



Society : Hounslow Light Opera Company  
Production : Ruddigore  
Date : Friday November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018  
Venue : Hampton Hill Theatre  
Report by : Des Wilby – Regional Representative (District 3)

[Show Report](#)

### **In memory of Peter King (1937 – 2018)**

It was a pleasure to have once again visited Hounslow Light Opera Company as they paid a lovely tribute to former president, chair and long-standing member - Peter King.

Ruddigore is a fabulous comic opera and Peter's favourite Gilbert & Sullivan show. First performed in 1887 it is both a well-written and witty story with many twist and turns throughout. For me at least, I find it rather surprising that it occupies a somewhat modest position in popularity among Gilbert and Sullivan operas. Whilst the narrative is slightly disjointed, overall Ruddigore has many memorable numbers and is certainly more mischievous and humorous than most.

Thanks to Anne Pringle for her kind invitation and also to John Malone for quickly finding me a convenient seat after arriving a few minutes late.

The main storyline focuses on the bad baronets of Ruddigore, condemned by a witch's curse to commit a crime a day or perish in unspeakable agony. Sir Ruthven Murgatroyd escaped his fate as the 'next in line' by feigning his death and disguising himself as Robin Oakapple, a shy young farmer. Finally unmasked by his younger brother Sir Despard, Robin Oakapple, aka Sir Ruthven Murgatroyd, is forced to take on the title and start a life of evil – something he desperately tries to avoid...

Congratulations must go to Wesley Henderson Roe (Director) whose experience ensured the overall success of this show. With some talented cast members to work with it must have been pleasing to not only see all your hard work, and effort, come together so well. Characterisations were excellent at all times but several stood out and deserve special mention – more on that later... The relatively uncluttered stage accorded plenty of space for the cast and an obvious high-standard of attention to detail ensured everything ran smoothly with no delays or distractions.

Lee Dewsnap (Musical Director) provided full musical accompaniment himself having arranged the entire score for his electronic organ. Isabella Stocchetti not only assisted Lee in this arduous task but also conducted throughout the performance. This ensured a rhythm and beat that drove Sullivan's music precisely to keep the action flowing. All music was perfectly timed with the vocals being both well-rehearsed and first rate. I was pleased the music never overshadowed any dialogue, or singing, during the show.

Choreography was good and congratulations must be given to Karen Munday and Fay Ellingham for their efforts here. All movement was precise and smooth with no issues to note. I particularly enjoyed the freedom Mad Margaret was allowed around the stage, the Ghost scene and Sir Despard's entrances and general prowling through the audience.

Having previously seen Johanna Chambers in 'The Zoo', and remarked that it would be fabulous to watch her perform in a full-scale show, I was delighted she took the lead here as Rose Maybud. Demonstrating a real understanding for her character, Johanna brought just the right amount of humour to the role especially when referring to her little book of etiquette, not to mention her fickleness when choosing a suitable husband. This was an all-round wonderful performance that highlighted both Johanna's acting talent and fabulous voice.

Like many other societies, HLOC has struggled to attract men in recent years and they are indeed fortunate to have Paul Huggins and Tony Cotterill to rely upon. Paul was definitely believable as both the hero, Robin Oakapple, and reluctant villain Sir Ruthven Murgatroyd. Richard 'Dick' Dauntless played by Tony Cotterill, the likable ladies' man in the show. Both Tony and Paul delivered solid acting and singing performances and are to be congratulated.

Felicity Morgan took on the challenging role of Mad Margaret and was nothing short of superb. Indeed, her portrayal was so good that you could almost feel her fragility of mind and it felt wrong to laugh at her 'safety valve' - the Basingstoke reference. A wonderful portrayal of this unusual character and 'Cheerily carols the lark' was sung with such pathos.

Geoffrey Farrar was a joy to watch as the devious villain Sir Despard Murgatroyd. In his Dracula cloak and top hat Geoffrey entered the auditorium and quickly broke the 'fourth wall'. The revelation he'd tied a woman to the train tracks that morning, to keep up with his crime a day requirement, elicited considerable boos and hisses from the audience. However, it was the further revelation that he'd knowingly done this on a South East train line during a rail strike that was hilarious. This was fabulous character acting and a demonstration of truly owning the stage and role.

Edz Barrett not only stole the show but he put it in a suitcase and took it home.... Playing the aged servant 'Old Adam' Edz was nothing short of hilarious and delivered quite the best piece of character acting I've seen in a very long time. Never dropping his guard, Edz was totally absorbed in his character throughout and it was difficult not to focus on him entirely. The most impressive thing here was this was achieved without a great deal of speaking or singing. Utterly fabulous and the reaction of the audience says it all.

The ghost scene, with previous generation of Murgatroyds appearing from their pictures in the gallery, was very well done indeed. Wearing a variety of period costumes, from across the ages, it was Steve Taylor who, as Sir Roderic, led the challenge against Sir Ruthven for failing in his daily criminal duty. This was a great cameo role for Steve to play and to also demonstrate his fine singing voice.

Clare Henderson Roe filled the semi comedy role of Dame Hannah well indeed. I enjoyed her solo 'Sir Rupert Murgatroyd' but it was the duet with Sir Roderick, 'There grew a little flower' that was beautiful. Andrea Wilkins (Zorah) and Anne Pringle (Zennor) led the Bridesmaids/Village Women well in the opening number - 'Fair is Rose'. A special mention must be given to the various HLOC alumni, friends and past members of The Young Savoyards who came together and formed the male and female choirs. This really added a rich sound and depth to the show and was a lovely touch to involve on this special occasion.

Lighting was run by Nigel Lewis and his team. With no 'glitches', or noticeable problems, the quality was of a consistently high level throughout with all cast members being clearly lit when required. Sound was run by Ian Nethersell and his team. Again, everything worked well during the show – in this case with all speaking and singing being clearly audible.

Ian Nethersell also took on the responsibility of Stage Manager and was assisted by Natasha Shirley. And Stage Crew (Friends of the Company). Together they ensured all scene changes were handled swiftly and with minimal disruption/delay. As such everybody, and everything, was in the right place at the right time.

Susan Mills and her team gathered together a suitable array of Props which were of excellent quality and appropriate for the period and setting.

Wardrobe was jointly managed by Maggie Revis, Veronica Martin and team. The selection of costumes was of a high quality and appropriate for the time period and setting. I thought Mad Margaret's costume was terrific and loved the variety for the ancestors also.

I will take it from the lack of specific programme credit that Hair and Make-up was the responsibility of individual actors. Suffice to say everyone looked great.

Tony Cotterill and Anne Pringle ensured the programme was of a very good standard and full of much information for the audience to enjoy reading. The tribute to Peter King, thoughts from Wes and background on Ruddigore were nice to read. I was particularly pleased to read about HLOC's various Awards and to see the prominent NODA reference.

Ruddigore proved to be a lovely tribute to Peter King and an excellent production. Congratulations to all cast and crew involved here in staging a wonderful evening's entertainment.

I look forward to being invited to future productions – especially The Pirates of Penzance scheduled for October 2019.

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