

'Hail, Hail, the Gang's All Here' for LRP's 'Pirates'

'Pirates of Penzance' Review

By BURNIE GARELICK



PHOTO BY KATHLEEN WENZEL

Jim Wellington fills the stage as the "very image of the modern major general" in Last Resort Players' "Pirates of Penzance." It opens this weekend and continues Nov. 11 to 13.

That's the first tune you hear when the orchestra plays the overture to Last Resort Players' (LRP) "The Pirates of Penzance," now playing at the Florence Events Center. Actually, the words are: "With Cat-Like Tread, Upon Our Prey We Steal." But these pirates are anything but stealthy. Cat burglars they are not. These pirates are soft-hearted poets and bunglers, rather like the Keystone Kops, the Penzance police keeping the peace on the shores of Cornwall in nineteenth century England.

Penzance also includes impetuous, perplexed young lovers and a doting daddy general and his brood of weather girls in this zany musical comedy by W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan.

The show debuted in 1879 in New York and in 1880 in London and became a beloved classic throughout the world, along with other Gilbert and Sullivan shows like "H.M.S. Pinafore" and "The Mikado."

That's pretty good for a couple of musicians who preferred to write serious music and dramatic plays.

"The Pirates of Penzance" is an operetta, sometimes called light opera. Don't worry; you're not being coerced into four hours of droning Wagner, however grand that can be. Operetta is light on drama and tragedy, light on endless arias by dying divas and light on plot and character, more akin to melodrama with its dastardly villains, pure heroes and damsels in distress. And like melodrama, "The

Pirates of Penzance" has a subtitle: "The Slave of Duty."

Unlike Broadway musical comedies, operetta has more singing than dialogue, and in Gilbert and Sullivan shows, the lyrics are tricky — voluminous rhyming words at breakneck speed, a little bit like rap and hip hop in Lin-Manuel Miranda's spectacular "Hamilton," currently taking Broadway by storm. In fact, Miranda pays homage to Gilbert and Sullivan in his songs, just as Gilbert and Sullivan paid homage to a song

in Verdi's "Il Trovatore," which premiered in 1853. The Cat-Tread song parodied "The Anvil Chorus," which was also parodied in Popeye and Bugs Bunny cartoons, among other works. "Hail, Hail the Gang's All Here" was a pop song written in 1917, and it has never stopped hailing lyrics. Music is not bound by time or space.

With lots of singing and lots of action and exquisite timing, "The Pirates of Penzance" is a difficult show to mount, and Last Resort Players director Leah Goodwin has done a masterful job blocking the actors in tandem with music director Jennifer Weier and music Aaargh-tistic director Laura Merz. Weier's orchestra includes a dozen players, many of whom are members of the Oregon Coast Chamber Orchestra.

Applause and armloads of "aaaaahs" to all the performers for striking dexterity and harmony.

Special kudos to Sean Abplanalp, Hilary Roach, Crystal Farnsworth, Jim Wellington, Sandy Vaccaro and Dana Rodet.

Abplanalp, a tall drink of water, plays innocent young Frederic, the tenor hero and pirate apprentice sworn to uphold his duty, no matter what

pitfalls he encounters. Roach is Mabel, the soprano diva, his first love, and wise to the world. Roach delivers several send-ups of grand opera belle canto singing that would delight Gilbert and Sullivan. Farnsworth plays Ruth, Frederic's long-suffering nurse maid and the pirate workhorse. While her character is not very good at distinguishing "pilot" from "pirate," Farnsworth's singing is, like her name, crystal clear.

Veteran Florence actor Wellington as Major-General Stanley, with big yellow brick-like epaulets, gets the show-stopping song, "I am the Very Model of a Modern Major-General," a tongue-twisting rhyme-bashing recitation of his dubious resume, and he handles it with aplomb. This song has been parodied many times; the best rendition is satirist Tom Lehrer's "Elements" in which every single element is so beautifully enunciated you think you've been to "Hahvard" where the elements have been "discahvered."

Vaccaro is the swashbuckling Pirate King, and his hearty voice is at its wittiest at word play, such as the "orphan" and "often" banter with the Major-General and the Paradox song ("Now For the Pirates' Lair")

when he and Ruth tell Frederic the truth about his birthday. Veteran actor Rodet is hilarious as the Sergeant of Police, a manic, tap dancing athletic wizard who traverses the entire stage in seconds, organizing his police. Rodet's singing patter speeds like a bullet train but renders every syllable sparkling clear. A policeman's lot may not be happy, but Rodet's stage presence is a treat.

The pirates, fetching daughters, and cops are splendidly attired, thanks to Douglas Hansen's costuming expertise. Each of the two acts has its own stunning set, from the pirate ship to the moonlight chapel. The walkway that departs one side of the stage, surrounds the orchestra, and returns to the other side of the stage is a stylish podium for solos and sotto voce commentary. This production abounds with all kinds of harmony!

In conclusion, LRP catches the rollicking riff of Gilbert and Sullivan and runs with it for a home run in this delightful production of "The Pirates of Penzance." The show plays Nov. 4, 5 and 6 and Nov. 11, 12 and 13 at the FEC, 715 Quince St. Join the gang 'cause here's where it's at!

Voyage 'Down a Classic Country Road' set to begin next week

Fresh from two week-long engagements at Seven Feathers Casino, Florence's Buck and A Quarter Band returns with another memorable classic country music show this November.

"Down a Classic Country Road" features musical director, arranger, keyboardist and vocalist Marty Adams in a familiar role. Lending his vocal talents to classic hits from Jerry Lee Lewis to Sonny James and

John Denver, Adams gives his usual stellar effort to these hit songs. Adams spent many years in Hollywood recording studios as a keyboard player, and recently released a new gospel album entitled "Power of

Grace," which can be found on iTunes.

Mike Jacobson wrote and directed last year's popular "Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes? A Classic Country Retrospective," and has put together another show in the same style.

Jacobson performed with such diverse talents as Elmer Bernstein, Henry Mancini, Jerry Lewis, and George Hamilton as well as appearing in numerous musical theater productions, and the Colgate/Texaco Country Showdown.

In this new production, Jacobson tackles songs by artists such as Steve Goodman, Johnny Horton, Eddie Arnold and Freddy Fender.

Joining Adams and Jacobson will be Doug Bushwar, who played guitar for the The Maddox Brothers and Rose.

Doug's guitar and vocals were a memorable part of last year's show, and he brings his considerable talents to some great new renditions of classic tunes, ranging from Elvis to Hank Locklin.

Also returning is bass player Earl Knight, who played with Merle Haggard, and does a great job with the vocals on



COURTESY PHOTO

"Down a Country Road" stars Buck and A Quarter Band. classic Merle hits.

Denise Dee, who many will remember from her beautiful rendition of "Stand By Your Man" by Tammy Wynette, rounds out the vocals with songs by Patsy Cline, Patti Page and Kay Starr.

Dee is also known for her beautiful jazz singing, and has performed with Harold Jackson of the Ink Spots, and the talented jazz duo On The Wing. Her versatility is evident in songs like "Blue Bayou" by Roy Orbison.

Holding everything together rhythmically with his outstanding drumming is Florence native Bob Severy.

If you enjoyed the Ink Spots tribute "If I Didn't Care" and

last year's "Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes?," you are sure to enjoy "Down a Classic Country Road."

The show will be performed at the CROW Center for the Performing Arts, 3120 Highway 101, on Nov. 11, 12 and 13 and 18, 19 and 20.

Showtimes are Fridays and Saturdays at 7 p.m. and Sunday matinees at 2 p.m.

Tickets are \$15 per person and can be purchased by calling 541-999-9671 or in person at Best For Hearing or On Your Feet With A Splash.

A portion of each ticket sold will go to benefit Children's Repertory of Oregon Workshops (CROW).



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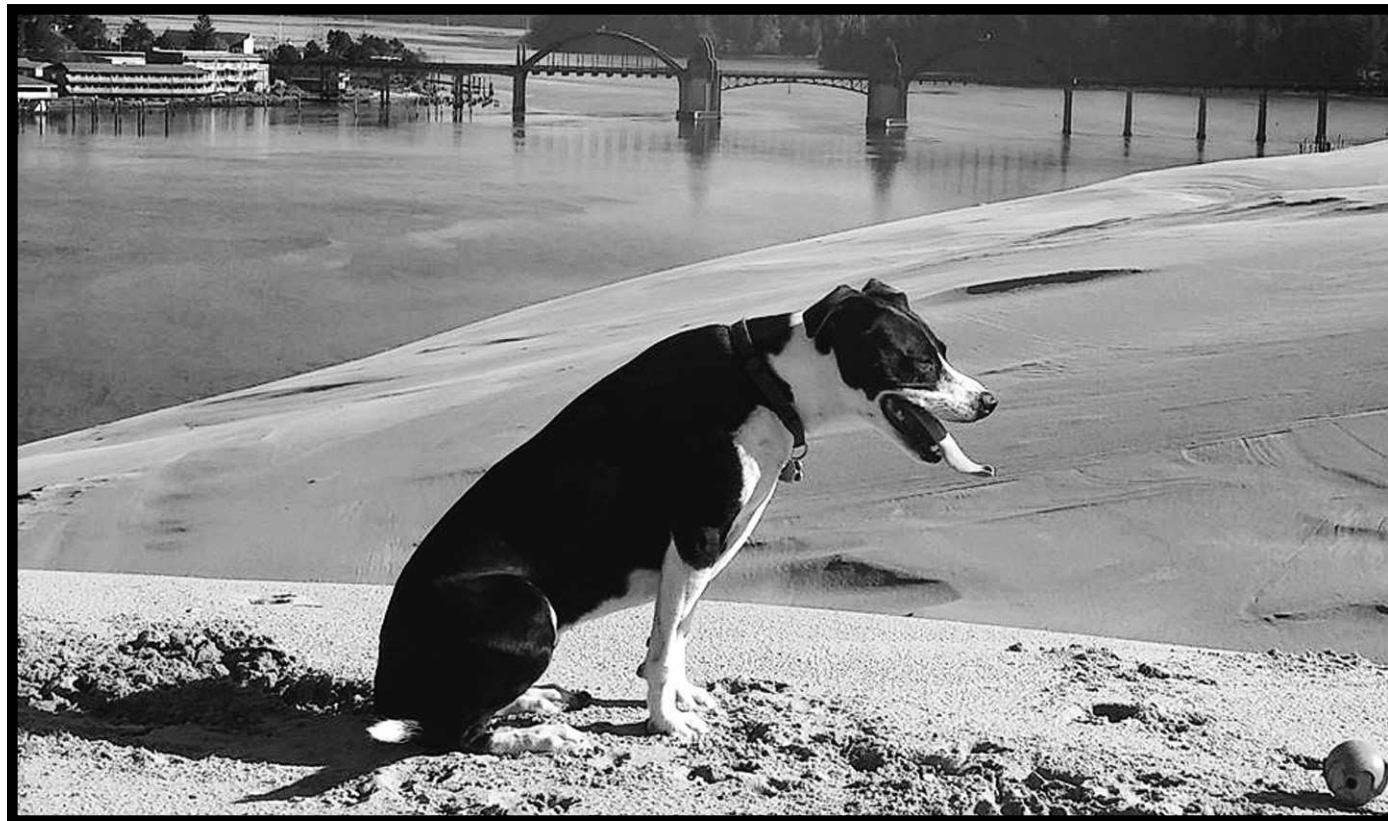


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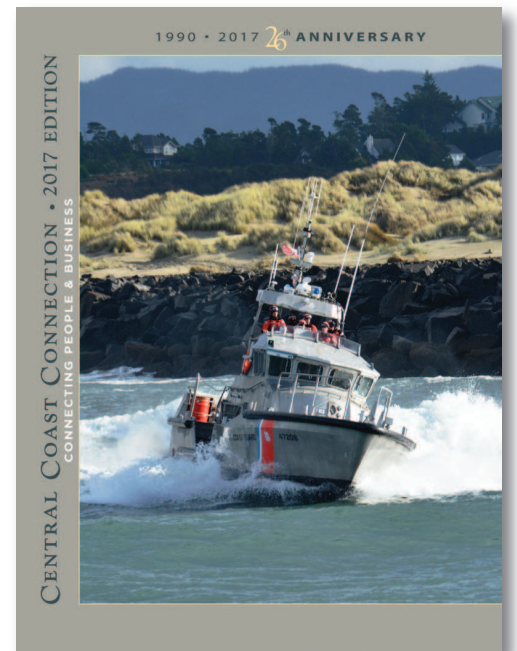
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