

MUSIC APPRECIATION

FEBRUARY Report by Kathleen Howcroft

This month we watched and discussed a 2018 recording of the comic opera in one act, Trial by Jury. It was performed by the National Gilbert & Sullivan Opera Company and Orchestra. Music by Arthur Sullivan and libretto by W S Gilbert. It was first produced 25th March 1875 at London's Royalty Theatre, where it initially ran for 131 performances and was considered a hit. The opera premiered more than three years after Gilbert & Sullivan's only previous collaboration, Thespis, 1871-1872, a Christmas entertainment. The success of Trial by Jury launched the famous series of 13 collaborative works between Gilbert & Sullivan that came to be known as the Savoy Operas.

The story concerns a breach of promise of marriage lawsuit in which the Judge and legal system are the objects of light-hearted satire. The principle characters were The Learned Judge, The Plaintiff, The Defendant, Counsel for the Plaintiff, Usher, Chorus of Bridesmaids, Gentlemen of the Jury, Attorneys and public. As with most Gilbert & Sullivan operas, the plot of Trial by Jury is ludicrous, but the characters behave as if the events were perfectly reasonable. This narrative technique blunts some of the pointed barbs aimed at hypocrisy, especially of those in authority, and the sometimes base motives of supposedly respectable people and institutions.

After its original production in 1875, Trial by Jury toured widely in Britain and elsewhere and was frequently revived and recorded. There are 14 musical numbers sung by the chorus, Usher, Defendant, Bridesmaids and Plaintiff etc. The Judge's ditty, When first, my friends, I was called to the Bar, is the best known comic song in the English language.

We moved on to The Merry Widow, or in German, Die lustige Witwe. Produced in 1906 in Hamburg. An operetta by the Austro-Hungarian composer Franz Lehar. The librettists, Viktor Leon and Leo Stein, based the story – concerning a rich widow, Hanna Glawari, and her countrymen's attempt to keep her money in the principality by finding her the right husband. The original comedy play L'attache d'ambassade, The Embassy Attache by Henri Meilhac.

The operetta has enjoyed extraordinary international success since its 1905 premiere in Vienna and continues to be frequently revived and recorded. The recording we watched was from San Francisco about five years ago.

Act 1 at the embassy in Paris of the poverty-stricken Balkan principality of Pontevedro. Act 2 Party at Hanna's house. Hanna entertains by singing an old Pontevedrin song Es lebt' eine Vilja, ein Waldmagdelein. There lived a Vilja, a girl of the woods. Act 3 A theme party in Hanna's ballroom, which she has decorated to look like Maxim's in Paris, complete with can-can dancers. We only had time to watch the 3rd act which wets our appetite for more. Thank you to Rob & Diana for providing another excellent morning.

FUTURE MEETINGS

Friday 15th MARCH

Please bring your favourite CDs

NO MEETING IN APRIL GOOD FRIDAY

Friday 18th MAY

Friday 15th JUNE

Friday 20th JULY

All meetings at 10 am in the Millennium Room, Cotherstone Village Hall

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