

A Little Night Music | Gilbert and Sullivan Society of SA



Left – Deborah Caddy and Emilene

Whitehead. Photo – David Haddy

To name just a few of the shows touched by his magic, who wrote the lyrics and sometimes the music for *West Side Story*, *Gypsy*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Into the Woods* and the one under review, ***A Little Night Music***, American **Stephen Sondheim's** name has been synonymous with interesting music and entrancing lyrics that move the story along since his name hit the lights in the late fifties. At 88 years old he is a highly awarded and acclaimed composer and lyricist and his work has earned him dozens of accolades over the years.

The story now being told in this elegant production by the **Gilbert and Sullivan Society of SA** at the Arts Theatre in Angas Street, Adelaide, is a gentle, humorous, poignant and memorable one. There are some bright songs, well sung and articulated and reasonably well known such as “*You must meet my wife*” and “*Weekend in the country*” but “*Send in the Clowns*” is the stand-out and it is touchingly and beautifully sung by *Desiree*. **Bronwen James** gives this character depth and her experience and talent produce a beautifully controlled and touching performance. She is a treasure for the stage indeed.

Overture first, of course, and a taste of the delightful musicianship and understanding of the complexity of Stephen Sondheim's music from all female orchestra under its musical director, **Christine Hodgen**. His music and lyrics do more than enhance or background the story – they are an integral part of it. The orchestra is very attractively dressed and are at the back of the stage throughout with forest as a backdrop. This is a very well dressed show throughout and all praise to the costume coordinator, **Helen Snowell** and her assistants for such consistent accuracy, attractiveness and variety from the chaps who move the furniture in tails and white gloves to the male character's outfits and the stunning gowns worn by the women. Oh, those beautiful hats especially in Act 2! Congratulations to them.

The play is set in a small Swedish town in 1900. The unusual family set up is soon revealed. A middle aged, well-to-do lawyer, *Frederik Egerman* (**Robin Schmelzkopt**) has married an 18 year old girl, *Anne* (**Emilene Whitehead**).

Cradle snatcher, *Frederik*? Yes, but tough luck, *Fred*.

She likes the house, the status and the wealth but she's not keen on the idea of her wifely duties and, 11 months after the wedding, her loving husband is still aching to consummate it. **Robin's** gentlemanly mannered and kindly *Frederik* is played very well with wry humour and his singing voice is good too.

Emilene is rather too childlike and her singing voice unsure and not yet developed but she has promise. From a previous marriage *Frederik* has a gloomy cello-playing son, *Henrik*, two years older than his step-mother and in love with her. He is tormented by that secret and his social ineptitude – “Why does everyone laugh at me?” and, to top those problems, he is studying for the priesthood and is anguished by the question of the morality of what he feels for *Anne*. *Henrik* is played by **William Richards**, an utterly unconvincing actor whose singing is poor too. Even his fake cello playing produced nothing until he and **Heather Lander** in the orchestra behind the scrim caught up with each other. *Frederik* takes *Anne* out to a club and the star for the evening there is the fading, once famous and glamorous, *Desiree Armfeldt* who is now reduced to touring small towns and, for a moment, time stands still when they recognise in each other the lovers they were years ago. They meet again later, of course, but there's a formidable fly in the ointment in the person of the smartly uniformed, jealous, towering dragoon officer, *Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm*, *Desiree's* current lover. His steam-rolling nature prefers bullets to talk and when he asks *Frederik*, “Are you fond of duels?” it is obvious where his thoughts lay. **Nicholas Bishop** gives a first class performance of this straight-backed, fiery, no-nonsense, unfeeling dragon of a dragoon. **Deborah Caddy** gives life and energy to his long-suffering wife, *Charlotte*, who stands up for herself with courage.

Desiree's wheelchair-bound mother, *Madame Armfeldt*, rules a luxurious country house and cares for her 13 year old grand-daughter *Frederika* to keep her innocent of her mother's lifestyle. Old, *Madame* may be, but the ex-courtesan has a witty tongue and a grand manner. She finds old age disagreeable and is more than Lady Bracknell-like when she says, “To lose one's lover or one's husband is vexing. To lose one's teeth is catastrophic!” **Norma Knight's** performance is a joy and, that she has had 100 roles in opera, oratorio, operetta and musicals shows in her assurance and comfort in the dominating role she plays. **Henny Walters'** future looks assured from all she has done in the past and her convincing portrayal of *Frederika*. The Gilbert and Sullivan Society offer so much opportunity and good training for the young in their shows.

Throughout there's a sort of Greek chorus, commenting wittily in song on how things are going and they add style and panache to the show and other actors in the show make it a coherent and delightful performance under the most competent Direction of **Pam O'Grady** and Associate **Richard Travaskis**.

Gilbert and Sullivan Society of S.A. presents
A Little Night Music
by *Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler*

Director Pam O'Grady

Venue: Arts Theatre | Angas Street, Adelaide

Dates: 26 April – 05 May 2018

Tickets: \$20 – \$36

Bookings: 84477239 | www.gandssa.com.au

Related Articles



[Born Yesterday | Independent Theatre](#)

Born Yesterday will surely be a contender for the show of the year when the reckoning comes – for several good reasons – starting with the play itself. Photos – Jacqui Munn First and...