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Exhibitionism

This Gilbert & Sullivan Society production has something for every connoisseur of comedy

BY ADAM ROBERTS, FRI., JUNE 15, 2012

Patience

Brentwood Christian School Performing Arts Center, 11908 N. Lamar, 474-5664

www.gilbertsullivan.org

Through June 17

Running time: 2 hr., 30 min.

For some, patience is exactly what the doctor ordered when it comes to an evening at the opera. But fear not, ye who run for the hills at the mere utterance of "Richard Wagner" - the Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin possesses just the antidote for Walkürian gravitas. Theirs is a Patience of a frolicking sort, allegorized in the riotous operetta's title character.

On the surface, a plot parodying the aesthetic inclinations of late-19th century Europe might not appear to be especially excellent fodder for uproarious comedy. But this sixth collaboration of Sirs G & S is not as intellectual as it might sound. One of the best lyricists of all time, Gilbert had the most incredible way of turning phrases, evoking through them wit and humor. In many ways, this "meta-lyricist" can be seen as the father of witticism in English-language musical theatre libretti through the mid-20th century.

Now, this is not to say that the humor of Gilbert and Sullivan is everyone's cup of tea (pardon the pun). If Will Ferrell and Adam Sandler are more your comic bag, you might opt instead for the latest "Frat Pack" farce. But before you do, know that there's a lot of thinly veiled potty humor lurking in Sullivan's lines, too. Truly, there's something to be had here for every connoisseur of comedy.

And the G&S Society's revival, directed by Ralph MacPhail Jr., with musical direction by Jeffrey Jones-Ragona, is fantastic, to boot. As Patience, Meredith Ruduski shimmers with each caricatured gallop, her voice bounding remarkably in tandem through Sullivan's score. Likewise, rival poets Archibald Grosvenor and Reginald Bunthorne - played by Holton Johnson and Arthur DiBianca, respectively - are expressed with such over-the-top hubris and bravado that the characters' lively ridiculousness is rivaled only by the performers' impressive skill. One mustn't forget Janette Jones, whose performance as The Lady Jane ... well, let's just say that one must see it for oneself! There's not a weak link to be seen or heard.

If there's a complaint to be had, it's only that there are many moments of "phasing" between orchestra and cast. The production is mounted in the Brentwood Christian School's beautiful new Iva Lea Worley Barton Theater, which features in its design, thankfully, an orchestra pit - a detail overlooked or disregarded in the design of too many new performing arts venues. But with the privilege of an orchestra pit comes the responsibility of ensuring that instrumentalists and onstage company are synched up. This often takes time in a new venue, and - especially in the case of an opening night - this is but a small concern in the context of a production that is otherwise of very high quality.

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Got milkmaid?: Meredith Ruduski's Patience pursued by Holton Johnson's Grosvenor PHOTO COURTESY OF CECILY JOHNSON



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KEYWORDS FOR THIS STORY

Patience, Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin, Ralph MacPhail Jr., Jeffrey Jones-Ragona, Meredith Ruduski, Holton Johnson, Arthur DiBianca, Janette Jones

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**AISD NEEDS TO CUT FAT** Re: "AISD Weighs Tax Increase". Look, until the Austin Independent School District cuts fat and waste like sports (oh, did ...

**SECTION 8 HOUSING IS THE REAL PROBLEM** After reading "There Goes the Neighborhood" and a companion piece in the Statesman, all one has to do is substitute ...

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