

Mr. D'Oyly Carte's "B" Company 1880

11th – 23rd October: Bristol

"THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE" AT THE NEW THEATRE ROYAL.

On Saturday, an opportunity was afforded us by the managers to be present at one of the concluding rehearsals of Gilbert and Sullivan's operatic melodrama of "The Pirates of Penzance." As most of our readers must be aware, the piece has for the last seven or eight months crowded the auditorium of the Opera Comique and there seems to be little abatement of its popularity, and no probability of the metropolitan troupe being able to go with it into the provinces, Mr. D'Oyly Carte has formed a special and, we are enabled to say, very full and competent company, in order no longer to delay its presentation at the great provincial centres. The enterprise of our local managers has enabled them to secure for their patrons the first opportunity of witnessing it out of the metropolis; and, although it has been for some weeks past rehearsed by the selected company at the Opera Comique, it was deemed advisable, before its presentation to a Bristol audience this (Monday) evening, to have a couple of rehearsals, with full chorus, orchestra, and scenery, upon the stage of our New Theatre.

The story is, of course, an absurdity, but it is an absurdity in the true Gilbert style. There is a quaintness and spontaneity in the humour of that playwright which falls to the lot of very few of his contemporaries. He places little reliance on the sources from which *opera bouffe* and extravaganza writers as a rule seek inspiration. He rarely resorts to puns or the distortion of words; nor does he aim at the creation of broadly extravagant characters. In those respects his productions transcend most of the productions encountered in the comic drama. Mr. Gilbert relies rather on the drollery of the situations he contrives for his *dramatis personæ*, on the oddity of his stories, and upon that admixture of the congruous and incongruous which philosophers tell us is an irresistible provocative of laughter.

There is much in "The Pirates of Penzance" which recalls memories of "H.M.S. Pinafore." The part of Major-General Stanley is obviously shaped on the lines of Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B., Ruth's blunder in apprenticing the boy Frederic to a pirate in mistake for a pilot smacks considerably of Little Buttercup's "mixing up" of the two children Rackstraw and Corcoran; and the episode of the numerous pendant daughters of the Major-General is strongly suggestive of "the sisters, the cousins, and the aunts" of the Admiralty First Lord. Despite these little points of similarity, there is quite sufficient novelty in the *libretto* to justify its claim to originality, whilst the varied incidents of the plot are as entertaining and laughable as could be desired.

The reader must not suppose that the pirates of Penzance are of the "Black Beard" and "Dare-devil Jack" type met with in the story books of the last generation. They are a somewhat courteous and very tender-hearted race, whose pride it is "to spare the weak," as, when they attack the strong, they are sure to get thrashed; and a chief article in their creed is – the pirate king being himself parentless – "never to capture an orphan." It is not, perhaps, surprising that they cannot make piracy of the kind we have mentioned pay; and we find them at the opening of the piece confessing that fact, and lamenting that the last three ships they seized were manned entirely by orphans, and that, prompted by their feelings of humanity, they had to let them go.

The curtain rises upon the pirates' retreat, a passage of bold and very picturesque scenery on the Cornish coast. The sea is viewed rolling in with its silvery

foam, and the rock-bound shore (very vigorously painted by Mr. Barraud) wears an air of wildness and majestic grandeur well in keeping with the story. The pirates, who are seen lying about amongst the cliffs in picturesque groups, are celebrating the birthday of Frederic, an apprentice of the band, who is within a few hours of the end of his term. He informs them that he is about to part with them for ever. He loves, he says, admires, reveres them as comrades; but he detests them as pirates, and it is his purpose to devote the remainder of his existence to their extermination. Of this resolve, since it is prompted by "a sense of duty," the pirates find it unreasonable to complain, and at the end of the act the separation accordingly takes place. Not, however, until there have been some stirring scenes.

A bevy of charming girls come tripping over the rocks and prepare to amuse themselves by paddling in the water. They are caught with one shoe off, and their alarm is piquantly expressed in a hopping chorus to which the pirates contribute, being determined to get married immediately through the instrumentality of

A doctor of divinity

Located in the vicinity.

It is soon made known that the young ladies are all daughters of Major-General Stanley, who inhabits a castle hard by; and scarcely is the discovery made when the gallant warrior himself appears upon the scene.

This character, as we have already hinted, is moulded somewhat after the fashion of Sir Joseph Porter; and he introduces himself in a patter song, studded thickly with scientific words of length and difficulty. It recounts the accomplishments of the distinguished officer, who seems to be thoroughly versed in astronomy, mathematics, nautical history, and nearly all branches of science except, indeed, in military affairs. The rapid delivery of this song is occasionally interrupted in a highly ludicrous manner by the General's hesitation for a rhyme. We must not anticipate the interest and fun of the opera by following the story too closely, but we may state that Frederic finds his love returned by Mabel, the General's eldest daughter; that the pirates capture the old man, but that, upon his assuring them that he is only "a lowly orphan," he is permitted to depart with his daughter Mabel and her newly-gained lover Frederic.

The action of the second act is laid amidst the ruins of an old abbey, the painting and making out of which constitute another triumph for Mr. Barraud's pencil. General Stanley has bought the abbey, beneath whose aisles lie the remains of many an illustrious ancestor, and he consoles himself with the reflection that although he cannot tell whose ancestors they *were*, he is very sure – having purchased the entire lot – whose ancestors they *are*.

Frederic has now been made aware that by the terms of his indenture his apprenticeship will not end till his 21st birthday, and that, he having been born in leap year, on the 29th of February, some years must elapse before he can be released. The sense of duty by which he professes to be ever swayed then prompts him to inform the pirates of the cheat which the general has practised upon them by representing himself to be an orphan. The band is attacked in a very ludicrous manner by a body of policemen, who are in turn themselves put upon the defensive, and an ingeniously contrived concatenation of situations brings about the necessary happy *dénouement*.

Of the music to which Mr. Sullivan has wedded this laughable story we can speak in high terms of praise. It is destined, we think, to become quite as popular as "Pinafore," and we shall expect to hear some of its numbers whistled and sung through the streets. The Chatter chorus in the first act will be sure to win this renown, and so will that of the "Bobbies" in the second. The effect is exceedingly humorous –

a sort of tarantula [*sic*], which the men in blue keep up on their truncheons. There is, too, something intensely comic in the chant in monotone which they sing as a sort of commentary on the sayings of the General's daughter. Besides the lighter music there are passages which boast high art quality. The concerted music towards the end of the first act would only require to be sung with solemnity to be worthy of grand opera, and the concerted music in the second act and the finale are fine examples of dramatic composition. The opening song of Ruth is very beautiful, and especially so is the duo, "O leave me not," between Frederic and Mabel, in the Abbey scene; in fact, the music throughout (although here and there the practised ear may detect bits which bear some resemblance to passages in other operas) is bright, tuneful, and well harmonised.

The performance tonight, we can promise the reader, will be a very perfect one. The principal *artistes* engaged are all excellent; there is a chorus of between thirty and forty practised dramatic singers, which, with an augmented orchestra (of which Mr. George Chapman is leader), will be directed by Mr. F. Stanislaus whose name as a musical conductor cannot fail to be known to most musical persons. [*The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* (Bristol, England), Monday, October 11, 1880; Issue 10111.]

"THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE" AT THE NEW THEATRE ROYAL.

Last night, the company formed by Mr. D'Oyly Carte for the production in the provinces of Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera of "The Pirates of Penzance" made their first start, and commenced their brief twelve nights' engagement at our New Theatre Royal. A more perfect and satisfying representation of any piece has never, we venture to say, been witnessed in any theatre out of the metropolis. It is not only that the principal *artistes* are of generally excellent quality and recognised attainments, but the chorus and orchestra are more than ordinarily large and good, the scenery is beautiful, the dresses and appointments as perfect and characteristic as art could make them; whilst, thanks to the careful training which has been given to the work by Mr. R. Barker, under whose direction it has been produced, the action works smoothly.

We noticed the plot of the piece so much at length in our yesterday's issue that little on that score need be added. It is, as we then said of it, full of droll incidents and mirth-provoking absurdities. Nothing could be more ridiculous than are the situations into which Major-General Stanley and his long line of daughters are thrown in both acts; quite as absurd is the idea of the old officer, simply because he has misrepresented himself to the pirates as an orphan, wandering and weeping night and day amidst the ruins of an old chapel. Very laughable, too, is the introduction of the police force (with the grotesque music allotted them) and their conflict with the pirates, whilst a crowning absurdity is that of the lawless buccaneers surrendering themselves to the "Bobbies" when called upon to do so in the name of Queen Victoria. The spectators find it impossible to resist laughter, so that the opera is as mirthful as it is musically charming.

The overture, which was played under Mr. Stanislaus's direction with great precision and spirit, is a masterly example of musical writing. Those who are at all familiar with Mr. Sullivan's compositions must know how great a master he is of orchestral effect. Even his accompaniments are not mere supports to the vocalisation, but boast a higher and more illustrative quality; whilst his symphonies are full of force and character. The overture to "The Pirates of Penzance" falls little short of anything he has written. Its melodies are graceful and flowing, its harmonies rich, whilst it boasts the rich and varied colouring which always affords so much value to compositions of the class.

The opera, especially considering that it was a first representation, went capitally. We mention the fact of its being the first night of performance because a certain amount of nervousness attacks the most practised artists when they find themselves for the first time *vis-à-vis* with a large and new audience, and because, moreover, it takes some little time to ascertain the pitch of a large auditorium like that of our New Theatre. That the vast audience was highly gratified was made evident by the hearty laughter and the reiterated plaudits and encores.

The principal soprano part, Mabel, was admirably filled by Miss Laura Clement, who, to a pretty face and graceful figure, adds a cultivated voice of much freshness and purity, and good acting powers. Her facile and brilliant execution of the waltz song, "Poor wandering one," in the first act, led to an enthusiastic encore, and she won very deservedly a similar compliment (with the tenor, Mr. Gerard Coventry) in the exquisitely sweet and tender madrigal, "O leave me not to live," in the second act. Miss Augusta Roche, who filled the *rôle* of Ruth, has a rare musical contralto voice, which we are sure will do her good service as the engagement proceeds. Her rendering of her opening aria, "When Frederick was a little boy," narrowly escaped an encore, and she was deservedly applauded in the duet with Frederic, and the concerted music in the second act. Mr. Gerard Coventry, the tenor, was a little uneven, obviously from nervousness, but he sang the beautiful air "O is there not one maiden here" with much tenderness, and imparted a like quality to the madrigal. Mr. G. W. Marnock, who played the pirate king, has a baritone voice of robust quality, and he sang the dashing song, "I am a pirate king," energetically. Mr. W. T. Hemsley acted and sang very satisfactorily as his Lieutenant, Samuel, whilst no force in the kingdom, operatic or otherwise, could boast a more efficient Sergeant than is Mr. Marler. He and his attendant "Bobbies" very soon established themselves in the favour of the audience. The chorus, "When the foeman bares his steel," with the concerted music which follows it had to be repeated, and a most vigorous re-demand followed Mr. Marler's quaint and humorous rendering of the song "When a felon's not engaged at his employment." A cleverly-drawn character is that of Major-General Stanley. He is, in fact, the Sir Joseph Porter of the opera, and to his presence much of its humour is due. The part had an able exponent in Mr. David Fisher, jun., who evoked a vociferous encore for his patter song, and was greatly laughed at and applauded at other parts of the piece.

The concerted music, which possesses far more than average quality, was much applauded, and the unaccompanied chorale towards the close of the first act, "Hail, poetry" – a really grand example of harmonised vocal music – had to be repeated, and well nigh evoked a second encore. The pretty chorus for the sopranos, "Climbing over rocky mountains," was greatly admired, and the Chattering chorus was heartily laughed at and as heartily applauded. There was a large audience. [*The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* (Bristol, England), Tuesday, October 12, 1880; Issue 10112.]

NEW THEATRE ROYAL. – Managers, Messrs. George and Jas. Macready Chute. – Brilliantly mounted, and before a large audience, Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera *The Pirates of Penzance* was on Monday last presented at this Theatre for the first time before a provincial audience. The company is generally an efficient one. Miss Laura Clement, the representative of Mabel, has a voice of peculiar sweetness. She very soon secured the good will of her audience obtaining for her first song, "Poor wandering one," an undeniable encore. Miss Roche both sang and acted admirably as Ruth. Mr. David Fisher acts amusingly and sings sufficiently well as the Major-General. Probably the best suited of the gentlemen is Mr. Marler, who, as the

Sergeant of Police, took care that the audience should hear every syllable of the intensely amusing songs with which he is intrusted. The policeman's chorus was warmly redemanded, and narrowly escaped a second encore. Mr. Gerard [Coventry] sings the love music of the part of Frederic very sweetly. Mr. Marnock is fairly efficient as the Pirate King. The chorus is both strong and of good quality, and the characters are picturesquely costumed. During the week Mr. Stanislaus has had the advantage of presiding over Mr. George Chapman's excellent band, and, under his very able direction the instrumentation has from the first gone with much smoothness. The two scenes have been specially painted by Mr. Barraud, and of these the second is well deserving special mention. [*The Era* (London, England), Sunday, October 17, 1880; Issue 2195.]

NEW THEATRE ROYAL. – Managers, Messrs. George and Jas. Macready Chute. – *The Pirates of Penzance* was played here for the last time on Saturday, 23rd inst., when two performances were given before large audiences, the *matinée* attracting a fashionable assembly. [*The Era* (London, England), Sunday, October 31, 1880; Issue 2197.]

25th – 30th October: Brighton

THEATRE ROYAL AND OPERA HOUSE. – Proprietrix. Mrs. H. Nye Chart. – *The Pirates of Penzance* has been produced this week. The piece has so often been noticed in our columns that criticism is unnecessary. It is well mounted, and the grouping is most tasteful. The choruses are given with precision that shows careful training. Miss Laura Clement possesses a voice of rare sweetness, and held the audience enthralled – notably in the farewell duet with Frederic. Mr. David Fisher was effective as Major-General Stanley. Mr. Gerard Coventry ably represented Frederic – in fact, all are well up to their business, and crowded houses have rewarded the enterprise of the manageress. [*The Era* (London, England), Sunday, October 31, 1880; Issue 2197.]

1st – 6th November: Nottingham

THEATRE ROYAL. – Manager, Mr. Thomas W. Charles. – The much talked of *The Pirates of Penzance* was produced here for the first time on Monday last before a crowded audience, whose alternating bursts of laughter and applause showed very early in the evening that they had been – to use a Yankeeism – "hit to a dot." The wonderful quaintness of the libretto, and the bright yet scholarly music to which it is wedded, is fascinating to a degree, and we may safely prophesy that the popularity of this truly comic opera will stand the test of a good many return visits. The execution of the work was capital all round, each of the artists seeming to revel in the fun of the thing almost, if not quite, as much as the spectators themselves. Miss Laura Clement, as Mabel, was dainty in appearance, charming in her acting, whilst her singing was delicious – there is no other word for it. Mr. David Fisher, jun.'s Major-General Stanley was in the best form of refined comicality. Mr. Marnock looked "penny plain and twopence coloured" to a hair's breadth as the Pirate King. Mr. Coventry distinguished himself as the Pirate apprentice, and Mr. Marler was every inch, and a trifle over, a policeman. A word of praise is also due to Miss Augusta Roche, whose Ruth was conceived and rendered in true burlesque spirit. The choruses were splendidly given throughout, and the new scenery reflected great credit on M. Jules Camus. Owing to the thronged condition of the theatre a morning performance is announced for Saturday. [*The Era* (London, England), Sunday, November 7, 1880; Issue 2198.]

8th – 13th November: Leicester

"THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE" AT THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE.

A large audience assembled at the Opera House on Monday evening, on the occasion of the first production in Leicester of the new melo-dramatic opera entitled "The Pirates of Penzance." All those who are in any way interested in musical events, or in the introduction of new works for the stage, are aware that this opera is by the authors of "H.M.S. Pinafore," Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan; and they also know that the success it has achieved has quite equalled that gained by the comical nautical musical drama, in which naval affairs are so cleverly hit off.

Of course the two operas are entirely distinct as far as the plots are concerned, but at the same time the construction of "The Pirates of Penzance" reminds us now and again of the composers' earlier work. This remark will apply to the libretto as well as to the musical composition. The idea given by the "hardly ever" incident in the "Pinafore," is introduced in the "Pirates" by the remark made in the last act that the privateers are all gentlemen, or "nearly all," and the circumstances surrounding the policemen's chorus also call to recollection some of the concerted pieces for the sailors in the opera which has had such a great run both in England and across the Atlantic, and the "Conspirators' Chorus" in "Madame Angot's Daughter." There has been no plagiarism on the part either of Mr. Gilbert or Mr. Sullivan, it is true, but the impression given in these particulars is somewhat similar in all three works.

In the "Pirates of Penzance," the dialogue is as smart as in the "Pinafore," while the music, if possible, is much better. Catching as are many of the airs and choruses in the "Pinafore," they do not possess the body of tone to be found in Sullivan's later effort. The scoring in the newer work is decidedly original throughout, the effects produced are frequently very fine, and some of the airs and duets are charming. The duet for Frederic, the pirate apprentice, and Mabel, General Stanley's daughter, is an exquisite number, and must become a great favourite. The choruses are easy; but there is a dash and a tunefulness about them which will make them very popular, while the orchestration is always pretty, fresh, graceful, and interesting. "The Pirates of Penzance" will certainly roam about as long as "H. M. S. Pinafore" sails on the sea of popular approval.

Of the performance of the opera, by Mr. D'Oyly Carte's company, we have little to say except in praise, for there is not an indifferent artiste in the troupe. The part of Major General Stanley is capitally represented by Mr. David Fisher, junr. On Monday evening his interpretation of the song in which he describes all his military capabilities as a Major-General was received with roars of applause, and his efforts in other respects were cordially appreciated. Mr. G. W. Marnock makes a good Pirate King. He possesses a big bass voice, and although now and then he sings out of tune, he fits the character admirably. Mr. Hemsley scores a success as Samuel, the lieutenant, and Mr. G. Coventry gives a very creditable representation of Frederic, singing with commendable taste and judgment. Miss Laura Clement's delineation of Mabel is thoroughly effective. She is a good actress, and her rendering of the music allotted to her is well-nigh faultless. The services of Misses Clara Merivale (Edith), Lucy Millais (Kate), Agnes Mitchell (Isabel), and Augusta Roche (Ruth, a pirate maid-of-all-work) also deserve recognition, and Mr. Marler, as the sergeant of police, makes us believe that he knows a thing or two.

The chorus is well balanced, and contains some capital voices of all parts, the result being most satisfactory. The unaccompanied chorus was one of the finest parts of Monday evening's performance. As far as the band is concerned, little is wanting. In spite of a little unsteadiness, which was excusable, and the occasional undue

prominence of a brass instrument, they got through their work on Monday night very well indeed, thanks in no small measure to the precision with which Mr. F. Stanislaus conducted. The stage appointments and dresses are all that could be desired. In all respects the entertainment provided at the Opera House this week in the "Pirates of Penzance" is such as may be thoroughly enjoyed by anybody. [*Leicester Chronicle and the Leicestershire Mercury* (Leicester, England), Saturday, November 13, 1880; pg. 2; Issue 3634.]

OPERA HOUSE. –Lessee, Mr. Elliot Galer. – *The Pirates of Penzance* made their first appearance on Monday night at this place of amusement with great success. Mr. Fisher, jun., scored a success as Major-General Stanley, as did Mr. Hemsley (the Lieutenant) and Mr. Marnock (the Pirate King). The Sergeant of Police of Mr. Marler was also good. Miss Clement was superb as Mabel, and the Misses Merivale (Edith), Mitchell (Isabel), Millais (Kate), and Roche, (the maid-of-all-work), were all excellent. The stage appointments are magnificent, as usual. [*The Era* (London, England), Sunday, November 14, 1880; Issue 2199.]

15th November – 4th December: Liverpool

PRINCE OF WALES THEATRE.

"THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE."

Piracy, for some reason or another, has always had a strong tinge of romance given to it, whether it was told in story or portrayed dramatically. The "Bold Buccaneer" has been treated as a sort of hero by Scott, Maryatt, and every writer who has dealt with him; and the modern notion of the Paul Jones and other sea thieves is that at their worst they were handsome dare-devils who preyed for the mere love of adventure on rich-laden galliots, and who filled up their leisure by carrying off not very reluctant maidens to their "lairs" in some little-visited islands. This accepted notion of the "pirate" has been most cleverly satirised by Mr. W. S. Gilbert, the writer of the libretto of the "Pirates of Penzance." His pirate is certainly the "mildest-mannered man who ever scuttled ship or cut a throat," and in respect of death-heads, cross-bones, long flowing curls, and a gallantry to the fair sex, he is the type of the roamer of the seas.

The plot of the *Pirates of Penzance* (which was produced for the first time in Liverpool last night at the Prince of Wales theatre before a large and brilliant audience) hinges upon a very small pivot – the mistake of a servant maid who has a child entrusted to her; who is told to apprentice the boy to be a "pilot," but mistaking the word has him bound to a "pirate." This youth, Frederick (Mr. G. Coventry), is associated with a regular band of sea rovers; and although despising their calling, "being the slave of duty" he remains among them until his apprenticeship is concluded. The "pirates' lair" is visited by the daughters of General Stanley (David Fisher, jun.), and all the damsels are made captive by the pirates, the pirate king (Mr. J. W. Marnock), according to the regulations of the band, appropriating two of them. There are love scenes, rescues, and recriminations, all of which are burlesqued with infinite humour by Mr. Gilbert. Some of the lines are written in that quaint yet catching style which Mr Gilbert has made his own.

When the piece was being composed, the metropolis was shocked by the frequency of acts of violence, and the, police, as usual, were condemned. This Mr. Gilbert hits off most happily. In the "Lay of the Police," the officers say,

When the enterprising burglar's not a-burgling,
When the cut-throat isn't occupied in crime,
He loves to hear the little brook a-gurgling,

And listen to the merry village chime.
When the coster's finished jumping on his mother,
He loves to lie a-basking in the sun;
Ah! take one consideration with another,
The policeman's life is not a happy one.

Mr. Arthur Sullivan's music is worthy of the libretto. The opera abounds with beautifully-written songs and choruses. The policemen's chorus and the chorus of maidens and pirates were charmingly given, as were also the fine sea song "I'm the Pirate King," "Poor Wandering Heart," [*sic*] and the other leading items. In every sense the production of "The Pirates" by the able company was a marked success, and is another evidence of Mr. Emery's managerial skill. [*Liverpool Mercury etc* (Liverpool, England), Tuesday, November 16, 1880; Issue 10249.]

PRINCE OF WALES THEATRE. – Lessee, Mr. F. Emery. – Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan had their "second innings" in Liverpool for the week at the Prince of Wales Theatre, where *The Pirates of Penzance* was produced on Monday, for the first time in this city, in the presence and hearing of a crowded and fashionable audience. It was expected that the libretto would once more be thoroughly Gilbertian in its comicality and humour, and in this respect those who were present could not possibly have been disappointed; and, on the other hand, it was anticipated that Mr. Sullivan's music would have much of the charm which belongs to other operas of his composition. Reminiscences of kindred works are not wanting in the *Pirates*; but after all, the melodiousness and sparkle of the various numbers (especially of the choruses) made the audience forget comparisons, and only gave themselves up to the enjoyment of a work which possesses so much excellence. Scarcely any better representation of the work could have been given than that which was furnished by the capital corps of artists engaged for performance in the provinces; and Mr. Emery fully maintained his reputation as a theatrical proprietor by the thorough efficiency which characterised the mounting of the opera at his charming place of amusement. Mr. David Fisher, jun., had a part entirely after his own heart in Major-General Stanley, and he made the best use possible of the favourite opportunity which was thus afforded him of displaying his abilities as comedian and vocalist. "I am a Major-General," a song full of "go," was cordially encored, and a similar compliment was paid to Mr. Marler's "Sergeant of Police" ditty. Miss Laura Clement was a bewitching Mabel, and she sang her music most artistically. Miss Augusta Roche also secured much favour by her singing and acting as the "Slavey," while the Pirate King was splendidly played by Mr. Marnock, and Mr. Gerard Coventry proved a capable exponent of the part of Frederic. The band and chorus were well up to the requisite standard, and the combined musical forces on the stage and in the orchestra were skilfully "piloted" by Mr. F. Stanislaus. [*The Era* (London, England), Sunday, November 21, 1880; Issue 2200.]

PRINCE OF WALES THEATRE. – Lessee, Mr. F. Emery; Acting Manager, Mr. G. Redmond. – Success continues to attend the performances of *The Pirates of Penzance* at the Prince, where large audiences during the week have greatly enjoyed the latest production of the joint wit and wisdom of Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan. [*The Era* (London, England), Sunday, November 28, 1880; Issue 2201.]

PRINCE OF WALES THEATRE. – Lessee, Mr. F. Emery. – *The Pirates of Penzance* has again served to crowd Mr. Emery's theatre to its utmost capacity during the past week, and another morning performance this day (Saturday) has been found necessary. [*The Era* (London, England), Sunday, December 5, 1880; Issue 2202.]

6th – 18th December: Birmingham

PRINCE OF WALES THEATRE. – Manager, Mr. J. Rodgers. – Mr. D'Oyly Carte's opera company have appeared during the present week with much success in Sullivan and Gilbert's opera of *The Pirates of Penzance*. Mr. Rodgers deserves every credit for being instrumental in introducing to the Birmingham public this the latest, and in several respects the best, comic opera which has yet been composed by Mr. Sullivan. It is not often that music and opera-loving patrons have such an opportunity of appreciating delightful and melodious music wedded to such a humorous libretto. The especial charm of the opera is that from beginning to end it never flags in interest; that the music throughout is sparkling and fresh; and, when the occasion demands, charmingly pathetic. The piece was capitally put on the stage, the dresses and appointments being simply perfect. Of the acting it would be difficult to speak too highly. Miss Laura Clement, as General Stanley's daughter, acted and sang with considerable piquancy and feeling. Her vocalisation was perfect; and her rendering of the air "Poor Wandering One," and the duet with Frederic "O leave me not to pine," was beautifully and expressively given. Miss Augusta, Roche as Ruth, the pirate maid of all work, made a very good impression upon the audience. She acted with great ease and spirit; and her singing was marked by much carefulness and finish. Mr. David Fisher, jun., who took the part of Major-General Stanley, displayed rare merits as an operatic artist, and his rendering of the popular patter song "I am the very pattern of a modern Major-General" was the essence of mirth provoking drollery, and, as might have been expected, was enthusiastically encored. Mr. Gerard Coventry, who was intrusted with the part of Frederic, although scarcely possessing a voice equal to the demands made upon it, nevertheless sang with much care, and his acting was all that could be wished for, and in the second act was noticeable for its tenderness. The Pirate King of Mr. G. W. Marnock was capitally portrayed, and in the first act he won the good opinion of the audience by his singing of the air "I am a Pirate King," declaimed with much vigour. Mr W. T. Hemsley, as Samuel, the Lieutenant, acted fairly well; and the Sergeant of Police of Mr. George Marler was capitally played. "When at felon's not engaged in his employment" was delivered with exquisite drollery, and was several times encored. The parts of Edith (Miss Clara Merivale), Kate (Miss Lucy Millais), and Isabel (Miss Agnes Mitchell) were all creditably sustained, and the choruses were given with precision and uniformity. There have been large audiences. [*The Era* (London, England), Sunday, December 12, 1880; Issue 2203.]

20th December – 1st January 1881: Glasgow

ROYALTY THEATRE "THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE"

Mr. Knapp still believes it unwise to put one's trust in pantomimes, and on the whole we are not sorry for his want of faith. Christmas, it is true, would be sadly incomplete without a pantomime of some sort, but we have at this particular Yuletide season several very excellent productions of this kind, and that being so, we commend the lessee of the Royalty for providing an entertainment which is not only essentially different but is the best of its kind. Last year, it will be remembered, Mr. Knapp opened his theatre with "Madame Favart." Then played for the first time on the Glasgow stage; this year we have Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera, "The Pirates of Penzance," also a novelty here, and, as we believe, after the performance of last evening, an unqualified success. Probably the weather last night had a good deal to do with the fact that the audience, although a good one, did not crowd the theatre.

The manner in which the opera was performed and received, however, was exceedingly encouraging both to the lessee and the artists, and we shall be greatly disappointed if during the next few weeks "The Pirates of Penzance" do not become universal favourites.

To give even a rough sketch of the plot of this latest contribution to English Comic Opera is not an easy task, for the reason that its story is of that flimsy order which cannot well be described. A youth named Frederic, of good birth, is apprenticed by his nurse Ruth to a Pirate King in mistake for a Pilot or a Pilot King. At the opening of the play Frederic's indentures have lapsed by time, and the jolly pirates are drinking his success and congratulating him on being able to join the band as a full member. He startles them not a little, however, by stating that though he has remained with them so long from motives of duty, it is his intention to exterminate the whole band on the first convenient opportunity. Ruth, his old nurse, in a very taking song confesses the mistake she made, adding that since then she has watched over his fortunes. The hero Frederic up to this time has seen no other female than Ruth, and believing her own ingenuous avowal that she is beautiful is about to engage himself to her when a bevy of damsels, young and very fair, appear on the scene. Frederic at once discards Ruth, and persuades Mabel, a General's daughter, the fairest of the damsels, to take compassion on his forlorn condition. Being very much in earnest, and in most amorous haste, he attempts to run off with her. The Pirates suddenly appear, and propose to marry one of Mabel's numerous sisters, but are met with the remonstrances of the father, a retired Major-General, who at first vainly attempts to influence them. When, however, the parent pitifully represents that he is an orphan, and that if his children were taken from him he would be doomed to lead a life of solitude, the Pirates relent, and the act closes with the departure of the Major and his daughters, who carry Frederic with them. In the second act the Major-General is discovered wandering at night in a ruined chapel. He falsely told the Pirates that he was an orphan, and for this fib the honest veteran's conscience gives him no rest. Meanwhile Frederic has engaged a body of police to arrest the Pirates, and they are asked into the chapel to receive the Major's blessing ere starting on their perilous undertaking. They set off to accomplish their mission after singing a merry-going chorus. Frederic is about to follow them when the irate King and Ruth arrive to claim him again as an apprentice. The unfortunate youth was bound to the King till his twenty first birthday, and as he first saw the light of day on the 29th February they insist that since his birthday only recurs in leap year he cannot be freed till the year 1940. The hero's charming sense of honour obliges him at once to return to the band, and also to disclose to the King that the Major had deceived them in declaring that he was an orphan. The King swears vengeance on the false swearing Major. Frederic has now to break the direful news to Mabel, and he bids her a long farewell, promising, however, that he will return in 1940 and marry her. In this scene there is a charming little duet in the old English style, which is certainly one of the musical gems of the work. The Police come back for their leader, but find that he has abandoned them, and hearing the Pirates coming they hide in the chapel, in which the conscience stricken Major still wanders about. The Pirates seize him; they in turn are attacked by the Police, and are at last forced to yield in the name of Queen Victoria. The Pirate band turns out to be composed entirely of noblemen, and the Major gladly disposes of his daughters to them. The above may serve to give an idea of the leading points of the plot, but it is impossible to describe the spirit of mirth which is born of Gilbert's lines without quoting the greater portion of them. They are brim full of exquisite humour, and to them much of the success of the opera must be attributed. Most of the

situations of the play are in the highest degree comical. Those who have seen any of the predecessors of "The Pirates of Penzance" can readily imagine the style of music Mr. Sullivan has composed for the new opera. It contains innumerable neatly written melodies, many of them even at the first hearing proving very attractive. The concerted music, the choruses, and the orchestration of all the music are worthy of the reputation of the English composer. We have always regarded the instrumentation of his works as the strong point in Mr. Sullivan's writings, and believe that few composers of the day can equal him in this department of his art.

Last night's performance of "The Pirates of Penzance" was, as we have already hinted, most satisfying. All the artists worked well together, and gave a finely balanced interpretation of a work the many delicate points of which require skilful handling. Miss Laura Clement (Mabel) has a fine clear soprano voice, and entering thoroughly into the spirit of the piece – singing her music correctly, and acting with the requisite amount of abandon – she carried the sympathies of the house with her in all she did. The young prima donna received from time to time the well merited plaudits of an appreciative audience. Miss Augusta Roche as Ruth, the "pirate maid-of-all-work," also made a good impression. Mr. Gerard Coventry was not conspicuously strong as Frederic, the hero of the piece. His voice is not very powerful, yet it is sweet and generally in perfect tune; at the same time more fire, alike in his vocalism and in his acting, would not come amiss. Probably the most successful effort of the evening was that of the interpretation of "The Pirate King" by Mr. G. W. Marnock. If we mistake not we have more than once met this gentleman in public; first as Mr. George Walker (of Glasgow) and then as Signor Giorgio Valchieri. Be that as it may, the Mr. G. W. Marnock of last evening made a capital appearance, and acted his important part in excellent style, receiving as he merited a goodly share of the honours. Mr. David Fisher, jun., is not a perfect vocalist, but his clever acting makes amends for any such shortcomings, and he easily raised the Major-General to the position of one of the most important in the cast. The minor characters were all satisfactorily interpreted. Nothing but praise can be given to the chorus; in every section they are thoroughly efficient, and sing with telling vigour and confidence. The orchestra is also good, yet some refractory members, who will play wrong notes and occasionally fall behind, might with advantage be made to improve in their execution of last evening. These, however, are minor matters, and we can confidently praise the general excellence of last night's performance.

A special word of praise is due to Mr. Knapp for the very pretty mounting of the opera. Perhaps we should rather render our thanks for the artistic setting of "The Pirates" to Mr. Smyth, the scenic artist of the theatre, or better still to both gentlemen. The opera is in two acts, and as many scenes. The first scene is "a rocky sea shore on the coast of Cornwall," as to which we may say that it is pretty enough to stand for a seascape in Cornwall or anywhere else, the foreground occupied with rocks and a pirate's cavern, charmingly set, and in the background a stretch of sunlit sea, with a schooner lying at anchor. The scene in which the second act is carried through is, however, by far the finer of the two. It is a ruined chapel by moonlight, with Gothic arches and massive columns and pointed windows, all relieved and chastened under softest light. The pillars are garlanded with leaves, lending a certain feeling of Christmas to a scene which for exquisite purity and taste is seldom witnessed in a theatre. We have no doubt, as we have said, that "The Pirates of Penzance" will prove a big success. Its success will show that theatre goers appreciate an opera which, although a comic opera, is neither noisy nor vulgar. [*Glasgow Herald* (Glasgow, Scotland), Tuesday, December 21, 1880; Issue 305.]

ROYALTY. – Lessee and Manager, Mr. E. L. Knapp. – Mr. D'Oyly Carte's *Pirates of Penzance* company opened here on Monday evening, in presence of a crowded and fashionable audience. [*The Era* (London, England), Sunday, December 26, 1880; Issue 2205.]