

Comedy Opera Company Ltd., 1879
(Under the management of Mr. Richard D'Oyly Carte.

14th – 26th April: Liverpool

PRINCE OF WALES THEATRE

After much eager expectation, preceded by the fair wind of popular favour at the port of London, "H.M.S. Pinafore" arrived at Liverpool last evening, manned by a competent crew, well officered, and as "taut" in every department as a careful government ((headed by Mr. D'Oyly Carte) could make her. No more bright and attractive operatic "craft" has been berthed at the Prince of Wales Theatre for a long time, and Mr. Emery deserves hearty congratulations upon having secured a work which is sure to prove the most attractive of his current season. The nautical opera which bears the title of "H.M.S. Pinafore," as nearly everybody knows, is the result of the combined talents of Mr. W. S. Gilbert and Mr. Arthur Sullivan, who have already done much, by legitimate work, to deliver the English stage from being given up wholly to the flimsy, flippant, and too frequently suggestive French emanations, under the title of opera bouffe. In this instance, the librettist and composer have proved to demonstration that it is possible to secure legitimate success by perfectly legitimate means – brilliant lines which need not raise a blush, and masterly, if not always quite original, music, which gives increased value to the store of our national compositions. The quaint and piquant humour for which Mr. Gilbert has been so long noted is conspicuous in the "Pinafore" in every scene, and the fame which Mr. Sullivan has already acquired as a composer of melodic power and inventive capacity is greatly increased by his share of the work, which was last night heard in its entirety, and with all necessary stage accessories, for the first time in this town. The company engaged to give it a representation in the provinces appeared for the first time in their several parts on this occasion; and although there were several parts in the performance which would have borne improvement, the musical *ensemble* was throughout of a highly creditable and effective character. An audience which crowded the theatre to its utmost limits evidently attended for a musical treat, and in this respect there could have been little disappointment if the frequent and hearty encores were any criterion. The author of "H.M.S. Pinafore" has wisely contented himself with a plot which is simplicity itself; but the thorough unanimity of the co-partners has proved sufficient to produce a work which is undoubtedly the best of its class in every sense, bright and merry from first to last, and full of music which cannot fail to charm the dullest ear. The opera is divided into two acts, and the whole of the action takes place on the quarter deck of the Pinafore while lying off Portsmouth. The stage realism of the picture in the broad light of day, and afterwards under the witchery of moonlight, is exceedingly striking, and attracted universal admiration throughout the performance. The simple story is that of the love of one of the common seamen on board the ship for the captain's lovely daughter, which after extreme threats of personal bodily injury on the part of the former, is reciprocated by the lovely damsel, but love matters are greatly complicated by the suit of the First Lord of the Admiralty, who is smitten by the captain's daughter's charms. The more common love and excessive ambition of the sailor are discovered, and he is ordered into custody, as well as consigned to the "deepest dungeon" of the ship, when a mysterious bumboat woman, strong and stalwart, though called "Little Buttercup," sets everything right by proving that Ralph Rackstraw, the common sailor, and the captain, got "mixed" in their babyhood while she nursed them, and that the former was the patrician, while the latter only belonged

to common parents. Thus the action is brought happily to a close, and in despair the Admiral marries one of his numerous first cousins, who are brought prominently forward in the opera. The overture to the opera is brisk and sparkling; and as the curtain is raised a nautical chorus by the salts, who are busy at work, called "We sail the ocean blue," gives a merry keynote to what follows – a characteristic aria for the bumboat woman, "For I'm called Little Buttercup," in which she describes the multitude of wares she has to sell. A madrigal, "The Nightingale," displays Mr. Sullivan's harmonic powers in a new and attractive light; and a ballad entitled "A maiden fair to see" is a delicious composition, which has much grace and beauty, enhanced by charming orchestration, conspicuous for its excellence in every sense. Then follows a good introductory song given to the captain in which he states his rank on "H.M.S. Pinafore," with a chorus which is sure to catch the popular ear most readily. A rather lack-a-daisical ballad, "Sorry her lot," introduces Josephine, the charming heroine, who was most captivatingly represented by Miss Douglas Gordon, and a barcarolle, "Over the bright blue sea," with a swing and rhythm about it which are quite captivating, ushers in the strictly punctilious First Lord, who delivers his sentiments, after a severe lesson in etiquette, to the officers, in an air very much after the style of the Judge's song in "Trial by Jury," called "When I was a lad I served a term," which was heartily encored. The glee, "A British tar is a soaring soul" is evidently well and skilfully written, but it was completely marred last evening in consequence of the voices getting at "sixes and sevens" as to time and key. The choicest items of the second act are a delicious serenade song to the moon; a piquant duet for Little Buttercup and the captain; an admirably written trio ("Never mind the why and wherefore"), which had to be repeated; a vigorously written duet, "Kind captain I've important information"; and a stirring song, "He is an Englishman," which secured the most genuine applause and heartiest encore of the evening. There are frequent evidences of Mr. Sullivan's skill in composition, and throughout the limited number of instruments employed in the orchestral work are employed to the best advantage. The company is fairly effective, and no doubt will improve upon more intimate acquaintance with the work. The First Lord was played with becoming importance and pomp by Mr. R. Mansfield; Mr. M. Dwyer showed good vocal ability as the captain; Mr. P. Blandford looked, acted, and sang with much force in the character of the hero; and Mr. Arthur Rousbey gave intense interest to the well-marked character of Dick Deadeye. Little Buttercup was well represented by Miss Alice Barnett; and Miss Haidee Crofton proved a charming Hebe. The band, under the baton of Mr. Van Biene, proved competent exponents of the music; and the choruses had a good deal of the necessary weight and colour about them. A farcical musical trifle, entitled "After All," proved a pleasant introduction to the programme, which will be continued until further notice. [*Liverpool Mercury etc* (Liverpool, England), Tuesday, April 15, 1879; Issue 9751.]

PRINCE OF WALES THEATRE. – Lessee, Mr. F. Emery; Acting-Manager, Mr. G. Redmond. – So long as Mr. W. S. Gilbert is capable of writing so brilliantly, and Mr. Arthur Sullivan has the power to compose so skilfully and originally, there is no likelihood that English comic opera will be pushed out of the field by its more volatile sister French opera bouffe. Of the truth of this opinion the aspect of the interior of the Prince of Wales Theatre on Monday night afforded striking confirmation. After a long absence from the provinces *H.M.S. Pinafore* was then played for the first time in the country, and an audience which literally packed every corner of the Theatre then gave the most delightful work a reception which could hardly have been exceeded in cordiality by that given to its first performance in the Metropolis. The general opinion

of provincials, so far as Liverpool is concerned, was most unmistakably in favour of the new work, the highest admiration being expressed for the brilliantly satirical Gilbertian lines and thorough appreciation of the Sullivan music, which, as one was remarked, far exceeded anything he has yet done in an operatical way, and fairly "knocks Lecocq into a cocked hat." The company engaged to give the work its provincial representations, marshalled under the banner of Mr. D'Oyly Carte, contains several competent artists, but in connection with a first public performance the general competency was not so great as it will probably be after repeated appearances. There was an occasional lack of the necessary pulling-together spirit, and the slips in time, tune, and proper colouring did not certainly add to the full effect of the comical nautical opera. Miss Douglas Gordon, who represented Josephine, the Captain's daughter, was evidently nervous at the commencement of the opera, but she gathered confidence as she proceeded, and before the close the almost universal opinion seemed to be that she is an artist of great talent, with a good and useful voice and possessed of genuine acting power which are sure to make her a favourite wherever she goes. Miss Alice Barnett, the Little Buttercup, was eminently suitable in her impersonation of the part, and she received quite the lion's share of the evening's honours. Miss Haidee Crofton played the little role of Hebe most satisfactorily. Mr. Richard Mansfield, "the popular entertainment artist from the United States," was cast for Sir Joseph Porter, and, while his singing was scarcely so effective as it might have been, his acting was wonderfully good and well-studied. Mr. M. Dwyer was an admirable Captain Corcoran, Mr. Percy Blandford acted and sang with much manliness in the part of Ralph Rackstraw, and Mr. Arthur Rousbey gave a graphic and grotesque delineation of the crew's dark cloud, Dick Deadeye. The boatswain's mate was capitally played by Mr. R. Cummings, and Mr. C. M. Blythe made the most of the carpenter's mate. The Pinafore's quarter deck was a splendid scene, and elicited universal admiration. The Desprez-Cellier vaudeville, entitled *After All*, formed a piquant introduction to the evening's entertainment. [*The Era* (London, England), Sunday, April 20, 1879; Issue 2117.]

PRINCE OF WALES THEATRE. – Lessee, Mr. F. Emery. – No more brilliant and legitimate success has attended any of Mr. Emery's special engagements than that which has been secured by the representation of the Gilbert-Sullivan comic opera, *H.M.S. Pinafore*, at the "Prince," during the past fortnight. The booking of places was almost complete at the beginning of the week, and night after night the Theatre has been filled to overflowing. The efforts of the various artists engaged in the performance of the attractive work have greatly improved since the first night, and as a consequence the enjoyment of the audiences is all the greater. The Little Buttercup of Miss Alice Barnett comes in for the lion's share of approbation, and Mr. Arthur Rousbey's Dick Deadeye, Mr. R. Cummings's Bill Bobstay, Mr. C. M. Blythe's Bob Beckett, and Miss Haidee Crofton's Hebe, are likewise marked and applauded. Miss D. Gordon sings and dresses well. Mr. R. Mansfield, if he would infuse a little more "pepper" into his singing, would be a highly satisfactory and admirable Admiral, and Mr. M. Dwyer and Mr. P. Blandford now make more of Captain Corcoran and Ralph Rackstraw. Master Fitzaltamount, junior, who plays the mite of a midshipman, merits much praise for his delightfully natural acting in the part. The First Lord's "sisters, his cousins, and his aunts," and the jolly Jack Tars, are about as lively and well-voiced as could possibly be desired, and they have added most materially to the undoubted success of the opera in connection with its start in the Provinces. Morning performances of the *Pinafore* have been given each Saturday with great success, there

being a crowded house last week. Miss Helen Barry follows, with *Led Astray*, on Monday. [*The Era* (London, England), Sunday, April 27, 1879; Issue 2118.]

28th April – 10th May: Dublin

THE GAIETY THEATRE

The crowd that thronged the theatre last evening, when "H.M.S. Pinafore" was for the second time produced in Dublin, is the most inerring as it is the most satisfactory test of the popularity of the piece. When W. S. Gilbert writes the words and A. Sullivan composes the music of a piece, the result is an assured success. There was never anything like it until "Trial by Jury" first took the dramatic world by surprise, and even now there is nothing like it except "The Sorcerer" and "Pinafore." The three pieces are unique, and the whole range of dramatic nomenclature, ranging from high tragedy to broad comedy, from the Italian to the opera comique, has not one word to describe them. Nor is it easy to discriminate their respective merits, for while everyone is loud in their praises of all three, everyone has a special pet of his own. "Pinafore" has a multitude of votaries. The grotesque and startling originality of the main idea, the strangeness of the situation, the wonderful rhythm and the sly humour of the songs, and the light, lively, fascinating music, full of catching airs that slip through the ears, and for weeks afterwards haunt the brain, and "beat time to nothing in one's head," have all conjoined to render it popular. The music and the words so reach on each other, the quaintness of the music so enhances the humour of the words, that it is very hard to say which of the joint creators of the piece deserves the most credit. Two or three of the songs are as good in their way as anything that Gilbert – almost as good as anything that the author of the *Ingoldsby Legends* – has written. In the Admiral's song the ludicrous incongruity between his prosperity and the alleged cause of prosperity are capitally touched off, and in the song "He is an Englishman," there is a sly fling at the most universal of British prejudices hidden under the delightful absurdity of the words. The other songs are almost equally clever and catching. There have been some not unimportant changes in the company since the piece was last among us. Mr. Richard Mansfield has succeeded to the important role of the First Lord of the Admiralty, and higher praise could not be well accorded him than to say that he sings and acts with all the humour and cleverness of his predecessor. As they are both to model their performance on the same eminent living personation, the similarity in their sustainment of the role is, of course, a compliment to the fidelity of each. Miss Douglas Gordon is now the Captain's daughter, Josephine, and looks, acts, and sings the part well nigh perfectly. The character of Little Buttercup loses indeed in grace, but gains in comic effect in the hands of Miss Alice Barnett, and in Mr. Percy Blandford Ralph Rackstraw finds an able personator. The other members of the company are the same, and in the same roles that we remember them before, and there is no need to reiterate the praise then very liberally bestowed on them. We might feel tempted to give a special mention to Mr. M. Dwyer as Captain Corcoran, or to Mr. A. Rousbey as Dick Deadeye, but we would be almost obliged in fairness to criminate the rest of the company. It is always pleasant to see a good piece well performed and a good audience there to listen and laugh, and that triple gratification was certainly afforded last evening at the Gaiety. [*Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin, Ireland), Tuesday, April 29, 1879; Issue N/A.]

THE GAIETY THEATRE

Last evening there was such a crowd at the Gaiety as must have largely taxed the apparently inexhaustible zeal, tact, and good humour of the young ladies who officiate as box openers. It must be a provoking thing to have dozens of people clamorously demanding seats when all the available seats are occupied already. Such was the condition of things everywhere at the Gaiety last evening. The performance was under the immediate patronage of the Duchess of Marlborough, and the Viceregal presence enhanced the attractiveness of the popular piece that is being played, and had its effect on the numbers and the good humour of the audience. There were present in the Viceregal box her Grace the Duchess of Marlborough, Lady Rosamond Fellowes, attended by Captain King, A.D.C. There have been few more successful pieces than "H.M.S. Pinafore," and its popularity seems to have been largely increased since it has been last amongst us. We have already expressed our cordial approval of the company by whom the piece is being played at present, and subsequent performances tend to enhance the favourable impression, Last evening augurs well for a most successful run. [*Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin, Ireland), Friday, May 2, 1879; Issue N/A.]

GAIETY THEATRE. – Lessee, Mr. M. Gunn. – Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan's clever production *H.M.S. Pinafore* has been the great attraction during the week. Charmingly rendered as it is by Mr. R. D'Oyly Carte's clever company, and staged with Mr. Gunn's usual liberality, the production is a great success. Miss Douglas Gordon, Miss Haidee Crofton, Mr. Percy Blandford, Mr. A. Rousbey, Mr. Mansfield, and Mr. M. Dwyer particularly distinguished themselves in the interpretation. Cellier's operetta *After All* has been the opening piece. [*The Era* (London, England), Sunday, May 4, 1879; Issue 2119.]

THE GAIETY THEATRE

There has seldom been a more successful engagement than "H.M.S. Pinafore" at the Gaiety. Its popularity, which was great enough when the engagement commenced, has gone on increasing each successive evening. To-day there will be a mid-day performance, and in the evening the engagement will conclude. It needs no spirit of prophecy to foretell that there will be a crowded house on both occasions. [*Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin, Ireland), Saturday, May 10, 1879; Issue N/A.]

12th – 24th May: Birmingham.

PRINCE OF WALES THEATRE. – Mr. James Rodgers, Proprietor. – The return of Mr. D'Oyly Carte's popular comedy opera company to this Theatre was welcomed on Monday evening by a crowded house. Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan's nautical comic opera *H.M.S. Pinafore* was again produced in Birmingham, and was provocative of alternate outbursts of laughter and enthusiastic applause. In consequence of the very liberal support bestowed upon the company during a previous visit to the Prince of Wales in the autumn of last year, the Proprietor decided on sundry morning performance, the first of which was announced for Thursday. Since their last appearance here there have been several changes in the company, but the performance is no less meritorious. [*The Era* (London, England), Sunday, May 18, 1879; Issue 2121.]

PRINCE OF WALES THEATRE. – Mr. James Rodgers, Proprietor. – The enterprise that has always been displayed in the management of this popular house by

the Proprietor in catering for his numerous patrons, by providing from time to time the best talent the Dramatic Profession can supply, has never been more thoroughly appreciated or more liberally recognised than during the past fortnight. Since the first appearance of Mr. R. D'Oyly Carte's *Pinafore* company on Monday week, the Prince of Wales Theatre has been literally packed at each representation, there being on many occasions scarcely a vacant seat in any part of the house. To meet the public demand upon the resources of the Theatre, morning performances have been held, and have also been liberally supported. [*The Era* (London, England), Sunday, May 25, 1879; Issue 2122.]

26th – 31st May: Royal Alexandra Theatre, Liverpool

ROYAL ALEXANDRA THEATRE. – The return of "H.M.S. Pinafore" to Liverpool ton-night is a theatrical event of much interest, and this is greatly increased by the fact that the opera on this occasion will be performed at the Royal Alexandra Theatre, in consequence of a friendly arrangement between Mr. Saker and Mr. Emery (lessee of the Prince of Wales Theatre). The public will have the benefit of this coalition in the shape of an earlier return of the celebrated work than would otherwise have been the case, and there is little doubt that the Saker-Emery venture will be crowned with complete success. In order to meet the extraordinary demand for seats a morning performance of the "Pinafore" will be given nest Saturday.

ROYAL ALEXANDRA THEATRE

The recent brilliant success of the Gilbert-Sullivan opera "H.M.S. Pinafore" at the Prince of Wales Theatre fully warranted the special arrangement between Mr. Seker and Mr. Emery to have the work again performed in Liverpool with as little delay as possible. As a consequence of this friendly business coalition, the opera was given at the Royal Alexandra Theatre on Monday, in the presence of a crowded and most enthusiastic audience. Details as to the quality of the representation or undoubted merit of the work are not requited, as the cast is precisely the same as that of a few weeks ago. The principals are now, however, more at home in their work, and the bright and sparkling choruses, the effective accompaniments, and other musical features of the opera are also of even a more satisfactory nature. There will be a morning performance of the "Pinafore" on Saturday. [*Liverpool Mercury etc.* (Liverpool, England), Wednesday, May 28, 1879; Issue 9788.]

ROYAL ALEXANDRA THEATRE. — Lessee, Mr. E. Saker; Treasurer, Mr. F. Wilkinson — As the result of a friendly managerial arrangement between Mr. Saker and Mr. F. Emery, the "governor" of the Prince of Wales Theatre, *H.M.S. Pinafore* again anchored in Liverpool for a week on Monday night, manned by the same crew as on her previous voyage to this port, but on this occasion her anchorage ground was at the "Alexandra" as the result of the managerial coalition. This gives an earlier opportunity to residents here of again hearing the familiar strains of the Gilbert Sullivan work than would otherwise have been afforded, as the opera will not again be at the "little house" until after the summer (so-called) has come and gone. A house packed in every corner showed the interest felt in the performance of the work on Monday evening, and the enthusiastic applause with which principals and the chief numbers were received proved that the representation was again up to the mark. The quarterdeck scene, with Portsmouth in the distance, was as bright and animated as ever, and no small amount of the success secured by the *Pinafore* on this occasion was due to the tuneful, well-toned, and effective chorus, which sets an example, in the way of spirit and action, which might safely and satisfactorily be copied by those who

are similarly engaged in connection with classical opera. The orchestra, too, under the direction of Mr. Van Biene (who proves as good a conductor as he is a violoncellist), added weight and worth to the general representations. Of the principals it need only be said that repeated performances of the opera since the first provincial rendition at the "Prince" have given greater maturity to their vocalisation and ripeness to their acting. The chief honours on Monday were given to Miss Douglas Gordon (Josephine), Miss Alice Barnett (a singularly attractive Little Buttercup), Miss Haidee Crofton (Hebe), Mr. A. Rousbey (Dick Deadeye), Mr. R. Cummings (Bill Bobstay), Mr. R. Mansfield (the Admiral), Mr. M. Dwyer (Captain Corcoran), and Mr. P. Blandford (Ralph Rackstraw). A morning performance of the opera will be given to-day (Saturday). [*The Era* (London, England), Sunday, June 1, 1879; Issue 2123.]