

The Yeomen of the Guard

Godalming Operatic Society - 4th Aug 2025

The very highly regarded Godalming Operatic Society opened this year's adjudicated Festival with The Yeomen of the Guard. The Society is to be roundly congratulated on reaching its centenary year, having been founded in 1925. Their first production was Yeomen, and by way of centenary celebrations they resolved to "stage the opera in a thoroughly traditional manner, avoiding any temptation of gimmickry". To a large extent, this aim was achieved.

The evening got off to a resounding start with a fine rendition of the overture under Richard Stockton's baton. This segued into a strong rendition of the opening scene, Duncan Hamilton immediately establishing himself as a strong character actor. The scene ended with Wilfred's "Jealous Torment" aria - an interesting and enjoyable inclusion for a Festival audience, but it is hard to make a case for its inclusion in mainstream performance.

In the following "Tower Warders" double chorus scene, everybody sang almost everything. I'm sure this added considerably to the chorus sound, but it did rather cloud the distinction between Yeomen and Citizenry. And towards the end of the number there was an unfortunate breakdown in rapport between stage and orchestra.

The show unfolded in a pleasing way. When it came to the difficult plot setting scenes with the Lieutenant of the Tower we were fortunate to be in the capable hands of Richard Arthur. In a somewhat unrewarding role that can occasionally go unnoticed, Mr Arthur gave a commanding performance which drove the plot forward with clarity and pace. He was equally commanding (and demanding) in the hapless Jack Point's "audition" scene.

Elsie (Petronella Kereszturi) gave us a touching performance of "Tis done, I am a bride" (but please be careful to "find your light"), and then fasten

your seatbelts for the fun of the Phoebe and Wilfred scene culminating in "Were I thy bride". Duncan Hamilton and Rebecca Lucas Coxon made sure that we were not short changed when it came to fun and laughter. A slightly negative comment, I'm afraid - I didn't much take to Wilfred's "bench-ography" routine after the number. Of itself it was meaningless, and seemed to exist solely to incorporate an obscene gesture at the end (unless I've misunderstood the meaning of "innuendo").

The Act I finale was excellent. Should Meryll (as was traditional) whisper "your sister!" to Fairfax? I must say I prefer the unwitting Wilfred to enlighten him. "The prisoner comes" was both musically and dramatically excellent, and led most effectively into the mayhem that characterises the end of Act I.

Lee Power (Jack Point) came into his own in Act II. His work with Shadbolt at the beginning of the act was one of the show's highlights.

The quartet "Strange Adventure" is a sombre moment, reflecting upon funerals and beheadings. As we play the humour of a show, we must not be afraid to play the pathos, and I found the little gavotte moves in this number oddly out of place.

The difficult and relentless patter number "Like a ghost his vigil keeping" was extremely well handled, and the important story telling came across loud and clear.

And so we set out on the downward spiral to the tragic end. I especially liked a delightful staging of "A man who would woo", and of course Point's tragic end. The unhappy ending to the story continued even into the curtain calls, for the first one of which Point remained insensible downstage centre. This makes for a highly poignant ending, and in fact mirrors old D'Oyly Carte practice.

A tiny piece of advice going forward: there was quite a lot of telling the story to the fourth wall. Real people talk *to each other*. But all in all this was a very impressive centenary Yeomen of the Guard, of which Godalming may be justly proud.