

"THE GONDOLIERS"

Burton Operatic Society's Debut AN AUSPICIOUS START

When the Burton and District Operatic Society was formed some 12 to 18 months ago, there were many who wondered whether it would follow in the footsteps of the previous society of similar name, and enjoy a similar success, or whether it would break with the past and set out to explore fresh fields.

When it was announced that the new society would make its debut with the Gilbert and Sullivan opera, "The Gondoliers," memories went back to those lavish Town Hall productions, and the fear was expressed that those days were past, and only their memories remained.

Undaunted, the members of the new society clung to their decision, and last night, the results of their faith and confidence were seen when "The Gondoliers" opened at the Little Theatre, Burton, for a run of six nights, plus a matinee on Saturday afternoon.

The choice of this opera was a happy one. Chronologically, it follows the "Yeoman of the Guard," in which that form of wit now known as Gilbertian is lacking, but in "The Gondoliers," both librettist and composer go back to the old style, and it seems all the brighter as a consequence.

Another quailm felt about the Burton production was that the Little Theatre stage might be too small, and that the chorus might overwhelm the principals, both as regards movement and sound.

Fortunately the assumption was well wide of the mark, and small though the Little Theatre stage may be when compared with other stages in the town, there seemed to be ample room for everybody with no suggestion of histrionic claustrophobia.

INFECTIOUS ENTHUSIASM

Soon after the performance opened last night, the reason for its success became apparent—all those taking part were enjoying themselves, and their enthusiasm was transmitted to the audience—a satisfactorily large one for an opening night.

From the principals down to the members of the chorus, all were engrossed in the music and no one could fail to share the pleasure.

Comparisons were unnecessary and uncalled for. True, it was nothing like a Drury Lane show, but the interpretation was just as sincere—perhaps more so—and the intimacy provided by the smallness of the Little Theatre produced a happy atmosphere not found in the larger buildings.

Turning to the production itself, one forgot that it was entirely a local product, and on reflection, one feels that although tradition may have been followed, a new era has begun in Burton.

Large-scale shows can be presented, artistes are available so to present them, and there is a public willing and anxious to appreciate and support them.

Naturally there were faults and weaknesses, but they were obvious only to those who were looking for them, and in no way detracted from the pleasure of the evening.

From the first it was obvious that all those taking part had been well grounded in the opera, and more than usual attention paid to detail.

The chorus acted like a chorus and not like a body of people planted on the stage and told to hang around while the principals got on with the job. Such being the case, they became an integral part of the show and rounded off an evening of success.

Of the principals, it would be difficult and unwise to single out anyone for special mention—difficult because they worked together as a team, and unwise because some of them are alternating on the succeeding nights this week with other artistes.

Taken by and large, all have good voices, and know how to use them, and added to this, they can act.

Reginald Evans was quite happy as the Duke of Plaza-Toro, and was admirably supported by Edith Broughton as his Duchess, with Joy Edwards as their daughter.

Their attendant, who, in the end, turns out to be the rightful king, was safe in the hands of Geoffrey Wenden.

One of the best portrayals was that of the Grand Inquisitor by Ernest Bailey, whose voice and bearing were ideally suited to the part.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

The two gondoliers who do not know whether they are King or commoner were played by Maurice Smalley and James Mercer, who joined well in duet and were excellent partners in mime.

Their vivacious wives were played by Effie Cottrell and Edythe Bramley.

Taking part in lesser, but not unimportant roles, were Alan Smith, John Welsh, Mary Scott, Catherine Grant, Doris Storer and Molly Kidger.

In the chorus were Jean Barton, Agnes Buxton, Kathleen Buggins, Dorothy Sillita, Ivy Smith, Valerie Sharp, Glenise Turner, Mabel Whiteland, Bernard Boarne, Reginald Brunning, Ernest Cooper, Bernard Emery, Ivor Bowen, Gordon Penlington, Sandra Postle, Wendy Scott, Angela Storer and Tony Scott.

The musical director and producer, to whom a large proportion of the plaudits were due, was Margaret Sheardown, with Irene Marlow as assistant producer and chorus mistress, and a special word of praise is due to Evelyn Woodhouse, who played the piano accompaniment—no mean feat when one studies the piano transcription of the score. She was assisted by Denis Reynolds as tympanist.

Finally, a word about the scenery and costumes. The former was far beyond that expected, and was so arranged to give an impression of spaciousness, and the latter were lavish and in keeping with the whole show.

Summing up, the Burton and District Operatic Society has got off to an excellent start, and if progress is the motto, one looks to the future with confidence and eager anticipation. And let it be repeated, it was given in Burton, for Burton audiences, by Burton artistes, wherein lies a home truth if anyone cares to look for it.



MUSICAL COMEDY IN BURTON.—At the Little Theatre last week, the Burton and District Operatic Society presented the Gilbert and Sullivan opera, "The Gondoliers," and achieved an outstanding success, the theatre being filled for each performance. In this picture is seen the chorus and some of the principals.



MUCH OF THE SUCCESS of "The Gondoliers," produced by the Burton and District Operatic Society last week, was due to the principals, some of whom are seen here. From left to right are Reginald Evans (the Duke of Plaza-Toro), Daphne Carnwell (the Duchess of Plaza-Toro), Ernest Bailey (the Grand Inquisitor), Joy Edwards (daughter of the Duke and Duchess) and Geoffrey Wenden (Attendant to the Duke).

