is highly talented and, more importantly, fully in tune with the tone of the performance which is full of bawdy humour, comical songs and playful dialogue.

But this does bring home the fact that Gilbert and Sullivan’s work is pure joy for some but can leave others cold. Every sentiment and emotion is wrapped up in a very distinctive style of comedy and - like pantomime - if it isn’t the type of humour to float your boat, it can really sink your spirits.

Yet, if you know you like your romance full of saucy romps and each line of dialogue served with a sprinkling of cheeky wit, then the Charles Court Opera serves up an excellent version of the genre. Alexandra Hutton’s Mabel is particularly memorable and showcases Hutton’s impressive vocal dexterity and wonderfully varied facial expressions brilliantly. John Savournin (multitasking as director and choreographer, as well as playing the Pirate King) is a towering presence and delivers a commanding performance. Amy J Payne is entertaining as the poor, tragic Ruth, whose pursuit of pirate apprentice Frederic (Kevin Kyle) is much like her tangled hair do - a messy affair destined to end in tears.

Martina Trottman’s costume designs are remarkable - not only in relation to Ruth’s alarming appearance but the three dainty maidens (Hutton, Charlotte Baptie and Nichola Jolley), whose beautifully angelic dresses and stunning floral bonnets give them a heavenly aura. Very stylish work all round, but some will find it a much better fit than others.