

Lampoon on the English class system

STIRRING STUFF ON A SEA OF LOVE



© In a scene from Burton Operatic Society's *HMS Pinafore* are (l-r) Steven Foster, Andrew Last, Mark Jones, Alan Swift, Adrian Bader and Sarah Cottle.

First laugh of the evening was at our own expense. As musical director Peter Vernon raised his baton we all stood for the National Anthem, then collapsed with mirth as the excellent orchestra belted out jolly Jack Tar music from the overture.

So began the first night of Burton and District Operatic Society's *HMS Pinafore*, or *The Lass that Loved a Sailor*, which continues until Saturday at de Ferrers High School, Harehedge Lane, Horninglow. Frank Doran produced.

Just as well we had that early chuckle, for this particular Gilbert and Sullivan show gets off to a melancholy start, with a song or two of unrequited love. Of course, they wrote it in the days when the audience had to be given time to take their seats before the good songs came on.

And what good songs there were to come! And what good singers the Society can boast!

Mark Jones was splendidly cast as Sir Joseph Porter, who rose without seeing a ship to be "ruler of the King's Navée". It was a shame he fluffed a verse in that delicious song *When I was a Lad*, in

which Gilbert satirised the real life appointment of a stationer to be First Lord of the Admiralty. Commandably, Mark sailed on unruffled, in professional fashion.

Top marks too to Sarah Cottle, as Josephine the Captain's daughter, for some glorious singing, and to Sally McInnes, for a marvellous characterisation as Little Buttercup, the bumboat woman.

Andrew Last did a magnificent job as the ugly cripple Dick Deadeye. Today a Gilbert would have to think twice about including such a character, especially as a baddie, and a modern audience would sympathise, not hiss. Luckily no inhibitions marred Andrew's performance and Deadeye was as deliciously horrible as Gilbert intended.

There were fine performances from all the principals, who also included Alan Swift, Adrian Bader, Steven Foster, Mike Storr, Linda Kemp, and from all the

sailors, and the First Lord's cousins and his sisters and his aunts of the chorus.

It's old hat to say that WS Gilbert's lyrics are as fresh as ever, and perhaps we wish they weren't in this lampoon on the English class system, which is supposed to have disappeared. When this show was written, though light hearted, it would have been seditious if the battle of love versus class had not been settled in true pantomime fashion.

Of course, Gilbert was being satirical again, when he wrote those lines about the virtues of being an Englishman. He was pricking the bubble of our national conceit, but likely as not few people realised it. His words and Sullivan's music were, and are, stirring enough to warm the heart of any anti-Marketeer and anti-Chunnel jingoist. And of course, stirring enough to prompt us to stand once more, for the National Anthem. — DS.