

## VISIT TO BUXTON OPERA HOUSE

On a beautiful day in August the theatre group visited the Buxton Opera House to enjoy a performance of Iolanthe, one of the operas on the 2025 Gilbert and Sullivan Opera Company's Festival programme.

In a nutshell Iolanthe is a whimsical blend of fantasy and political satire. The story follows Strephon a half fairy half mortal shepherd, who hopes to marry Phyllis, a ward of the court. But their path to love is blocked by the pompous House of Lords-most notably the Lord Chancellor himself, (played by Simon Butteriss who members might remember took a similar part as First Lord of the Admiralty in HMS Pinafore) who also has his eye on Phyllis. When Strephon's fairy heritage comes to light, the fairies storm into Westminster, throwing the House of Lords into delightful disarray.

Strephon is miserable at losing Phyllis, but when he sees her reveals that his mother is a fairy, which accounts for her apparent youth. Phyllis and Strephon ask Iolanthe to plead with the Lord Chancellor to allow their marriage. This is impossible she replies, for the Lord Chancellor is my husband.

In the end, love wins the day, culminating in a joyfully absurd finale where fantasy and politics collide in perfect harmony.

Although many of our group were unfamiliar with Iolanthe it is one of the most beloved of the Savoy Operas. At the end of this performance we could see why this opera had such a reputation. The performance was certainly brilliant, sparkling, enchanting and eccentric.

Iolanthe should not be taken too seriously. it is as much the vehicle for splendid pageantry as in the entrance of the peers and the parody of Wagnerian opera in summoning Iolanthe from the depths of the stream in act 1 as it is for political satire.

The Lords dressed in full ceremonial costume with ermine and coronets presented a striking spectacle and together made a good choir.

The Lords - Earl of Mountararat (James Cliverton) and Earl Tolloller (Adam Sullivan) took their parts as suitors for the hand of Phyllis with enthusiasm and panache.

The fairy chorus were not only a delightful group in voice but grace of performance.

Simon Butteriss played a star performance as the Lord Chancellor, particularly the tongue twisting patter song. When you are awake in act 2.

The National Festival Orchestra with their leader Sally Robinson and conductor James Hendry delivered an outstanding accompaniment to this performance and the spirit of Gilbert and Sullivan tradition.

The enthusiasm of the audience as they were leaving the theatre was a measure of how successful the performance had been.

Allen Ball