

Reviews

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC
[Gilbert & Sullivan Society of SA](#)
[The Arts Theatre](#)
Until 05 May 2018



Review by [John Wells](#)

Some things need skill and talent to pull off: roasting a pheasant, a late cut, unclasping a bra with one hand.

And Sondheim. There is a huge degree of difficulty in producing any Sondheim musical. "A Little Night Music" has all the things that make Sondheim deliciously difficult: complex and demanding music, exhilaratingly clever but complicated lyrics (try singing "Now, as the sweet imbecilities tumble so lavishly onto her lap" quickly), and subtle, nuanced characters. "A Little Night Music" shows Sondheim at his best: playful, ambiguous and with an unerring sense of melody.

The G & S Society's production is a sparkling and delightful success.

The success is due to a perfect balance between the music and the action. Christine Hodgen (musical director) and her salon orchestra do a wonderful job playing the intricate score. Hodgen has worked hard with the singers, who combine in a polished performance. The principal voices are supported by an excellent chorus which punctuates the action with tuneful interventions. The experience and, in many cases, the professional training of the singers is evident. The overall sound is elegant and precise. Pam O'Grady's direction embraces the sadness and regret that underscore the sometimes-silly narrative goings-on. There is a palpable atmosphere of longing, regret and desire. O'Grady builds the production from this emotional centre with real theatrical flair.

At the heart of the story is the romance between the aging actress Desiree Armfeldt and her newly-married old love Fredrik Egerman. This relationship is beautifully realized by Bronwen James and Robin Schmelzkopf. James' convincing combination of hollow brio and forlorn hopefulness is as rousing as it is heart-breaking. She does not have as strong a voice as the other principals, but her stark, almost desolate rendition of "Send in the Clowns" is still and moving. Schmelzkopf captures the foolish bravado of a middle-aged man impetuously married to a (virginal!) teenaged bride, although he does not quite find the same emotional depth as James. Nicholas Bishop is impeccable as the dense but focused Count Carl-Magnus (Desiree's current lover) and Deborah Caddy shines as his dutiful but distraught wife Countess Charlotte. Caddy's manipulative cattiness and awful sadness is a wonderful counterpoint to Bishop's selfish bluster. Norma Knight is irascible and biting reflective as Desiree's mother.

The production design works well: O'Grady and Tim de Jong have created a sylvan grove, attractively painted by Brian Budgen. Helen Snoswell's costumes suit the period and look wonderful. Jason Groves' warm lighting gives the action a burnished, glowing tone.

It is rare to see such an accomplished amateur production of such a challenging musical.